ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Story of the Great Snow Barrens

Where All Trails End

by Theodore Goodridge Roberts

how Violet
have revolu-
ed science,
won endorse-
of all leading
icians and
y specialists.

Strength and Beauty Are Yours for the Asking! Learn the Secret!

Write Today for Our Free Book on

Physical Perfection *via* Vi-Rex Violet Rays!

We have just published a remarkable book for your benefit, explaining in detail the manifold uses of Violet Rays, both as a curative power and a tonic. We want you to have this book! It will give you a clear understanding of what this tremendous discovery of Violet Rays means to YOU. It tells WHY Violet Rays can do more for your muscles, tissues and nerves than any massage, medicine or diet. ***Grasp this opportunity! Write at once!***

Free Trial!

10 days' free trial enables you to test the great benefits derived from scientific use of

Vi-Rex Violet Rays

Feel the thrill of youth's bounding vitality! Increase your store of energy, revitalize your worn-out cells, make every fibre of your body tingle! All this you can have through the use of Vi-Rex Violet Rays right in your own home. You don't have to take any risk in giving Vi-Rex Violet Rays a trial. Take 20 treatments in your own home. Use this marvelous machine for 10 days. If you do not feel better, sleep better, look better, send it back and you will not be out one penny.

Nerves, Muscles, Tissues—All Respond!

Violet Rays penetrate to every cell in the body, imparting that stimulating vigor which brings the glow of health, tones up the entire system, putting life into over-taxed and sluggish tissues. As a quick relief from pain or physical stiffness, Vi-Rex has no equal. Its soothing rays quickly find the source of distress and afford speedy comfort.

x Electric Co., Dept. 913
26 W. Madison St., Chicago, Ill.
send me without cost or obligation your free
cribing your wonderful Violet Ray Machine

.....

.....

.....State.....

Treat Yourself at Home for:

Asthma	**Neuritis**	**Blackheads**
Constipation	**Neuralgia**	**Dandruff**
Headache	**Catarrh**	**Goitre, Pains**
Rheumatism	**Pimples**	**Skin Diseases**

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO.

Dept. 913 **326 W. Madison St., Chicago, Ill.**

SIX AMAZING FACTS

About the Oliver Typewriter Offer

1 Half Price

2 $100 Value

3 Free Trial

4 No Money in Advance

5 Easy Terms

6 Brand New

Now Priced at $49.50

The Oliver would still be selling at $100, as it is a standard $100 typewriter in every way, were it not for our new selling method and the resulting increase in production.

We subtract $50.50 from the usual price because we have found it unnecessary to spend that amount per machine to maintain an enormous force of salesmen and agents, costly branch houses in over 50 cities and other extravagances.

We now deal direct with the buyer, saving you the selling cost. You get the identical $100 Oliver, our finest and latest model, brand new, and you become your own salesman. This simple way saves you $50.50.

Over 900,000 Olivers Sold

Direct From the Factory

Here is our plan. We ship the Oliver direct from the factory to you, for Free Trial. Use it 5 days as if it were your own. Compare it with any standard $100 typewriter. Note its simplicity, fine work and speed.

If you agree that it is the finest typewriter regardless of price and desire to buy it, send us $49.50 cash. Or if you wish to buy on easy installments, the price is $55, payable as follows: $3 after trial, then $4 per month.

If the Oliver does not sell itself, ship it back at our expense. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges, so that the FREE TRIAL does not cost you a penny.

This is the most liberal typewriter offer ever made—and all due to co-operation between maker and buyer. Over 900,000 Olivers have been sold.

Save $50.50

There's no need now to pay $100 for a new typewriter when you can get the Oliver for half. Nor no need to buy any rebuilt machine, costing even more than a new Oliver.

Our offer is being accepted by thousands. The very liberality of the offer proves the ability of the Oliver to sell itself. Were it not such a superior typewriter this offer would be impossible.

The coupon brings you EITHER a Free Trial Oliver or Further Information. Neither obligates you in the slightest. Check the coupon now and take advantage of this remarkable saving.

Canadian Price, $79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company

739 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

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

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50.

If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is.....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

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

Occupation or Business.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXIX CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 17, 1921 NUMBER 2

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

LONG COMPLETE STORY

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

Our Christmas Number

Next Week will be an especially attractive issue, leading off with a swift, two-part serial of laughable complications, entitled "Masqueraders All," by Neil Moran. An ingenious mystery novelette, "The Lost Hour," by Lyon Mearson will be published complete, and among the short stories by such writers as William Merriam Rouse, Raymond S. Spears and Harold de Polo you will find a timely tale by Edgar Daniel Kramer—"Christmas Comes to Lost Glory." For New Year's you will get the start of Carolyn Wells's "The Green Stain."

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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

Big Money for the Man Who Knows What to Do!!

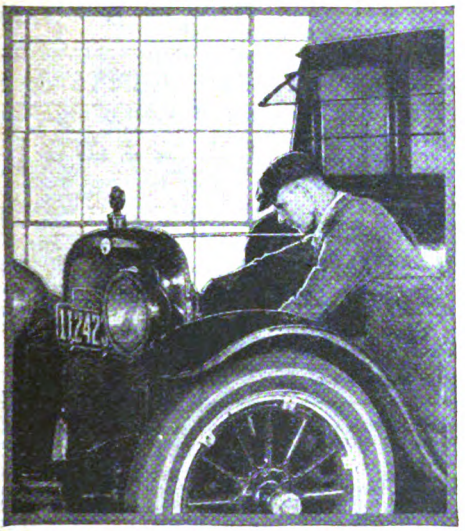
Big Opportunities in Auto Game

Right now men like you are wanted for big pay jobs in the Automobile Engineering field. Over 8 million cars are in operation and there are more jobs open than there are good men to fill them. Thousands of men are needed to keep these 8 million cars in going condition.

The percentage of new cars this year is smaller than for several years past. This means more work on the old cars—rebuilding and replacing parts.

Learn at Home—Easy, Inexpensive

You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. You don't have to go to school and spend hundreds of dollars for tuition and board. The new Library of Automobile Engineering will tell you everything you need to know. It explains everything about every standard make of car. All the brand new models are included as well as the cars made for several years back. Thousands of pictures show you how everything is done.



Everything About Every Auto

The 6 big volumes flexibly and durably bound contain 2700 pages and more than 2400 pictures, blueprints and wiring diagrams showing the inner workings of every car. A complete index enables you to find the very thing you want in a second or two. No need to go through the whole set or even a whole book to find it. In this way you can devote more time to the most important things but you are saved needless study on the things you won't have much use for. The information is right on the job though, to help you whenever you need help.

A Few of the Subjects Covered

Gasoline Motors (Construction and Repair)—Automobiles (General description of all makes)—Engines—Pistons—Accessories—Crankshafts—Crank Cases—Carburetors—Manifolds—Fuel Supply—Valves—Exhaust Systems—Lubrication—Bearings—Flywheels—Clutches—Transmissions—Gears—Steering Mechanisms—Axles—Chassis—Springs—Final Drive—Brakes—Wheels—Tires—Radiators and Cooling Systems—Rims—Electrical Equipment—Generators—Motors—Ignition—Starters—Lighting Systems—Storage Batteries—Magnetos—Welding—Bench Work—Machines—Garage Equipment—Trouble Shooting—Motorcycles—Steam Automobiles—Gasoline Tractors—Trucks—Electric Automobiles—Fords.

New AUTO BOOKS Shipped FREE Mail Coupon

15 Auto Experts Will Help You

This library is the work of 15 leading automotive experts who each put a lifetime of experience into it. They know exactly what you need and give it to you in plain everyday English. It cost over $50,000 to produce these books yet they are sent to you without a deposit of any kind for 7 days' free examination.

Membership FREE

With each set of Automobile Engineering Books we give a one-year membership in this Society worth $12.00. This membership entitles you to the following benefits:

Consulting Privileges: The Society maintains a staff of Engineers and Experts to work out problems and answer questions by mail for its members.

Standard Tests: The means by which you are able to determine your exact fitness for the work you are doing or would like to do. This means finding out how much you really know about your job.

Free Employment Service: All members can use the Society's free employment service to get a better job. This includes listing in the bulletin called "Men."

Don't Send Money Now

We will lend you the whole set of these great pay-raising books for a week to use as you please in your shop or home. Examine them carefully and decide with the books before you if you want to take advantage of this golden opportunity. Over 75,000 sets have been sold on this no-money-down plan—keep the books a week and send them back at our expense or pay $3.00 a month until the special price of $24.80 has been paid. (Regular price is $45.00.) There are no strings to this offer. It is open to every man over 21 years in the United States and Canada. You sign nothing but this coupon. No agent will call upon you. Mail the coupon and get the books, then decide whether or not you want to keep them. Mail the coupon now.

American Technical Society
Dept. AA-169, CHICAGO

American Technical Society,
Dept. AA-169, Chicago

Send me the 6 volume set of Automobile Engineering books for a week's free trial by express collect. I will either return the books in one week at your expense or send you $2.80 as first payment and $3.00 every month until a total of $24.80 is paid. With these books I am to receive a free membership in your Society, including Consulting Privileges, Standard Tests and FREE Employment Service.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Reference.....

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	
Minimum space four lines.		

Jan. 28th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Dec. 24th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—MAKE BIG MONEY from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction—perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from $75.00 to $200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. J. R. Wood, Sales Manager, Box 483, Chicago, Ill., Dept. 703.

FASTEST SELLING SANITARY BRUSH LINE in America. Huge profit-making opportunity for live workers, with advancement. Other specialties. Get complete details. Act quick. Best season at hand. A. E. Silver-Chamberlin Co., Clayton, N. J.

CREW MANAGERS—AGENTS. OPALINE PAINTINGS ARE A KNOCKOUT. Make old territory new. Seasoned picture men double their sale. Beginners make $1.00 an hour and more with rigs. Greatest hit ever made. Samples and expense money furnished. Write today. Consolidated Portrait Co., Desk A-22, 1029 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS MAKE $100 TO $200 A WEEK. Big demand for our new, fast selling, imported manicure sets, safety razors and pencil sharpeners. Write today for side or full time proposition. Universal Importers, Dept. A, 20 E. Jackson, Chicago.

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

Build Permanent Business following our Sure Success Plan introducing Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear from factory to family. Attractive outfit assures quick sales. Large profits. Investigate for yourself. C & D Co., 13 B, Grand Rapids, Mich.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

AMBITIOUS WRITERS—SEND TODAY FOR FREE COPY AMERICA'S LEADING MAGAZINE for writers of Photoplays, Stories, Poems, Songs. Instructive, helpful. Writer's Digest, 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

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

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

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

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for Civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalogue. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND! LAND! 20, 40, 80 acre tracts in Michigan. Rich clay loam soil; $15 to $35 per acre. Small pmt. down, bal. long time. Investigate this opportunity. Write for free booklet today. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First Natl. Bk. Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month. Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days, $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-145, Dayton, Ohio.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. M-204, Chicago.

MEN WANTED—TO SELL W. S. N. DEPENDABLE FRUIT TREES and shrubbery. Big demand. Complete cooperation. Commission paid weekly. We deliver and collect. Write for terms. Willems, Sons' Nurseries, Carter Building, Rochester, N. Y.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

$10.00 A DAY EASILY EARNED. Seven Bar Boxes Assorted Soaps, Christmas Perfumes, Combination Christmas Boxes; selling like hot cakes. Men, women, 100% profit. Old established firm. Crofts & Reed Co., Dept. 170, Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2806 F Congress, Chicago.

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

GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel choruses, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

RAG JAZZ PIANO PLAYING taught anyone in 20 lessons. "Christensen" schools in most cities. See your phone book, or write for booklet about mail course. Teachers wanted in unoccupied cities. Christensen School 441, 20 E. Jackson, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Have You The Courage To Start Over?

JIM BARTLETT was my best friend. He was a successful business man and he talked straight from the shoulder. There was no mincing words when he started telling me what I ought to do.

"Bill," he said earnestly, "the trouble with you is that you have fallen into a rut. You get up early and go to work every morning and you work hard all day. But you don't get anywhere. It isn't that you haven't a good head on your shoulders—for you have. But you don't use it. You don't think three feet beyond your job."

"But what can I do?" I asked helplessly. "I have a wife and child. I'm too old to take chances."

"Too old!" fairly shouted Jim. 'Why, if anything, you're too young!

"At 35, Henry Ford was working in the mechanical department of the Edison Electric Light & Power Co. for $150 a month. At 38, John R. Patterson, who founded the National Cash Register Company, was the proprietor of a small and none too successful country store. At 25, George Eastman, president of the Eastman Kodak Company, was earning $1400 a year as a bookkeeper in a savings bank. At 22, Edison was a roaming telegraph operator—out of a job—too poor, when he arrived in New York, to buy his own breakfast!

"Success wasn't handed to these men on a silver platter, Bill. They worked for it and worked hard. Did they quit when they found themselves temporarily blocked or working up a blind alley? You bet your life they didn't. They had the courage to start over. And you've got to have that same courage if you ever want to get anywhere."

FIVE years have passed since I had the above conversation with Jim Bartlett.

I remember going home that night to a frugal supper. I remember sitting in the parlor thumbing a magazine. I remember reading the story of a man just like myself who had studied in his spare time and had gotten out of the rut.

As I read on I felt new ambition rise within me. I decided that I, too, would have the courage to start over.

So I tore out that familiar coupon which I had seen so often and mailed it to Scranton. Information regarding the course I had marked came back to me by return mail.

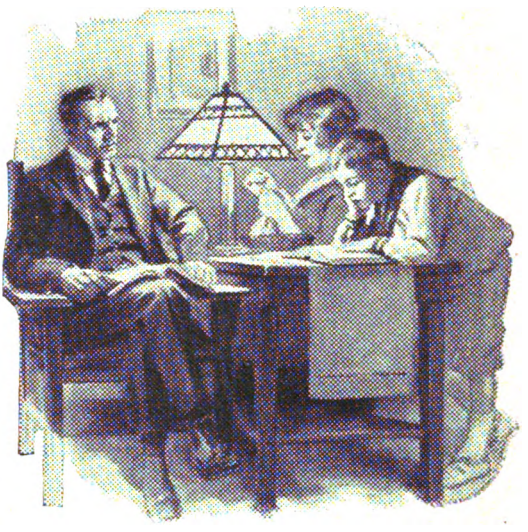
I tell you frankly that I had no idea the course would be so interesting—so easy—so fascinating—so profitable.

My employers learned of my studying, saw evidences of it in my work and in four months I received my first increase in salary.

Advancement followed advancement, for I was always thinking beyond my job—always studying to get ready for the job ahead. And just the other day I was made General Manager.

HOW much longer are *you* going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you advancement and more money?

No matter where you live, the International Correspondence Schools will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your



means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. courses will surely suit your needs.

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2235-B SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
☐ Electric Lighting & Railways	☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ ADVERTISING
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Show Card & Sign Ptg.
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Railroad Positions
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Cartooning
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Private Secretary
☐ Toolmaker	☐ Business Correspondent
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Stenographer & Typist
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Certified Public Accountant
☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R	☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Commercial Law
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ AUTOMOBILES
☐ PLUMBING & HEATING	☐ Mathematics
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Navigation
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.	☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ CHEMIST	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ Spanish
☐ Pharmacy	☐ BANKING ☐ Teacher

Name.....

7-1-21

Street and No.....

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

Occupation.....

Sent On Approval

THIS wonderful high grade 21-jewel watch—the acme of watch production—universally recognized by owners and experts as the peer of all watches—is now being sent out on approval. Take advantage of this opportunity—a rare bargain.

Free Book The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms (after free examination) of only $5.00 a month. Send for the most complete watch book ever produced. Write letter or post card today—it is free.

Burlington Watch Company, Dept. 1459
19th Street and Marshall Boulevard, Chicago, Ill.

The Burlington 21 Jewels

2 Tires for $11.25

FREE Tube with Each Tire

Most sensational tire offer of the year! **Two tires for less than the usual cost of one—and a free tube with each tire!** This is a special lot—all standard makes—selected for record-breaking sale. *No double treads or sewed tires.* Our big volume means best tire values! Thousands of steady customers everywhere are getting full mileage out of these slightly used tires and you, too, can get **8000 Miles**

Size	1 Tire	2 Tires	Size	1 Tire	2 Tires
30 x 3	$ 7.00	$11.25	32 x 4½	$13.50	$22.90
30 x 3½	7.95	13.65	33 x 4½	13.95	23.45
32 x 3½	9.00	15.45	34 x 4½	14.45	23.90
31 x 4	10.00	16.90	35 x 4½	14.95	24.45
32 x 4	11.50	19.75	36 x 4½	15.45	25.45
33 x 4	12.25	20.90	35 x 5	15.90	26.15
34 x 4	13.25	22.45	37 x 5	16.45	26.55

SEND NO MONEY! Shipment C. O. D. Express or Parcel Post. Examine tires on arrival and if not fully satisfied return same at our expense and your money will be promptly refunded, including shipping charges. State whether Straight Side or Clincher. **DON'T DELAY! ORDER NOW!**

ALBANY TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
2721 Roosevelt Road Dept. 384 Chicago, Illinois

WANTED: Railway Mail Clerks, $135 to $195 Month.
U. S. Government wants hundreds. Men—boys over 17. Write IMMEDIATELY for free list of Government positions now open.
FRANKLIN INSTITUTE Dept. T-265 ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

MAKE MONEY AT HOME. You can earn from $1.00 to $2.00 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing. We teach you how, sell your work, and pay you cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Building, Toronto, Canada.

IF YOU WANT MORE PAY—BECOME A DRAFTSMAN. We teach you Mechanical Drawing at home in your spare time; no previous training required. Our graduates earn $35 to $100 a week and more as they advance. Write today for Free Book "Your Future in Drafting." Columbia School of Drafting, Dept. 1583, Washington, D. C.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

RAILWAY MAIL AND OTHER GOVERNMENT CLERKS needed soon (men, women). $1600-$2300. Permanent. Write quickly. Mr. Ozment, Former U. S. Government Examiner, 198 St. Louis.

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY: good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MEN WANTED TO MAKE SECRET INVESTIGATIONS and reports. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Government Detective, 107 St. Louis.

EARN $250 A MONTH, EXPENSES PAID, as Railway Traffic Inspector. Local or traveling. Outdoors. Start at $110 monthly, position guaranteed after 3 months spare time study. Write for Free Booklet CM-39. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, Baggagemen, $140-$200, Colored Porters by Railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Ry. Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

SONG POEMS WANTED

SONG-WRITER'S BOOKLET FREE—A wonderful instructive booklet, "The Song-writer's Guide," sent absolutely free. Submit your latest song-poems. We write music, print, and secure copyright. The Metropolitan Studios, Room 273, 914 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago.

SONG WRITERS—HAVE YOU IDEAS? If so, winner in Herald-Examiner's $10,000.00 Song Contest (Nationally-known "Song World" Editor) wants your song poems for guaranteed proposition. Casper Nathan, 207 Woods Theatre Bldg., Chicago.

SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best proposition to offer you. Don't hesitate—act now. Ray Hibbeler, D147, 4040 Dickens Avenue, Chicago.

Write the Words for a Song. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on a royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Composing Studios, 238 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

57 Different Stamps from Guatemala, Finland, Peru, India, Russia, France, Czecho-Slovakia, Philippines, etc., perforation gauge, millimetre scale, ruler, price lists to approval applicants, 10c. Send now. Leader Stamp Co., Dept. W, St. Louis, Mo.

TELEGRAPHY

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Where All Trails End

Part I

by Theodore Goodridge Roberts

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CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE NORTH.

VICTOR KENT, his guides, dogs, and sleds, arrived in the settlement of Mooseyard in the first dark of an evening early in January. They came out of the north, as the load on the sled bore witness. The head and hide of a musk-ox were packed there, the pelts of a white fox, and also the pelts of five gray timber wolves. Beside the pelts lay the three hard-hitting, quick-firing rifles that had won them.

During the last hour they had made good speed, despite the drifted condition of the trail and the long day that lay behind them. It was a poor outpost of civilization toward which they had been laboring, but during the days that they had been facing south and east each of the three men had frequently been visited by thoughts of the joys that awaited them at the end of the trail. To the two half-breeds had come hazy dreams of their snug little cabins within easy reach of Mooseyard and of plentiful supplies of hot food prepared by their dusky wives. Victor Kent, too, had had his dreams, and it did not seem at all strange to him that the goal of his desire should lie here on the edge of the wilderness, surrounded by the frame buildings and dreary desolation of a "dead" mining town. He had spent two pleasant weeks here before starting on his expedition, going on short hunting excursions and enjoying the friendship of Edmund Scott, manager of the little bank, and his daughter Flora.

Only its most optimistic citizens had any doubt as to the deadness of Mooseyard. Ten years ago, when silver was first found in the district, mighty things had been expected of the town. For a little while it had flourished, and its streets had known busy life. It had been linked to the out-

side world by a narrow-gage railway. The International Bank had established a modest branch there, and a wooden hall had been christened the Broadway Theater and fitted up to show motion pictures two nights a week.

Now the town was merely the shabby, half-deserted ruin of its former greatness. The mines had for the most part been abandoned. Three of the four general stores had ceased to do business, and the one that remained lingered in the face of failure.

For a little while the Cobalt Hotel had been a cheerful hostelry, waxing fat on the surrounding prosperity and charging outrageous prices. Its bar had been loud with the voices of prospectors, promoters, gamblers, and commercial travelers. But now the bar was gone, and the hotel itself appeared neglected. Its false front that had once aimed to be imposing now lacked most of its paint and sagged dejectedly. Dirt streaked the panes through which yellow lamplight fought its way to the frozen street.

But the three men from the north were not in a mood to be critical. They stamped the light snow from their moccasined feet and entered the front room of the hotel, where a rusty sheet-iron stove belched forth welcome heat. Their arrival had aroused quite a commotion in the silence of the settlement. Dogs had come from warm hiding-places and a few loungers from the store followed them into the hotel with many questions and noisy salutations for Sam Trent and Little Joe, the half-breed guides.

The sportsman only paused long enough to reply politely to the greeting of Bill Jones, the hotel keeper, who had come forward at the noise of their approach.

"I'll see you boys in the morning," he said to his guides.

He left the room and climbed the stairs to the chamber he had occupied on his previous stay in Mooseyard. Jones had told him it was unoccupied and ready for him. In a tiny closet he found the black leather bag that he had left at the hotel on his way in ten weeks before. From it he drew fresh linen, collars, and ties, and set about preparing himself for the eyes of civilized man—and woman. He shaved and bathed hurriedly.

Victor Kent was six feet tall. His one hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle were firmly molded on lines of strength and endurance, and his shoulders had a breadth that gave great symmetry to his figure. It would have been hard to gain an idea of his age from his face. Strength of character and fearlessness were written there for all to read. Many foreign suns and many winds, chilling and blistering, had weathered and darkened his skin to a permanent tan. It was the face of a man who had observed much of the world and forgotten nothing that he had observed. In his steady gray eyes the light of eager anticipation shone now, but on occasion they could harden till their glance cut like steel.

As Kent turned over the contents of the bag, he came upon a large envelope that was filled to the bulging-point with pages cut from various well-known magazines. He paused long enough to glance over these. They were articles dealing with the chase of big game in out-of-the-way corners of the earth, and all were signed by Victor Kent. They were simply written, in a direct, clean-cut style, and the photographs with which they were illustrated were marvelously full of action. The sportsman seemed to enjoy these photographs keenly, though he spared them only a moment's attention. When he had first met the Scotts early in September he had shown them these articles, and both Flora and her father had been deeply interested.

Well and warmly attired, Kent presently left the hotel and walked briskly up the street against a biting wind that tossed the snow up in light clouds, colder and more stinging than salt spray. He reached the snug little house occupied by Mr. Scott, and was admitted by the half-breed servant. Julie had heard of his arrival and had carried the news to her mistress with great delight.

So the sportsman found Flora Scott waiting for him in the cheerful warmth of the drawing-room, a flush of excitement in her cheeks, a friendly greeting on her tongue.

He stepped forward and seized her outstretched hands eagerly. For a few sweet moments he searched the deep, gray-blue mysteries of her eyes, while the loneliness and doubts of the past weeks vanished from his heart and the certainty of a dream fulfilled took their place. Without speaking he drew her toward him—suddenly released her hands and embraced her. Then he drew back a pace, and eager, tumultuous words broke the bond of his silence.

"It is true, then! I was sometimes afraid I had dreamed it."

Her eyes looked steadily into his. "It is very true, Victor—dreaming and awake—my love for you."

He kissed her. "I know it is a strong love, Flora," he said gently, "or I would not have dared even to hope for it. God knows to what tests its strength may be put!"

For a while they sat in contented silence, hand in hand. At last he spoke.

"I'll give up this sort of life, girl, as soon as I am done with this job, and then you will marry me. Think of it, dear heart! You and I—and to the devil with expeditions, and sunstroke, and snow-shoer's cramp!"

There was a hint of trouble in the face that Flora turned toward him—a shadow of distress in her eyes.

"But how could I leave dad?" Her hand tightened on his. "How can I leave him, no matter how much I love you—while I still love him? I shall always love him and worry about him. He would go mad, I think, were I to go away. Poor dad! He has no one else—and nothing else, Victor."

Her voice shook a little.

"Then we'll not leave him, dear," Kent replied. "He and I are the best of friends. I shall be through with this piece of work by spring, or—"

"But isn't it finished now, Victor?" the girl exclaimed. "Julie saw one of your men, who told her you brought in a big bull musk-ox, and a white fox, and many wolf pelts—that you had had the greatest run of luck that he had ever seen. So isn't the expedition finished? Surely there can be nothing more to call you back into that wild country, Victor?"

"I promised more than musk-ox and fox and wolf, dearest," he said in a low voice. "I didn't know then that you were alive in the world, or I would have been tempted to promise nothing beyond a trip to Mooseyard. But my word has been given, and I have not made up my bag yet. I still need something else—another head and hide. I may have to go west or north again. I don't know. I don't want to go fifty yards from here."

Within him love cried out against the call of duty, but he knew that the quest that drew him to the blinding snows and cutting winds of the barren places must be fulfilled. Then there would be time enough for rest and loving. Then he would take this marvelous girl to the world of life and cities—to far, warm seas, and blue and golden islands of the south; or, if necessary, he would bring the world to her. He did not lack money, and for the moment he felt that all these things lay lightly within his grasp—ready to be brought to the service of his love. For a moment he felt himself all-powerful. Then the shadow of his promise rose in his mind once more, and with it the realization that he was the servant of others besides Flora Scott.

His thoughts were broken by the opening of the hall door and the approach of footsteps.

Flora rose to meet her father, and Victor stepped forward to shake the hand of his friend Edmund Scott.

The banker was not alone. The man who accompanied him was of heavy build, with a large, much-lined pink face, from which deep-set eyes looked out with a bright and moving gaze that missed little. He was dressed in a suit that fitted his broad form without a wrinkle. It was evidently a masterpiece that had come quite recently from the hand of a famous New York tailor. The heavy gold charm that hung from his watch-fob and the seal-ring upon his finger seemed in keeping with his shape and features. There was an unexpected vitality about his speech and movements, and he overshadowed the gentle, almost hesitant Edmund Scott.

The banker hastened forward at the sight of the sportsman, who had stopped in his tracks at the entrance of the stranger. They shook hands warmly.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed with genuine pleasure in his voice, "it is good to have you back with us again. We have missed you more than I can say during the past two months—but that's over with, Victor. The wanderer has returned in safety."

The large man bowed to Flora, and she greeted him pleasantly enough, then turned to her father, who seemed to have forgotten the need of an introduction between the two guests. Scott dropped Victor's hand and introduced the stranger.

"Mr. Swithen, who is interested in our mines and timber," he said, and there was a note of respect and admiration in his voice as he spoke the name. "He is blowing life into the cooling ashes of this place, Victor. Ah! I beg your pardon—Victor Kent, the explorer and big-game hunter. He writes about his adventures, Swithen."

Kent acknowledged the introduction cordially, and the two men shook hands.

"I have brought Mr. Swithen home to dinner, Flora," said Mr. Scott. "And of course Victor will remain. Come, that will be a better dinner-party than we have had for many a day."

"Julie has risen to the occasion," said his daughter. "She has prepared one of her famous moose-steak puddings. You see, she has not forgotten your tastes, Victor. That pudding was under way directly she learned of your arrival."

The dinner was indeed a cheerful one. Julie's seventeen-year-old daughter, slim and dark and silent as a pure-bred Indian girl, served the meal and waited on them with deft hands. The table was lighted with candles that glowed beneath red shades, and the soft radiance felt very good to Victor Kent's snow-weary eyes.

Mr. Scott was in an unusually bright mood, for he liked company, and was very fond of Victor. The few weeks that the sportsman had spent in the settlement before he had struck into the wilderness had been a delightful period to the lonely and disappointed banker. He had found in him a companion who knew the outer world from which he seemed so effectually isolated, and who could appreciate his library, and share his views on the volumes of verse and philosophy he loved so well.

Even now, though he talked cheerfully and smiled and laughed with his daughter and his guests, there was something pathetic about the man. The light would die suddenly from his face, leaving it blank and despairing. Yet once he had been an important figure in a big town whose word carried weight, and whose company was sought after by men of his own standing and ability.

When his wife died he had been a steady, reliable citizen with a comfortable future before him and one daughter to care for. But he had gone to pieces then. He had muddled his business and forgotten his friends. The bank that he had served so well was not a soulless corporation, so it did not drop him entirely to sink into the depths of poverty. It treated him as well as was possible under the circumstances, sending him into northern Ontario to take charge of the branch just opened at Mooseyard, then an active and hopeful young place.

Under the new conditions he had braced up, but his ambition was gone. He had worked hard and well while there was work to do; but of late years business had been falling away rapidly, and the bank was declining with the town.

Flora had come to him several years after his establishment in Mooseyard, and had brought him a companionship to which he clung eagerly. He was a sad but kindly man, hungry for friendship and amusement, well-intentioned and somewhat weak. The present stagnation of the place steeped him in depression.

Kent was in a high-heady glow. He talked and acted as though he had not a care in the world, and laughed with the abandon of youth. The eyes of Mr. Swithen surveyed him frequently, sometimes with a covert and momentary regard, sometimes with open curiosity. The capitalist listened attentively and apparently with great interest to Kent's stories of the trip. Kent described the barren lands and the

lands of little sticks, and told of a blinding blizzard that had caught him far from his camp and his guides and without food. He told of the chase of the musk-ox herd, and of the slaying of the big bull, and the face of Flora Scott beyond the candles was flushed and eager as she listened to the vivid tale. Also he told many amusing things. His guides were evidently funny fellows.

He addressed the capitalist, whose intent gaze was upon him at the moment.

"Mr. Swithen, why don't you throw big business to the winds for a while and go after big game? You are on the outskirts of the wilderness already—why not seize the opportunity to tone up your muscles and give your doubtless overworked brain a rest?"

Swithen's eyes flickered.

"You English are remarkable people," he said, smiling indulgently. "You have been through the war, Mr. Kent, and now you talk about tracking down a musk-ox as if your life depended on bagging it. You are like a boy with his first air-rifle."

Victor laughed with the others. He shook his head at Swithen.

"But I am not an Englishman," he explained. "I am an American citizen. I have lived in England, now and then, and I was in the army for a short time early in the war. As for the musk-ox—well, his hide and bones will fetch a good price in Washington, and the stories I mean to write about him will sell in New York and London. I get a lot of fun out of this sort of thing, but it is not done entirely for fun. I have an eye on fame, too—Victor Kent, F.R.G.S.; that sort of thing."

Swithen's eyes became less alert.

"Victor Kent. Of course!" he said. "I didn't catch the name at first. I remember reading something of yours last summer—about Greenland, I think."

During the remainder of the meal Swithen seemed less interested in Kent, and divided his conversation between Flora and her father. He talked quietly, but even his voice was alert, sometimes almost impatient. To the attentive Kent he gave the impression of a restrained vitality, eager to express itself in sweeping gestures and in flaming words. Yet his words, his manner, and his dress were those of the man of big business that he called himself—the financier who counts in millions and who spends freely.

After dinner they went to the sitting-room, and coffee was brought to them beside the replenished fire of logs.

It was early when Mr. Swithen arose and bade them good night. He clasped Victor Kent's hand once more in a cordial handshake, and made some conventional remark as to the probability of their meeting again at an early date. It would indeed be difficult for two transients to avoid meeting in the limited business and social circles of Mooseyard. When Mr. Scott had returned to his armchair, Victor asked him a casual question or two concerning the departed guest.

"He is the very man we need here, Victor," said the banker. "He will save Mooseyard and put it on its feet again, I honestly believe. He has the vision to see the future of this country and the possibilities of the mines. And he has the money to take advantage of the possibilities."

"He is from New York, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Scott. "But he has been in Canada for some time, and has become interested in Canadian mines. He has been in Mooseyard for ten days now. He opened an account with the International immediately on his arrival, and I think he means business. I sincerely hope so."

"Oh, he probably means business," said Victor, smiling. "When a financier of Mr. Swithen's stamp spends ten days in a northern settlement far from the city and the stock market, he very probably means business."

There was another caller that evening—Captain Farley, an officer of the Mounted Police, whose post was at Mooseyard Junction, some miles west of the settlement, who arrived very shortly after the departure of Mr. Swithen. He visited the settlement at least once a week—on duty, just to study the lay of the land, he said; but in reality he came for no other reason than to enjoy the society and conversation of Flora Scott for a few short hours.

Ever since their first meeting nearly two

years before he had admired and loved her, but he did not tell her of his love. The captain was a shy man, and no fool. He could see quite well that he had never touched her heart.

He was an ex-army officer, and his left hand had been crippled early in the war. The fingers of that hand were still stiff, and oddly uncertain in their movements. He was a slim, lightly built man of about thirty years of age, with a pleasant face and a quiet manner. During his two years with the Mounted Police he had proved himself a very valuable man.

Flora went out to the kitchen and prepared fresh coffee for the captain. Farley lit one of Victor's cigarets, and began questioning Victor about his last expedition. The two men had met early in September, and had liked each other immediately.

When they left, the captain walked home with Victor. He, too, was billeted at the hotel—though only for the night.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO TALKED MILLIONS.

THE following morning Victor Kent went to the bank and drew a substantial sum of money. Then he returned to the hotel, and found his two guides smoking in the tropical proximity of the stove. He paid them off, and they pocketed the bills eagerly.

"But remember, boys," he said, "I am not dismissing you. We will be going north again in a very few days, I expect; so don't go far or stay too long. In fact, you had better report to me here to-night, Sam; I may have a job for you."

"That all right, boss," replied the half-breed cheerfully. "I'll be ready, you bet!"

Kent strolled from the hotel to the general store, ostensibly to purchase a bottle of ink, and remained for more than half an hour in conversation with Tim Haney, the proprietor. Haney shared with the majority of the citizens of Mooseyard a feeling of not wholly disinterested friendship for the open-hearted, talkative sportsman. The extent of Victor Kent's wealth was a subject of much speculation with these simple souls, but they all agreed that he was a very fine fellow who had more money than he knew what to do with.

As a possible purchaser of mining property or real estate he was full of potentialities, and most of these men had something or other of the sort that they vaguely planned to sell him at a top-notch price. Haney, indeed, had made an abortive attempt to persuade his friend to invest some of his capital in the Mooseyard Provision & General Supply Company, but Kent had appeared unwilling to discuss business matters and was completely absorbed by his infatuation for sport and exploration. Now Haney was garrulous with two months of village gossip and primed with respectful compliments on the success of Kent's expedition.

Victor Kent paid other visits that morning, and everywhere his reception was the same. McKay, who owned and in summer operated the sawmill, had much to say of Mooseyard's latest acquisition and capitalist, Hiram Swithen.

"There's a man that knows opportunity when he sees it, Mr. Kent," said the mill man enthusiastically. "He's been looking over the timber on the north arm of the Whitefish River, and he's making arrangements to buy out the old mossbacks that hold it at present and commence operations on a large scale next fall. He wants the sawmill as well, and between you and me, Mr. Kent, he has mentioned a very generous purchase price—an amount I would be very foolish to refuse."

"A remarkably energetic man," said Kent carelessly. "I wonder what attracted his attention to Mooseyard. He must be very astute to scent out the wonderful possibilities of this district from away down in New York."

"He didn't," replied McKay shortly. "He's been up in Canada for several months looking for a suitable mining district in which to invest some of his capital. I reckon Mooseyard and the mines round it are the best prospects he's come across."

"Well, I wish him success," said the sportsman. "For my part, I would consider it a waste of time to think of business in a country where there is such sport to

be had. I tell you, McKay, I am already impatient to be back on the trail of the musk-ox. And musk-ox are not the only game to be hunted here."

As he made his way back along the trafficless street, with its slovenly array of sagging buildings, for the most part locked and deserted, Victor Kent turned over in his mind some of the conversation he had heard that morning and some of the observations he had made the night before. It was evident that the little town was stirring in its hitherto dreamless slumbers and had some notion of leaping wide awake at the magic touch of the prince of finance.

He ate his midday meal in the unlovely atmosphere of the hotel dining-room, and when that was done with went up to his bedroom to attend to some correspondence. He wrote three letters. Two of these required little time or thought, and were soon sealed and addressed to the editors of two New York magazines. The third he composed with knitted brows and considerable reflection. At last he wrote a few brief lines in his firm bold hand and sealed the envelope. He addressed it to Ottawa.

For several seconds he held the letter between his thumb and finger, regarding it with thoughtful eyes and evident indecision. Then his hesitation passed, and with a sudden movement of his strong hands he tore the letter into four pieces. He laid the pieces carefully on his ash-tray on the table beside him and touched a match to the heap. As the flames flared up and died, leaving only a veil of white ash behind, his face cleared and he smiled once more.

"I'll play the game out myself," he said half aloud—and in his voice there was an evident note of relief.

In these days of the decline of Mooseyard the railway gave no service on its little branch line after the first heavy fall of snow; but a trail for dog-sleds was kept open most of the time between the settlement and Mooseyard Junction, sixteen miles away to the south. Victor Kent intended to send his letters by this route the following morning, in charge of his trusty guide.

He descended to the dreary office where a few loungers sat in chipped wooden armchairs smoking and talking with the manager—a man whose dress and personal appearance were as unambitious and neglected as his hostelry. He nodded cheerfully to the men in the room.

"I am sending a man in to Mooseyard Junction with mail at six o'clock tomorrow morning, men," he said, speaking loudly that none might fail to hear his words, "and I shall be delighted to send in letters for anybody if you will have them here by eleven to-night. Will you chaps please let others know? I don't want anybody who has mail ready to miss this opportunity."

"That's good news, sir," said the hotel keeper. "It's near a week since any mail has gone to the junction. I reckon there'll be quite a packet for Sam Trent to take along."

Victor Kent wandered without haste through the settlement and out along the trail that led through a group of near-by mines. There was no wind this afternoon, and the air was blue and still. The quiet cold did not tear at him or urge him to any speed, so he took his time and enjoyed the walk, stopping often to inspect the mines. Only a few of them were still running, and these were being operated with reduced shifts. For the most part they were deserted and already dropping into ruin.

At last he turned and took his way back through the darkening afternoon, past the lifeless activity of a few straggling log cabins occupied by the families of the miners or of half-breed trappers. Though no detail of the things he had seen that afternoon had escaped his attention, Kent's mind had been focused on a very vital and insistent problem, and he did not emerge from the depths of thought until he reached the Scotts' bungalow. When he was once more in that room of happy memories and face to face with the girl he loved, he became again the care-free, glad-hearted lover of the day before.

"Have you made any more definite plans, Victor?" Flora asked a few minutes later. "Tell me—why must you leave me now, dear. I cannot understand the

urgency of the hunt that can snatch you away from me so soon."

Her face was radiant with a vital, tender happiness, but in her eyes there was a troubled question that pleaded for an answer. She was more beautiful to him now in her fresh, earnest loveliness than even in his fondest dreams she had ever been. Her slender, firmly rounded figure, the tints of living copper glowing in her dark hair, the color in her cheeks, the whiteness of her hands, struck to his heart with a new flame of joy and pain. He took her hand in his, and when he spoke it was only of the joy.

"I must leave you, dear girl," he said. "It is no matter of choice—I must; but I believe it will only be for a little while. I believe I am nearly done with this hunt. And then, dearest, I promise you there will be no more of these partings. Let us think of that time and of the present, and forget the little while that lies between."

She smiled up at him bravely.

"The present is very sweet," she said simply.

Edmund Scott came in, this time without his friend Swithen, and the three sat down to a jolly dinner. Mr. Scott was unusually talkative. The coming of Swithen, with all that it promised, had roused him to an almost feverish degree of interest and hope. He talked sanguinely of a return of the old boom days to Mooseyard.

"He has imagination, Victor," said the banker, "and wide vision. He talks in millions."

Victor Kent listened to his host's enthusiasms without comment, but with a frosty glimmer of amusement in his gray eyes. Flora expressed some impatience with the capitalist and his plans; she seemed a little troubled by her father's faith in his schemes. Victor read this in her face and her desire that the subject of conversation should be changed. He adroitly drew the banker into a literary discussion that quickly drove other topics from his mind. There was in the older man an almost childlike quality of mind that attracted Victor Kent strongly. His delight in a book, or a friend, or a fresh amusement, was very pleasant to see. Victor had no difficulty in realizing the depths of the depression that had grown on him with the growing isolation of the town, or the eagerness with which he looked forward to the possible revival of its active life.

After dinner they played cards—three-handed bridge, in which Victor played recklessly and lost cheerfully, and Scott displayed uncanny skill. Victor had eyes only for the movements and expressions of Flora Scott, and ears only for the thrilling beauty of her voice. With both of them the varying fortune of the cards went almost unheeded, and their hearts throbbed to the excitement of a more vital game in which love and fate held all the trumps.

The evening slipped quickly by, and when Victor Kent looked at his watch he found that he must be leaving if he was to keep his appointment at the hotel. He walked along in the frosty night, with little room in his mind for any thoughts but those of Flora.

A steady murmur of gruff voices came to his ears as he entered the door of the office, and he saw a group of a dozen men composed of a great variety of faces and costumes gathered in the center of the room near the stove. Three sat somewhere apart from the others and played cards with furious intentness by the light of the smoky lamp that hung directly above their heads.

"Good night, gentlemen," said Kent, including them all in the genial though impersonal salutation. "How goes the world with you? You seem to have collected quite a mail, Jones."

Jones, the hotel keeper, handed him a parcel of letters which had been brought in during the evening. Word of Kent's intention of sending a man out had evidently spread through the settlement, and many had taken advantage of the opportunity.

Kent ran up to his bedroom and brought down a box of expensive cigars, which he passed around among the men. They were an interesting group, typical of a frontier town where the boom tide has ebbed. The sportsman was acquainted with a few of them, and he joined in their conversation easily, being a good talker and an even better listener. There were Robinson and Allen, owners of mining concerns, who had

once been very wealthy, but who had lost everything. Robinson, the older man, whose fortune had enjoyed the more meteoric rise and suffered the more complete collapse of the two, sat in sullen silence with an expression of hopeless anger on his lined and worry-scarred face. Hurdman, a real-estate agent, beak-nosed, slant-browed, and sallow of complexion, was wanted by the police of several cities, and found Mooseyard a safe place of sujourn. His shabby clothes bore witness to the slump in the real-estate business in the town. Also McKay, the mill-owner, was there, enthusiastically reiterating his faith in Hiram Swithen and the future of Mooseyard.

"Well," said Allen slowly and thoughtfully, "he's mapped out a very comprehensive campaign in the mining field. He has purchased options on half a dozen claims, though he has only bought one outright. That ought to have the good effect of booming the price of silver property at any rate. Of course, he may be throwing away his money. I think the ore's pretty well played out in this district, but he may strike a fresh lode. He's going to wake the town up, anyway, boys—let's be thankful for that. He can afford to lose a bit of money if he's as rich as he talks."

"He's a gentleman," said Jones solemnly from one corner of his cigar-filled mouth.

"He's a four-flusher," sneered Hurdman—"a big piker! No one could wake this town up, boys! it's dead for keeps."

McKay, on the opposite side of the circle, became greatly excited at this. He leaned toward Hurdman and gesticulated with his outstretched right hand, the glowing end of his cigar almost touching the other man's animal-like face.

"That's all rot, Hurdman!" he said. "You haven't made such a darn big success of business in this town that you can afford to criticise a financier like Mr. Swithen. He's the man who is going to save this place—not knockers like you. Why, listen to this: I have it straight he's going down to Toronto in a few days to dicker with the railway company for the purchase of the line from Mooseyard Junction. He says he's willing to pay five hundred thousand dollars. Half a million! He's no piker, boys!"

There was a general chorus of assent to this, and some inaudibly murmured bit of skepticism from Isaac Hurdman. The agent believed Swithen to be much like himself, only working on a larger scale. He had kept his eyes open, and he did not consider Mooseyard a good field for such operations. He believed that Swithen must have some brilliant scheme up his sleeve, though, and if it succeeded and the capitalist made a killing he intended to get some juicy pickings from the carcasses that would remain.

Suddenly Robinson raised his bowed head and drew in a mighty breath. He crashed a heavy hand down on the desk by which he sat and glared from one man to another around the room. His eyes were blazing, and his unkempt gray hair dragging down across his forehead from beneath his fur cap gave him a wild and pitiful appearance.

"Perhaps he isn't a piker," he bellowed hoarsely, "but I wasn't a piker—remember that—and this town has taken every damn cent I had. If he does make a success of these mines he'll be just reaping where I sowed. And you'll all get round and worship him as though he were a god. But don't be too sure, boys! This man Swithen talks millions, but he only spends hundreds."

His rage departed as suddenly as it had flamed up, and he dropped into his previous attitude of listless dejection. The men had listened to his tirade uneasily, some grinning, some frowning impatiently. Now Hurdman spoke.

"That's right, Robinson," he said. "That fellow talks millions, but he has only flashed a few thousands."

"He is certainly making big plans," said Kent. "Can you tell me what he has actually done so far? Remember, I just got in last night, so I am not posted on the operations."

"He bought the Silver Glory Mine," replied McKay.

"He got it for five hundred dollars," spoke up a roughly clad woodsman contemptuously, "an' it ain't worth fifty."

"And he has bought options on six other neighboring claims that were abandoned five years ago." McKay paid no attention to his interrupter. "I don't know exactly, but I reckon he has secured options from the five men who own that belt of timber up on the Whitefish. Then, he is going to Toronto in a few days to—"

"He says he is." Hurdman addressed Kent. "Mr. Swithen talks a lot, but if you add up all he has spent since he came to this town I don't think it will come to much over two thousand dollars."

Just then Sam Trent entered, and Victor drew him aside and gave him the packet of letters and his own two.

"You leave at six o'clock, Sam," he said, "and deliver these to the postmaster at Mooseyard Junction. They say the trail is in good condition, so that won't take you long. I want you back here as soon as possible."

"Yes, boss," replied Sam. "The trail is hard, and my snow-shoes are swift. I leave at six."

For half an hour longer the sportsman listened to the talk, but he learned nothing more regarding Swithen, save that he was boarding with McKay and so had an excellent opportunity of innoculating that gentleman with his ideas.

Kent went to his bedroom and lit the oil-lamp that stood on the yellow-pine bureau. His apartment was even more cheerless by night than by daylight. Its expanses of wall where the pink-flowered paper bulged and wrinkled were decorated by two gaudy fire-insurance calendars and a cheap colored print of unintelligible design. The room was the largest and probably the best that the Cobalt Hotel could offer, but it was far from being either cheerful or cozy. However, Kent was not easily affected by his environment, and he spent very little of his waking time in the room as a rule.

He dragged a dunnage bag from the closet, and from it took two weapons—an ugly-looking little automatic pistol and a long, heavy revolver. He examined them minutely, and whistled a little tune while he applied a few touches of oil to the six-shooter. Both were fully loaded. Then he changed his suit of well-cut tweeds for his woods clothes, and placed his moccasins where he could reach them and slip his feet into them instantly. He placed the lamp on a chair at the head of the bed and stretched out with an open book in his hand. Kent smoked and read, occasionally looking at his watch as the hours wore on.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST SHOT.

AT three o'clock in the morning Victor Kent laid aside his book, rose from the bed, and set about noiselessly completing his dressing for the outside air. He pulled on two extra pairs of heavy woolen stockings and over these his knee-high moccasins. He donned a short, wool-lined coat, pulled his fur cap down about his ears, and incased his hands in a monstrous pair of mittens. The little automatic pistol was in his hip pocket, and the weight of the six-shooter lay against his chest. He had moved swiftly through these last preparations, and it was only a few seconds after he had risen from the bed that he blew out the light and silently slipped from the room. By dark halls and creaking stairs he reached the door and let himself out into the morning.

A bitter windless cold lay on the land, and in its grasp the settlement lay frozen and motionless. His footsteps made no sound in the empty street. The ugly frame houses that showed as blacker blotches in the dark with the crudeness of their outline hidden and made indistinct might have been tombs tenanted by the dead, for all the signs of life they gave. Kent knew that the villagers would not be stirring for another three hours. There was nothing to drag them early from their warm blankets.

On the outskirts of the settlement the sportsman picked up the trail that led to Mooseyard Junction and followed it into the scrubby and uneven woods that stretched away to the south. The chill of the air did not bite beyond his skin, and he delighted in the intense stillness that seemed to wait in breathless suspense for

some inevitable moment drawing ceaselessly nearer. The atmosphere was pregnant with action soon to be released.

There was no moon, only starlight and ghostly, luminous glimmerings from the smooth snow in the open places, but Victor Kent followed the trail without difficulty. Its twisting course was clearly marked between borders of ragged underbrush, and he had traveled it before—in the early winter, with Flora Scott by his side. He remembered the day vividly, but his mind did not follow up the tempting train of thought to be side-tracked among the rambling paths of memory. His whole being, mental and physical, was concentrated on one goal—driven by one desire. Victor Kent had trained himself to this ability to concentrate all his energies on the objective directly before him till it had become one of the powerful elements that made up the strength of his character. It had won him some praise and distinction in France and a high measure of recognition in another field of activity previous to the war, and had made of him one of America's most successful gig-game hunters. He hunted big game now.

When he had covered about two miles of the way Kent paused and studied the situation.

At this particular place the wind-torn undergrowth that had been thin and scraggy grew in thickly tangled masses to the edge of the trail. Farther back the larger trees had stood apart each in its little space of snow, and in the daylight one could have peered far between their trunks; but here the spruce, fir and hemlock crowded each other, making an impenetrable screen of spindly, dark branches laced with white. There were few open spaces, here where the wood became a forest. The path was narrow, and the tangled brush rose high on either side.

After a brief moment of observation Victor drew back and, running forward a few steps, leaped into the air. He was no lightweight, and he was heavily clad, but for all that the jump was a magnificent one. It lifted him clear above the snow-topped underbrush and landed him several feet in from the path in a drift of powdery snow. He wallowed clear of the snow, stood erect, and shook himself with vigor.

"Well," said Kent to himself with some satisfaction, "I don't think I ever did better than that."

Fifteen years before, at college, he had been a good all-round athlete and a star performer on the football field, and it was evident that his muscles had not been allowed to grow stiff or rusty with disuse.

He drew his clasp-knife from the pocket of his coat and hacked off an armful of boughs from a young fir-tree. Then he hollowed out a snug nest in the snowdrift in which he had fallen, and after spreading fir-boughs thickly for lining, crouched down to await the coming of dawn. He relit the friendly pipe that he had extinguished only a short time before and puffed away.

Many times Kent, the hunter, had waited in cold and in heat and under vastly less comfortable conditions than the present for the coming of his quarry, yet never with less certainty or with greater curiosity as to the future on which he waited. Even these long minutes before the zero hour when he was to lead his men across shell-swept and machine-gun guarded fields had not seemed more eternal than these last minutes of the dying night.

Slowly the darkness thinned and took on a gray, unearthly aspect. On all sides the trunks of trees became clearly visible as by the touch of magic, and through the network of branches he could indistinctly see a fragment of the trail. But his eyes sought rather the expanse of colorless sky.

At the first lift of dawn under the stars to the southeast he bestirred himself with a deep sigh of relief, knocked the red coals from his pipe, and restored it to his pocket. He left his retreat, and floundered waist-deep a few yards farther on into the dim, snow-shrouded woods to the foot of a tall spruce. He climbed to a position near the top and looked out over the panorama revealed by the chill pallor of daybreak.

The light grew swiftly stronger, and every minute Kent could see with greater distinctness across the miles of forest. In the southeast a widening band of orange stretched up from the horizon, and high

above the last stars dimmed and died out. The forest was a patchwork of white and dark green, and among this tangle of tree-tops and snow Victor at last found the white ribbon of trail appearing and disappearing in the chaotic picture. He searched it intently with his keen glance for several minutes.

About a mile back the shapeless figure of a man came suddenly into view approaching from the settlement, only to vanish again almost instantly around a turn in the path. Once more it appeared, and with a careful scrutiny the man in the spruce settled one doubtful point in his mind. The man was not Sam Trent.

The light grew clearer and stronger, and Victor Kent remained in his lookout, watching and waiting, well screened by the dark-green boughs. His pulse was beating high and hard, but his nerves were steady as steel and his clear eye missed no movement on the trail below. Far away he saw another figure with the stature and gait of Sam Trent—a figure that swung swiftly over the snow. Again the first man appeared around the bend within three hundred yards of him. Kent's hands tightened on the branch to which he held and a little smile lifted the corners of his mouth. The man who approached was Swithen beyond a shadow of doubt, and this seemed to be what the sportsman had expected.

Swithen came on at a shuffling trot, his long, powerful arms swinging at his sides. His shoulders were bent, and his large square head thrust forward. Kent imagined he could make out the fire blazing between those narrowed lids and see the taut lines that furrowed that ugly face. He appeared to be a very different man from the genial Mr. Swithen whom the sportsman had met at the Scotts' dinner-table on that evening of his return to civilization, nor did his sinister expression and unusual behavior tally with any estimate one might have made of his character from the varied and interesting opinions of him expressed by certain gentlemen of Mooseyard.

There were radical changes in his appearance and manner, and indeed it is to be wondered if, for the time being, he had not cast aside the identity of the New York capitalist to go hunting in the early morning. He halted suddenly and, turning in his tracks, gazed back over the winding course, or at least as much of it as was visible to him, and then peered into the woods to either side of him. He left the trail on the same side as Kent, but not with the agility displayed by the sportsman. With his hands he forced an opening through a tangle of young firs, and with a long stride passed from sight among the drifts and undergrowth of the forest.

Victor Kent maintained a breathless silence, and kept his sharp eyes trained on the white length of the trail. Swithen had entered the woods at a point about fifty yards nearer the settlement than the spruce from which he had been watched. Five minutes dragged by, and he did not reappear. The slim figure of Sam Trent swung into view coming at a good pace. Kent watched him till in a few seconds he vanished round a turn in the path, and then with the utmost care he began to descend the tree. It was a ticklish business for a man of his size to worm his way earthward through the branches of that spruce without giving some indication of his presence that would betray him to the man whom he knew waited not far distant. For all he could tell, Swithen might have discovered his nest in the snow and, having traced his footsteps to the base of the tree, be waiting to receive him in the dim shadows below. Branch by branch he worked his way slowly down, with scarcely the ghost of a sound and with very little telltale swaying of the green foliage. At last he dropped into the deep snow at its foot and began a catlike advance through the dense underbrush.

Kent progressed foot by foot, crawling on hands and knees with the snow sometimes drifting in his face and sharp boughs cutting across his cheek, but always safely screened by the growth of dwarfish evergreens. He had set a straight course for a certain point, but he followed it by a twisty line that lengthened the few yards amazingly. At last he saw what he was looking for—Swithen standing waist-deep

in the snow among the underbrush and going out upon the trail.

Victor Kent settled himself face down with only his eyes and fur cap showing above the level of the snow. He was not far in from the path, and the other was only a few feet beyond him. He slipped his right hand into the breast of his short, wool-lined coat, and produced something on which his fingers tightened firmly. Excitement throbbed in his veins, as it had throbbed many times before, when he had pursued less dangerous destroyers or more worthy game. Through the screen of boughs he could see his man from waist to shoulder, and so he waited with nerves as taut as violin strings. The air was still and cold, and the white smoke of his outblown breath drifted for a moment before it vanished.

He heard the light sound of moccasins on the hard trail—but he looked only at Swithen's shoulder. He replaced his unmittened right hand in the front of his coat. Slow seconds moved by—and then he saw Swithen lean forward and extend a long arm with something that gleamed at the end of it. Victor jerked his hand from his coat, raised his gun high, leveled it, and fired. Swithen sagged forward with a snapping of branches and crushing of bushes beneath the weight of his fur-clad body.

Kent leaped into the trail in the rear of the motionless and scared guide. Sam Trent had turned at the shot and stood with a wash of pallor lightening his brown face and his hands thrown above his head. He dropped them at the appearance of his master, and surprise followed fear in his black eyes.

"That was I who fired, Sam," explained the sportsman, his voice as cheerful and unshaken as though he had merely been engaging in a bit of target practise at a discarded tomato-can. He advanced toward the astounded half-breed.

"Killed a skunk—but don't you worry or say a word. It's all O. K., and a good job. You go on with the letters, and you needn't come back to Mooseyard till tomorrow. Then you can go home."

Sam regarded him with a blank expression of incomprehension. Victor reached into an inner pocket of his coat and drew out a worn leather pocketbook. From it he hastily counted a dozen bills of low denominations and thrust them into the hands of his guide, who received them without a moment of hesitation.

"And here are wages for two months," Kent continued. "I may need you again in two months—so look for me in the village. Good-by till then, Sam."

But Sam Trent was far from satisfied, and he hated to continue on toward the junction with such an itching curiosity unsatisfied. He lingered in the hope of an explanation that would account for the sportsman's presence on the trail at this hour.

Sam had proved a good guide during these weeks of wandering among the northern barrens. He was not a talkative man and he was honest beyond the usual honesty of his breed. Victor had grown to like him and to trust him thoroughly, and he felt sure that he was liked and respected in return. Now he wished with growing impatience that the guide would be on his way and leave him to a quiet survey of the situation and some adjustment of the troubled workings of his mind. There were also details to be attended to in connection with the lifeless thing that lay stiffening in the cold not three yards away. He must not spend too much time upon the business of Mr. Hiram Swithen or some casual, but even more troublesome, intruder might appear upon the scene.

Sam faced his open regard with a question in his eyes and one on his lips.

"What did ye shoot, boss?" His voice lowered to a confidential tone. He peered with crafty expectancy into the bushes on either side, but saw nothing beyond the trampled snow.

Without another word, but with a shrug of his lean shoulders, Sam faced about and continued on his way with the mail for Mooseyard Junction with a reluctant obedience and with a troubled brain in which curiosity and doubt grew rapidly stronger. Before he had gone very far he turned and stealthily retraced his steps. The hunter watched him out of sight with a smile on

his face. Then his expression changed and was masked in deep and conflicting thought. The light of triumph that had flamed in his eyes smoldered and they became grave and puzzled. A huge cedar log protruded above the snow beside him, and there he sat down and proceeded to light a fat, brown cigaret.

The work that lay behind him he regarded with an unmitigated satisfaction. It had been a neat job. But the hunt was not over and there was still an element of uncertainty. The fulness of success was not yet attained, though the last hour had carried him far toward this goal.

If the events of this morning had happened three months before Victor Kent would have had no complexity of emotions to deal with and would have been stirred by no deeper sensations than those enjoyable ones of triumph and satisfaction, for until three months ago the stream of his life had carried him ever toward simple ends—conflict with man and beast and the exploration of strange lands. Now a new influence drew him, heart and mind, and brought new difficulties to be faced and solved.

When his cigaret singed his fingers he tossed it aside and rose with decision. He had overcome his moment of doubt, he thought, and stood with a firmly courageous face toward the wild fancies of the future.

He entered the underbrush and walked directly toward the place where Swithen had stood. He discovered exactly what he had expected—an ungainly, heavily clad body stretched with outflung arms in a disturbed welter of blood-stained snow. Kent stooped and picked an automatic pistol from the snow where it had fallen from the relaxed right hand. Swithen lay on his face, so he turned him over without ceremony, though with a touch of pity that vanished at the first glance. His face, marked with the sickly pallor of death, snarled up at its slayer with a bearlike ferocity.

The dead man's fur coat was flung open, and Victor Kent searched his pockets with swift and adept fingers. From the inside pocket of his coat he collected a handful of papers and letters, which he proceeded to examine rapidly, but with the greatest care. The greater part of this harvest proved to be ordinary business correspondence with a brokerage firm in New York. It dealt with large sums of money, and to that extent seemed to uphold the late Hiram Swithen's statements regarding his position in the metropolis. The double-barreled name of the firm was very foreign and hard to pronounce. Two of the letters he found more interesting than the others, and these he placed in his own pocket. He returned the rest of the assortment and neatly buttoned the fur coat. He dropped the pistol in the side pocket of his jacket.

For a moment he stared down at the dead man and many thoughts passed through his brain. The end of that life meant the collapse of many dreams, the sudden dissolution of many cherished hopes in the settlement of Mooseyard. Archie McKay would blaze with horror and righteous wrath against the murderer of his friend the capitalist; all that group of disappointed visionaries who kept alive the commercial activity of the town would feel it as a severe blow struck directly at their futures.

When he first heard the news Edmund Scott would take the matter much to heart, and then, hard on the first intelligence, would come the news that Victor Kent—his friend and his daughter's friend—was the murderer and that he had flown to the woods with the mounted police in hot pursuit. That would be very hard on the banker. His mind would fumble with the problem in vain and his disappointment would be a bitter thing.

And Flora—all that morning Victor had struggled to keep his mind clear of thought of Flora—his clear visions of her face—and he had succeeded. But now her name was on his lips and in his heart, and his eyes burned.

He wasted no further time at the scene of the ambush, but proceeded to cut a few armfuls of boughs. With these and the loose, powdery snow he covered the body. Then he set out for the hotel at a strong stride, his face expressionless and his eyes hard. His whole being lay in the clutches

of the despair that had dogged him ever since the firing of the first shot.

CHAPTER IV.

"I TRUST AS I LOVE."

THE cold January sunlight was drifting down from a clear, blue sky when Victor reached the settlement. He met no one till he entered the hotel, when he came face to face with Bill Jones, whose wide-open blue eyes, ever curious in the affairs of others, showed great astonishment.

"It's a cold morning, Mr. Kent," he remarked. "But ye don't seem to mind that, sir. Have ye been shootin'? But, no, I see ye ain't got yer gun along. I thought ye might have been out after the grouse. Well, I wish I was as young and spry as ye be, Mr. Kent, and I'd be afoot early, too."

"I've just been for a stroll, Jones," Victor replied. "Getting up an appetite for breakfast. And there's no better appetizer than a walk in the frosty air on a morning like this. It must be forty below, I should say. Did Sam Trent get off for the junction all right?"

"Well, I wasn't about at six o'clock, Mr. Kent, but he's gone, and I reckon he's well on his way by this time."

"Yes—I have no doubt of that. Sam is a good lad. He doesn't slouch. Well, I hope there is some hot breakfast ready for me. I'll be down in five minutes."

"There's flapjacks and pork and coffee, sir, and Jennie will have them on the table by the time ye're ready, pipin' hot."

In Victor Kent's face there was now no mark of any mental disturbance. He had schooled his features well and with all his staring Bill Jones had found no reason to think him in any but his usual quietly cheerful humor. In his years as master of the Cobalt Hotel Bill Jones had had many strange guests who had done many strange things.

Victor threw off his heavy outer garments in his bedroom and descended to breakfast. While he ate he roughly filled in the plans that he had made the day before when all had still been uncertain and the blow had still been to strike. He must fly into the north alone, and for weeks exercise his full cleverness to outwit the vigilant and unwearying forces of the frontier law that would be on his trail. And for weeks he must be a criminal in the eyes of his friends in Mooseyard and perhaps of the girl he loved. He would go to her and tell her he was innocent, but more than that he could not tell her. He could give no explanation of the killing, no reason for his flight—and for long weeks she would hear him called a murderer and would hear the details of his crime expounded in full. That was a hard test for love, he knew. But such was his faith in Flora that in the depths of his heart there was little room for fear, only sorrow for the pain that she must suffer and for the separation that they must endure.

Victor counted on several hours of safety before the discovery of the body—in any case, he could not leave before nightfall—and in that time he could secure provisions, dogs, and sled. He knew that Little Joe's dogs were well rested and fit to take to the trail once more. After his meal he set out for the house of his friends, the Scotts.

While Flora Scott kept her father's coffee cup filled and passed the plate of toast to him at intervals she talked and laughed and kept him talking and laughing. She was light-hearted this morning. She always endeavored to send her father off in good spirits in the morning to face the unromantic monotony of his day's idling and laboring at the bank. On some mornings during the past few weeks she had found it a very difficult matter to be bright and smiling and an absolute impossibility to be talkative: but now, thank Heaven, that was done with! Even if Victor must go away again—even if he must leave her for months—she could be happy and at peace in the knowledge of the deep, unswerving love that his lips had declared to her for the first time two days before. Waiting would be a different matter now, for his coming would be a certainty, and he had promised that this would be his last expedition.

"I wonder when there will be a mail in, daddy," she said. "Those books we or-

dered last month must be waiting at the junction now. I am just dying to get at them—aren't you? I do hope they are as interesting as the advertisements describe them to be."

"There is sure to be a great deal of absorbing reading matter in that selection, my dear. I have looked forward to their arrival for days. In fact, I have already selected places for them on the shelves. But, of course, there will be plenty of time to arrange them when they come. That collection of translated Chinese poetry has particularly aroused my curiosity. The review in *The Bookman* gave it the very highest praise and compared it favorably with modern European poetry. It will give us an entertaining evening, and Victor will enjoy it, too."

Flora helped her father into his fur coat and handed him his gloves and his walking-stick. He kissed her good-by, and as he turned to the street door, said over his shoulder:

"It is fine to see you so happy, Flora. I think it is Victor's return, is it not? He is our best friend—the truest friend in the world, and I am very, very glad that his coming can bring you happines. You deserve all the joy you can find in this place, my dear. I know what you gave up to make a home for me here, and all the pleasures and associations you must have longed for during these years. Well, perhaps there is a better time coming—perhaps Mooseyard will become part of the world once more, or you have the opportunity of returning to the world."

From the street Edmund Scott waved his hand to the girl who stood at the window to watch his departure and set off toward the bank with his usually stooped shoulders squared courageously, the light of hope in his faded gray eyes.

Flora seated herself at the piano and began to play and sing. There were things waiting to be done—a basket of sewing to be attended to, and Julie awaiting instructions for the day's housekeeping; but the music that thrilled in her heart this morning had to be expressed. It came to the ears of Victor Kent, who had entered the house noiselessly and stood in the sitting-room door, gazing with tense face upon the singer.

When the song came to an end she turned and rose from the piano. He stepped forward with outstretched arms. In the first meeting of their eyes she caught some hint of the pain against which he was struggling, and read black foreshadowing of danger.

He took her hands and regarded her gravely for a moment. When he spoke it was quietly and with a steady voice.

"I must go away, dear," he said; "quick and far. I must leave you—go in danger and disgrace—and lose you. God knows when I shall return. If I return soon it will be as a prisoner in the hands of the police."

He released her hands and she placed them on his shoulders with the gentleness of a caress. She was hardly conscious as yet of the words that he had spoken, but she was keenly conscious of his distress, and all the strength of her love surged out to him. She knew the power of the man and his mastery over his emotions, and she knew that he was battling hard against some persistent element of doubt or disaster. Her fingers lay lightly on the shoulders of his coat and she questioned him with wide blue eyes.

"Trust me, dearest," she said. "Tell me why you must go—the danger that threatens you. Trust me, Victor, for I trust you as I love you."

He stooped and kissed her, and for a moment held her in an embrace. In his heart he cursed himself for an impulsive fool. Two days before he had come back after weeks of absence to this girl of whom he had dreamed for so long, and, rashly confident with the sweet power of his dream, had told her of his love, while his duty was still unfulfilled and a mighty task still awaited him. If he had only waited! Then when this crisis arose he could have faced it with a fearless heart and a free mind, knowing that he would bear the burden of disgrace and separation alone. But he had spoken, and so when he was hiding from the law and starving in the wilderness he would be hounded by the bitter knowledge that he had brought suffering and shame to her.

"But I shall be hunted for my life," he said in a low voice, vibrant with feeling despite its surface calm. "All the machinery of the law will be in motion against me within twenty-four hours. Farley—all the force east of the prairies will be hunting me. You will hear the story, Flora—hear, and shiver with disgust at the thought of me. No, by God! Not that! Believe me, Flora. Know that what I did had to be done. I had to do it. I cannot tell you why—you or any one—now; but some day you will know and understand it all—if only that day is not too late. Now I must escape into the woods, and leave myself undefended in your heart—run and hide for a greater reason than to save my own life. If that were the only stake—my own life—I would fight it out to a finish, here and now!"

His hands were gripped tensely at his sides and anger blazed in his eyes—anger at the fate that had brought the horror of this moment upon him.

Flora stepped to him and kissed him suddenly and swiftly. Then she raised her head and looked him searchingly and tenderly in the eyes. His did not waver.

"You cannot tell me anything?" she asked gently. "What you have done? Why you go?"

"That is it, my wonderful one. I cannot tell you," replied Victor.

"Can you tell me this much? Are you guilty of doing a wrong or a mean or a cowardly thing, Victor?"

"No—may God strike me dead, darling! No! I swear it by my love for you. I did my duty—no more. But—but when you hear how shall you believe me? And I must go to-night—run like a sneak—hide in the dark—be hunted like a mad dog. And lose the greatest thing in the world, the only thing—your love and trust. I would to God I had died a year ago, before I knew the glory of life!"

The white oval of her face beneath the dark sweep of her hair was bloodless, but all fear was gone from her.

"Listen, dearest," she breathed. "Two can hide in the wilderness. Two like us can travel as fast and as far as one. Victor, I am going with you!"

"But it cannot be," Victor said. "Flora, you do not understand. The disgrace! The danger! No, I must go alone, and you must wait in loneliness. The knowledge of your trust has strengthened me, and I am ready to face it out."

"I am going with you—"

"I cannot take you, dearest and bravest, for I love you too well. This flight may end in death."

"Don't you want me? Don't you want me—whether you live or die?" The words came in a low cry wrung from the very heart of the girl and she trembled in Victor's arms.

"God knows I do, you wonderful one!"

"Then I go with you!" she cried. "I shall feel no disgrace, dearest, for I know there is no shame. I shall help you—not hinder you. I can use a gun and I can travel as far on snow-shoes as most men. Nothing else matters to me, Victor; and no one else in the world matters to me now."

For a little while Victor had known the bitter torture of fear—fear lest at the word of disgrace Flora's love would weaken and disappear. So now when he found her more glorious in her love and faith than he had ever dreamed he felt at once humble and triumphant. In the light of the hope that succeeded his despair the exile that lay before him with all its unknown hardships took on the magic colors of romance. Even as he knew that pursuit was inevitable, he knew that eventually the name of Victor Kent would be cleared of all shadow of disgrace, and they would be free to return to Mooseyard or go where they would in safety and in honor. All his adventures and his final success would be shared by this wonderful girl.

Flora Scott was almost as at home in the woods as he. She knew the north and the ways of the north; she was strong and posessed great power of endurance. Together they could battle against storm and hunger and the wilderness, and find joy in the battle. Their most dangerous enemies would be the tireless agents of the law, and Victor felt confident of his ability to elude them.

For a few minutes they talked hurriedly,

and in low voices, sitting side by side on the couch before the gray, ash-strewn cavity of the fireplace. Victor's arm was around her shoulder and he held her hand in his while they talked. Ripples of sunlight warmed and shimmered in her hair. He told her of Father Quinn, a missionary priest of whom he had heard much, and of the little Indian village not two days' journey to the west of which he was the spiritual and temporal guardian. The little priest would marry them when they reached the village. Victor had never been within miles of the village, but in his room at the hotel he had accurate maps by which he would be able to set a sure course. He counted on the lapse of hours before Swithen would be missed or his body discovered, and when the hue and cry was finally raised it would be toward the north that the first pursuit would be directed, where the sportsman was known to have explored and hunted, where there was infinite room to dodge and hide. So perhaps by going west they would gain a few more hours.

As they could not leave before night, Flora had plenty of time in which to pack her dunnage and make what arrangements she could for her father's comfort. She could think of no written or spoken word that would ease the agony of mind that would be his, and indeed for the present she dared not allow herself to contemplate anything but her lover's danger. She longed for the hour of flight and the excitement that would bring freedom from thought.

Their plan was simple and quickly formed. During the day Victor would make arrangements for securing easy possesion of Little Joe's sled and fine team of dogs and would collect what supplies he could. He would dine with the Scott's as usual that evening, but would leave early, excusing himself on the ground of an engagement. As soon as he deemed it safe he would return with the dogs and sled, and Flora would be waiting for him in the shadow of the house, with her dunnage and her snow-shoes.

There was much to occupy Victor's attention that morning, so as soon as they had arranged the details of the equipment that Flora was to bring he rose and buttoned his coat.

" Good-by, dear girl," he said. " I need not tell you to be brave. I came to you and you gave me courage and strength and the most precious thing in the world—your love. Before God, the day will come when I shall make good in your eyes. All the years of my life I will be striving to justify your wonderful trust in me."

He went from the house with the warmth of her last kiss on his lips.

In his bedroom at the hotel Victor dragged leather bags and dunnage sacks from the closet and got to work in earnest. In a side pocket of his satchel he found a bundle of maps held together with an elastic band. He spread them open on his bed and on his narrow dressing-table and studied each in turn. Over the last of the maps he spent a long time, making mysterious marks and lines of his own with his fountain pen and marking in roughly the trail that he expected to follow to the Indian village of Whitewaters. This done he carefully repacked all the bags, making a very shipshape job of it.

He reserved one bag in which to pack away the habiliments of civilization he was so soon to discard. His outfit included plenty of warm flannel shirts and heavy wool socks, extra mitts and extra moccasins. He found room for a few pounds of mellow tobacco, and among the miscellaneous small articles included in his kit were two pairs of large-lensed yellow goggles. Victor knew that these would prove very necessary for the protection of their eyes against the blinding glare of infinite, unbroken expanses of snow.

He spent a busy hour over the packing, and when that was completed he occupied several thoughtful minutes with the writing of a few vitally important lines on a sheet of paper torn from his writing tablet. He sealed the page in an envelope, which he addressed to Ottawa. He placed it in a secure inner pocket. When the maps were folded and put away and the litter of preparation cleared up Victor left the little room and set out in search of his one remaining guide, Little Joe Sabatis.

He found the half-breed in an out-house back of the hotel, where he had come to mend a piece of broken harness and perhaps to enjoy a little conversation with his dogs. Joe was a sociable man, with a ready smile and a ready tongue, from which words came easily in English, French, or Indian dialect. When the tall form of Victor Kent appeared in the entrance of the shed he turned from the boisterous greetings of the dogs, touched his ragged fur cap in salutation, and removed the short black pipe from between his lips.

"Good morning, boss," he said. "This one ver' fine day."

"You're right, Joe," replied Victor. "But it's also bitterly cold. You must be glad to be off the trail for a while."

"That right, boss; but we had one darn lucky trip—good trails—plenty game. We go out agin soon, maybe?"

"Maybe, Joe; but I think I will be able to let you go home for a few days first. I will have my arrangements made by tomorrow morning and will be able to let you go then. The dogs seem to be in fine condition. They are good animals—the best team I have ever traveled with."

"You bet, boss," replied the guide, grinning proudly. "There ain't a better team on dis country. I train 'em myself from the time dey are little pup and they know all I say. Strong, too, and can stand plenty of hard work, you bet. They t'ink you are one good frien', too, Mr. Kent, and I reckon dey would go 'most as far and act 'most as good for you as dey would for Little Joe."

Victor was busy playing with the four handsome animals and calling each by its name. They jumped around him with joyful barks while he cuffed and petted them. Most of what Little Joe said in their praise was true, and Victor knew them well and knew that he could handle them, individually and collectively. Enduring power lurked in their well-knit muscles and their large eyes showed great intelligence.

Victor talked with the guide while he smoked a lazy cigaret, and during the conversation Little Joe's opinion of himself steadily rose, as did also his opinion of the sportsman.

"You are a very fine fellow, Little Joe," said Victor; "and you have done your duty well. If you will come up to my room for a moment I will give you a present that I have for you—something that is very hard to get these days."

"Dat sounds good to me, boss," replied the half-breed. The cockles of his heart that were already glowing with the wine of praise now warmed to the prospect of more potent spirits. He could make a shrewd guess as to the nature of the present.

When Little Joe had received a square, black bottle from the hands of his employer and had gone off to the illicit enjoyment thereof, he left Victor assured of the success of his plans. He was once more the master of his destiny. He was even able to take a little of the sleep that he would need so badly. He had had none the night before and all through the following night he would be flying along white trails and through dark eternities of forest—flying from the law, not in fear, but in triumph with his love by his side.

Victor slept soundly for two hours. After he had eaten he went to the bank and cashed a check for several hundred dollars. He exchanged a few words with Edmund Scott, whose face had brightened at his entrance.

That brief glimpse of the bank manager bent above an open ledger, its white page covered by a tangled regularity of neat figures, his eyes peering up short-sightedly from beneath a green shade, remained fixed in the sportsman's mind and often returned to him at unexpected moments—sometimes in his dreams. Edmund Scott looked older and more impotent in these surroundings. He appeared as a captive hopelessly broken and shackled by the circuitous routine of a work in which he had lost all interest. And the little color and joy of his existence that lay beyond the bank in the home that Flora had made for him was to suddenly go out like the flame of a candle. Victor did not linger over this interview with his friend.

"Well, I'll see you later—at dinner-time," said Edmund Scott.

"Righto," replied Victor. "I'm sorry

to say I'll have to break away early, though. I have a bit of writing to do to-night."

Victor purchased some of the necessary supplies that afternoon — tea, flour, and bacon. He did not buy all that he would need, for he thought that he could obtain what more was necessary from the residents of Whitewaters—the village that was his first objective. Too large purchases in Mooseyard might cause comment. He had a good stock of ammunition. He went over his rifle that afternoon with exact and painstaking care; oiling and polishing and adjusting the sights until he had brought it to a point of efficiency that could be absolutely relied upon. After that he shaved and dressed by lamplight and took his way to the house of his friends.

During the dinner and the short evening that followed it, it was Victor who did most of the talking. Perhaps his mind was not always on the conversation, but he held his host absorbed in a discussion of the relative merits of two modern authors, and saved Flora the ordeal of painful efforts at gaiety. She was quiet under the stress of suppressed emotion; but in her eyes when they met her lover's there shone the steady light of trust.

Victor withdrew early. In the subdued light of the hall when they were alone together for a moment he touched his lips to her forehead and whispered:

"In two hours, dearest—at half-past eleven."

"I will be ready," she breathed.

Once more returned to his room the fugitive from justice changed his clothes, dressed as in the early morning, and packed away his stylish suit of tweeds, his shirts, collars and ties in the empty bag. He wondered whimsically when he would need them again.

Then he wrote a note and placed it in an envelope, addressing it to Little Joe Sabatis. He also placed in the envelope a slim wad of paper money—bills of large denomination. He sealed the packet and laid it in clear view on his dressing-table. Then he lit his pipe and sat down to await the hour of departure.

The note in the envelope addressed to Little Joe ran as follows:

DEAR JOE:

I have taken your dogs and outfit. Here is the price—one hundred dollars for each dog and another for sled and rigging. Don't believe all that you may soon hear about me. I usually have a mighty good reason for what I do. My respects to Sam Trent. He is a good man.

Your friend,
VICTOR KENT.

At the same minute, in the little house farther down the street, Flora had just finished the most difficult epistolary composition of her life. It read:

DEAR DAD:

Don't worry. I am with Victor, and we are safe. We shall come back soon.

FLORA.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

RECIPROCITY

HE'D lost a wager with his love—
And he was badly smitten—
He sent to her a box of gloves,
And then he got the mitten.

But she, repenting, in her turn—
She missed him; wished him back—
Sent him a lovely dressing-coat,
And then she got the sack.

Charles Bendix.

Everybody's Laughing Stock

by Herbert J. Mangham

AS soon as Philip Marble's name began to appear upon the bill-boards, he was approached by the usual hordes of aspiring young playwrights, but when he achieved his great success, he was almost mobbed. They called up for appointments until he had to have his telephone taken out. Men and women literally camped on his door-step, until he gained temporary peace by moving to another address. He always asked to be seated behind a pillar or a palm in a restaurant, but if he dared to peep out he was certain to be recognized.

What most of these ambitious aspirants wanted was a key to the golden portals which, by a mere turn of the hand, would bring them the fame and affluence popularly reputed to be the heritage of the successful playwright.

Phil always replied with the same indulgent condescension, the same extreme modesty, and the same platitudes with which Æschylus probably favored the young Hellenes. "Work, work and more work, my boy!" was the burden of his counsel, and he usually contrived to quote the old saw about genius, perspiration and inspiration.

Nobody but Marcella and myself ever knew that Phil really possessed a key, and we did not suspect him for almost two years.

When he first got his idea for a play, he rushed around perpetually with the expression of a man who has just sat on a tack. Every new situation, every new bit of dialogue, every revision, was recounted to us, sometimes three or four times, until even those of us who loved him most began to dread his approach.

Phil at his best was not clever. He was just nice and plump and jolly—just Phil, in short; but there was nobody who admired cleverness more than he, and his ready appreciation helped to make him the good company that he always was.

When he became obsessed of his precious idea, his first wish was to clothe it in a scintillating fabric of light persiflage; and to that end he haunted clubs and banquets, listening eagerly to the acknowledged wits of the town and painstakingly writing down all of their laughter-making remarks. He studied his notes carefully and extracted from them an essence that he used as a foundation for his dialogue. I went over each page of conversation with him and pointed out the portions that were obviously stale or unconsciously plagiarized, because I did not want the poor fellow to be branded as a thief.

He pored over books on technique until his brain was a giddy maze of dramaturgical phraseology, and his lips mechanically formed such words as "motivation," "foreshadowing," "business" and "dynamics."

His characters were all alike, projections of Phil himself, differing only in age, sex and social position. Only those who have read the original draft of the play can comprehend my amazement when he diffidently informed me that the central male character was written around my personality, and hoped that I would be free to accept the rôle when the play was produced. I immediately suggested drastic changes, which he humbly put into effect.

It was with much greater diffidence that he approached Marcella Alfred, with a hint that she was the inspiration for his heroine.

To express it algebraically, Marcella was to Philip as Juno to a young swineherd. None of us except Phil would have thought of comparing mundane Marcella to any mythological character, with the possible exception of Pandora. Wasn't Pandora the addle-pated hussy who opened the forbidden box and gave freedom to a lot of mosquitoes, California sand-fleas and such.

But to Phil, Marcella was a Juno, before whom such vile worms as himself should grovel; and when he did grovel, the haughty shrew calmly trampled upon his most sensitive portions.

When Phil laid before his goddess his humble offering, she at first rewarded him only with ungracious sarcasm; but when she had read the manuscript, she said that if this, that and t'other were changed, she *might* accept the part—providing, of course, that she had no other prospects. This, that and t'other *were* changed accordingly, so the two principal characters ceased to be mirrored Philips, and took on a shade of individuality.

Before finally submitting the manuscript for production, our budding young playwright introduced his brain-child to a friend who was an assistant dramatic critic, supposing in his simple innocence that dramatic critics knew something about plays. The friend returned the manuscript after a couple of days, claiming to have gone over it carefully, and suggested the reading of two text-books that had never been translated from the German, and the subsequent reconstruction of the second act.

The final draft revealed a light comedy somewhat lacking in smoothness and originality, but really no worse than many a play that I will admit to having appeared in.

With all the optimism of one who is conscious of having done his valiant bit to lessen the sorrow in this vale of tears, Phil tenderly packed his manuscript, and sent it by registered mail to the man who is generally conceded to be the foremost American producer. Then he waited.

I might place a row of stars here to denote the passage of time, in the manner of lady authors in the more delicate portions of their novels.

After a few months, during which Phil's enthusiasm never flagged, he sent a polite query concerning the fate of his submission. His manuscript was immediately returned, accompanied by a vague note of deep regret and heartfelt thanks.

Undaunted, Phil forwarded the play to the second most prominent American producer.

Again he waited patient months for the expected acceptance, to be rewarded finally with another vague note that echoed the sentiments of the first.

We heard less and less of the masterpiece that was to establish this new Shakespeare in his niche among the immortals, until, after three more trials, he turned his manuscript over to a playbroker, and ceased to speak of the matter. He confided to the world at large that art had no place in this worldly age, and that he had forsworn playwriting for plumbing or some other occupation in which effort could be appreciated by *hoi polloi*.

Phil was a chastened lad during the months that followed, and, going the good children of the proverb one better, was seldom either seen or heard. We were allowed to forget that a great genius was in our midst. If we ever mentioned his playwriting proclivities at all, it was only to wonder in passing why the man had been seized by the unexpected spasm, and why it had not spent itself sooner.

A long season in New York for the play in which I was appearing was followed by a tour that took me to the Pacific Coast. It was more than two years after Phil's

first symptoms when I returned, resolved to take a rest before seeking another engagement.

I had been settled just long enough to have my laundry done and my suits pressed when Phil one day burst into my apartment with no more consideration of my jaded nerves than a Kansas cyclone a-wooing.

Maher was considering his play!

The play-broker had actually aroused the interest of Marc Maher, one of the first to reject Phil's play, to the extent that he had spoken of terms.

Phil's most obstreperous moments of the year before seemed mere pleasantries under his achievements of the following week. I began heartily to wish that I had remained on the Mohave desert for my rest.

One of Maher's new productions, after an uncertain start, settled into a groove that led straight to the storehouse. He wanted a new play immediately, and closed negotiations with Phil's broker.

Phil suggested at the first opportunity that the leading parts were ideally suited to Marcella Alfred and myself, both of whom were temporarily at liberty. Maher agreed, and Phil shook hands with himself for his keenness of judgment, quite forgetting who had rewritten the rôles.

It seemed as if I had hardly returned from California, when I found myself on a cluttered stage with a typed manuscript in my hand, facing Marcella with another manuscript, with Phil gamboling about like a sportive cow and beaming benignly upon everybody from Marcella to the sulky old man who was sweeping out the dressing-rooms.

Our director stepped out from the wings. He was a well-fed, sleek, middle-aged man with a globular head, which he frequently tipped back the better to see his manuscript through the tortoise-rimmed glasses placed well forward on the bridge of his nose.

"Well," he said, "start her going! We got a lot to do, and we might as well be at it. All right, Miss Loftus, enter left."

The ingénue skipped gaily to the center of the stage and sat upon a table.

"Yoo-hoo!" she caroled, lifting her head towards an imaginary second-story window. "Come out into the arbor, Archie! I want some one to whisper sweet nothings in my ear!"

"We might as well change that right now," interrupted the director. "Here, now— When the curtain goes up, you are disclosed sitting by the table under the arbor and Archie is leaning against the table, lighting a cigaret; and you say: 'Look at those dark clouds! I do believe it is going to rain!'"

"But, Mr. Agnew," objected Phil in horrified tones, "that will spoil my *bon mot* about the 'pearly ears.'"

Mr. Agnew lowered his head and gazed at Phil over his glasses.

"I am going to cut that out," he said tersely.

Phil stepped back, disconcerted, and Mr. Agnew returned to his manuscript.

"Now, Archie—" he resumed.

But Phil had regained his speech and again stepped forward.

"Mr. Agnew!" he remonstrated. "This is supposed to be a cheerful spring day! You will spoil the atmosphere by talking about clouds!"

"I am going to introduce a shower to strengthen the climax of the first act," patiently explained Mr. Agnew; "so we shall have to have clouds."

Mr. Agnew returned to the carnage, and Phil sat upon an upturned scrub-bucket, from which he was immediately dispossessed by the sulky janitor.

Phil watched in silent agony while we worked out the first few pages of his play in the new light of the Agnewlian vision; but when the director cut out bodily the scene in which the ingénue pilfered my fraternity pin, the sufferer was again goaded to remonstrance.

"Mr. Agnew!" he pleaded. "I need that to prepare for the big accusation episode, the pivot scene of the second act!"

"I am cutting that out," said the director.

Phil exhorted, threatened, argued and implored, while Mr. Agnew peered unmoved at him over his tortoise-rims.

"I am going to cut that out, too," was the director's final reply, and he turned

away, tipping back his head in order to bring the manuscript into focus.

Phil went to Maher with tears in his eyes to tell of the butchery of his comedy, but Maher refused to intercede, saying that Mr. Agnew was responsible for more successes than any other man on Broadway, so, whatever he was doing, he probably knew what he was about.

By the day of the final dress rehearsal Phil's three-act comedy was a four-act melodrama. Even the title had been changed, from " Love in a Landaulet " to " The Web of Life."

While putting on my make-up, I tried vainly to form a clear idea of what I was going to do, but my benumbed brain could register nothing save a confusion of scenes, phrases and stage directions.

Phil watched me disconsolately, thumbing absently the tattered remains of his original manuscript. His eyes were lifeless, and the poor fellow looked almost thin.

" If ever I write another play—" he mumbled.

Mr. Agnew literally pushed and pulled us through the final rehearsal. Only once did the author intrude upon our notice. It was when Mr. Agnew decided to throttle another of his pet lines.

" Mr. Agnew!" begged Phil. " That is all of my play that is left!"

" It doesn't jibe with the rest of the scene," responded Mr. Agnew, and Phil subsided. " Now, Mr. Brook—"

I leaned toward Marcella.

" Margaret," I said accusingly, " your lack of faith in me—"

" Mr. Brook!" interjected the director. " That line has been changed!"

" So stupid of you, Mr. Brook!" echoed Phil. " That line belongs to the original play!"

It was Phil's last assertion of self.

" Margaret," said I, tenderly, again leaning toward Marcella, " your love for me—"

II.

I SOMEHOW removed the most of my grease-paint, dragged myself to my apartment and fell across my bed. Somewhere in the confusion of ideas in my brain was one that concerned sympathy with Phil, but I felt that I was an object of pity myself. I don't believe that I moved a muscle before noon of the following day. When I opened my eyes the sun's rays were streaming vertically into my window, my light was burning and I was still dressed in my street clothes.

I undressed wearily, took a cold plunge and telephoned for food. Then I slept again. After a soothing warm bath, followed by a cold shower, I went to the nearest Chinese café and drank two pots of tea.

As I walked the two miles to the theater, my brain cleared marvelously. When I reached my dressing-room I was actually singing. Scenes gradually presented themselves to me as concrete wholes. I essayed to enliven the lugubrious Philip, although I was not confident of success myself. The short time allowed us for rehearsals had not permitted the usual out-of-town preliminary appearance, necessitating our opening on Broadway with none of us certain of what we were doing. And life or death is sometimes determined by a first night on the Great White Way.

" How I am going to get through this evening," remarked the ingénue to Marcella, nervously awaiting the rise of the curtain, " is more than I know."

" I don't know what I am going to do, either," replied Marcella, " but I am going to do it without worrying my poor head. It has had about all it can stand the past two weeks."

She was magnificently cool, seemingly uncaring that the fate of the play and of her engagement would be determined before midnight. Mr. Agnew moved constantly from one to another, giving last directions to which we assented absently. Pouring water into already overflowing vessels is a thankless task.

The ingénue and *Archie* began their scene a little uncertainly, with Mr. Agnew in the wings frantically feeding their lines to them, but upon the entrance of the ingénue's mother the tempo picked up noticeably. After fifty years' experience, Mrs. Carruthers could face any conditions with perfect composure. She skilfully paved

the way for the entrance of Marcella and myself, and when we began our quarrel scene I could feel the audience thoroughly within our grasp.

From that moment the progress of the play was scarcely ruffled. The entire company moved with confident precision. When we hesitated, Mr. Agnew promptly fed us our lines, and if we could not catch them we extemporized.

The shower at the end of the first act brought a gratifying burst of applause, and the audience at the end of the second kept us on the stage for three curtains.

The climax of the third act— Well, if Caruso and Farrar or Garden and Muratore ever received a greater ovation than Marcella and myself, after our court-room scene, it must have been somewhere abroad! We bowed singly and together until we were giddy. Whatever else one may say about that girl, one must admit that she knows how to make her points tell, and that it is easy to play up to her.

Somebody yelled "Author!" and Phil was forced to come out on the stage with us. He could do nothing but blush and modestly indicate that the triumph was ours; but Marcella and I spoke a few meaningless words of thanks, and the curtain was finally allowed to rest.

I paced to and fro behind the scenes, wondering if we could possibly keep up the pace during the fourth act; but my qualms were unnecessary. The final curtain descended upon an undoubted success. The play was established, the name of Philip Marble was made, and Marcella and I could already see our own glowing on electric signboards. Phil had nothing to say.

Marcella and I both received several overtures from other managements before we could remove our make-ups. We lost little time in coming to a better understanding with Maher.

During the next few weeks I saw very little of Phil. Success seemed to have increased his modesty. He didn't even make any demonstration when Marcella gave notice, announcing her intention of accepting a starring offer from another management. I resolved to remain with the "Web of Life" until my reputation was more securely established, rather than risk an unknown play. A very capable actress was substituted for Marcella, and I found the change agreeable. Marcella had an inexcusable fondness for these garlic-scented Italian table d'hôtes that sometimes made my love-making very arduous. Her leaving, too, may have had something to do with my name's being featured on the electric sign in front of the theater, and in all of the advertising.

One morning about six weeks after the opening night, I sat down at my breakfast-table with the expectation of eating a leisurely meal. My valet (Phil and I both had valets now) propped the morning paper against my coffee pot, folded with the column of theatrical news items outward.

I was drying my left eye, after an uncannily skilful shot from my grapefruit, when my right was attracted by the name of Philip Marble. It was in ordinary type and only three lines long, but I jumped up with such impetuosity that my chair was thrown backward, flew past an amazed valet and lunged into the hallway, grabbing the first form of headgear that came under my hand.

Unceremoniously bursting into Phil's apartment, I did not slacken my pace until I came to a sudden stop beside his breakfast-table.

"Listen!" I exclaimed dramatically,— "this from the *Morning Telegraph!* 'November 2 has been selected as the date for the first presentation at Atlantic City by B. H. Trees of his latest bedroom farce, "Peggy's Pink Pajamas." The author is Philip Marble, recently brought into prominence by the record breaking "Web of Life."'"

"But why all this unseemly commotion?" reproved Phil, swallowing painfully. "You made me down half of this coffee at a gulp, and it wasn't at all pleasant, I assure you. It is only common politeness to knock before entering apartments other than your own, anyhow. I am sure my valet would have admitted you. And when did you begin wearing brown derbies?"

I removed my valet's hat, my mind too full to be abashed.

"But when did you write it?" I asked.

"It is my custom to write in the mornings," he replied, "when not annoyed by housebreakers. It might further interest you to know that Madame Halska, the pseudo-Polish emotional actress, will appear in a new starring vehicle, also written by Philip Marble, just as soon as the play has been revamped frequently enough to suit the lady!"

I sat down abruptly.

"You did all this in a month," I exclaimed reproachfully, "and never once said a word to me!"

"Why should I?" he replied. "When I wrote my first play, I foolishly told everybody about it, and was ridiculed for my pains. Though I must say, Brooksy, that you were more charitable—or should I say less *un*charitable?—than some of our other friends."

"How did you do it, Phil?" I asked. "You must have had a terrific burst of inspiration."

"Just work! Good, hard work!"

III.

I WATCHED the papers eagerly for the comments on the new plays. The critics were non-committal about the true merits of "Peggy's Pink Pajamas," but all were agreed that it was destined to outdistance "Up in Bertha's Bathroom" in popularity; and all were equally agreed that Madame Halska's new vehicle was better fitted to display her talents than anything that she had yet presented.

Coincident with the success of the two new plays was the failure of Marcella's first starring venture and the announcement of the coming production by Edmund Apperson, the apostle of realism, of a new drama entitled "Sealed Lips," written by the brilliant new star of the literary firmament, Philip Marble!

With his name on the publicity list of four plays, all at the stage when they are most discussed, Phil was attaining an enviable reputation. He was courted by the most exclusive clubs, treated with respectful fellowship by men whose mere names were the signal for awed silence, and deluged with invitations that he could not accept. His bearing was becoming regal, his tailoring distinctive, and even his complexion underwent some mysterious, but quite legitimate, improvement.

The rehearsals of "Sealed Lips" were halted midway by the dismissal of the leading woman. Phil told me that he did not like her interpretation, so he insisted upon her immediate discharge! Marcella was hurriedly summoned to take her place, with the understanding that she was to be starred.

The rehearsal that I attended a few days later differed greatly from those of the "Web of Life," especially Phil's rôle in it. There was nothing of the worm who groveled. The director was there with his bloodthirsty pencil hovering over the manuscript, but I had to smile at the deference with which he and his associates suggested their changes. Instead of Phil pleading for mercy for his play, he assented readily to almost all proposed changes and broached many more. I learned later that he had welcomed the prunings and revisions before rehearsals of one of those "play doctors," who are now considered necessary adjuncts to every producer's office. When I commented upon his new attitude, he replied loftily:

"Experience, my dear fellow, has taught me that plays, if you will pardon a bromide, are not written, but rewritten."

I was effectively silenced. No longer was I revered as one of those personages hallowed by the glamour of the footlights, but was to be patronized by the fat stiff!

Philip's urbanity was not ruffled until Marcella wished to annex one of the minor character's lines.

"Certainly not!" he said.

"The star's part needs to be bolstered up in that scene," argued Marcella. "It does not stand out prominently enough."

"This is not a starring vehicle," replied Phil.

"That line will be changed, or I will leave the cast!" she exclaimed.

"Just as you please!" snapped Phil. "Changing that line would unbalance the scene, and I will not allow it! As I said before, this is not a vehicle, but a *play*, in which we have consented to star you. I

must remind you that you are not yet a star of much magnitude. Another failure or a season of idleness, and you will be back where you were before the 'Web of Life.' My scene stands!"

The rehearsal was resumed. Marcella wept a few tears of vexation in an obscure corner, but was ready for her next cue.

"Sealed Lips" and Marcella were both successes. A crook play by Phil, produced a month later, lasted barely two weeks, floating to oblivion with the ebb of the dramatic crime wave; but it was followed immediately by an historical drama that attracted national notice from the literati, and later by a vehicle for a prominent male star. Summer brought an outdoor pageant and a musical comedy libretto!

One of the opening guns of the next season was a tragedy with a famous Shakespearean actor. For every play that left Broadway for the road there was a new one ready to open; and several successes from the former season, including those with Marcella and myself, were still running indefinitely. The "Web of Life," with three companies touring the United States and one each in London, France, and Australia, had not yet left Broadway.

We came to accept each new play as a matter of course. Yet, with all of Phil's productiveness, there was no "Marbellian school," for almost every form of play, and every style of writing was represented. The versatility of the man was unprecedented.

He wrote articles for the leading magazines, and addressed drama classes, and the women's clubs. His fame as an after-dinner speaker eclipsed that of any of the men he had formerly envied. There seemed to be no limit to his activities.

The announcement of his engagement to Marcella at Christmas created small surprise. For months she had been making a pest of herself with her chatter about Phil, his accomplishments and his dominant personality.

His cup was filled when Courtney Wells, manager of the New Art Theater, announced that he was going to put on Phil's latest play exactly as written, with settings by Regnault, and incidental music by Oliver Morton Pellier.

He was sitting in my apartment enthusing about the marvelous understanding of Courtney Wells, when I received a telephone call from Marc Maher, the producer of "The Web of Life."

"It's about a minor change in the cast," I explained, when I returned. "He also said that the new play that he has just accepted from you is so nearly perfect that he has given orders to have it produced without alteration."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Phil, jumping to his feet. "What shall I do?"

"Do!" I repeated stupidly. "Rejoice!"

"You don't understand, Brooksy!" he said, pacing up and down the room. "Oh, I must get away where I can think!"

He stumbled out of the room and I watched him out of sight, trying to understand his unexpected behavior. In the end I gave it up and settled down to read.

Fifteen minutes later, my valet answered an imperious ring, and Marcella rushed angrily past him.

"What have you done to Phil?" she demanded.

"I haven't done anything to Phil!" I retorted tartly.

"Well, he has just come to my apartment quite upset about something, and I can't make anything of his mutterings except that you have just told him something."

"Perhaps," I reflected, "his work is beginning to tell on him. Let's go and talk with him."

We found him huddled forward in a chair, his hands pressed to his temples. He raised his head as we entered and stood clinically in front of him.

"Friends," he said, "I'm a fraud!"

I drew up chairs for Marcella and myself. "Tell us the rest of it!" I commanded.

"You remember 'Love in a Landaulet,' from which Mr. Agnew derived 'The Web of Life—'"

We nodded.

"That is the only play I ever wrote!"

Our jaws dropped.

"Do you mean that you stole the others, or what?" I asked.

"No, not that," replied Phil. "The others are all the same play!"

Marcella and I stared witlessly at each other.

"You see," Phil continued, "my original play was so unlike Mr. Agnew's version that I just changed the names of the characters, and turned it over to another producer. There it went through another disguising metamorphosis, so I just kept on copying it and submitting it to other producers. All they seem to need is a few characters to start with."

"So," I said, "this play that Marc Maher has just bought is the same one that he bought from you in the first place!"

"Practically," replied Phil. "Of course, I have been polishing and revising it all along until it is really a very decent piece, and I would like to see Courtney Wells produce it as written. But if he and Maher both produce it without change, the jig is up and I am everybody's laughing stock."

"I might have known," I said, "that no one could write those plays in two seasons!"

"Most of my time went into the writing of my speeches."

"Did you write all of those yourself?" I asked, putting a strong accent on "those."

"I had a little help," he admitted. "A couple of young fellows from Columbia University collaborated with me. They were really a brilliant pair of youngsters, and the extra money came in very handy to them."

Phil grinned foolishly at Marcella. All of his new aplomb had dropped from him, and he was again the old-time Phil. Marcella beamed.

"Sweet thing!" she said, moving to the arm of his chair and pressing his head to her breast. "Who but mother's child could ever have done such a thing!"

I turned away from this touching display of pre-nuptial affection.

"The only thing for you to do," I said, picking up my hat and gloves, "is to have Maher call in your old friend, Mr. Agnew, and give him a free hand. He will not recognize the play. I doubt if he ever read it!"

They did not understand me at the time, but I later repeated my plan in detail. It enabled them to retire with glory from the theater to an estate on Long Island. It is queer that with my head I never get one big idea like Phil's.

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THE KEY

LOVE passed me by and dropped a key,
A worthless thing it seemed to be;
But, thinking he might need it for
Unlocking some unyielding door,
I followed him and whispered clear:
"You've lost your little key, I fear!"
Love turned, without the least surprise,
But with a twinkle in his eyes,
And said: "I have some more like it.
Keep it. 'Most any door 'twill fit.
Keep it and use it often, too,
It may unlock Success for you."

Since then I've wandered to and fro,
Using Love's key where'er I go,
And many gates have swung aside
When I the magic key applied.
So many doors I have passed through,
I've found that what Love said is true.
Perhaps you've guessed it all the while:
The key Love dropped is just a Smile.

Thomas Russell Shelton

Black Jack

Part II

by Max Brand

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

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ELIZABETH CORNISH and her brother Vance witness the death of Black Jack, otherwise known as Jack Hollis, a noted bandit and man-killer. Elizabeth takes his motherless baby to prove her theory that environment is stronger than heredity. Twenty-four years later the baby has grown to be Terence Colby, and Elizabeth has led him to believe that he is the last of an aristocratic Southern family. Her brother Vance is a wastrel, and Elizabeth decides to leave her fortune to Terry. Vance determines to fight for his own, and knowing that Elizabeth would disown the boy if ever he showed signs of his evil paternity plans to reveal his identity to Terry, surreptitiously. A celebration is planned for Terry's twenty-fifth birthday. Vance invites Sheriff Joe Minter, the very man who killed Black Jack. Then he sends an anoymous letter to Terry from a near-by town. As the day of the party draws near Vance sees his plans maturing and prepares to profit from them

CHAPTER VIII.

BLOOD WILL TELL.

TERRY did not come down for dinner. It was more or less of a calamity, for the board was quite full of early guests for the next day's festivities. Aunt Elizabeth shifted the burden of the entertainment onto the capable shoulders of Vance, who could please these Westerners when he chose. To-night he decidedly chose. Elizabeth had never seen him in such high spirits. He could flirt good-humoredly and openly across the table at Nelly, or else turn and draw an anecdote from Nelly's father. He kept the reins in his hands and drove the talk along so smoothly that Elizabeth could sit in gloomy silence, unnoticed, at the farther end of the table. Her mind was up yonder in the room of Terry.

Something had happened, and it had come through that long business envelope with the typewritten address that seemed so harmless. One reading of the contents had brought Terry out of his chair with an exclamation. Then, without explanation of any sort, he had gone to his room and stayed there. She would have followed to find out what was the matter, but the requirements of dinner and her guests kept her down-stairs. But something very important had happened. For she knew perfectly well that it takes a great deal to make a youngster of twenty-five forget food.

Immediately after dinner Vance, at a signal from her, dexterously herded every one into the living-room and distributed them in comfort around the big fireplace; Elizabeth Cornish bolted straight for the room of Terence. She knocked and tried

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the door. To her astonishment, the knob turned, but the door did not open. She heard the click and felt the jar of the bolt. Terry had locked his door!

A little thing to make her heart fall, one would say, but little things about Terry were great things to Elizabeth. In twenty-four years he had never locked his door. What could it mean? She had been as close to his secrets as a mother. Closer, perhaps, for she was as much a friend as an adopted mother. And now the locking of that door shut her out definitely. It put a period to one part of their relations.

It was a moment before she could call, and she waited breathlessly. She was reassured by a quiet voice that answered her: "Just a moment. I'll open."

The tone was so matter-of-fact that her heart, with one leap, came back to normal and tears of relief misted her eyes for an instant. Perhaps he was up here working out a surprise for the next day—he was full of tricks and surprises. That was unquestionably it. And he took so long in coming to the door because he was hiding the thing he had been working on. As for food, Wu Chi was his slave and would have smuggled a tray up to him. Presently the lock turned and the door opened.

She could not see his face distinctly at first, the light was so strong behind him. Besides, she was more occupied in looking for the tray of food which would assure her that Terry was not suffering from some mental crisis that had made him forget even dinner. She found the tray, sure enough, but the food had not been touched. The napkin was still draped across it, fresh and crisp and sharp of fold as only Wu Chi could arrange it. There was a little bunch of wild-flowers on one corner of the tray, already wilting, and their heads leaning over the edge; that was Wu's idea of an appetizer. But Terry had not eaten!

She turned on him with a new rush of alarm. And all her fears were realized. Terry had been fighting a hard battle and he was still fighting. About his eyes there was the look, half-dull and half-hard, that comes in the eyes of young people unused to pain. A worried, tense, hungry face. He took her arm and led her to the table. On it lay an article clipped out of a magazine, with ragged edges where the knife had carelessly gashed it out. She looked down at it with unseeing eyes. The sheets were already much crumbled. Terry turned them to a full-page picture, and Elizabeth found herself looking down into the face of Black-Jack, proud, handsome, defiant.

Had Vance been there he might have recognized her actions. As she had done one day twenty-four years ago, now she turned and dropped heavily into a chair, her bony hands pressed to her shallow bosom. A moment later she was on her feet again, ready to fight, ready to tell a thousand lies. But it was too late. The revelation had been complete and she could tell by his face that Terence knew everything.

"Terry," she said faintly, "what on earth have you to do with that—"

"Listen, Aunt Elizabeth," he said, "you aren't going to fib about it, are you?"

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"Why were you so shocked?"

She knew it was a futile battle. He was prying at her inner mind with short questions and a hard, dry voice.

"It was the face of that terrible man. I saw him once before, you know. On the day—"

"On the day he was murdered!"

That word told her everything. "Murdered!" It lighted all the mental processes through which he had been going. Who in all the reaches of the mountain-desert had ever before dreamed of terming the killing of the notorious Black-Jack a "murder"?

"What are you saying, Terence? That fellow—"

"Hush! Look at us!"

He picked up the photograph and stood back so that the light fell sharply on his face and on the photograph which he held beside his head. He caught up a sombrero and jammed it jauntily on his head. He tilted his face high, with resolute chin. And all at once there were two Black-Jacks, not one. He evidently saw all the admission that he cared for in her face. He took off the hat with a dragging motion and replaced the photograph on the table.

"I tried it in the mirror," he said quietly. "I wasn't quite sure until I tried it in the mirror. Then I knew, of course."

He became all at once tenfold more dear to her. His calm was breaking her heart. She felt him slipping out of her life.

"What shall I say to you, Terence?"

"Is that my real name?"

She winced. "Yes. Your real name."

"Good. Do you remember our talk of to-day?"

"What talk?"

He drew his breath with something of a groan.

"I said that what these people lacked was the influence of family—of old blood!"

He made himself smile at her and Elizabeth trembled.

"If I could explain—" she began.

"Ah, what is there to explain, Aunt Elizabeth? Except that you have been a thousand times kinder to me than I dreamed before. Why, I—I actually thought that you were rather honored by having a Colby under your roof. I really felt that I was bestowing something of a favor on you!"

"Terry, sit down!"

He sank into a chair, slowly. And she sat on the arm of it with her uncertain hand going over his hair and her mournful eyes on his face.

"Whatever your name may be, that doesn't change the man who wears the name."

He laughed softly, in an ugly way.

"And you've been teaching me steadily for twenty-four years that blood will tell? You can't change like this. Oh, I understand it perfectly. You determined to make me over. You determined to destroy my heritage and put the name of the fine old Colbys in its place. It was a brave thing to try, and all these years how you must have waited, and waited to see how I would turn out, dreading every day some outbreak of the bad blood! Ah, you have a nerve of steel, Aunt Elizabeth! How have you endured the suspense?"

She felt that he was mocking her subtly under this flow of compliment. But she could not answer or turn the point of his talk. It was the bitterness of pain, not of reproach, she knew.

She said: "Why didn't you let me come up with you? Why didn't you send for me?"

"I've been busy doing a thing that no one could help me with."

"And that, Terry, dear?"

"I've been burning my dreams."

He pointed to a smoldering heap of ashes on the hearth.

"Terry!"

"Yes, all the Colby pictures that I've been collecting for the past fifteen years. I burned 'em. They don't mean anything to any one else, and certainly they have ceased to mean anything to me. But when I came to Anthony Colby—the 1812 man, you know, the one who has always been my hero—it went pretty hard. I felt as if —I were burning my own personality. As a matter of fact, in the last couple of hours I've been born over again."

Terry paused. "And births are painful, Aunt Elizabeth!"

The tears which had been gathering in her eyes now trembled toward a fall, but she checked them. He had, indeed, changed greatly. She told it chiefly in his restraint. He had become a man and had escaped from her influence.

"I've only one thing to ask you, Aunt Elizabeth—do you mind me still calling you that?"

At that she cried out and caught his hand. "Terry, dear! Terry, dear! You break my heart!"

"I don't mean to. You mustn't think that I'm pitying myself. But I want to know the real name of my father. He must have had some name other than Black-Jack. What was it?"

"Are you going to gather his memory to your heart, Terry?"

"I am going to find something about him that I can be proud of. Blood will tell. I know that I'm not all bad and there must have been good in Black-Jack. I want to know all about him. I want to know about—his crimes."

He labored through a fierce moment of silent struggle while her heart went helplessly out to him.

"Because—I had a hand in every one of those crimes! Everything that he did

is something that I might have done under the same temptation."

"No, no!"

"I tell you, it's true!"

"But you're not all your father's son. You had a mother. A dear, sweet-faced girl—"

"Don't!" whispered Terry, suddenly overcome. "Wait a moment!"

He was able to speak after a moment.

"What do you know about her?"

"I think—"

"I suppose he broke—her heart?"

"She was a very delicate girl," she said after a moment.

"And now my father's name, please."

"Not that just now. Give me until to-morrow night, Terry. Will you do that? Will you wait till to-morrow night, Terry? I'm going to have a long talk with you then, about many things. And I want you to keep this in mind always. No matter how long you live, the influence of the Colbys will never go out of your life. And neither will my influence, I hope. If there is anything good in me, it has gone into you. I have seen to that. Terry, you are not your father's son alone. All these other things have entered into your make-up. They're just as much a part of you as his blood."

"Ah, yes," said Terry. "But blood will tell!"

It was a mournful echo of a thing she had told him a thousand times.

"You'll wait, though? You'll wait for your father's real name; and when I've finished talking to you to-morrow night maybe you won't ask it at all."

"Perhaps not."

But she could see that his mind was as set as steel.

CHAPTER IX.

A CORPSE OR A KILLER.

SHE went straight down to the big living-room and drew Vance away, mindless of her guests. He came humming until he was past the door and in the shadowy hall. Then he touched her arm, suddenly grown serious.

"What's wrong, Elizabeth?"

Her voice was low, vibrating with fierceness. And Vance blessed the dimness of the hall, for he could feel the blood recede from his face and the sweat stand on his forehead.

"Vance, if you've done what I think you've done, you're lower than a snake, and more poisonous and more treacherous. And I'll cut you out of my heart and my life. You know what I mean!"

It was really the first important crisis that he had ever faced. And now his heart grew small, cold. He knew, miserably, his own cowardice. And like all cowards he fell back on bold lying to carry him through. It was a triumph that he could make his voice steady—more than steady. He could even throw the right shade of disgust into it.

"Is this another one of your tantrums, Elizabeth? By Heavens, I'm growing tired of 'em. You continually throw in my face that you hold the strings of the purse. Well, tie them up as far as I'm concerned. I won't whine. I'd rather have that happen than be tyrannized over any longer."

She was much shaken. And there was a sting in this reproach that carried home to her; there was just a sufficient edge of truth to wound her. It made her want to explain and she instantly lost half the force of her attack. Had there been much light she could have read his face; the dimness of the hall was saving Vance, and he knew it.

"God knows I'd like to believe that you haven't had anything to do with it. But you must have had something to do with it. You and I are the only two people in the world who know the secret of it—"

He pretended to guess.

"It's something about Terence? Something about his father?"

Again she was disarmed. If he were guilty it was strange that he should approach the subject so openly. And she began to doubt.

"Vance, he knows everything! Everything except the real name of Black-Jack!"

"Good Heavens!"

She strained her eyes through the shadows to make out his real expression; but

there seemed to be a real horror in his restrained whisper.

"It isn't possible, Elizabeth!"

"It came in that letter. That letter I wanted to open, and which you persuaded me not to!" She mustered all her damning facts one after another. "And it was postmarked from Craterville. Vance, you have been in Craterville lately!"

He seemed to consider.

"Could I have told any one? Could I, possibly? No, Elizabeth, I'll give you my word of honor that I've never spoken a syllable about that subject to any one!"

"Ah, but what have you written?"

"I've never put pen to paper. But—how did it happen?"

He had control of himself now. His voice was steadier. He could feel her recede from her aggressiveness.

"It was dated after you left Craterville, of course. And—I can't stand imagining that you could be so low. Only, who else would have a motive?"

"But how was it done?"

"They sent him an article about his father and a picture of Black-Jack that happens to look as much like Terry as two peas."

"Then I have it! If the picture looks like Terry, some one took it for granted that he'd be interested in the similarity. That's why it was sent. Unless they told him that he was really Black-Jack's son. Did the person who sent the letter do that?"

"There was no letter. Only a magazine clipping and the photograph of the painting."

They were both silent. Plainly she had dismissed all idea of her brother's guilt.

"But what are we going to do, Elizabeth? And how has he taken it?"

"Like poison, Vance. With a pride that would bring the tears even to your eyes. He—he burned all the Colby pictures. Oh, Vance, twenty-four years of work are thrown away!"

"Nonsense! It seems that there's a tragedy. But there isn't. This will all straighten out. I'm glad he's found out. Sooner or later he was pretty sure to. Such things will come to light."

"Vance, you'll help me? You'll forgive me for accusing you, and you'll help me to keep Terry in hand for the next few days? You see, he declares that he will not be ashamed of his father."

"You can't blame him for that."

"God knows I blame no one but myself."

"I'll help you with every ounce of strength in my mind and body, my dear."

She pressed his hand in silence.

"I'm going up to talk with him now," he said. "I'm going to do what I can with him. You go in and talk. And don't let them see that anything is wrong."

"Trust me. I can still act a lie. It's a sort of family talent."

If she had been watching him closely enough she would have seen that he winced under this trust. But she was blind with her pain. She went on into the living-room and presently Vance, from the hall, heard her cheery voice talking—even laughing. He shook his head in reluctant admiration. There was a quality of the Spartan about her that always baffled him. Then he went up the lazy sweep of the staircase to the room of Terence. For it was absolutely necessary that he remove from Terry's mind any lingering suspicion about his attitude. He must play the friend now or never—and he hoped and believed it would be the last time such a necessity might arise.

The door had not been locked again. He entered at the call of Terry and found him leaning over the hearth stirring up the pile of charred paper to make it burn more freely. It burned as compacted paper always does, with many little flares of flame and much smoldering and smoking. A shadow crossed the face of Terry as he saw his visitor, but he banished it at once and rose to greet him. In his heart Vance was a little moved. It was not entirely hard for him to muster a great expression of sympathy. He went straight to the younger man and took his hand.

"Elizabeth has told me," he said gently, and he looked with a moist eye into the face of the man who, if his plans worked out, would be either murderer or murdered before the close of the next day. "I am very sorry, Terence."

"I thought you came to congratulate me," said Terry, withdrawing his hand.

"Congratulate you?" echoed Vance with unaffected astonishment.

"For having learned the truth," said Terry. "Also, for having a father who was a strong man."

Vance could not resist the opening.

"In a way, I suppose he was," he said dryly.

He struck fire from Terry with that. Perhaps it was sheer imagination, but it seemed to him that the other was already changed, harder, colder. In Terry he had always been aware of a sort of muscular manhood which he did not like. Now there was less sense of muscle and more of an active mind. He could not quite understand, unless it were the working of the spirit of Black-Jack. Indeed, it gave him a grisly feeling to see the eyes of Terry sharpen into points of light.

"A master of men, whatever else he may have been," said the younger man.

"Surely. Of course he was that. And if you look at it in that way, I *do* congratulate you, Terence!"

But the fire which he had ignited was still burning in Terry.

"You've always hated me, Uncle Vance," he declared. "I've known it all these years. And I'll do without your congratulations."

"You're wrong, Terry," said Vance. He kept his voice mild. "You're very wrong. But I'm old enough not to take offense at what a young spit-fire says."

"I suppose you are," retorted Terry in a tone which implied that he himself would never reach that age.

"And when a few years run by," went on Vance, "you'll change your view-point. In the mean time, my boy, let me give you this warning. No matter what you think about me, it is Elizabeth who counts."

"Thanks. You need have no fear about my attitude to Aunt Elizabeth. You ought to know that I love her, and respect her."

"Exactly. But you're headstrong, Terry. Very headstrong. And so is Elizabeth. Take your own case. She took you into the family for the sake of a theory. Did you know that?"

The boy stiffened.

"A theory?"

"Quite so. She wished to prove that blood, after all, was more talk than a vital influence. So she took you in and gave you an imaginary line of ancestors with which you were entirely contented. But, after all, it has been twenty-four years of theory rather than twenty-four years of Terry. You understand?"

"It's a rather nasty thing to hear," said Terence huskily. "Perhaps you're right." I don't know. Perhaps you're right."

"And if her theory is proved wrong—look out, Terry! She'll throw you out of her life without a second thought—and find a new theory, though this time it probably won't be a baby."

"Is that a threat?"

"My dear boy, not by any means. You think I have hated you? Not at all. I have simply been indifferent. Now that you are in more or less trouble, you see that I come to you. And hereafter if there should be a crisis, you will see who is your true friend. Now, good night!"

He had saved his most gracious speech until the very end, and after it he retired at once to leave Terence with the pleasant memory in his mind. For he had in his mind the idea of a perfect crime for which he would not be punished. He would turn Terry into a corpse or a killer, and in either case the youngster would never dream who had dealt the blow.

No wonder, then, as he went down-stairs, that he stepped onto the veranda for a few moments. The moon was just up beyond Mount Discovery; the valley unfolded like a dream; the cascades and the fall were noisy flashes of silver. Never had the estate seemed so charming to Vance Cornish, for he felt that his hand was closing slowly around his inheritance.

CHAPTER X.

TERRY MEETS THE SHERIFF.

THE sleep of the night seemed to blot out the excitement of the preceding evening. A bright sun, a cool stir of air, brought in the next morning, and cer-

tainly calamity had never seemed farther from the Cornish ranch than it did on this day. All through the morning people kept arriving in ones and twos. Every buckboard on the place was commissioned to haul the guests around the smooth roads and show them the estate; and those who preferred were furnished with saddle-horses from the stable to keep their own mounts fresh for their return trip. Vance took charge of the wagon parties; Terence himself guided the horsemen, and he rode El Sangre, a flashing streak of blood red.

The exercise brought the color to his face; the wind raised his spirits; and when the gathering at the house to wait for the big dinner began, he was as gay as any.

"That's the way with young people," Elizabeth confided to her brother. "Trouble slips off their minds."

And then the second blow fell, the blow on which Vance had counted for his great results. No less a person than Sheriff Joe Minter galloped up and threw his reins before the veranda. He approached Elizabeth with a high flourish of his hat and a profound bow, for Uncle Joe Minter affected the mannered courtesy of the "Southern" school. Vance had them in profile from the side, and his nervous glance flickered from one to the other. The sheriff was plainly pleased with what he had seen on his way up Bear Creek. He was also happy to be present at so large a gathering. But to Elizabeth his coming was like a death. Her brother could tell the difference between her forced cordiality and the real thing. She had his horse put up; presented him to the few people whom he had not met, and then left him posing for the crowd of admirers. Life to the sheriff was truly a stage. Then Elizabeth went to Vance.

"You saw?" she gasped.

"Sheriff Minter? What of it? Rather nervy of the old ass to come up here for the party; he hardly knows us."

"No, no! Not that! But don't you remember? Don't you remember what Joe Minter did?"

"Good Lord!" gasped Vance, apparently just recalling. "He killed Black-Jack! And what will Terry do when he finds out?"

She grew still whiter, hearing him name her own fear.

"They mustn't meet," she said desperately. "Vance, if you're half a man you'll find some way of getting that pompous, windy idiot off the place."

"My dear! Do you want me to invite him to leave?"

"Something—I don't care what!"

"Neither do I. But I can't insult the fool. That type resents an insult with gunplay. We must simply keep them apart. Keep the sheriff from talking."

"Keep rain from falling!" groaned Elizabeth. "Vance, if you won't do anything I'll go and tell the sheriff that he must leave!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Do you think that I'm going to risk a murder?"

"I suppose you're right," nodded Vance, changing his tactics with Machiavellian smoothness. "If Terry saw the man who killed his father all his twenty-four years of training would go up in smoke and the blood of his father would talk in him. There'd be a shooting!"

She caught a hand to her throat as if she were choking. But the color rose in her cheeks. One could see her pride come to give her strength.

"I'm not so sure of that, Vance. I think he would come through this acid test. But I don't want to take chances."

"I don't blame you, Elizabeth," said her brother heartily. "Neither would I. But if the sheriff stays here I feel that I'm going to win the bet that I made twenty-four years ago. You remember? That Terry would shoot a man before he was twenty-five?"

"Have I ever forgotten?" she said huskily. "Have I ever let it go out of my mind? But it isn't the danger of Terry shooting. It's the danger of Terry being shot. If he should reach for a gun against the sheriff—that professional man-killer—Vance, something has to be done!"

"Right," he nodded. "I wouldn't trust Terry in the face of such a temptation to violence. Not for a moment!"

The natural stubbornness on which he had counted hardened in her face.

"I don't know."

"It would be an acid test, Elizabeth. But perhaps now is the time. You've spent twenty-four years training him. If he isn't what he ought to be now, he never will be, no doubt."

"It may be that you're right," she said gloomily. "Twenty-four years! Yes, and I've filled about half of my time with Terry and his training. Vance, you *are* right. If he has the elements of a man-killer in him after what I've done for him, then he's a hopeless case. The sheriff shall stay! The sheriff shall stay!"

She kept repeating it, as though the repetition of the phrase might bring her courage. And then she went back among her guests.

As for Vance, he remained skilfully in the background that day. It was peculiarly vital, this day of all days, that he should not be much in evidence. No one must see in him a controlling influence.

In the mean time he watched his sister with a growing admiration and with a growing concern. Instantly she had a problem on her hands. For the moment Terence heard that the great sheriff himself had joined the party, he was filled with happiness. Vance watched them meet with a heart swelling with happiness and surety of success. Straight through a group came Terry, weaving his way eagerly, and went up to the sheriff. Vance saw Elizabeth attempt to detain him, attempt to send him on an errand. But he waved her suggestion away for a moment and made for the sheriff. Elizabeth, seeing that the meeting could not be avoided, at least determined to be present at it. She came up with Terence and presented him.

"Sheriff Minter, this is Terence Colby."

"I've heard of you, Colby," said the sheriff kindly. And he waited for a response with the gleaming eye of a vain man. There was not long to wait.

"You've really heard of me?" said Terry, immensely pleased. "By the Lord, I've heard of *you*, sheriff! But of course everybody has."

"I dunno, son," said the sheriff benevolently. "But I been drifting around a tolerable long time, I guess."

"Why," said Terry with a sort of outburst, "I've simply eaten up everything I could gather. I've found fellows who knew something about your work in detail. And I've always cornered them. And I've even read about you in magazines!"

"Well, now, you don't say," protested the sheriff. "In magazines?"

And his eye quested through the group, hoping for other listeners who might learn how broadly the fame of their sheriff was spread.

"That Canning fellow who traveled out West and ran into you and was along while you were hunting down the Garrison boys. I read his article."

The sheriff scratched his chin.

"I disremember him. Canning? Canning? Come to think about it, I *do* remember him. Kind of a small man with washed-out eyes. Sort of silent, and always with a note-book on his knee. Did I say silent? Not so far as questions went. 'What's that tree?' says he. 'Did you ever see a real mountain lion? Did you ever shoot one?' Yep, he talked all the time. I got sick of answering all that gent's questions, I recollect. Yep, he was along when I took the Garrison boys, but that little party didn't amount to much."

"*He* thought it did," said Terry fervently. "Said it was the bravest, coolest-headed, cunningest piece of work he'd ever seen done. And, by Jove, sheriff, I agree with him—every inch!"

"H-m-m," said the sheriff.

"Perhaps you'll tell me some of the other things—the things you count big?"

"Oh, I ain't done nothing much, come to think of it. All pretty simple, they looked to me, when I was doing them. Besides, I ain't much of a hand at talk!"

"Ah," said Terry, "you'd talk well enough to suit me, sheriff!"

The sheriff had found a listener after his own heart.

"They ain't nothing but a campfire that gives a good light to see a story by—the kind of stories I got to tell," he declared. "Some of these days I'll take you along with me on a trail, son, if you'd like—and most like I'll talk your arm off at night beside the fire. Like to come?"

"Like to?" cried Terry. "I'd be the happiest man in the mountains!"

"Would you, now? Well, Colby, you and me might hit it off pretty well. I've heard tell you ain't half bad with a rifle and pretty slick with a revolver, too."

"I practice hard," said Terry frankly. "I love guns."

"Good things to love, and good things to hate, too," philosophized the sheriff. "But all right in their own place, which ain't none too big, these days. The old times is gone, son. The old times is gone when a man went out into the world with a hoss under him, and a pair of Colt's strapped to his waist, and made his own way, and took pot-luck no matter where he went. Them days is gone, and our younger boys is going to pot!"

"I suppose so," admitted Terry reverently.

"But you got a spark in you, son. Well, one of these days we'll get together. And I hear tell you got El Sangre?"

"I was lucky," said Terry.

"That's a sizable piece of work, Colby. I've seen twenty that run El Sangre, and never even got close enough to eat his dust. Nacheral pacer, right enough. I've seen him kite across country like a train! And his mane and tail blowing like smoke!"

"I got him with patience. That was all."

"S'pose we take a look at him?"

"By all means. Just come along with me."

Elizabeth struck in.

"Just a moment, Terence. There's Mr. Gainor, and he's been asking to see you. You can take the sheriff out to see El Sangre later. Besides, half a dozen people want to talk to the sheriff, and you mustn't monopolize him. Miss Wickson begged me to get her a chance to talk to you—the real Sheriff Minter. Do you mind?"

"Pshaw," said the sheriff. "I ain't no kind of a hand at talking to the womenfolk. Where is she?"

"Down yonder, sheriff. Shall we go?"

"The old lady with the cane?"

"No, the girl with the bright hair."

"Doggone me," muttered the sheriff. "Well, let's saunter down that way."

He waved to Terence, who, casting a black glance in the direction of Mr. Gainor, went off to execute Elizabeth's errand. Plainly Elizabeth had won the first engagement, but Vance was still confident. The dinner table would tell the tale.

CHAPTER XI.

BLACK-JACK'S CAPTURE.

ELIZABETH left the ordering of the guests at the table to Vance, and she consulted him about it as they went into the dining-room. It was a long, low-ceilinged room, with more windows than wall-space. It opened onto a small porch, and below the porch was the garden which had been the pride of Henry Cornish. Beside the tall glass doors which led out onto the porch she reviewed the seating plans of Vance.

"You at this end and I at the other," he said. "I've put the sheriff beside you, and right across from the sheriff is Nelly. She ought to keep him busy. The old idiot has a weakness for pretty girls, and the younger the better, it seems. Next to the sheriff is Mr. Gainor. He's a political power, and what time the sheriff doesn't spend on you and on Nelly he certainly will give to Gainor. The arrangement of the rest doesn't matter. I simply worked to get the sheriff well-pocketed and keep him under your eye."

"Very nicely done, Vance. But why not under yours, Vance? You're a thousand times more diplomatic than I am."

"I wouldn't take the responsibility, for after all, this may turn out to be a rather solemn occasion, Elizabeth."

"You don't think so, Vance?"

"I pray not."

"And where have you put Terence?"

"Next to Nelly, at your left."

"Good Heavens, Vance, that's almost directly opposite the sheriff. You'll have them practically facing each other."

It was the main thing he was striving to attain. He placated her carefully.

"I had to. There's a danger. But the advantage is huge. You'll be there between them, you might say. You can keep

the table-talk in hand at that end. Flash me a signal if you're in trouble, and I'll fire a question down the table at the sheriff or Terry, and get their attention. In the mean time, you can draw Terry into talk with you if he begins to ask the sheriff what you consider leading questions. In that way, you'll keep the talk a thousand leagues away from the death of Black-Jack."

He gained his point without much more trouble. Half an hour later the table was surrounded by the guests. It was a table of baronial proportions, but twenty couples occupied every inch of the space easily. Vance found himself a greater distance than he could have wished from the scene of danger, and of electrical contact.

At least four zones of crossfire talk intervened, and the talk at the farther end of the table was completely lost to him, except when some new and amazing dish, a triumph of Wu Chi's fabrication, was brought on, and an appreciative wave of silence attended it.

Or again, the mighty voice of the sheriff was heard to bellow forth in laughter of heroic proportions.

Aside from that, there was no information he could gather except by his eyes. And chiefly, the face of Elizabeth. He knew her like a book in which he had often read. Twice he read danger signals. When the great roast was being removed he saw her eyes widen and her lips contract a trifle, and he knew that some one had come very close to the danger line indeed. Again when dessert was coming in bright shoals on the trays of the Chinese servants, the glance of his sister fixed on him down the length of the table with a grim appeal. He made a gesture of helplessness. Between them four distinct groups into which the table talk had divided were now going at full blast. And above that uproar, shrill with the voices of women laid over the deep bass rumble of the men, he could hardly have made himself heard at the other end of the table without shouting.

Yet that crisis also passed away. Elizabeth was working hard, but as the meal progressed toward a close, he began to worry. It had seemed impossible that the sheriff could actually sit this length of time in such an assemblage without launching into the stories for which he was famous. Above all, he would be sure to tell how he had started on his career as a man-hunter by relating how he slew Black-Jack.

Once the appalling thought came to Vance that the story must have been told during one of those moments when his sister had shown alarm. The crisis might be over, and Terry had indeed showed a restraint which was a credit to Elizabeth's training. But by the increasing weariness in the face of Elizabeth as the meal progressed, and by the growth of a hunted look in her eyes, he knew that the climax had not yet been reached and that she was continually fighting it away.

He writhed with impatience. If he had not been a fool, he would have taken that place himself, and then he could have seen to it that the sheriff, with dexterous guiding, should approach the fatal story. As it was, how could he tell that Elizabeth might not undo all his plans and cleverly keep the sheriff away from his favorite topic for an untold length of time? But as he told his sister, he wished to place all the seeming responsibility on her own shoulders. Perhaps he had played too safe.

The first ray of hope came to him as coffee was brought in. The prodigious eating of the cattlemen and miners at the table had brought them to a stupor. They no longer talked, but puffed with unfamiliar awkwardness at the fine Havanas which Vance had provided and looked with dull eyes—that inward look which tells of digestion in progress, and nothing in the mind. Even the women talked less, having worn off the edge of the novelty of actually dining at the table of Elizabeth Cornish. And since the hostess was occupied solely with the little group nearest her, and there was no guiding mind to pick up the threads of talk in each group and maintain it, this duty fell more and more into the hands of Vance. He took up his task with pleasure.

Farther and farther down the table extended the sphere of his mild influence. He asked Mr. Wainwright to tell the story of how he treed the bear so that the tenderfoot author could come and shoot it. Mr.

Wainwright responded with gusto. The story was a success. He varied it by requesting young Dobel to describe the snow-slide which had wiped out the Vorhemier shack the winter before.

Young Dobel did not make as much as he might have made out of his material, but he did well enough to make the men grunt at the end, and he brought several little squeals of horror from the ladies.

All of this was for a purpose. Vance was setting the precedent, and they were becoming used to hearing stories. At the end of each tale the silence of expectation was longer and wider. Finally it reached the other end of the table. The whole audience was sitting still, waiting for the next story, and suddenly the sheriff became aware of the situation with a start. He been totally occupied with pretty Nelly opposite him, and the political conversation of Mr. Gainor, and the admiration of pleasant Elizabeth Cornish. Now he discovered that tales were going the rounds, and that he had not yet been heard. He rolled his eye with an inward look, and Vance knew that he was searching for some smooth means of introducing one of his yarns.

Victory!

But here Elizabeth cut trenchantly into the heart of the conversation. She had seen and understood. She shot home half a dozen questions with the accuracy of a marksman, and beat up a drum fire of responses from the ladies which, for a time, rattled up and down the length of the table. The sheriff was biting his mustache thoughtfully.

It was only a momentary check, however. Just at the point where Vance began to despair of ever effecting his goal, the silence began again as lady after lady ran out of material for the nonce. And as the silence spread, the sheriff was visibly gathering steam.

Again Elizabeth cut in. But this time there was only a sporadic chattering in response. Coffee was steaming before them, Wu Chi's powerful, thick, aromatic coffee which only he knew how to make. They were in a mood, now, to hear stories, that tableful of people. An expected ally came to the aid of Vance. It was Terence, who had been eating his heart out during the silly table-talk of the past few minutes. Now he seized upon the first clear opening.

"Sheriff Minter, I've heard a lot about the time you ran down Johnny Garden. But I've never had the straight of it. Won't you tell us how it happened?"

"Oh," protested the sheriff, "it don't amount to much."

Elizabeth cast one frantic glance at her brother, and strove to edge into the interval of silence with a question directed at Mr. Gainor. But he shelved that question; the whole table was obviously waiting for the great man to speak. And Gainor was of no mind to cross Minter in a story-telling mood. A dozen appeals for the yarn poured in.

"Well," said the sheriff, "if you folks are plumb set on it, I'll tell you the facts. I ain't much on embroidering a yarn. But I'll tell you just how it come about."

There followed a long story of how Johnny Garden had announced that he would ride down and shoot up the sheriff's own town, and then get away on the sheriff's own horse—and how he did it. And how the sheriff was laughed at heartily by the townsfolk, and how the whole mountain district joined in the laughter. And how he started out single-handed in the middle of winter to run down Johnny Garden, and struck through the mountains, was caught above timberline in a terrific blizzard, kept on in peril of his life until he barely managed to reach the timber again on the other side of the ridge. How he descended upon the hiding place of Johnny Garden, found Johnny gone, but his companions there, and made a bargain with them to let them go if they would consent to stand by and offer no resistance when he fought with Johnny on the latter's return. How they were as good as their word and how, when Johnny returned, they stood aside and let Johnny and the sheriff fight it out. How the sheriff beat Johnny to the draw, but was wounded in the left arm, while Johnny fired a second shot as he lay dying on the floor of the lean-to. How the sheriff's wound was dressed by the companions of the dead Johnny, and

how he was safely dismissed with honor, as between brave men, and how afterward he hunted those same men down one by one.

It was quite a long story, but the audience followed it with a breathless interest.

"Yes, sir," concluded the sheriff, as the applause of murmurs fell off. "And from yarns like that one you wouldn't never figure it that I was the son of a minister brung up plumb peaceful. Now, would you?"

He enjoyed the mutter of wonder.

"Fact," he declared.

And again, to the intense joy of Vance, it was Terry who brought the subject back, and this time the subject of all subjects which Elizabeth dreaded, and which Vance longed for.

"Tell us how you came to branch out, Sheriff Minter?"

"Ain't I making you kind of tired with all this talk?" said the sheriff.

There was an appreciative chorus of denial. Most of the people there had heard the same stories in the same words three or four times, at least, but really the stories were good enough to stand repetition. What most men dreaded was not the present but the future, and many a man shuddered at the idea of the sheriff as a table companion.

"It was this way," began the sheriff, while Elizabeth cast at Vance a glance of frantic and weary appeal, to which he responded with a gesture which indicated that the cause was lost.

"I was brung up mighty proper. I had a most amazing lot of prayers at the tip of my tongue when I wasn't no more'n knee high to a grass-hopper. But when a man has got a fire in him, they ain't no use trying to smother it. You either got to put water on it or else let it burn itself out.

"My old man didn't see it that way. When I got to cutting up he'd try to smother it, and stop me by saying: 'Don't!' Which don't accomplish nothing with young gents that got any spirit. Not a damn thing—asking your pardon, ladies! Well, sirs, he kept me in harness, you might say, and pulling dead straight down the road and working hard and faithful, and never stepping out on no parties like the other boys, and never swearing none in particular, till I was close onto eighteen years old. But all the time I'd been saving up steam, and swelling and swelling and getting pretty near ready to bust.

"Well, sirs, pretty soon—we was living in Garrison City them days, when Garrison wasn't near the town that it is now—along comes word that Jack Hollis is around. Some of you older folks remember Jack Hollis. But a lot of you younger folks ain't never heard nothing about him. But in his day Jack Hollis was as bad as they was made. They was nothing that Jack wouldn't turn to real handy, from shootin' up a town to sticking up a train or a stage. And he done it all just about as well. He was one of them universal experts. He could blow a safe as neat as you'd ask. And if it come to a gunfight he was greased lightning with a flying start. That was Jack Hollis."

The sheriff paused to draw breath.

"Perhaps," said Elizabeth Cornish, white about the lips, "we had better go into the living-room to hear the rest of the sheriff's story?"

It was not a very skilful diversion, but Elizabeth had reached the point of utter desperation. And on the way into the living-room unquestionably she would be able to divert Terry to something else. Vance held his breath.

And it was Terry who signed his own doom.

"We're very comfortable here, Aunt Elizabeth. Let's not go in till the sheriff has finished his story."

The sheriff rewarded him with a flash of gratitude, and Vance settled back in his chair. The end could not, now, be far away.

CHAPTER XII.

TERRY SPEAKS.

"I WAS saying," proceeded the sheriff, "that they scared their babies in these here parts with the name of Jack Hollis. Which they sure done. Well, sir, he was bad."

"Not all bad, surely," put in Vance. "I've heard a good many stories about the generosity of—"

He was anxious to put in the name of Black-Jack since the sheriff was sticking so close to "Jack Hollis," which was a name that Terry had not yet heard for his dead father. But before he could get out the name the sheriff, angry at the interruption, resumed the smooth current of his tale with a side flash at Vance.

"Not all bad, you say? Generous? Sure he was generous. Them that live outside the law has got to be generous to keep a gang around 'em. Not that Hollis ever played with a gang much, but he had hangers-on all over the mountains and gents that he had done good turns for and hadn't gone off and talked about it. But that was just common sense. He knew he'd need friends that he could trust if he ever got in trouble. If he was wounded they had to be some place where he could rest up. Ain't that so? Well, sir, that's what the goodness of Jack Hollis amounted to. No, sir, he was bad. Plumb bad and all bad!

"But he had them qualities that a young gent with an imagination is apt to cotton to. He was free with his money. He dressed like a dandy. He'd gamble with hundreds, and then give back half of his winnings if he'd broke the gent that run the bank. Them was the sort of things that Jack Hollis would do. And I had my head full of him. Well, about the time that he come to the neighborhood, I sneaked out of the house one night and went off to a dance with a girl that I was sweet on. And when I come back I found dad waiting up for me ready to skin me alive. He didn't realize that I was outside the licking size. He tried to give me a clubbing. I kicked the stick out of his hands and swore that I'd leave and never come back. Which I never done, living up to my word proper.

"But when I found myself outside in the night I says to myself: 'Where shall I go now?'

"And then, being sort of sick at the world, and hating dad particular, I decided to go out and join Jack Hollis. I got a loan of a hoss and out I went. I was going to go bad. Mostly to cut up dad, I reckon, and not because I wanted to particular.

"It wasn't hard to find Jack Hollis. Not for a kid my age that was sure not to be no officer of the law. Besides, they didn't go out single and hunt for Hollis. They went in gangs of a half a dozen at a time, or more if they could get 'em. And even then they mostly got cleaned up when they cornered Hollis. Yes, sir, he made life sad for the sheriffs in them parts that he favored most. He spoiled more good reputations than any other ten men that ever I hear tell of, did Jack Hollis!

"I found Jack toasting bacon over a fire. He had two gents with him, and they brung me in, finding me sneaking around like a fool kid instead of walking right into camp. Jack sized me up in a minute. He was a fine looking boy, was Hollis. Straight as an arrow and strong as a bull and limber as a willow sapling, was Jack. He gimme a look out of them fine black eyes of his which I won't never forget. Aye, a handsome scoundrel, that Hollis!"

Elizabeth Cornish sank back in her chair and covered her eyes with her hands for a moment. To the others it seemed that she was merely rubbing weary eyes. But her brother knew perfectly that she was near to fainting.

He looked at Terry and saw that the boy was following the tale with sparkling eyes.

"I like what you say about this Hollis, sheriff," he ventured softly.

"Do you? Well, so did I like what I seen of him that night, for all I knew that he was a no-good man-killing heartless sort. I told him right off that I wanted to join him. I even up and give him an exhibition of shooting.

"What do you think he says to me?

"'You go home to your ma, young man!'

"That's what he said.

"'I ain't got a mother living,' says I.

"'Ah, lad,' says he, 'that's too bad. You sure need one a power. Then go back to your dad. He'll serve two purposes.'

"'I've swore I'll never go back to him,' says I.

"'Ah,' says he, 'I see how it is! A little fight between you and your father, eh? Now, son, you take my advice and go back and ask his pardon. Maybe you think he's a hard man? You step out and you'll find that the world's a damned sight harder.'

"That's what he says to me.

"'I ain't a baby,' says I to Jack Hollis. 'I'm a grown man. I'm ready to fight your way.'

"'Any fool can fight,' says Jack Hollis. 'But a gent with any sense don't have to fight. You can lay to that, son!'

"'Don't call me son,' says I. 'I'm older than you was when you started out.'

"'I'd had my heart busted before I started,' says Jack Hollis to me. 'Are you as old as that, son? By the look of the dull eye of yours, you ain't sure that you even got a heart yet. You go back home and don't bother me no more. I'll come back in five years and see if you're still in the same mind!'

"And that was what I seen of Jack Hollis.

"I went back into town—Garrison City. I slept over the stables the rest of that night. The next day I loafed around town not hardly noways knowing what I was going to do.

"Then I was loafing around with my rifle, like I was going out on a hunting trip that afternoon. And pretty soon I heard a lot of noise coming down the street, guns and what not. I look out the window and there comes Jack Hollis, hell-bent! Jack Hollis! And then it pops into my head that they was a big price, for them days, on Jack's head. I picked up my gun and eased it over the sill of the window and got a good bead.

"Jack turned in his saddle—"

There was a faint groan from Elizabeth Cornish. All eyes focused on her in amazement. She mustered a smile. The story went on.

"When Jack turned to blaze away at them that was piling out around the corner of the street, I let the gun go, and I drilled him clean. Great sensation, gents, to have a life under your trigger. Just beckon one mite of an inch and a life goes scooting up to Heaven or down to hell. I never got over seeing Hollis spill sidewise out of that saddle. There he was a minute before better'n any five men when it come to fighting. And now he wasn't nothing but a lot of trouble to bury. Just so many pounds of flesh. You see? Well, sir, the price on Black-Jack set me up in life and gimme my start. After that I sort of specialized in man-hunting, and I've kept on ever since."

Terry leaned across the table, his left arm outstretched to call the sheriff's attention.

"I didn't catch that last name, sheriff," he said.

The talk was already beginning to bubble up at the end of the sheriff's tale. But there was something in the tone of the boy that cut through the talk to its root. People were suddenly looking at him out of eyes which were very wide indeed. And it was not hard to find a reason. His handsome face was colorless, like a carving from the stone, and under his knitted brows his black eyes were ominous in the shadow. The sheriff frankly gaped at him. It was another man who sat across the table in the chair where the ingenuous youth had been a moment before.

"What name? Jack Hollis?"

"I think the name you used was Black-Jack, sheriff?"

"Black-Jack? Sure. That was the other name for Jack Hollis. He was mostly called Black-Jack for short, but that was chiefly among his partners. Outside he was called Jack Hollis, which was his real name."

Terence rose from his chair, more colorless than ever, the knuckles of one hand resting upon the table. He seemed very tall, years older, grim.

"Terry!" called Elizabeth Cornish softly.

It was like speaking to a stone.

"Gentlemen," said Terry, though his eyes never left the face of the sheriff, and it was obvious that he was making his speech to one pair of ears alone. "I have been living among you under the name of Colby—Terence Colby. It seems an appropriate moment to say that this is not

my name. After what the sheriff has just told you it may be of interest to know that my real name is Hollis. Terence Hollis is my name and my father was Jack Hollis, commonly known as Black-Jack, it seems from the story of the sheriff. I also wish to say that I am announcing my parentage not because I wish to apologize for it—in spite of the rather remarkable narrative of the sheriff—but because I am proud of it!"

He lifted his head while he spoke. And his eye went boldly, calmly down the table. A thrilling glance to follow or to receive. Each man and woman was shocked into electric interest as the gaze fell on them.

"This could not have been expected before, because none of you knew my father's name. I confess that I did not know it myself until a very short time ago. Otherwise I should not have listened to the sheriff's story until the end. Hereafter, however, when any of you are tempted to talk about Black-Jack or Jack Hollis, remember that his son is alive—and in good health!"

He was even smiling in a mirthless way as he finished. And he hung in his place for an instant as though he were ready to hear a reply. But the table was stunned. Then Terry turned on his heel and left the room.

It was the signal for a general upstarting from the table, a pushing back of chairs, a gathering around Elizabeth Cornish. She was as white as Terry had been while he talked. But there was a gathering excitement in her eye, and happiness. The sheriff was full of apologies. He would rather have had his tongue torn out by the roots than to have offended her or the young man with his story.

She waved the sheriff's apology aside. It was unfortunate, but it could not have been helped. They all realized that. She guided her guests into the living-room, and on the way she managed to drift close to her brother.

Her eyes were on fire with her triumph.

"You heard, Vance? You saw what he did?"

There was a haunted look about the face of Vance, who had seen his high-built schemes topple about his head.

"He did even better than I expected, Elizabeth. Thank Heaven for it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHALLENGE.

TERENCE HOLLIS had gone out of the room and up the stairs like a man stunned, or walking in his sleep. Not until he stepped into the familiar room did the blood begin to return to his face, and with the warmth there was a growing sensation of uneasiness.

Something was wrong. Something had to be righted. So much had happened to him within the last twenty-four hours that his brain sang with the thought of it. And gradually his mind cleared. The thing that was wrong was that the man who had killed his father was now under the same roof with him, had shaken his hand, had sat in bland complacency and looked in his face and told of the butchery.

Butchery it was, according to Terry's standards. For the sake of the price on the head of the outlaw, young Minter had shoved his rifle across a window-sill, taken his aim, and with no risk to himself had shot down the wild rider. His heart stood up in his throat with revulsion at the thought of it. Murder, horrible and cold-blooded, the more horrible because it was legal.

His memory drifted back to other features of the tale, the consummate gentleness and right-mindedness of Black-Jack Hollis in sending the youth back to his home. What save the judgment of Hollis had kept the sheriff himself from a career of crime? And yet he had shot down the man like a mad dog, for the sake of a price on his head!

Terry writhed at the thought. Writhed, and instinctively went to the window and threw it up. The cool wind caught at his face and throat. He saw, vaguely, the outlines of the Blue Mountains and the lofty pyramid of Mount Discovery wedged into the steel-blue of the sky. He saw these things without thinking of them.

Something had to be done. What was it?

And when he turned, what he saw was

the gun cabinet with a shimmer of light on the barrels. Then he knew. He selected his favorite Colt and drew it out. It was loaded, and the action in perfect condition. He weighed it sensitively in his hand. Many and many an hour he had toyed with that gun. Many and many an hour he had practised and blazed away hundreds of rounds of ammunition with it. It responded to his touch like a muscular part of his own body. It was something sentient and alive to his thought.

He shoved it under his coat, and walking down the stairs again the chill of the steel worked through to his flesh. He went back to the kitchen and called out Wu Chi. The latter came shuffling in his slippers, nodding, grinning in anticipation of compliments.

"Wu," came the short demand, "can you keep your mouth shut and do what you're told to do?"

"Wu try," said the Chinaman, grave as a yellow image instantly.

"Then go to the living-room and tell Mr. Gainor and Sheriff Minter that Mr. Harkness is waiting for them outside and wishes to see them on business of the most urgent nature. It will only be the matter of a moment. Now go. Gainor and the sheriff. Don't forget."

He received a scared glance, and then went out onto the veranda and sat down to wait.

That was the right way, he felt. His father would have called the sheriff to the door, in a similar situation, and after one brief challenge they would have gone for their guns. But there was another way, and that was the way of the Colbys. Their way was right. They lived like gentlemen, and above all, they fought always like gentlemen.

Presently the screen door opened, squeaked twice, and then closed with a hum of the screen as it slammed. Steps approached him. He got up from the chair and faced them, Gainor and the sheriff. The sheriff had instinctively put on his hat, like a man who does not understand the open air with an uncovered head. But Gainor was uncovered, and his white hair glimmered.

He was a tall, courtly old fellow. His ceremonious address had won him much political influence. Men said that Gainor was courteous to a dog, not because he respected the dog, but because he wanted to practise for a man. And he was never to be taken by surprise. He had always the correct rejoinder, always did the right thing. He had a thin, stern face, very full-fleshed about the chin and a hawk-nose that gave him a cast of ferocity in certain aspects.

It was to him that Terry addressed himself.

"Mr. Gainor," he said, "I'm sorry to have sent in a false message. But my business is very urgent, and I have a very particular reason for not wishing to have it known that I have called you out."

The moment he rose out of the chair and faced them Gainor had stopped short. He was quite capable of fast thinking, and now his glance flickered from Terry to the sheriff and back again. It was plain that he had shrewd suspicions as to the purpose behind that call. The sheriff was merely confused. He flushed as much as his tanned-leather skin permitted. As for Terry, the moment his glance fell on the sheriff he felt his muscles jump into hard ridges, and an almost uncontrollable desire to go at the throat of the other seized him. He quelled that desire and fought it back with a chill of fear. For it seemed to him that the sight of the sheriff had made him another man, put a new soul inside him.

"My father's blood working out!" he thought to himself.

And he fastened his attention on Mr. Gainor and tried to shut the picture of the sheriff out of his brain. But it lingered there in the corner of his mind. It was a keen and steady torture. The desire to leap at the tall man was as consuming as the passion for water in the desert. And with a shudder of horror he found himself without a moral scruple. Just behind the thin partition of his will-power there was a raging fury to get at Joe Minter. He wanted to kill. He wanted to snuff that life out as the life of Black-Jack Hollis had been snuffed. He wanted, most of all, to feel the last pulse stagger and weaken

and go out under the power of his finger-tips. That, he felt, was the soul of his father come back to earth in his body. And he fled from the impulse. He kept saying to himself, "How must a Colby meet this crisis, for the Colbys knew how to do the right thing?"

He excluded the sheriff deliberately from his attention and turned fully upon Gainor.

"Mr. Gainor, will you be kind enough to go over to that grove of spruce where the three of us can talk without any danger of interruption?"

Of course that speech revealed everything. Gainor stiffened a little and the tuft of beard which ran down to a point on his chin quivered and jutted out. The sheriff seemed to feel nothing more than a mild surprise and curiosity. And the three went silently, side by side, under the spruce. They were glorious trees, strong of trunk and nobly proportioned. Their tops were silver-bright in the sunshine. Through the lower branches the light was filtered through layer after layer of shadow, spilling through holes and pouring through crevices with diminished intensity until on the ground there were only few patches of light here and there, and these were no brighter than silver moonshine, and seemed to be without heat. Indeed, in the mild shadow among the trees lay the chill of the mountain air which seems to lurk in covert places waiting for the night.

It might have been this chill that made Terry button his coat closer about him and tremble a little as he entered the shadow. Some one was opening windows in the living-room and a fresh current of laughter and talk went out to them; yet the noise was sufficiently in the background, so that it did not really intrude. Presently they were in the middle of the little grove. The great trunks shut out the world in a scattered wall. There was a narrow opening here among the trees at the very center. The three were in a sort of gorge of which the solemn spruce trees furnished the sides, the cold blue of the mountain skies was just above the lofty tree tips, and the wind kept the pure fragrance of the evergreens stirring about them. That odor is the soul of the mountains. Even in the lowlands if one comes on it there is a deeper breath drawn, a lifting of the head, an upspring of thought to the high places. Terry felt all these things as he had never felt them before. A great surety had come to him that this was the last place he would ever see on earth. He was about to die, and he was glad, in a dim sort of way, that he should die in a place so beautiful. He looked at the sheriff, who stood calm but puzzled, and at Gainor, who was very grave, indeed, and returned his look with one of infinite pity, as though he knew and understood and acquiesced, but was deeply grieved that it must be so.

"Gentlemen," said Terry, making his voice light and cheerful as he felt that the voice of a Colby should be at such a time, being about to die, "I suppose you understand why I have asked you to come here?"

"Yes," nodded Gainor.

"But I'm damned if I do," said the sheriff frankly.

Terry looked upon him coldly. He felt that he had the slightest chance of killing this professional man-slayer, but at least he would do his best—for the sake of Black-Jack's memory. But to think that his life—his mind—his soul—all that was dear to him and all that he was dear to, should ever lie at the command of the trigger of this hard, crafty, vain, and unimportant fellow! He writhed at the thought. It made him stand stiffer. His chin went up. He grew literally taller before their eyes, and such a look came on his face that the sheriff instinctively fell back a pace.

"Mr. Gainor," said Terry, as though his contempt for the sheriff was too great to permit his speaking directly to Minter, "will you explain to the sheriff that my determination to have satisfaction does not come from the fact that he killed my father, but because of the manner of the killing? To the sheriff it seems justifiable. To me it seems a murder. Having that thought there is only one thing to do. One of us must not leave this place!"

Gainor bowed, but the sheriff gaped.

"By the eternal!" he scoffed. "This sounds like one of them duels of the old days. This was the way they used to talk!"

"Gentlemen," said Gainor, raising his long-fingered hand, "it is my solemn duty to admonish you to make up your differences amicably."

"Whatever that means," sneered the sheriff. "But tell this young fool that's trying to act like he couldn't see me or hear me—tell him that I don't carry no grudge ag'in' him, that I'm sorry he's Black-Jack's son, but that it's something he can live down, maybe. And I'll go so far as to say I'm sorry that I done all that talking right to his face. But farther than that I won't go. And if all this is leading up to a gun-play, by God, gents, the minute a gun comes into my hand I shoot to kill, mark you that and don't you never forget it!"

Mr. Gainor had remained with his hand raised during this outbreak. Now he turned to Terry.

"You have heard?" he said. "I think the sheriff is going quite a way toward you, Mr. Colby."

"Hollis!" gasped Terry. "Hollis is the name, sir!"

And he trembled. All at once the other two were touched with awe, for they saw that the pallor of the youth was not the pallor of nervousness or fear, but the pallor of a consuming rage that shook and burned him.

"I beg your pardon," said Gainor. "Mr. Hollis it is! Gentlemen, I assure you that I feel for you both. It seems, however, to be one of those unfortunate affairs when the mind must stop its debate and physical action must take up its proper place. I lament the necessity, but I admit it, even though the law does not admit it. But there are unwritten laws, sirs, unwritten laws which I for one consider among the holies of holies."

Palpably the old man was enjoying every minute of his own talk. It was not his first affair of this nature. He came out of an early and more courtly generation where men drank together in the evening by fire light and carved one another in the morning by moonshine with glimmering bowie-knives. He looked upon the sheriff and Terry now with an affectionate eye.

"You are both," he protested, "dear to me. I esteem you both as men and as good citizens. And I have done my best to open the way for peaceful negotiations toward an understanding. It seems that I have failed. Very well, sir. Then it must be battle. You are both armed? With revolvers?"

"Nacher'ly," said the sheriff, and spat accurately at a blaze on the tree-trunk beside him. He had grown very quiet. Terry noted that his eyes had a shifty, considering look, as though there were an eye behind an eye, so to speak. And he knew that the sheriff was getting ready for the game—game it was to him!

"I am armed," said Terry calmly, "with a revolver."

"Very good."

The hand of Gainor glided into his bosom and came forth bearing a white handkerchief. His right hand slid into his coat and came forth likewise—bearing a long revolver.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the first man to disobey my directions I shall shoot down unquestioningly, like a dog. I give you my solemn word for it!"

And his eye informed them that he would enjoy the job.

He continued smoothly: "This contest shall accord with the only terms by which a duel with guns can be properly fought. You will stand back to back with your guns not displayed, but in your clothes. At my word you will start walking in opposite directions until my command, 'Turn!' and at this command you will wheel, draw your guns, and fire until one man falls—or both!"

He sent his revolver through a peculiar, twirling motion and shook back his long white hair which glowed in the twilight beneath the spruce.

"Ready, gentlemen, and God defend the right!"

CHAPTER XIV.

VANCE WINS.

THE talk was fitful in the living-room. Elizabeth Cornish did her best to revive the happiness of her guests, but she herself was a prey to the same subdued

excitement which showed in the faces of the others. A restraint had been taken away by the disappearance of both the storm centers of the dinner—the sheriff and Terry. Therefore it was possible to talk freely. And people talked. But not loudly. They were prone to gather in little familiar groups and discuss in a whisper how Terry had risen and spoken before them. Now and then some one for the sake of politeness strove to open a general theme of conversation, but it died away like a ripple on a placid pond.

"But what I can't understand," said Elizabeth to Vance when she was able to maneuver him to her side later on, "is why they seem to expect something more."

Vance was very grave and looked tired. The realization that all his cunning, all his work had been for nothing, tormented him. He had set his trap and baited it and it had worked perfectly—save that the teeth of the trap had closed over thin air. At the dénouement of the sheriff's story there should have been the barking of two guns and a film of gunpowder smoke should have gone tangling to the ceiling. Instead there had been the formal little speech from Terry—and then quiet. Yet he had to mask and control his bitterness; he had to watch his tongue in talking with his sister.

"You see," he said quietly, "they don't understand. They can't see how fine Terry is in having made no attempt to avenge the death of his father. I suppose a few of them think he's a coward. I even heard a little talk to that effect!"

"Impossible!" cried Elizabeth.

She had not thought of this phase of the matter. All at once she hated the sheriff.

"It really is possible," said Vance. "You see, it's known that Terry never fights if he can avoid it. There never has been any real reason for fighting until today. But you know how gossip will put the most unrelated facts together, and make a complete story in some way."

"I wish the sheriff were dead!" moaned Aunt Elizabeth. "Oh, Vance, if you only hadn't gone near Craterville! If you only hadn't distributed those wholesale invitations!"

It was almost too much for Vance—to be reproached after so much of the triumph was on her side—such a complete victory that she herself would never dream of the peril she and Terry had escaped. But he had to control his irritation. In fact, he saw his whole life ahead of him carefully schooled and controlled. He no longer had anything to sell. Elizabeth had made a mock of him and shown him that he was hollow, that he was living on her charity. He must all the days that she remained alive keep flattering her, trying to find a way to make himself a necessity to her. And after her death there would be a still harder task. Terry, who disliked him pointedly, would then be the master, and he would face the bitter necessity of cajoling the youngster whom he detested. A fine life, truly! Of course Terry would marry before long and bring home another young nuisance around the place. And then children—noise—an end of the sweet peace of the valley. He would hate them and they would hate him—and yet he must stay and take his beggar's bread at their table! An almost noble anguish of the spirit came upon Vance. He was urged to the very brink of the determination to thrust out into the world and make his own living. But he recoiled from that horrible idea in time.

"Yes," he said, "that was the worst step I ever took. But I was trying to be wholehearted in the Western way, my dear, and show that I had entered into the spirit of things."

"As a matter of fact," sighed Elizabeth, "you nearly ruined Terry's life—and mine!"

"Very near," said the penitent Vance. "But then—you see how well it has turned out? Terry has taken the acid test, and now you can trust him under any—"

The words were literally blown off ragged at his lips. Two revolver shots exploded at them. No one gun could have fired them. And there was a terrible significance in the angry speed with which one had followed the other, blending, so that the echo from the lofty side of Sleep Mountain was but a single booming sound. In that clear air it was impossible to tell the direction of

the noise. It might be from the bunk-house of the cow-punchers down the slope where they would be frolicking, perhaps. Or it might be from any direction.

Every one in the room seemed to listen stupidly for a repetition of the noises. But there was no repetition.

"Vance," whispered Elizabeth in such a tone that the coward dared not look into her face. "It's happened!"

"What?" He knew, but he wanted the joy of hearing it from her own lips.

"It has happened," she whispered in the same ghostly voice. "But which one?"

That was it. Who had fallen—Terry, or the sheriff. As plain as though he had been present, Vance saw the practised hand of the sheriff whip up his revolver and watched Terry crumble on the ground. Vance shook a little—because of the vividness of his own vision, not from pity for Terry. A long, heavy step crossed the little porch. Either man might walk like that.

The door was flung open. Terence Hollis stood before them.

"I think that I've killed the sheriff," he said simply. "I'm going up to my room to put some things together; and I'll go into town with any man who wishes to arrest me. Decide that between yourselves."

With that he turned and walked away with a step as deliberately unhurried as his approach had been. The manner of the boy was more terrible than the thing he had done. Twice he had shocked them on the same afternoon. And they were just beginning to realize that the shell of boyhood was being ripped away from Terence Colby. Terry Hollis, son of Black-Jack, was being revealed to them.

The men received the news with utter bewilderment. The sheriff was as formidable in the opinion of the mountains as some Achilles. It was incredible that he should have fallen. And naturally a stern murmur rose: "Foul play!"

Since the first vigilante days there has been no sound in all the West so dreaded as that deep-throated murmur of angry, honest men. That murmur from half a dozen law-abiding citizens will put the fear of death in the hearts of a hundred outlaws. The rumble grew, spread: "Foul play." And they began to look to one another, these men of action.

Their murmuring was merely a deep undertone to the women. After the first silence of awe there had been a shrill outbreak of clamor. Only Elizabeth was silent. She rose to her feet, as tall as her brother, without an emotion on her face. And her brother would never forget her.

"It seems that you've won, Vance. It seems that blood will out, after all. The time is not quite up—and you win the bet!"

Vance shook his head as though in protest and struck his hand across his face. He dared not let her see the joy that contorted his features. Triumph here on the very verge of defeat! It misted his eyes. Joy gave wings to his thoughts. He was the master of the valley. The woman would not long survive this blow! Then he let her see his face.

"But—you'll think before you do anything, Elizabeth?"

"I've done my thinking already—twenty-four years of it. I'm going to do what I promised I'd do."

"And that?"

"You'll see and hear in time. What's yonder?"

The men were rising, one after another, and bunching together. Before Vance could answer there was a confusion in the hall, running feet here and there. They heard the hard, shrill voice of Wu Chi chattering directions and the guttural murmurs of his fellow servants as they answered. Some one ran out into the hall and came back to the huddling, stirring crowd in the living-room.

"He's not dead—but close to it. Maybe die any minute—maybe live through it!"

That was the report.

"We'll get young Hollis and hold him to see how the sheriff comes out."

"Aye, we'll get him!"

All at once they boiled into action and the little crowd of men thrust for the big doors that led into the hall. They cast the doors back and came directly upon the tall, white-headed figure of Gainor.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Window Box

by Rose Henderson

THE place was a many-storied apartment house in upper Manhattan, the time about eight o'clock of a sultry July evening, and Keith Shorely was gazing out of his furnished-room window and wishing that the pleasant-faced, gray-haired woman across the court and two flights down would bring her blue granite teapot and water the mignonette and clove pinks in her green window-box.

Since early June he had watched her watering those flowers night after night. The pinks were so small in the beginning he could not be sure what sort of plant they were. But he knew the yellow-white mignonette blooms the minute he saw them, because they were like a border his mother had beside the front porch back in Akron, Ohio, and also because of the delicate fragrance that floated up to his window.

Keith was not much of a botanist. He had not been aware that he cared anything special about flowers until he came to live in the single room with the one window that opened over a cement court and gave a slitted glimpse of Broadway between tall brick buildings. The cement court was hot and bare, the noisy street was hot and bare, and so Keith grew to be fond of the pink and white and green of his neighbor's window-box.

It was the only one in the whole hot, dusty court, and its familiar blooms and the sight of the gray-haired woman bending over them comforted Keith's heart on the lonely evenings when he had finished his work at the architect's office down-town, had eaten a solitary dinner at some cheap restaurant, and had come back to the four walls and a window where he slept and read and wrote letters home.

To-night the flowers drooped over the side of the box. He had not seen her watering them the evening before, and it was past the usual time that she appeared with the blue teapot, pushed the window as high as it would go, and leaned out to sprinkle the plants. He had never known her to miss a night. Yet the window was halfway open. She must be at home.

Keith sat down in his creaking rocker and waited. To the left of his window a gray blanket hung from a sagging clothesline. He had seen that selfsame blanket flapping in the winds of December when he first came to the furnished room. It had appeared at intervals ever since. Subconsciously he knew the number of black stripes in its dingy border. And he hated its hot griminess. He decided that it must belong in the apartment with the tattered green blinds and the dirty pillow that was perpetually airing on the window-ledge.

Air seemed to take the place of water in the sanitation scheme of these neighbors on the left. When Keith first observed the

filthy bedding, he had wondered if the people who owned it were quite respectable. But he soon realized that it didn't make much difference to him whether they were or not. In Akron, Ohio, neighbors could not be so completely ignored. That was one great advantage of New York. Yet if it was an advantage it was sometimes rather a tragedy.

Keith stared down at the little piece of Broadway flowing past his outlook. Loaded cars and buses and automobiles passed. Young men walked in chatting groups. Young men and girls laughed and sauntered in couples. Some of them looked cheap and tawdry, but some of them seemed much like the young people he had known back home. Here he knew no one. Among all the crowds that thronged the subway, that packed the surface cars, that whirled by in buses and automobiles, he was a solitary, unheeded atom.

The men at the office were older than he. Only two or three spoke to him, and he never saw any of them outside of office hours. At first he had liked the novelty of it all. It had stirred him like a subtle stimulant, this aloneness in the midst of the crowd, this fascinating position of an unobserved spectator, and he had plunged into his work with a zeal which had brought praise from his employer. But recently he had suffered a reaction. With the hot weather his ardor for work had waned. Indeed, his longing for companionship had grown to be a very painful obsession. He was getting so homesick he could hardly eat. It was the restaurant food, he told himself, yet he really knew that it was more than that. He was smitten with an ache of desolation that dogged his waking hours and haunted his sleep.

Theaters and other places of amusement failed to answer his need. He felt worse among the pleasuring crowds than he did at home. And so he sat alone in his room, watching expectantly for the woman across the court to come to the window and smile as she revived her row of drooping garden-flowers.

That window-box made him think of evenings back in Akron when he had walked through the quiet streets with one of the town girls beside him. No special girl, necessarily—just one of the old crowd he had danced and played tennis and gone to high school with. A sweet-faced, organdy-frocked girl with a gay young laugh and a chummy hand in the crook of his elbow.

They used to talk about his going away to study architecture as they strolled the moonlit, flower-bordered streets. The girl, whoever she happened to be, was always encouragingly sympathetic and prophesied a glowing future. Looking back now, he remembered that they talked a good deal about his future. Then he had gone to Tech. for a year, and had come on to New York to serve his apprenticeship. The glowing future had become a drab and uninteresting present. In the midst of scenes which meant thrilling adventure in Akron, Ohio, Keith found himself dull and disheartened.

A wind sprang up in the dusty court, tossing torn newspapers giddily, sweeping over the roofs, and plunging in through the narrow gap that opened on Broadway. The gray blanket flapped and billowed. Keith sat up suddenly. Some one had pushed up the half-open window across the way and was sprinkling the flowers from a blue teapot. Some one with gold-brown hair parted on the side, and softly shining ear puffs. The girl's arm curved slim and white above the clove pinks. Her cream-colored blouse fell away from her throat in a round, boyish collar. Keith liked the smart black ribbon tie she wore.

All at once she looked up at him, then down again quickly, finished her watering, and pulled the window shut. Keith sat back in his creaking rocker and burned his fingers on his cigaret. The notch of street was full of blown, hurrying figures. A dirty newspaper soared rakishly before him and flapped down six stories to the cement floor. A light gleamed behind the white shade of the window across the way. Keith sighed and swore softly under his breath. Somehow he was going to meet that brown-haired girl. She looked like home folks. She had set his heart thumping with the one shy glance.

A faint whiff of mignonette stole up to him from the box where the flowers were

reviving. His room seemed unbearably hot and confining all at once. It was as if it became closer and narrower because of the closed window across the way.

The wind grew more blustering, and the empty street and dreary court seemed to mock his gloom. The dingy blanket snapped violently in a rising gust, tore itself loose, and rose like a giant kite before his window. Then it veered suddenly across the court, sank down, and collapsed in a soggy heap on the jutting window-box.

Keith leaned over his sill and scowled at the sight of the smothering thing crushing the pinks and mignonette. Then he grinned boyishly, threw away his cigaret, snapped on the light, and blinkingly surveyed himself in the mirror. He brushed his hair, put on a fresh collar, stuck a clean handkerchief in his pocket, and went out whistling.

II.

THE girl looked prettier than ever when she opened the door and listened gravely as he introduced himself and gave a rather incoherent account of the blanket and the window-box.

"Oh, won't you come in and help me get it off?" she laughed when she finally understood. "I'm not used to New York apartments, and I'd probably fall out and break my neck. And aunty can't afford to lose me for a while yet."

"Well, I should say not." Keith followed her through a neat white kitchenette, and they pushed the window up and leaned out together.

"Do you know the people it belongs to?" asked the girl as they lifted the blanket away from the drooping flowers.

"No, I don't know a soul in this building." There was a plaintive note in the remark. Keith realized it after he had spoken, and hoped the girl hadn't noticed.

"However can we return it?" she wondered.

"Don't let's try," said Keith. "I'll say we've done our duty if we just drop it on the fire-escape down-stairs. They'll see it and come after it. Or if they don't it won't worry me any." As he tossed the soggy blanket away the wind caught it, sucked it back, and draped it over the lower railing.

"Good enough," laughed the girl. "And the flowers aren't badly smashed. You must have a bouquet. I forgot the poor things last night. Aunty says I should water them every evening. They dry up so in a little old box like this."

Keith thrilled deliciously to the touch of her fingers as she stuck a clove pink in his buttonhole.

After that it was easy. Keith was introduced to Mrs. Lane, the gray-haired woman who lay on a couch in the dining-room. He expressed polite regret at her illness.

"Oh, it's nothing serious," she said. "Guess I'm just a mite glad I got sick. Caroline takes such good care of me. I like a little fussing over once in a while. So Caroline's mother loaned her to me. They live up in Vermont. Take Mr. Shorely in the other room, Caroline, and put on some records. I've often noticed you up at your window, Mr. Shorely. I'm real glad to meet you."

Keith and Caroline put on a record and then sat down on the davenport and talked against the music. They kept this up for some time, putting on a record and then sitting down to talk. Finally they let the records go and just talked.

Caroline was tremendously interested in architecture. She said she wished her brother would take it up when he got through college. He was a junior at Dartmouth, and crazy about dramatics. He wanted to be an actor. But the stage was so uncertain. Caroline thought that planning and building houses must be the most fascinating work imaginable.

They discussed music and plays and books. Keith was delighted to find that Caroline liked Conrad. She knew him as well as Keith did. They revived the tales and gloated over them together.

"Most girls don't like him," observed Keith.

"No?" There was just a hint of coolness in the monosyllable.

"Girls I knew back home, I mean. They used to object to his grimness."

"I like grimness—in books," declared

Caroline. "It seems to give them substance, some way."

"So do I when it's real, and with Conrad it always is."

"Tell me about your back home."

They compared homes and schools and sports. They discussed the merits and demerits of New York City, Bedford, Vermont; and Akron, Ohio. And at last Keith rose reluctantly to go.

The cheery voice of the woman on the couch arrested his departure. "Caroline, why don't you get out some of that cake and strawberry preserves your mother sent? You've been talking to Mr. Shorely so hard I just know he's hungry."

Caroline laughed and went into the kitchen. "I want you to know I carried these eats all the way from Bedford, Vermont," she said.

They sat down in the dining-room and ate from shiny blue plates. Caroline's aunt, propped among her pillows, picked daintily at a piece of fruit-cake like a wise-eyed bird. Keith, used to cheap lunch-rooms, liked the old-fashioned serving-table and the framed photographs on the wall. And he enjoyed the food more than anything he had eaten since he came to New York. To him it was ambrosia. He sat blissfully with a plate of cake and preserves, and an ample napkin draped across his knees. They would have called it a "lap supper" in Akron.

III.

BACK in his room, he looked out at the empty court with a quiet sense of satisfaction and content. Cars and buses and automobiles passed the Broadway gap. He felt again the thrill of a poised and interested spectator. The wind brushed his face with a caressing coolness and a faint scent of cloves and mignonette.

At the office the next day he toiled eagerly over blueprints. Caroline's face frequently drifted before him—her dark-blue eyes with glints of gold in them, her shining hair, the little curls at the nape of her neck. But the vision did not disturb him. It soothed and heartened and set him to work with renewed enthusiasm.

That afternoon the manager again spoke to him approvingly. "I thought you were losing interest," the man observed. "But that drawing's a fine piece of work. Keep it up."

There was kindly encouragement in the voice and in the hand on his shoulder. Keith marveled that he had ever found the office dull. He gazed out at a shimmering sky-scraper that rose beyond his window. Some time he would build towers like that, towers full of offices and shops and men and women working. Buildings that rose majestically and dominated the teeming streets and cars and Elevated tracks and formed the calm, wise reservoirs for the city's fevered energy. He would build other sorts of buildings, too. Churches and theaters, and suburban homes with airy porches and pergolas. Some time he would build a home for himself. He smiled dreamily. Caroline's face flitted before his eyes, and his fingers found the withering clove pink in his buttonhole.

IV.

THAT night he bought a new book, one that Caroline had spoken of wanting to read, and hugged it fondly under his arm as he plunged into a crowded subway entrance. He would read the book that evening, and the next night he would take it over and loan it to Caroline.

He felt himself swept along in the usual jam, but to-night he was exultantly eager about it all. The youthful Akron point of view had come back to him. He was proud of New York, proud of being a part of the great swirling, home-going mob. He was making good at the office. Some time he was going to build a sky-scraper, and now he was going home to his own little niche in the vast, teeming city, going to read a novel beside his own window, and watch a brown-haired girl water the flowers in her aunt's window-box.

New York was human, after all—awfully human. To-morrow night he was going to see the girl again, and they would put some records on the phonograph and sit on the davenport and talk. And some night, when she had read the novel, they would discuss it together. Before long he

would buy a lot of flowers and some of the best candy he could find. And perhaps they would go to the theater. Before long—

"Let 'em off! Let 'em off!" yelled a vociferous guard, and Keith was shunted back behind an iron railing, wedged between a fat woman and an angular man. The man's elbow dug into Keith's ribs. He shifted his book, gained an inch in the direction of the fat woman, and beamed jovially upon his fellow sardines.

"Aw-right! Let 'em on! Step lively!" roared the guard.

The fat woman lurched ahead, and a girl with a scarlet turban and very red lips slipped into her place. The girl's shoulder brushed Keith's, and she turned and smiled with a frankness of invitation that sent the blood into his cheeks. Her face was coated with powder and rouge, but the soft roundness of youth showed through the make-up. She seemed to have caught and misunderstood the aftermath of Keith's smile.

He fell back behind the angular man and was swept through the door, the crowd pummeling him from every direction. He struggled into the car, swayed, stumbled, grabbed a strap, and regained a precarious balance. The red-turbaned girl was far down the aisle. The doors clanged, the train jerked forward, everybody swayed drunkenly against everybody else, the lights blinked, and the black walls swept past.

V.

In his room that evening Keith smoked, read, and kept a furtive eye on the window-box. It was cooler. He felt fresh and jubilant after an extra hard day. The pinks and mignonette were looking fit, too, in spite of recent mishaps. In due time the window went up behind the green box, and Caroline leaned out. Keith was about to call down to her, when another head appeared—a sleek, black head and a pair of stalwart shoulders.

Keith got up belligerently. He drew back so that the girl could not see him if she did look up. The man beside her picked a spray of mignonette and stuck it in his buttonhole.

"Looks like a darned movie actor!" muttered Keith.

The two laughed and chatted a moment, then the man put his arm across the girl's shoulders, drawing her inside as he closed the window.

Keith snapped on the light and continued to read his novel without getting much of the story. Then he closed the book, lighted another cigaret, and laughed a short, cynical laugh that left his face set and tired-looking. He threw the book into the middle of the bed, tipped back his chair, and put his feet on the rickety table.

He had been an idiot—a plain, unadulterated idiot, he told himself. Might as well confess it. He had fallen unconditionally in love with the girl the first time he saw her. And every moment he had seen her afterward had plunged him deeper.

Like a fool, he had imagined her lonely, a stranger in New York as he was. He had looked forward to showing her about town. But she had probably visited her aunt often and knew all sorts of city people. And he didn't know a soul.

"Fool! Fool!" he repeated, and got up and paced around the narrow room. It was not a good room to pace in. He felt foolish doing it, and sat down again and tried to read. But he could not forget a certain shy look in her eyes, a flutter of her hand against his, a kind of soft eagerness in her voice. Her full lips, her round chin, her every feature was as clear to him as if he had known her all his life. She was sweet and sensible like the girls back home, and yet to him she was eternally different. He hated the proprietary manner of the man, his beastly familiarity.

The room seemed stifling. A flame burned within him, and he got his hat and went out. The streets were filled with the usual jostling crowds. The lights glared bright and hot. He passed a movie theater, and caught the flare of an orchestra. He remembered the red-turbaned girl in the subway, and the convivial spirit of his youth rose urgently, after its long suppression.

He was sick of the daily monotony which his life had become, nauseated at his own pallid loneliness. He idled along the

street and gazed at the passing throng. He stopped in front of another theater and looked at the billboards. Inside, a mechanical piano banged the latest jazz. He wished he could go to a dance. Why couldn't he? He could. Of course, he was not crazy about the people you met at public dance-halls. Nice people in Akron wouldn't be seen at such places. But New York was different. He didn't know any nice people here, and he was getting to be a regular hermit.

Keith remembered a hall down on Third Avenue, not far from the office. It was tough, of course, but he felt a sudden desire to peer in at this alien world which had never before attracted him. A sense of reckless adventure swept him, blotting out the gentle romance of the night before.

A fresh wind crept in from the river and fluttered the thin dresses of the girls on the street. But as he went down to the subway the close, hot air rose like a stale breath from some subterranean furnace. There was less of a crowd than when he came up, and it was, on the whole, a cleaner, more leisurely assemblage. Men gave their seats to women. An attitude of pleasure-seeking marked most of his fellow passengers. Some of them looked a bit furtive, as he himself felt.

A few workmen in dingy clothing dozed over their dinner-pails as they swept along to some night shift. Looking at them, Keith felt a lurking sense of shame at his own discontent. The electric fans whirred, the stations flashed past. A man and woman across the aisle insisted on talking above the roar and nodded and grimaced grotesquely. Keith sat in a corner and speculated idly on the probable number of new faces he saw every day and never saw again, or would not recognize if he did see them. He rose with a start and rushed off with the crowd that left the train at his station.

Whirring fans and shuffling feet formed a kind of hypnotic monotone in the crowded dance-hall. Above this the orchestra beat its shrill accompaniment. The insistent rhythm caught Keith's spirit as he swung out across the floor, a garishly dressed girl in the circle of his arm.

"She can dance, anyhow," he said to himself, a faint smile twisting his mouth as he looked over her head at the swirling, writhing crowd. He preferred not to talk, but the girl was bent on getting acquainted.

"Say, you're some dancer," she said.

"So are you," mumbled Keith.

She had a shock of bobbed hair that kept tickling his chin. "Say, where do you woik?" she wanted to know.

Keith told her.

"Gee, that mus' be some swell job, awright. You oughta come over to the hall often. It's right near."

"Maybe I will—now," he laughed.

"Wisht you would. I'm crazy about your dancin'."

Keith tried another partner. She laid her head on his shoulder. "Say, I bet I seen you before," she said.

"Think so?"

"Sure! Your face looks awful familiar. Cert, I know. Gettin' on the subway tonight. Gee, wasn't they a mob, though!"

Keith recognized the face that went with the red turban.

He found another girl who danced well and didn't talk. He kept dancing with her until he felt himself rudely jostled by a squat, heavy-set man who cut in from a bunch of stags.

"Say, who'n hell d'ye think ye are?" growled the man. He slid his words out of the side of his mouth and glared at Keith over the girl's shoulder.

"Guess she must be his property," thought Keith. He decided he had had enough of the place anyhow. He was tired of the blaring music, of the stale powder, the cheap, hot perfumes, the liquor-and-tobacco-scented air.

The dancers were growing rougher and noisier. Keith watched the short man disappear across the packed floor, and then slipped out of the door and down the half-lit stairs to the street.

It was one o'clock. After the crowded hall the outer air felt cool. Yet a sense of turgid heaviness hung upon the neighborhood. It was as if one felt the massed human presences in this congested quarter. They had mostly deserted the streets. They gathered in pool-dens and dance-halls

or lay sprawled in hot rooms before open windows or on roofs and fire-escapes. They were out of sight, and yet one seemed oppressively aware of them. They possessed the streets with a kind of intangible density, a sullen emptiness, pregnant of their nearness.

Keith was anxious to get back to his own more wholesome neighborhood. The dance had tired him physically and had drugged his restlessness, but had left a wan disgust like a bad taste in his mouth. The memory of Caroline was refreshing as he thought of the girls he had danced with. He would take the book over to her the next evening, anyhow. No need to run until he had to. His fit of anger at the other man began to seem rather childish.

Keith hurried along in the shadow of the Elevated, and as he started to cross the street it seemed to him as if one of the heavy iron girders crushed down upon him. For an instant he felt his face grind against the pavement before a smothering blackness sucked him up away from the pain and dizziness of a blow.

He was limply unconscious as two men, one of whom had struck him over the head with a piece of gas pipe, dragged him back through the shadows to a darker alley, emptied his pockets, and ran away, catfooted, through another alley, to walk boldly forth in the sullen, empty streets.

VI.

When Keith opened his eyes the next morning he saw a cracked white ceiling which was strange to him, smelled a mixture of strong medicines, and felt an aching numbness in the back of his head. When he started to move a sharp pain tore its way down the back of his neck, a wave of nausea swept over him, and he sank into a well of darkness where he heard a queer, noise like somebody groaning away off.

After a while some one took his hand and pulled him back to the smell of medicines, the cracked ceiling, and the splitting headache. He rolled his eyes cautiously, and saw a white-capped nurse rubbing his wrist and fixing an interested, professional gaze upon him.

"Don't try to move," said the nurse quietly, speaking in the tone one uses to a small and rebellious child.

"Don't intend to," mumbled Keith, as if remaining stationary in the future were a matter of course.

In a little while the nurse went away. As usual, in New York, there were people close around him. These were moaning and breathing in a kind of muffled restlessness. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a humped form on the cot opposite him.

He felt weak and stiff and unbelievably giddy. Besides, there was the aching numbness and soreness in the back of his head that seemed to press him down like a weight. He moved a foot tentatively and then a hand. He touched his chin with his fingers and felt of the bandage across his forehead. He had a hazy recollection of grinding his face against the pavement under the Elevated tracks, a still hazier memory of dancing in a hot, crowded hall with a girl who kept her head on his shoulder, and back of that was Caroline standing at a window with a dark-haired man.

If that nurse ever came back he would ask her just what had happened to him.

He swallowed painfully and studied the cracked ceiling.

The days and nights wore on until a week had passed. Keith got the nurse to write to the office and explain his absence. She allowed him to scrawl a card home saying that he was all right. He had never been in bed so long before. He had never suffered any pain except a slight ache. The week seemed months to him. In another week they said he could go back to his room. The pain was gradually leaving him and he slept a good deal of the time.

"Seven days more until I get out?" he asked as the nurse finished dressing his head.

"Not more than that. Maybe less."

"Well, say, make it less, if you possibly can, won't you?"

"You're the one to make it less. Keep quiet and don't worry none," she commanded.

Keith turned over carefully and went to

sleep to the accompaniment of the breathing and groaning that went on in the ward around him. He dreamed that he and Caroline were taking a walk in Akron, and that a girl with a red turban kept putting her head on his shoulder. He waked up smelling a familiar fragrance, turned over, and saw a bowl of clove pinks and mignonette on the stand beside his cot. He got up with a jerk, in spite of dizzily throbbing temples and the darting pain in his head.

There was a note beside the flowers, and he tore it open with shaking fingers.

> Aunty and I are so anxious for you to get well. We read about your accident in the paper, but not until several days after it happened. I want you to know my brother, who has come on unexpectedly to look for a job on the stage.

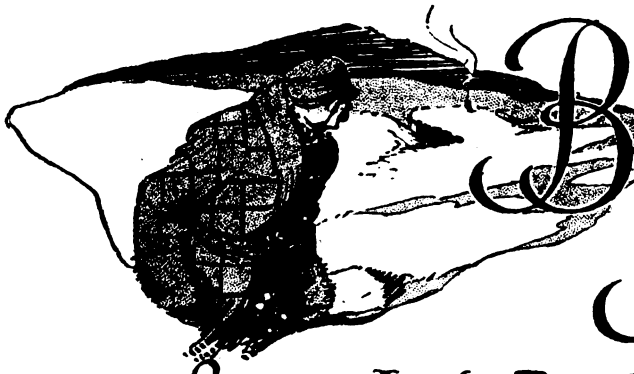
"Her brother!" said Keith fervently. He read the last sentence again.

> He will take this note with some window-box posies.

He read that sentence again, too.

> Sincerely,
> CAROLINE BRIGGS.

"So Briggs is her last name," mused Keith. He reached out and got a clove pink, and under cover of smelling the flower he pressed the note to his lips.



Bear Paws

by Jack Bechdolt

THE little cabin in Avalanche Cañon where Rod Hawley was hiding from the law stood eaves deep in drifts. The roof and chimney, by the warmth from within, managed to keep a bare space thawed so that a person having keen insight could still tell that a human habitation stood there.

The winter had brought snow unusual even to the high Olympics where fifteen feet on the level is nothing to get excited about. Snow was descending now and might fall for days—dry, powdery stuff that streamed down without sound. Its flakes were light as air, but their accumulated weight on the mountain slopes made uncounted tons, and now and again, where the accretion became too great for gravity, these tons would start in motion, sliding and rolling in great waves toward the lower levels while the very bed-rock of the range trembled to the thunder of their passing.

Hawley's cabin stood on a narrow bench, half way up the cañon side. None but a desperate man, and a man without other alternative, would choose it for such a winter as this.

Through the murk at the close of the brief winter day, little more to the sight than a dim, bulking shadow amidst the shifting, drifting, powdery downpour, came Deputy Sheriff Curt Gordon, of Skye.

A muffled figure, face almost hidden between the high turned collar of a Mackinaw coat and the cap with its ear flaps, he floundered with head thrust forward, long arms swinging rhythmically, never hurrying but seldom resting.

The wide, stubby "bear-paw" snowshoes on his feet—the only shoe fit to bear

a man safely over drifts so powdery—slipped along with scarcely a squeak.

The chimney of Rod Hawley's cabin sent up a homelike glow in the dark. Through the glass of a window, half exposed by the excavation about the door, came a gleam of yellow light that guided Gordon's steps.

The sheriff stripped the clumsy mitten from his right hand, using his teeth to do it, and nursed the hand in the pit of his arm until some of the numbness was gone. Then he took his pistol from its holster, and held it ready while with his left hand he knocked loudly.

The door was dragged open and in the glow of orange light stood Rod Hawley.

"'Lo, Rod," Gordon said casually. "Guess you know what I come for?"

"'Lo, Curt," Hawley answered just as casually. "Yes, I guess I know why you come." He stepped aside to let the sheriff in, then closed his house. "You don't need to keep a gun on me," he said.

"Better hand over your firearms, Rod."

"Sure! There's that rifle in the corner and here's my six-gun."

"I place you under arrest, Rod, charged with the murder of Ed Niles."

Hawley nodded understandingly.

"Been expecting to see me?"

"You're the only one I was worrying about, Curt. That Deputy Palmer wouldn't have found me in years. They must have busted up your vacation in California?"

"Yep, had to send for me."

By this time the sheriff had stripped his outer clothing and stood revealed, a man past forty-five, but with the springy, erect figure of twenty-one; a man with graying hair and graying mustache and a seamed face, but with the bright eyes of youth. Staring at him Rod Hawley burst out with a bitterness that had something terrible in it, "I would to God you had stayed in California, Curt Gordon!"

Those were the details of Hawley's arrest. Except for the prisoner's momentary flare-up, the hoarse cry that blended grief, despair and black rage, the scene was as every-day in its tone as the meeting of two men who had parted at breakfast.

And a moment after his bitter speech, Rod Hawley was saying: "I bet you're hungry, Curt. Let's eat."

II.

THE men sat at the cleared table, illumined by a bracket lamp fixed to the wall and the glow from the fireplace.

Gordon had filled his black pipe, and was enjoying it to the full, tired with the day's hard going, to all appearances ready to nod off at any moment. But Gordon's appearance belied his intentions. He had no idea of falling asleep.

Rod Hawley did not smoke. He leaned forward, his big hands on the table before him clasped tightly.

He was more powerfully built than Gordon, who was wiry. He was ten years younger, light-haired and blue-eyed. His face was covered with the yellow beard grown during his voluntary exile.

Hawley broke a long silence and his first words held a tone that roused the sheriff even before he caught their sense. "Curt, you'll never put me behind jail bars alive!"

Gordon stared shrewdly, not offering to take up the defiance.

"I'm telling you," Hawley said again.

"Rod, God is my witness you're the last man on earth I'd put behind the bars of my own free will. But I've taken my oath to do my duty by the office I hold and the county and State that hires me. The laws says I've got to take you—and I will. Stick out your hands, Rod."

Hawley hesitated, and Gordon repeated, "Stick out your hands."

Over Rod Hawley's extended wrists he snapped steel bracelets.

"I don't dare take any chances," he explained apologetically.

With the click of the steel lock Hawley's big frame shuddered. His lips twitched.

"Curt," he said hoarsely, "I guess you don't understand just how I came to shoot Ed Niles?"

"It's no use worrying yourself about that, Rod—"

"Oh, yes, it is! I want you should understand just how I come to do such a thing. You've been more or less my friend,

and a good friend to my folks since I was a kid, Curt. You was down in California on your vacation when that play came up—I wish to God you'd stayed there! That deputy that was taking your place, Palmer, he wouldn't have found me in twenty years. If you'd only stayed away!"

The sheriff sighed. "There's been times enough when I've been made fairly heart-sick over my job, but I've had to do what the law tells me to. And when they sent for me, when they sent me word that Palmer couldn't find you, I had to come. That was my duty so long's I kept my badge and gun."

"Curt, did you know Ed Niles?"

"Know him enough to feel he ain't any great loss to the community—"

"But you also know he's the brother-in-law of the Governor of this State?"

"Yep."

"And you know that having shot him I don't stand a Chinaman's chance of getting off with anything short of life sentence. Not if they have to tear the whole State wide open to find a court to send me up. Not if Niles was the lowest, dirtiest, most poisonous snake that ever showed his head, all of which he was. No matter what the circumstances could be, Curt, you know the Governor and his machine are out to get me—and they will get me!"

"The law aims to deal fair between man and man—"

Hawley cut the sheriff short with an exclamation so passionate it startled him. "The law! If they had to make over every law on the statute books they'd get even with me for what I did, because I killed Ed Niles—and I don't deny it. I never wanted to kill any man, never will, but I'm not ashamed I killed Niles— No! I'm proud I did it!"

"Rod, it's my duty to warn you what you say can be used against you. You'd oughtn't to discuss your case—"

"Listen," Hawley went on sternly, "I'm discussing my case before the only court is ever going to hear it, that's you and me—and God, if there is a God up there that decides things the law can't manage. You listen."

Gordon, who had been about to repeat his warning, was silenced by his prisoner's intentness. There was something in Hawley's manner, some vague, disturbing promise of terrible revelations that stopped his tongue.

Hawley continued quietly, "After you went away on your year's leave of absence traveling I had a couple of idle months, and went down to Seattle. I met the girl I married down there. She was employed as a typewriter for a lumber firm. Like me she was pretty much alone in the world. Her parents were dead and the family scattered, and she was making her own way. We got married and I found a job bossing a gang of concrete mixers on the new State dam at Snoquamish. That was our honeymoon you might say, up there in the little cottage on the mountainside, not quite so swell as the engineers's row, but plenty good enough. It was heaven for us!

"Ed Niles was there. He was a kind of superintendent, supposed to look out for the State's interest, one of those soft, political jobs like he always held. He was hardly ever on the job until he saw—until he saw her—my wife— Maybe you can guess what happened then—

"She told me one day, Curt, that Niles was bothering her. He used to come to the bungalow when I was on the job down at the dam. I didn't think so much of it at first, and wasn't looking to start trouble with Niles, either. But I began to see it was making her unhappy. Preying on her mind. I went to Niles one day and told him to stay away from my home. I warned him! Nobody can say I didn't warn him!

"The smash came in the middle of an afternoon. I couldn't get her out of my mind, staying home there alone, afraid of that man. Curt, it was like she was calling to me!

"Flesh and blood couldn't stand it and I sneaked off the job and run up the hill, just to ease my mind. When I got near the house I heard her cry out and I came tearing.

"Yes, you guessed it! It was Niles, crazy with bootleg whisky. She'd told him not to come in, but he come in anyhow and had taken hold of her—"

Hawley's face had gone white. In his blue eyes there waked a red blaze that was murderous. His manacled hands held stiffly in front of him worked convulsively and he drew a long, strangling breath.

"I shot him down like I would a mad dog," Hawley added after a moment. "Then in a little time, after I'd got her quieted I began to see what would happen to me. Ed Niles, the Governor's brother-in-law, big political boss! I've seen men sent up for life that didn't do half what I had done! I knew there was one thing to do—to run for it.

"Nobody had seemed to hear the shot. It was the middle of the afternoon and the row was empty, I suppose.

"I got my wife down to the auto stage that meets the evening train into Seattle and gave her all the money I had and the bank book. Then I lit out for the hills and come up here. In the spring I figured I'd go to some new place, maybe lower California or Mexico or some place and send for her to join me. And I would have, but they called you back off your trip to find me!"

The sheriff sighed heavily.

He reached across the table and covered Hawley's manacled hands with his own. His eyes met Hawley's and held them.

"Rod," he said, "you know I believe every word of it. I know you and know you don't lie. And if it had been me I'd have done the same thing. But my hands are tied. Can't you see it! I can't do anything but my duty—and my duty says I got to take you back to stand trial. But, Rod, they can't find a jury that will punish you for that—"

"They can! You know they can. You know that Ed Niles's friends will hand-pick a jury that will hang a new-born babe if the boss tells them to. Don't lie to me!"

The sheriff drew back slowly and his gaze wandered. He knew that what Hawley said was true. The political ring would revenge itself for the death of Ed Niles. Finally he nodded slowly, "Yes, they'll get you."

"And yet you say you'll take me back; hand me over to Ed Niles's friends! You'll take me back so they can murder me!"

Curt Gordon's seamed face twitched with pain. He pleaded brokenly, "But I've got to. That's my job!"

"Listen again," Hawley said quietly. "There's a baby coming, Curt. In the spring. Our child. And I swore to God that child won't have a jailbird for its father. Never mind about me, but for her sake—my wife—a decent girl, a loyal, loving, tender girl—and for our baby's sake—I ask you to give me my chance on their account, Curt!"

Gordon shook his head sadly.

"You know I can't do that. You know that all I've got out of twenty years in harness is the name of being honest—that and most always finding my man. And I never found my man yet, Rod, but I brought him back. That's the duty I swore to do and I've done it well enough that politics and changing administrations meant nothing to me. That's been my reward, that I was bigger than the party, bigger than the bosses, as big as the law itself. Nobody could touch me with dirty money, Rod, nor offers of soft jobs or any other kind of crookedness. And I'll tell you honestly if there was any price at all could move me, it would be just your asking. Because I liked your folks, my best friends, and I like you. But I guess I've had the honesty habit too long, now, to change over. I can't do it, and there's no use hoping."

"There is a price should be able to buy even you, Curt Gordon! How about justice—fair, impartial justice. I put my case in your hands. Will you send me to death?"

The sheriff shook his head sadly. "It's not for me to judge. I swore to do one thing—serve the law."

Hawley hesitated. He burst out suddenly, driven to play his last card. "You've got to understand—understand everything. You don't know—and I didn't tell you, because—well, because I didn't want to buy your help. But if you can't see the justice of it—why then, you got to be bought! Curt, reach in my shirt pocket, the buttoned one, and take out the picture that's in there. It's my wife's photograph."

"No."

"I say, do it!"

"It's no use, boy! I'm just as heart-broken on account of that girl as if she was my own, but—"

"*Look at that picture!*"

Gordon startled at the low, intense voice. His eyes widened. He seemed to sense something that was coming and to dread it; to guess at the significance of Hawley's words.

"No, Rod, no! I don't care who—"

"Look at her picture!"

With his eyes held fascinated by Hawley's stare the sheriff's hand fumbled at the buttoned flap to Hawley's shirt-pocket, opened it, felt inside and drew out a photograph on a cardboard mount. It seemed a full moment, after he had laid the picture face up in front of him, before he could wrench his gaze from Hawley's and look at the presentment of a young, comely woman that gazed back at him.

Gordon stared, and staring, began to stiffen. The knuckles of his big fists, resting on the table, whitened as the fingers clenched. His nostrils widened, quivering like the nostrils of a horse spent with running. Fascination kept his eyes on the portrait an endless time till finally he fairly jerked his glance upward to meet Hawley's, his eyes pleading for word that he had not seen right.

"Yes, it's her," Hawley said slowly. "It's Elsie."

"Your wife?"

"My wife, Curt. Maybe my widow, that's for you to say—"

"I was not told!"

"We had no address. How often did you write to her? How often? I didn't guess it until we were engaged, didn't guess she was your sister!"

Gordon bowed his head suddenly. His hands covered his face.

"Elsie!" he cried brokenly. "Elsie, and I never even knew! My own sister!" He drew a long, rasping breath that might have been a sob and his shoulders heaved. But presently he went on with a bitter quiet, "Yes, it was my fault. I seldom wrote her, seldom saw her from the time she went to the city and began to make her own way. Too busy, I used to say for excuse. I *was* busy, too, you know that, Rod Hawley, but—but this. Dear God!"

"We wanted to let you know," Hawley said gently, moved by evidence of the sheriff's grief. "The day we were married we sent telegrams to a lot of California hotels, hoping to get you. Then we laughed and said we'd save the news for a surprise—when you got back." His voice broke suddenly and ended in a harsh crackle, a parody of mirth. "Surprise! This is the surprise, Elsie suffering God knows what, alone, with the baby coming. Me wanted for murder. And you here, with my life and her happiness in your hands! You say you can't be bought, Curt. I didn't want to buy you. I didn't want you to know until your own sense of justice made you give me my chance. But you wouldn't. Now I've got to buy you, and that's your price, Elsie's happiness, her baby's future. She's your own sister, Curt Gordon. Do you dare refuse that price?"

The sheriff gave him no answer. Hawley went on: "Is it very much to do—for her, Curt? Just one lie? Just to say you couldn't find me, to give me one month more until winter begins to break, so I can make it over the range and get a running start on the crooked courts of this State?"

Still Gordon was silent, hands over his face.

Hawley said with a hushed reverence: "She loves me, Curt. I know she does, enough so this is going to break her unless it comes out right. Do you dare refuse your own sister?"

Gordon sprang up, silencing him with a terrible look. "Be still," he commanded. "You've had your say. Can't you see what lays between me and God?"

He began to pace the little cabin slowly, moving in a world of his own making, alone with his grief and his problem. Hawley said no more, and through the long winter night the two men sat wakeful, without a word, each insulated by his own tragedy.

The wind whimpered about the chimney. Burning logs settled together with muffled noises. Twice the place trembled to the vibration of snow slides among the peaks. When the fire died and the chill crept in Hawley put on fresh logs. Except for those

small details it was a night of awful quiet, of inward struggle and terrible indecisions, a night of a thousand years that left indelible marks on the lives of both men.

III.

ONLY Hawley's watch could tell when day broke, for no light came to the buried cabin. He stirred, moving stiffly from his seat by the table. Gordon was huddled motionless, but Hawley knew he had not slept.

"Take these cuffs off my wrists, Curt. I'll make some coffee. We need it."

The sheriff showed a haggard face. "You give me your word not to start a fuss?" he said hoarsely.

The prisoner considered in silence. Gordon had answered his plea of the night, answered the problem of his own sister's happiness. Plainly the answer was no.

"You mean that, Curt? You won't—help—her?"

"I can't." Gordon's words were toneless, as if all the life in him had been exhausted by his mental struggle. "I just can't after I passed my word to do my duty."

"All right. Well, loosen these cuffs and I'll fix up some grub—"

"You won't start nothing?"

The prisoner smiled bitterly. "You've got the guns, ain't you?"

Gordon loosed the steel cuffs and Hawley made coffee, thick, bitter and black. He fried some bacon, but neither ate much, though both knew the need of food if they took the back trail to Skye.

When they had finished they put the cabin in order and donned extra wool socks, heavy coats, caps with ear-flaps, all the paraphernalia of the trail.

The sheriff spread out his light pack, adding bacon and bread, for they would have two nights at least in the snow before reaching civilization.

They worked in silence.

Hawley walked to the door, dragged it open and stepped out. "Look here," he called, "this damn snow ain't never going to let up."

The sheriff joined him at the threshold. The snowfall had gone on through the night, was going on now, with an uncanny sort of industry that made the beholder marvel where it all came from. The night's accumulation lay more than a foot deep in the excavation at the cabin door, dry as desert dust. For days there had been no sun to thaw the drifts and form a frozen crust. The land was heaped fantastically high with it, a strange element, little more capable of sustaining a man's weight than so much water.

"Lucky we got bear-paws," Hawley mused. "A man couldn't travel a mile a day without snow-shoes. He'd just lay down and die of exhaustion."

Gordon was frowning at the mountainside that towered so stepply above the cabin.

"What damn fool ever built a shack here?" he muttered. "Look at those drifts. A whisper would pretty near start 'em sliding down and then— Sooner we get out from under that stuff the better for us!"

"When that slide comes," Hawley agreed, "there won't be any more cabin here, nothing but some busted logs at the foot of the bench when the snow melts next spring. And if anybody was in the cabin—"

"Don't talk so loud! I've known a man's holler to bring down a slide!" Gordon turned hurriedly within to collect his duffle.

Scarcely was his back turned than he heard the report of a rifle just outside the door, an explosion that was deafening in the confined space of the cabin. The sheriff wheeled about with a startled yell.

The moment his back was turned Hawley had snatched up his own rifle, set momentarily beside the door. Gordon saw him fire again as he wheeled.

The weapon was not turned on Hawley's breast, as the sheriff first thought. Hawley was shooting into the air. In a moment his purpose was clear.

The fantastic cupolas, castles, and domes of snow, clinging to the steep slope above them, the accretion of days of unnatural quiet and blizzard were dissolving their forms, reforming into billows and moving down upon them! The concussion of a rifle shot had upset their balance.

The change began slowly, so easily and gently that Gordon had time to reach his prisoner and grapple with him.

"You damn fool!" he cried, snatching at the weapon.

Hawley struggled with an insane strength, striving to wrest the gun free and fire again.

He flung the sheriff aside, into the yielding drift and raised the rifle.

The avalanche, slow in gathering, increased its speed. The mountain trembled with its coming. Great waves of snow leaped at the two men like breakers of a stormy sea.

The sheriff was floundering, trying to get to his feet.

"I told you," Hawley shouted. "Told you—you'd never get me—alive! Let God decide between—"

The deep-throated roar of tons of snow cut him short.

The billows rolled upon and over them. Cabin and men vanished.

There was a moment of chaos, a confusion of sound and motion beyond human comprehension. When it had died the air was white with clouds of snow dust that settled slowly, revealing again the eternal peaks. Down the mountain flank and across the bench extended a great scar of the naked rock. There was no trace of the men or the habitation, only the track of the slide, the silence of the hills and the snow pouring down in shifting clouds from above, diligent and unceasing.

IV.

CURT GORDON emerged from the dim, shadowy quiet of a land that might be death itself. Instinctively he began to struggle. With his first struggles life flowed back to him, bringing consciousness and will. He was like a man born again, experiencing all the pain and struggle of birth.

Had the snow that billowed down on him been rain-soaked or even damp it would have packed like concrete, and, like so much concrete, crushed him in its irresistible wave.

The slide started by Hawley's mad shot was dry and powdery, and the men had been caught close to the edge of its current. Gordon found, when he dug his way from the drift, that he had been tossed out of the stream.

He emerged, shaking himself, and slowly got his bearings. As memory flooded back to his brain he began to scan the fantastic snow ridges thrown up by the edge of the slide. His anxious glances were finally rewarded by sight of a man's mitten. Where the mitten lay he dug furiously and uncovered the form of Hawley.

Vigorous treatment brought Rod to his senses. He sat up and stared in wonder at the sheriff.

From staring Hawley looked about him, and to him, also, came the connected story.

The men gazed at each other without words, comprehending their relationship and their situation. Without snow-shoes, without pack or provisions, without a weapon—for the rifle had disappeared in the drifts—they were at the mercy of the wilderness.

In the first sickness of his despair Gordon found himself regretting angrily the impulse that had brought back consciousness. Better a thousand times he had laid in the drift to die of cold, a drowsy, happy death! Damn that mysterious thing that made a man fight to hold to life when living was only slow death by torture!

Yet he did not find it in his heart to blame his prisoner. In Hawley's place what else would he have done?

Finally the sheriff said grimly: "Well! You asked for a judgment, Rod. I guess it's thumbs down for the two of us."

"We'll die here, either starve or freeze, or both," Hawley agreed.

"And we can't travel, not without snow-shoes. How far could a man get in those drifts by wading?"

"A mile or so, or maybe better than that if he didn't lose his head and wear himself out with struggling—"

"A few miles! And it's forty-two back to Skye!"

"Yes."

"And not a cabin this side of the government ranger's. That would be thirty-five from here. Not a cabin!"

Hawley said nothing.

"It would have been a mercy, Rod, if

you hadn't lost the rifle. We could die quick—"

"Would you use it?"

"You know damn well I wouldn't!"

"I know you wouldn't, Curt. Not you!"

Hawley's manner gave his tribute of admiration to a brave man.

Gordon rose abruptly. "Well," he said, "we'll be starting, Rod—"

"Starting where?"

"Back to Skye." His manner was quiet, matter-of-fact. But he meant it. He added: "Get a move on!"

"And if I say I won't go?"

"You're my prisoner—"

"You can't make me. Your gun was lying on the table in the cabin when the slide started. You can't make me—"

"I can die doing my duty, Rod."

Hawley considered this. "Look here, Curt," he said slowly, "I won't lie to you. There is a cabin. A cabin not five miles from here. The geological survey men built it last summer. There's a cache of provisions in it, too. Two men could live there for months—"

"A cabin! Which way?"

Hawley shook his head stubbornly. "You'd never guess where," he said meaningly.

"I'll find it!"

"You'll die trying. Every step you make you'll be over your waist in this snow. If I led maybe we could do it. We'd have to go slow and work like hell—"

"Then you lead!"

Hawley shook his head again. "Is your life worth anything to you, Curt? Is it worth giving me two days' start after we reach that cabin? Or even twenty-four hours' start, just a day's lead on you and a chance to get out of this State and take Elsie somewhere where we can begin again? Just a day, Curt—"

The sheriff's lips pressed into a grim, hard line. "No," he said with finality. "Not one hour's start. You're my prisoner, and I never let one go yet. You know that."

"All right, find your own way—"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I ain't any more afraid to die than you are."

"That's final?"

"Final."

Their glances clashed. Hawley's face was as grim, as fixed with determination as Gordon's. They had each other's measure. Neither would give an inch. Hawley added by way of explanation: "When I started the slide I was expecting to die. I was ready then and I'm ready now, and no power on earth will make me show you the way to that cabin. Maybe there's some Power up above, Curt, that's bigger than law and duty as we see it. Maybe that Power will settle this affair between us. You lead on and I'll go without a kick, your prisoner. If that Power, whatever it is up there that rules things, can show you the way I'm satisfied. If we die together in the drifts—well, that's the answer, just the same. It's out of my hands, Curt. You lead!"

Gordon looked to right and left, before and behind. He had to choose a trail and had no more knowledge to guide him than the new-born kitten.

"All right," he said, "it's for the boss up there to decide."

Then he plunged abruptly into the drifts, floundering slowly, painfully away from where Hawley's cabin had stood.

And Hawley obediently followed in his path.

Hawley's lips were sealed. Not so much as by a glance would he indicate if the sheriff had chosen right or wrong.

He had not boasted when he put their lives to the test of blind Fate. Merely he had stated a truth, and he would die with the secret of their safety untold if that was Fate's ruling.

V.

NORTH, south, east, or west, any point of the compass, was open to Curt Gordon and the end of every projected trail was a grim question-mark.

He knew the section but slightly, and that by hearsay. He had never before chanced to visit Avalanche Cañon.

Before he plunged thigh-deep into the yielding snow he made a clear-headed effort to fix his course. He recalled all his scanty store of information about the lay of the

land, the valleys and streams, the benches and meadows and the timber, such timber as there was.

If he had to find a homesteader's claim, how much simpler! A man establishing a permanent residence would be guided by natural resources, at least. But the geological survey! Such a party would build a shack and a cache wherever next season's work might be, in any of a thousand little mountain meadows.

No use hoping for a sign from Hawley. Gordon accepted that as final.

Hawley was desperate. Once already he had tried to throw away his life, asking for a divine judgment. Hawley was ready to accept their condition as the judgment, ask no questions, hope for nothing, just go on until he could go no farther, then lie down and die.

Gordon knew Hawley well. He recognized the glint in the man's eyes, the stubborn set to his jaw.

Another thing, too, an insidiously persuasive thought Gordon could not down. If he perished there in the snow Elsie, his sister, would be spared disgrace. Nor would anybody ever know he had died with honor tarnished. How easy to give up trying!

That was Gordon's handicap. Worse than the cold, than the snow, than lack of food or any other essential was the idea. An idea can kill a man as surely as a lead bullet. Gordon knew that whatever trail he took ended only in a question-mark, and that every painful, floundering step he made, with the breath burning his aching lungs, muscles crying out with pain, that step led him only to—what?

Why struggle when to win meant Elsie's disgrace?

He stopped for breath, and Hawley stopped, close beside him.

They lay, half buried in the drifts, their chests heaving, bodies steaming while the chill cold only waited this chance to make itself felt.

Their eyes met and a long, grim look was exchanged.

"Come on," Gordon said finally and floundered away. Hawley followed as though riveted to a chain.

He knew whether Gordon was leading to safety or to certain death, but he gave no sign.

VI.

No use caring any more!

The thought came to Hawley with the shock of a splendid surprise.

How far they had gone he was not quite sure, two miles or so, perhaps more, but one thing he knew, Gordon's trail, bravely made, a heroic gamble, was leading now to a certain conclusion. There was no longer a question-mark at the journey's end.

Hawley saw that they would die in the snow.

Their course had led far to one side of the survey cabin. No man living, tired as these two, lying exposed in the cold, could hope to regain the strength to win back what they had lost.

Curt Gordon had curled up in the drift. His eyes were closed and his breathing was growing slower, quieter. Left to lie there a few hours those eyes would never open except on death. His lips twitched into a shadowy smile.

Hawley seized his arm and shook the sleeper. A sense of fair play prompted him to tell Gordon a decision had been given; that the uncertainty was ended. He shook him roughly, but the sheriff gave no sign of wakening.

Why bother him? He was happy for a little time. Sudden sense of pity for Gordon sent hot tears down Hawley's cheeks. Gordon was dying unbeaten.

The prisoner composed himself for his own death. He was content. Like Gordon he had done all a man could do. He felt he had no cause for shame.

Their last resting-place was among a little grove of dwarfed cedars and hemlocks, one of the many small groves dotting the meadow country. The drifts lay almost to the tree-tops, and Hawley, lying back, blinked peacefully at a canopy of green boughs.

In Hawley's thoughts the green seemed to merge slowly and change, fading and wavering until the beauty of line and pattern that delighted him became a face—a woman's face—Elsie!

He heard Elsie's voice—or was it the sigh of branches?

The voice spoke to him and what it said he knew with a start to be of the utmost importance. Elsie said something that startled him. A message, something he could not ignore, something so vital it roused him from his numbness of brain and body and made him sit up as though he rose from the grave.

Roused, he sat with lips parted, his blue eyes shining with a strange excitement.

Something had happened, something had been said to him, something he could not drag back from across the dim border of another world—and yet must remember!

He scowled with the effort, strained in his stillness, intent on making his brain function.

Then a new expression crossed his face, seeming to radiate through his body, electrifying him. He had remembered, and memory brought new life.

VII.

CURT GORDON had closed his eyes on the green canopy of the mountain cedars. If dreams had come to him or visions, no memory remained. A blank as compromising as death had intervened between that time and the discovery he was making now.

His eyes, staring upward as he lay on his back, were no longer looking at the green thatch. Instead they saw something shadowy, vague in detail as yet, but something strangely familiar. His nose caught familiar scents. His hand pressed a familiar texture. He was somewhere—where?

He had it!

Curt Gordon lay tucked in a bunk and the bunk was in a cabin. There was fire in the cabin and a smell of food cooking.

When memory had done its work, when reason assured him it was not a dream, but a miracle, he struggled to rise. Then he realized the pain of overstrained muscle, the sting of flesh that had been frozen and weakness that left him helpless.

He rolled his eyes and saw, vaguely, a man. The man was Hawley, and Hawley grinned cheerfully down on him, holding to his lips something hot and delicious.

Gordon drank the broth from the cup and felt a sense of peace, of comfort, of overwhelming satisfaction and drowsiness.

Hawley—Hawley and himself—in a cabin. Safe! He remembered dimly that something was unexplained, that there was a question unanswered. There had been snow, the knowledge that he was dying—Hawley dying beside him. Then this!

He tried to formulate his question, rolling his eyes to find Hawley. He got the dim impression that Hawley was seated near the window, by a table of some sort, writing something.

Then he slept again..

Hawley was writing a note in lead-pencil. As he wrote he glanced several times at the quiet figure in the bunk of the little cabin built by the survey party, and smiled with real affection.

"There lies a man, a real he-man," thought Hawley. "They don't breed 'em any straighter or braver. If he had his way he'd take me to jail in spite of his liking me, in spite of his own sister, because that's his duty. Yet I ain't sorry I saved his life."

Hawley shuddered then, for he remembered all too clearly the awful time of indecision, the moment when he found he could escape, and every impulse urged him to seize that opportunity without delay, to run for it and let Gordon take his own chances in the snow. That had been a struggle, a struggle like nothing else he knew, when he had turned back, risking everything to drag Gordon to safety.

In his heart Hawley felt that his act evened his account with Gordon. This risk paid every debt and left him free to break his word and make his own getaway.

He thought these things, but he lacked words to put them into the note he pinned to the cabin door. Instead he wrote:

CURT:

I got you to this place; it's the survey cabin I told you about, and I watched you two days till I was sure you'd pull through. I won't tell you how the trick was done because you'd follow me, and I mean to take every hour advantage I can get. If you can figure it out for yourself, well and good. Anyhow, nobody can ever blame you, Curt,

You did all a man could do to discharge your duty and I'll testify to that any place, any time. I reckon the condition you're in you are good for another day's sleep at least, likely more. You oughtn't to risk the trail till the snow packs, unless you can find out how I done it. Good-by, old-timer, and don't hold it against me. Elsie's happiness counts for something with you, like it does with me. I asked God for justice and I guess I got my answer all right when I found how to beat the snow.

Hawley signed his name and stuck up the message where Gordon would surely find it.

He took a last look at the sleeping man. The signs were good. The sheriff would come through all right.

Then with cap pulled low, collar turned up, food in his pockets, ready for the trail, he let himself out and closed the door snugly.

He floundered through the drifts to a near-by cedar, selected two tough, heavily thatched branches, and with a heavy hunting-knife lopped them off.

With leather thongs, his shoe-laces, he bound a branch to either shoe, the butt end toward his toe, the sleek, thick-needled thatch pointing behind. The branches were light, wide and webbed enough to support his weight on the soft drifts. Clumsier far than the man-made snow-shoe, durable only for a short distance, but renewable anywhere in that land of cedar growth.

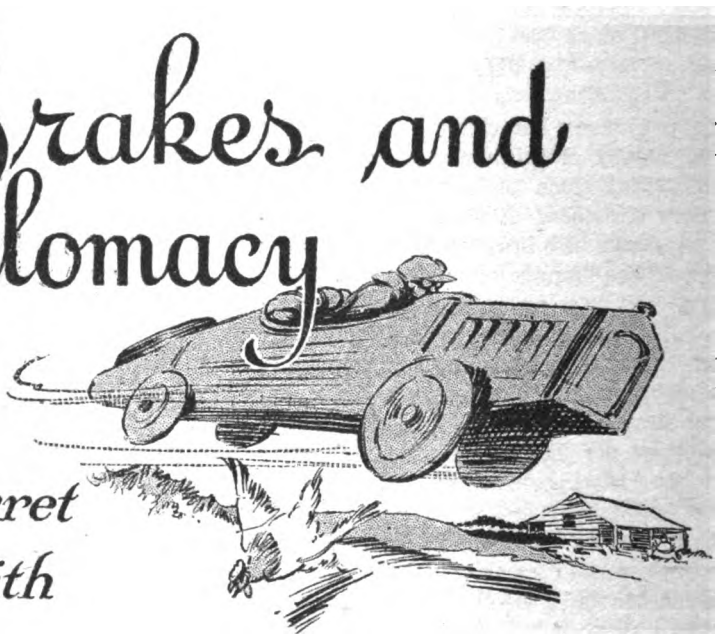
He glanced about him. Already the unceasing snowfall was covering all traces of what he had done.

Two days' start he was sure of. Curt might never guess the trick. He took the trail with a smile, and in his eyes a light of courage engendered by rosy hope, for at its end was the vision of freedom, peace, and eventually his wife and child.

(The end.)

Brakes and Diplomacy

by Garret Smith



JONAS KETCHUM was in action again. He was trying out another invention. As usual at such times, he was spreading consternation in his wake, and, equally as usual, he was noting with keen delight this reaction upon his neighbors. His lank, awkward form was hunched over the wheel of a long, low, bright-red racing car. A broad grin stretched his ordinarily wide mouth from one bat-wing ear to the other and filled his narrow, weather-beaten face with a series of leathery wrinkles. His thin, untrimmed, sandy hair stood straight up in the breeze through the wide-open windshield.

The racer lunged out of the Ketchum grounds, taking the short turn into the highway on two wheels. Jonas chuckled

in glee at the terrified antics of two nursemaids who scuttled to one side with their charges just in time to avert sudden death, as they thought. But Jonas knew better. He swung the wheel sharply over so that the red monster followed them in retreat. They screamed.

Jonas laughed and pressed a button in the dash, and the big car stopped dead with a jolt like a bucking bronco.

"See!" he shouted to the paralyzed girls. "The Ketchum Catch would stop a runaway freight-train in ten feet. It never fails."

But the nursemaids were in no mood to appreciate mechanical wonders of the Ketchum brand.

That mattered nothing to Jonas. He was quite used to this lack of honor to a prophet in his own neighborhood. He was already off again with a snort and roar of the eight-cylinder Hermiker engine. At sixty miles an hour he took the winding curves of the Oakwood highways. Cars and pedestrians alike scattered curbward. The purr of the powerful machine drowned out their heated remarks, but he knew what they were and grinned back at the eloquent faces and attitudes.

"Flock of danged sheep!" he scoffed. "Think they'd learn after a while I never hurt anybody yet."

And that was true. Jonas was a speed demon, but a lucky and skilful one. Despite all prophecies to the contrary, no manslaughter had yet been laid at his door. But then Jonas was young yet, only thirty-five. The dolorous seers still hoped to see him hung for cause.

He barely missed grazing the hubs of the brougham of old Simon Mentone, who despised all motor vehicles and still rode with stubborn pride behind his team of blacks.

"Wish I'd wrecked him!" grunted Jonas. "Old fossil! Good shaking up would have done him good."

Then he saw ahead of him another opportunity to put the Ketchum Catch to spectacular test. They were having a reception at the Caledons. A long line of limousines and electrics stood in front of the place; others were drawing up. Jonas headed straight for the jam and stepped on the gas.

The racer leaped into eighty miles an hour. Women screamed; men leaped to their feet and swore; chauffeurs who happened to be disentangled enough from the rest made desperate efforts to dash for safety.

But Jonas grinned and pressed the catch button. The red racer, with an indignant snort, stopped dead with its fenders all but locked into those of the Van Slade car, from which the aristocratic occupants were just alighting.

An indignant crowd surrounded the inventor.

"I'll have you arrested for reckless speeding," roared old Van Slade. "You might have killed a half-dozen people and smashed a lot of cars."

"Not at all, not at all!" Jonas snapped. "Knew I could stop it. No danger at all. Knew I could stop her on the dot. Wanted to show you. Got a great little invention here. Maybe you'd like to invest."

He leaped out and raised the hood of the racer.

"I don't care to see anything," Van Slade barked back. "None of your fool inventions interest me. This thing's the most dangerous yet. Puts a premium on recklessness."

Jonas slammed down the hood and leaped back into the driver's seat.

"'Nough said. I know what I got. Posterity will vindicate me."

And the red racer was off again.

Jonas had really hoped to impress Van Slade. He was one of the directors of the Hermiker Motor Company, and Jonas aimed to get the Ketchum Catch adopted by that company. In the first place, it was the biggest manufacturer of high-priced cars in the country. In the second place, his invention was particularly adapted to the Hermiker eight. The one weakness of that complicated car was the tendency of its powerful engine to jam the delicately adjusted transmission and run away at exceedingly inopportune moments. The Hermiker corps of mechanics had for a long time been working on the problem of overcoming this wayward tendency and

at the same time retaining the car's power and speed. So far in vain.

Old Waldo G. Hermiker, head of the company, was a stiff-necked party who kept the affairs of the concern strictly under his broad thumb. He had definite ideas as to what he wanted in this particular line, as in every other. He was a good, practical mechanic, risen from the ranks, and his ideas were based on a pretty definite understanding of the principles involved. He didn't propose to pay royalties to outside inventors when he could have the thing done in his own shop. Besides, he was pestered to death night and day by cranks trying to get at him with inventions of theirs, and he made it an invariable practise to see none of them.

So Jonas, with his latest brain-baby, was facing a pretty discouraging proposition. In his particular case the difficulty of getting serious consideration from anybody, let alone a case-hardened old curmudgeon like W. G. Hermiker, was greatly enhanced by his past record. Jonas had developed and tried out hundreds of brilliant schemes, and every one of them had been a conspicuous failure. Jonas couldn't accomplish even a failure without being conspicuous about it.

For instance, there had been the Ketchum Safety Dynamiter. The echoes of that thunderous failure were still rumbling about Oakwood in the shape of several lingering suits for damages.

Jonas had been left with a good-sized fortune by a hard-headed father some ten years before. That had left him free to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of his mechanical genius to his heart's content and to the mixed amusement and annoyance of his associates. But experiments had meant a large outlay and no income.

So now when he felt sure at last that he had something that would succeed, his resources were about gone. He must either get the financial backing to manufacture the Ketchum Catch independently or interest a big motor plant in taking over the patent on a satisfactory royalty basis. The latter arrangement was by far the most satisfactory. It would free Jonas from risk and responsibility and give him the means and opportunity to go on with other experiments. Jonas had no taste for manufacturing or the dull routine of business. Once an invention was done and placed—or, as had invariably happened before, been proven a failure—he lost interest in it and went on to something else.

The Hermiker Motor Company, therefore, was his logical goal. And his first chance at one of the influential men of that company had been worse than a failure. He had merely alienated old Van Slade and put still another obstacle between him and the head of the company.

Jonas became thoughtful as he continued on home. He slowed the racer down to twenty miles and practically let it drive itself. Jonas often drove automatically like that when he had a problem on his mind. But as every one about town knew his habits, they simply got out of his way, so it didn't matter much.

He came to himself on the sharp grade leading to his place, guided the car into the garage, and then went up to his laboratory and sat down at his desk. He became once more lost in thought.

Trouble with him, he decided, he had been too direct and forceful in his methods of approaching men. His raid on Van Slade had been on the impulse of the moment. He grinned reminiscently as he pictured the old man's wrath. But his smile was a little rueful as well.

"Wasn't any way to do," he decided. "I've got to cut out the rough stuff and try out some wiles. I hate to do it. I like to smash at 'em. Doesn't get me anything, though, and I've got to get something."

He took down a copy of the "Directory of Directors," and ran over a list of the directorate of the Hermiker Company. He grinned again ruefully as he was reminded that not only was Van Slade an active director, but another victim of his afternoon speed spree, old Simon Mentone, whose brougham he had nearly wrecked, was also on the list.

But about half of the board were men who lived elsewhere, and for that and other reasons his mocking face was unfamiliar to them. It was upon these men, one at a

time, that he decided to try his wiles, in the hope that through one of them he might at last win through to the unapproachable motor king himself.

Next he got out his books and took stock of his resources. A brief inspection confirmed his suspicion that they had reached the vanishing-point. Everything he had left in the world was tied up to the limit as collateral for loans. He had a lot of unpaid accounts out, and nothing coming in to pay them. Add to that certain suits for damages pending, and he was in a bad way. He must conduct his campaign on an exceedingly economical plan and make it yield results as soon as possible.

Another hour of cogitation evolved an elaborate plan whereby he could make the time spent in working up his approach pay expenses. This settled, he got out the red racer again and spread a streak of terror for ten miles across country to the next town of Greyfield, where a friend of his, George Deberou, had a country home. Deberou was a writer with a keen sense of humor. He had cultivated Jonas at first because he found in him delightful literary material. Deberou always listened with unfailing delight to the latest accounts of his quaint friend's mishaps told in Jonas's own inimitable Gatling-gun style.

He was neither surprised nor alarmed today when Jonas, turning the red racer into his gate, saw him standing up in front of his house and started for him at break-neck speed. His shaggy figure never wavered. He was used to Jonas's tricks, and simply replied in kind to the mad driver's grin. His faith was justified when the big car stopped dead just as the writer was within two feet of annihilation. Without further greeting Jonas leaped out and opened the hood of the car.

"Great little invention I've got here," spurted the enthusiast.

For the next fifteen minutes he deluged his friend with rapid, voluminous explanation of the Ketchum Catch, while the listener, making humorous comments at first, soon became greatly interested.

"Great!" he exclaimed when the lecture was over. "Jonas, I believe you have hit it at last. What are you going to do with it? Sell it to some motor concern or manufacture it yourself? If you're promoting it I might put in a piece of change."

"What I came over for," Jonas admitted. "Going to make big money out of it. Need help."

"How much do you want me to put in?"

"Not a dang cent. Want to give you a piece of it. All you've got to do to pay for it is hire a chauffeur from me."

"Hire a— I don't get you. Say it over again softly and slowly. Aren't starting an employment agency, are you?"

"Something like that. Listen. I am going to sell this patent to old Hermiker or bust. Couldn't get in to see that old guy with a stick of dynamite. Got to be foxy. Going to get next to one of the board of directors. Going to get job as chauffeur with this director under fake name. Got to stand in with chauffeur he's got now to begin with. I'll get acquainted with the chauffeur of the man I'm after, promise him a little bonus, and get him to quit and recommend me for his job. In order to do that, got to get him another job. There's where you come in—see? You said the other day you didn't like your chauffeur. When I say word, fire him; hire my man. Everybody's satisfied—see?"

After a little cross-examination Deberou understood and enjoyed the plot immensely. So Jonas thundered away, contented. His next week was a busy one spent in studying the various directors, to see which was the most likely victim of his scheme. He sifted the list of the men who did not know him personally down to five who, he learned, were influential enough with old Hermiker, their president, to get that difficult old gentleman to consider an outside invention.

Then he took to hanging around the brokerage offices and restaurants frequented by these men, in order to study their personalities at as close range as possible. This process presently eliminated three—Ellerton, Zimbrie, and Frawley, who were young men, progressive, and inclined to be good fellows.

Any one of these three, he decided,

might be workable. This investigation he accomplished without making himself conspicuous before any of these gentlemen or running much risk that they would recognize him again in the disguise of a chauffeur.

The next step was to study the chauffeurs of the men in question. Frawley's chauffeur, named simply and unobtrusively Brown, best fulfilled Jonas's specifications. They met at a restaurant to which Jonas had repaired while his employer was dining near by. Brown, to begin with, had the soul of a mechanic. He loved his job. Jonas found out after visiting with him on general subjects that he had ideas and ambitions. They became friends at one session. Jonas told him who he was, invited him to come out to his place the next time he had a half-day off. He told him he had a proposition that he might want to put up to him, and asked for references, stipulating, however, that he say nothing to his employer, Mr. Frawley, for reasons that he would explain later.

The upshot of it was that Jonas's inquiries regarding the man Brown proved most satisfactory. A week later he put the whole proposition before him, promised him a small interest in the patent if it succeeded, and a place in his own laboratory eventually. So a few days afterward Brown was installed as Deberou's chauffeur, and his old friend Winter, on his recommendation, was giving eminent satisfaction to the Frawley household.

Jonas was ready now for the final preliminary stroke, that of installing his Ketchum Catch on the Frawley car with a view to interesting this influential Hermiker Company man and through him getting at the redoubtable head of the company. Within the week he had his opportunity when the family were away for the afternoon. He ran out to his own place in the Frawley car, which fortunately was also a Hermiker eight. By the time it was necessary to go back the installation was done excepting one small but essential attachment which he slipped in his pocket as he hurried away. He could finish the job at any time in the Frawley garage.

He returned to the Frawley suburban home in high spirits. But when he got there those spirits were suddenly dashed to the ground. Mr. Frawley was already there waiting for him in the garage with another car, a new Hermiker eight. With him was a businesslike-looking individual who eyed the old car appraisingly as Jonas drove up.

"I've got a surprise for you, Winter," Frawley exclaimed as his chauffeur alighted. "I've sold the old car and bought a new one. You can just clean anything out of the old bus that belongs to us and turn it over to this gentleman who is handling the deal for me."

Jonas was so startled and dismayed that he could think of nothing to say that would block the transaction until the car dealer was out of sight in a car containing the only Ketchum Catch in existence.

"Who is the dealer that took the old car?" he managed to stammer finally to his employer.

"He's the Élite Garage man. He had a customer for it and could make me a better offer than the exchange price at the factory. So I let him have it."

Jonas was in the depths of despair. This meant a delay of months and possibly ultimate failure. He hadn't a cent left with which to make another set of the catch equipment. He might save enough out of his wages, but he couldn't take the time off to make it without losing this important job. He brooded over the subject through dinner and then decided to try the desperate expedient of running down the new owner of the old car. What representations he could make to him when he did so he didn't know yet.

At his first opportunity he dropped in at the Élite Garage, and, on the pretense that he had left a pair of good gloves in the old car, asked who had bought it.

"Man named W. A. Jenkins, over in Greenwich, Connecticut," said the garage man. "You can call his man up from here if you want to and inquire about the gloves."

"No, thanks," said Jonas; "I've a little time off, and I'll run over there. It's only a few miles."

At the Jenkins garage he was lucky enough to find the chauffeur at home, but he was loafing disconsolately about an empty garage.

"I think your boss bought a car at the Elite Garage the other day—Hermiker eight, belonged to Ed Frawley," was the way Jonas introduced himself.

The chauffeur came to life in an instant. He acted as though he were going to pounce upon Jonas, who involuntarily dodged back a step.

"Say! What the deuce? What do you know about that car? Are you one of the gang that nipped it?"

"Nipped it!" Jonas gasped. "What do you mean nipped it?"

"Maybe you know more about it than I do," replied the chauffeur, edging toward the telephone on the wall. "If you're one of the gang that stole the bus, I'll take it out of your hide. I've got in bad enough over it."

One can imagine Jonas's feelings at this new twist of circumstances.

"You mean to say that car is stolen?" he faltered. "I'm Frawley's chauffeur, and just came over to get some gloves I left in it. Who stole it? Where?"

"You seem all eaten up over a pair of gloves," sneered the other man. "My boss has lost a whole car, and I'll be lucky if I don't lose anything but my job. They swiped it on me last night over in New Rochelle when I dropped in for a poker game with some friends."

This seemed to be a case of badly spilled milk, but there was no use weeping over it, so Jonas, after clearing himself of suspicion, drove sadly back to the Frawley place, resigned to working until he got enough money to replace his lost model. What he should do after that he had not yet the slightest idea.

Several weeks of this passed. Jonas had settled down into a surprisingly conservative driver, though there were times when his old impulse toward mad racing nearly got the best of him. But these occasions were infrequent, for Jonas was very low in spirits.

But at length he succeeded in getting together enough money to make another model, and was about ready to hand in his resignation to his employer when he read in *Motor News* one evening an item that drove his spirits still further into the ground. It ran as follows:

> It is understood on good authority that the Department of Invention of the Hermiker Motor Company has about perfected a new patent brake device that will remedy the defects hitherto existing in their powerful, high-speed car. This is a device by which one of these cars going at full speed can be stopped in less than half its length by pressing a button on the dash. The details are still a secret, but it is understood that a patent has been applied for and that the device will shortly be put on the market.

So old man Hermiker had beaten him to it. If this article was true, Jonas's device would become useless. There was just one chance left in the world—that the Hermiker Brake would be so near like his own device that Hermiker could not get it patented without infringement.

After a little thought Jonas went to his employer.

"Mr. Frawley," he said, "I am getting tired of being nothing but a chauffeur. I've studied mechanics all my life, and have some ideas that might be of use to the Hermiker plant. I wonder if you couldn't get me a job there?"

Frawley was not particularly anxious to lose a good chauffeur, but he liked Jonas, and had been impressed in various conversations with him by his knowledge of mechanics.

So he consented, and in a short time did succeed in getting Jonas a try-out as a mechanic's helper.

Once in the Hermiker plant Jonas worked fast. In a day's time he had won the confidence of his associates in the laboratory. He had also learned what he wanted to know—that the man who had invented the new Hermiker Brake was named Winslow; also that he seemed an approachable sort of chap.

The next day he made Winslow's acquaintance.

"By the way," he said casually, two or three days later, "how is the new brake device coming on? I understand you are the chap who invented the idea. I worked

a little on a scheme of that kind myself once, and am particularly interested."

"Well, I'll have to confess that it isn't coming on as fast as I had hoped," Winslow admitted, after a little hesitation. "I've got it all done but one little attachment which happens to be very essential. The story in the magazine was a little previous. The old man was pretty enthusiastic over it to begin with, but since I have had trouble with it he's got cold feet and set some of the boys to experimenting in different lines."

"Then the patent hasn't been applied for?" asked Jonas hopefully.

"Not yet. Won't be, unless I hit on a solution of the final problem pretty soon."

"Maybe I could help you if you'd let me see your model," James suggested tentatively.

"I'm not supposed to," Winslow demurred. "There's always chance of leak, you know. Still you seem to be square, and you might be able to help me. I'd be willing to give you a piece of my bonus if you could put it over."

He took Jonas into the little private workroom that was assigned to him, and there Jonas was amazed and bewildered to find an exact duplicate of his Ketchum Catch excepting for one small detail, the little piece of metal that he had not had time to put in the day he transferred the model from his own car to Frawley's, the important little piece of metal which he still had in his pocket and which Winslow had not been able to duplicate.

On close inspection, he was still more amazed to find that the model was not a mere duplicate of his; it was the same one. He detected on the metal certain familiar marks which made the identity unquestionable.

He thought a moment, and then took out of his pocket the missing piece of metal.

"There's the attachment you've been working for," he said, placing it under the astonished eyes of Winslow.

"Where did you get that?" Winslow stammered.

"Where did you get this?" demanded Jonas, in turn waving his hand at the rest of the apparatus.

Winslow tried to look his questioner in the eye for a moment, but failed.

"See here," he faltered, "you've got me buffaloed. I don't know what you know about this, but I'm up against it, and might as well come clean. I haven't done anything more dishonest than to try to complete another man's experiment that hadn't been patented as far as I could find out. I bought a car of a second-hand dealer a while ago and found this apparatus hitched to it. I fussed around with it until I found out what it was meant for, and I have been trying to finish it. Now, what do you know about it?"

Jonas told him in a few words what he knew about it and showed him some papers to prove that the patent had just been granted to Jonas Ketchum, which he demonstrated was his real name.

"Now, I'm not going to make any kick over what you've done," he wound up, "if you will just help me put this over with Hermiker. If there's any come-back on you, I'll see that you have a good job in my laboratory, and you'll lose nothing. Now we'll just slip this apparatus into one of the cars, adjust it, and then we'll give old Hermiker a demonstration. After he's accepted it and has decided that this is what he wanted, I'll pull the ghastly facts on him, and I think by that time he'll be so satisfied with it that it 'll be all over but the shouting."

An hour later they were ready for the demonstration, but were told by Mr. Hermiker's secretary that the boss had lost interest in the brake and had just dictated orders that work on it be discontinued. Anyhow, he had gone home for the day.

"Very well," Jonas decided, the old Ketchum spirit of "smashing at 'em" coming to the fore again suddenly, "we'll take him by storm. We'll drive out and demonstrate before all of his company."

Jonas fussed with the gearing a little bit more, then they leaped into the fast car, and the car leaped out of the building and was soon on the main highway headed for the Hermiker country home in Westchester, Jonas driving in all his old style.

A half-hour later they approached the gates of the Hermiker residence, and the

gateman stepped forward to inquire their business. And at that moment the big Hermiker eight, true to form, ran away. The gateman dodged just in time as the gasoline devil crashed through the gate and up the winding driveway, nipping off all the curves as it went. Just before it reached the house it left the drive altogether, plunged across a strip of lawn and straight toward a terrace, where the Hermiker house-party were assembled at tea al fresco.

Men and women leaped to their feet in consternation. Old Mr. Hermiker himself, being a little gouty, was the last one to rise and face the destruction that threatened the company. And at that instant the fender of the big car just touched the chair that he had vacated, and then, as if smitten by Providence, stopped.

Jonas stepped lightly out of the car and, hat in hand, stood before the surprised head of the Herkimer Motor Company.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he interposed before the old man's wrath could break. "We're from the factory, out experimenting on the new brake. Car ran away on us, as this make does so often, you know. Afraid we would have smashed you up pretty badly if the new brake hadn't worked. The good old Ketchum Catch saved your life after your own precious car nearly slaughtered you."

Then old man Hermiker found his voice. The mechanic in him triumphed over his wrath and fright.

"Most amazing thing I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "Mean to say you fellows have finished that brake and that it works like that?"

Jonas in a few words explained the whole thing to him.

"Now, Mr. Hermiker," he wound up, "I know it looks rather bad for you people, but I don't believe any of you intended to steal my patent. I think you're satisfied it's what you want, and if you say the word I'll not bring any suit. You can have it at reasonable royalty terms, and I'll call off a deal which I have under way with some other people."

A half-hour later Jonas, full of contentment, drove out of the Hermiker grounds. He had in his pocket a rough memorandum signed by Hermiker, agreeing to take over the Ketchum Catch at terms very satisfactory to Jonas.

And as soon as they were out of sight of the Hermiker Lodge gate Jonas stopped the car and alighted. He opened the hood and, chuckling softly to himself, readjusted the slight disarrangement to the machinery which he had made before they started from the plant and which had made sure that the big car would run away at the right moment.

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THE BEACH BY WINTER TWILIGHT

HERE is no life except the lone patrol,
Now the cold trumpets of the north wind blow;
Sailless and sad the leaden waters roll,
And icy foam slips up to touch the snow.

The sun, the zephyr, and the wave's caress
Have changed or fled, departing with the birds.
Here is no maiden in her loveliness,
Nor any murmuring of tender words.

Young hearts that dreamed, may no such change be yours,
By twilight hearths at eve regathering!
In memory the summer noon endures,
And summer waits beyond the distant spring.

George Sterling.

The Wreck

Part III

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. He is convinced that he is a nervous wreck and suffering from insomnia. While recuperating at the Bar M Ranch, the Wreck offers to drive Sally Morgan, the ranch owner's daughter, thirty-five miles to the railroad. She is going to Chicago to buy her trousseau, being engaged to Sheriff Bob Wells. They set out in the flivver across the prairie, miss the road that is supposed to cross the trail, spend the night out, go hungry and get lost. Then the flivver runs out of gas and comes to a stop. The Wreck decides to stop a large motor-car which he sees approaching.

When the motorist refuses to sell him gasoline, the Wreck holds him up at the point of Sally's gun and takes what he needs. Then he compels the chauffeur to let out the air in all the tires, and forces the pompous motorist to crank the flivver. Going on, Sally and the Wreck come to a ranch-house in time for breakfast, and are met by the foreman, who announces that his Chinks have just left. Sally proves so good a cook that he wishes to retain her and Henry, who has introduced her as his wife. The foreman forces them to stay by, removing one wheel of the flivver and hiding it. The Wreck wants to fight, but Sally thinks it wise for them to hide out after their hold-up. A little later the ranch owner arrives and proves to be the very man they robbed. He gets the sheriff on the telephone and insists that the bandits be captured. The sheriff is none other than Bob Wells, Sally's fiancé. While the sheriff is forming his posse, Sally meekly cooks for the rich motorist and the Wreck, disguising himself by removing his horn-rimmed spectacles, humbly waits on the rich man's table.

CHAPTER X.

THE WRECK FIGHTS.

SALLY did not get her emotions sorted out and classified in an orderly manner for the rest of the day. They insisted on mixing themselves up; they refused to stay where she tried to put them. Ordinarily she was of a temperament quite serene and obedient to her will, except, of course, when the Wreck charged into it like a frisky steer. Even on those occasions her departure from a normal calm was brief and largely superficial. But the news that Sheriff Bob Wells was going out with a posse upset her poise; it struck deeper, and affected her in so many different ways that she seemed to be spinning like a weather-vane in a whirlwind.

She laughed, she was serious, she was scornful, she was angry, she was incredulous, she was alarmed—all these and other moods took possession of her, one giving way to another, only to come back and repeat itself after awhile, so that the final result was to leave her in a very uncertain state of mind.

It did not help her that the Wreck seem-

ed to be singularly unmoved by the news. He treated it as if it were a matter of small consequence. But Sally was not in the habit of steadying herself by leaning on Henry Williams; she could only account for his calmness by attributing it to a failure to realize the situation. He did not know what it meant to have a Montana sheriff and a posse hard on his heels, but Sally did.

Even at that, she did not believe they would be caught. Surely, she told herself, there would be a way out of things. It was not pursuit and possible capture that disturbed her and awakened every absurdly conflicting emotion that lay within her; it was the fact that Bob Wells was the instrument of the law. That jarred her in a most illogical but effective fashion. Any other sheriff might do his duty without protest from Sally; but Bob Wells—why did he go and run for sheriff, anyhow? He had plenty of other things to keep him busy. If he had not hustled around and got himself elected sheriff, he could have ridden over to the railroad with her and she would have been on the train long ago. It was a fool trick for him to get into politics, thought Sally.

"Don't let it worry you," said the Wreck.

"It doesn't worry me; I'm perfectly calm," retorted Sally.

"You're nervous, anyhow."

"I'm *not* nervous."

"I'm an expert on nerves," he said. "You can't fool me. I've spent my money on specialists and I know. Right now you're more nervous than I am—and I'm a wreck."

There was a good deal of that kind of conversation all afternoon. The Wreck had an idea that if he could get her really angry she might forget about the sheriff for awhile. But the only times she got angry were when she thought about Bob Wells, and then she was just as likely to be laughing again the next minute. As for getting angry at the Wreck, she refused. It was a form of comfort that was denied her, for some unaccountable reason.

"Bob Wells ought to have more sense than to let anybody fill him up with a fool story about four highwaymen," she said, as she sat down to peel potatoes for supper. "Why, there isn't any such thing as even one road agent, nowadays."

"We even have 'em in Pittsburgh, Sally."

"Pittsburgh! I'm tired of hearing about Pittsburgh. You'd think the sun rose and set in Pittsburgh."

"Not if you lived there," said the Wreck.

"Well, don't be holding it up as a model, anyhow. It sounds—provincial."

He refused to be irritated, which did not help Sally at all.

"But you'll see the sun rise and set there before I get through with it," he remarked, with a confident jerk of his head.

"Now, what do you mean by that?"

He explained, with a sudden enthusiasm that surprised her, that as soon as he had his process finished he was going to take the smoke out of Pittsburgh and take a lot of money away from the corporations that made the smoke. It was the first time Sally ever heard him talk much about himself, except the nervous part. They knew he was a chemist, and that was about all. Dad Morgan, not being qualified in chemistry and regarding it as something that existed only in text-books, had never pressed inquiries. He assumed that the Wreck was some kind of a professor and let it go at that.

But it seemed that the Wreck was a chemist who did things in steel plants and he had picked up a lot of information about smoke, as well as a good deal of smoke itself. He was going to make Pittsburgh as smokeless as though it were run by electricity. It was only a question of time and patience and a little more research, he said. He explained the whole thing to Sally, with a lot of words that she did not understand; and while he was talking about Pittsburgh and what he was going to do to it, she also learned that he was born in Yonkers, New York, had three sisters, was a graduate of a college, had been to Europe twice, had lived a year in Australia, could play golf, hated the movies and was thirty-two years old.

"H'm," said Sally, who actually forgot about Bob Wells for a few minutes. "I thought you were older than that."

"That's because I'm all shot to pieces," he said, gloomily.

"What rank nonsense."

"Wait till you get insomnia."

"Bosh. You only think you're sick. Whatever made you nervous, anyhow?"

"Women."

She stared.

"Women?" she echoed. "Henry, are you joshing me?"

"It's a fact," said the Wreck. "I can't stand women. There's a pair of them in the laboratory. And three of them in the office. And seven in the boarding house. And thousands of 'em, going to work, and coming home, and butting into you, no matter where you go. I haven't got anything against 'em, but I just can't stand 'em."

Sally continued to stare.

"Did you ever take one of them to a movie?" she asked, curiously.

"Once. But she got sore at it and cried."

"Did you ever learn to dance?"

"No!"

"Did you ever sit on a front porch and talk to one of them?"

"Not unless they nailed me."

"And you think you're a woman hater?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"I didn't say I hated them. I don't. I just can't stand them. They make me nervous. They act so—" He stopped and appeared to discover that she was a woman. "I—excuse me."

"Certainly I'll excuse you," said Sally, "because you're a big idiot. Put on an apron and help me with these potatoes."

He was obeying her when Charley McSween came into the kitchen, burdened with two medium-sized grips and a ridiculous little bag that belonged to the Wreck.

"Seein' as you've got convictions against rasslin' baggage," he said, "I fetched it up myself. Now, about accommodations." He scratched his ear. "When we have Chinks here, we sleep 'em off in a corner of the bunk house. But your wife ain't a Chink. We'd have plenty of room in the house, only the boss and family are here. There's one room left up-stairs, but she's awful small and I don't figure that she'll do for two people. Looks to me like Williams here—what's your first name, anyhow?"

"Henry," supplied Sally.

"Well, it looks to me like Henry 'd have to take the Chink corner of the bunk house. How about it, Henry?"

The Wreck said it would suit him exactly.

"The boys ain't like to bother you any, seein' as you're white," added Charley.

"They won't bother me," said the Wreck, significantly.

Sally was not so confident; she knew how "the boys" sometimes behaved when they had a dude on their hands. But she hoped that Charley was right, because the Wreck was not a patient young man and there was no telling what might happen if they started to haze him.

Four of the boys came in at supper time; there were three more who were out having a look at the fences and Charley said they might not be back for a couple of days. The quartet took one look into the kitchen and then made a quick start for the bunk house, where there was more scrubbing and shaving within the space of half an hour than Underwood's ranch had known since Charley could remember. Then they drifted into the kitchen and hung around.

Sally was always good to look at, even when she wore a big apron. If she was not downright pretty, she did not miss the mark by any noticeable distance. There was a smooth fluff in her brown hair that even Harriet Underwood might have envied. There was a steady, friendly look in her brown eyes, which were as fine and long-lashed as any pair that might have been found in the face of a beauty. Her lips had a pleasant curve when she smiled, showing strong, beautifully even teeth which even the Wreck had observed to be white beyond a fault.

The boys at Underwood's ranch even fell to cleaning their finger nails as they watched her. Somehow, without even so much as suggesting it by word or look, Sally had a way of creating in others—men, usually—an impulse to be neat. She did not mind having the boys sitting around the kitchen, even though they did not belong there until they were told to come and get supper.

There was, however, one feature that bothered her. She had chosen to be from the East, like the Wreck, and it was not easy to play the part. There were lots of things that a tenderfoot was not supposed to know, or say, and it kept her constantly on guard to remember the fact. She found it safer to confine herself to "Yes," "No," and "Really?" so far as it was possible. The boys laid it to shyness, although that was not one of her traits.

Just as she feared, they found the Wreck amusing. A good deal of the conversation centred around his spectacles, which he wore, except for excursions into the dining-room. But some rare policy of restraint seemed to have settled upon him; he calmly ignored most of what they said, and when he did answer it was with an apparent good-nature that surprised Sally. She knew, however, that he was not bearing it as easily as he seemed to be; he was simply holding himself in. Evidently she had made him understand the need for caution, and for that she was thankful.

He spent most of his time in the dining-room, while the boys were having supper in the kitchen, where Sally did all the table-waiting that was necessary. It was during supper that Sally confirmed an idea which came instinctively to her when the boys first entered the kitchen. One of them, they called him "Mort," was a cow-puncher by occupation and a lady-killer by way of diversion. There was no denying his good looks; certainly Mort would not have denied them. He was young and slim and straight, with a bold, slightly amused look in his eyes and a small black mustache of which he made a great deal. He was a graceful youth, a little too confident, but obviously efficient. She could see that to Mort a sort of deference was paid by the other boys, particularly when it came to a matter of women. Probably without realizing it, they stood aside for him and gave him a clear path when petticoats came to the ranch.

She had seen other Morts in her young time, but always when she could control circumstances to suit herself. The covert way in which his glance constantly followed her was faintly irritating; she was conscious of it even when her back was toward him. His gestures and his speech were meant for her, and her alone, and she did not welcome the exclusiveness. Given the freedom of her true Montana status, Sally would have handled him without the least trouble in the world. He would not have bothered her at all; at least, not more than a few minutes. But being a temporary tenderfoot hampered her, and took away most of her natural weapons. Probably, under other circumstances, she would not even have taken the trouble to dislike him; but now she disliked him frankly.

One by one the other boys deserted the kitchen after supper, but Mort stayed. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that the field belonged to him, growing out of the futility of competition. He sat there, watching and talking with practiced ease, as she went about her work. Now and then the Wreck came in from the dining-room, where the Underwood family still sat in the thrall of Sally's first real meal. The Wreck, donning his spectacles, would eye him narrowly, but say nothing. As for Mort, he now ignored the Wreck completely, having made it clear some time earlier that he regarded him merely as a passing source of polite amusement.

Sally fidgeted. She did not want to lose her temper; she felt that there was enough trouble on her hands. She kept an uneasy watch upon the Wreck, not that she expected or wanted him to do anything, but rather fearing that he might attempt something beyond his scope. There were times when she even wished that Bob Wells might walk into the kitchen, because everything would then be simplified and settled. Bob knew exactly how to handle them. But there was nothing to do but play a lone rôle. She scorned to ask anybody for help.

The Wreck observed a flush in her cheeks when he came out of the dining-room for the last time and cleared a place for himself at the end of the kitchen table, at which he sat. He did not ask any questions; he merely observed a fact, and then went gravely about the business of eating his supper. Mort was laughing quietly. The presence of the Wreck did not seem to dis-

turb him in the least degree; he did not seem to know that he was there.

"But you're goin' to like me a whole lot," said Mort, persuasively.

He was evidently reverting to a discussion from which the Wreck had been absent.

Sally made no answer. She was busy piling dishes in the sink and her back was turned toward the lady-killer.

"By and by there'll be a moon up," continued the cow-puncher, as he rolled himself another cigarette. "I'm a sort of an expert on moons, and walks, and things like that. I reckon we're goin' to have a look at that moon."

Sally continued to pile dishes. She was afraid that she going to get angry, particularly with the Wreck sitting there and listening. She imagined him writhing on the edge of his chair. If she had turned around to look at him she would have been astonished and dismayed to observe his stolidity.

So whole-heartedly was the Wreck minding his own business that Mort did not even waste a glance on him as he rose languidly from his chair and strolled in the direction of the sink. But the Wreck was watching the lady-killer. He seemed to be studying the graceful swing of his walk and the youthfully arrogant tilt of his head as he approached Sally Morgan, as if they were something to be envied and almost admired.

"There ain't a reason in the world why you ain't goin' to like me," said Mort, softly. "Now, for instance."

There was skill and experience in the arm that slipped around Sally's waist. She leaped aside with a swift movement and faced the owner of the arm, her eyes blazing.

Simultaneously, the chair in which the Wreck had been sitting went over backward with a crash. But the Wreck did not go with it. He seemed, as nearly as Sally could figure, to arrive at the spot where Mort was standing at about the same time the back of the chair touched the floor. One of the finest china platters in the Underwood pantry was in his hand.

The platter rose and fell and splintered musically, all in a breath, its pieces falling in a sort of cascade around the lady-killer's head. But the Wreck did not pause to observe results. There were other things to be done, and he did them.

If Sally had attempted to analyze his style, even she might have regarded it as unethical. It was fettered by no observable rules. It was free and loose and versatile, rather than orthodox, and its dominant characteristic seemed to be speed. That, of course, made it exceedingly difficult to follow. Likewise, it made it difficult for Mort to establish successful competition. He did not happen to be wearing a gun; but that occasioned him no dismay, for he was correctly accounted to be a smart young man with his fists. What bothered him was the total irregularity of the affair and the fact that the Wreck seemed to be careless in his methods.

Part of the time the Wreck had both feet clear of the floor, the result of a climbing tendency. The lady-killer found it peculiarly disconcerting to be climbed by a wild man who wore horn-rimmed spectacles. The impact of the platter was merely a passing discomfort. It was the things that followed that really counted. He was cramped for room; he could not get his arms into action. He felt as though a large bee had picked him out as a thing to swarm upon. The bee clung amazingly.

Perhaps the Wreck did use his fingers and his elbows, as well as his fists. Perhaps he even used a knee, now and then. It may have been that the top of his head more than once came in violent contact with the lady-killer's nose. It never occurred to him to break from the clinches, or to restrain an instinct that sent his hands searching for a windpipe to throttle. His sole idea was to remain at close quarters and do his work within the confines of an embrace.

Naturally, it could not last very long. Even a healthy young animal like Mort can be taken unaware and overwhelmed by a lawless fury from Pittsburgh. The lady-killer was suddenly tripped and went over on his back, and the Wreck finished it on the floor. When he arose he was gasping for breath and there was a cut on his cheek that bled in healthy fashion. But his spec-

tacles were still in place and his gray eyes gleamed through them with fanatical fire.

Mort lay for half a minute, blinking slowly, while he tried to orient himself. He was not very pretty to look at; all the time he had spent in shaving and scrubbing was thrown away. His dazed glance fixed itself on Sally, then moved uncertainly in the direction of the Wreck. Presently he hitched himself wearily to a sitting posture and began the job of climbing to his feet. He was approximately erect, although swaying, when the Wreck closed in again. Sally gasped. Heavens, wasn't he satisfied? *She* was.

But the Wreck closed in not to fight. He merely wanted to remove any further incentive to combat. He stooped, jammed one shoulder into the lady-killer's stomach and folded him over it. Staggering to the door, he pushed his way past three of the boys and Charley McSween, who had been standing there staring in, and chucked his burden half a dozen paces from the threshold. Then, without pausing for examination of his handiwork, he walked grimly back into the kitchen and resumed his place at the table.

"Do I get any coffee?" he demanded, irascibly, glaring at Sally.

He certainly got it.

CHAPTER XI.

—AND RIDES.

SALLY had very little speech with the Wreck that evening, and such words as they exchanged dealt with routine trivialities. He was not in conversational mood, finishing his supper in almost complete silence, but with excellent appetite. She waited upon him in an awed daze. There were a thousand things she wanted to say, but she could not bring herself to the point of breaking in upon his reverie. She would have liked to wash the cut on his face, where the blood had dried, but feared that he would resent attention.

When he finished supper, he mumbled something about taking a walk, and left the kitchen, plainly with no desire for company. It worried her a little when he did not come back; in fact, she did not see him again that evening. She did not know, of course, that the Wreck was haunted with the fear that she would try to thank him for something. He did not want to be thanked. Or, if it was not a case of thanks, and she wanted to scold him, he was in no mood to endure a reprimand. So he escaped.

A couple of hours later, as she sat outside the kitchen door, studying a landscape half lighted by the moon, she glimpsed a figure against the sky-line of a low ridge, and she thought, of course, that it was the Wreck in search of lonesome consolation. She sighed and was sorry for him. She did not learn until next day that the figure was probably that of the lady-killer enjoying the moon by himself, for it appeared that the Wreck had been sound asleep in the bunk house for more than an hour.

As she went up to bed her mind was still filled with wonder and not a little apprehension. He was altogether too unexpected and disconcerting, she thought; he never gave anybody warning. If it had been somebody else, there would have been words; even Bob Wells would have said something before he began the thrashing. She smiled involuntarily as she recalled an earlier wish that Bob might walk into the kitchen in order to save a situation. It did not appear that there had been any urgent need of his services.

"Nevertheless, Henry Williams is going to get himself into trouble," she mused. "He just won't learn to restrain himself, and I don't seem to be able to do a thing with him. But it was dear of him, all the same. My, how he can fight!"

She found him in the kitchen next morning, with a fire started and a kettle set to boil, and looking as nearly contented as he ever did. She did not want him to think she was ungrateful, so she forced herself into an expression of thanks. The Wreck merely grunted and changed the subject by telling her how poorly he was sleeping, which relieved her, because it was a sign that he was normal again. After awhile he disappeared, to get the dining-room ready for breakfast.

Charley McSween came in cautiously.

" 'Mornin', ma'am."

" Good morning," said Sally.

He sent a glance slowly about, then breathed like a man relieved at the failure to find something.

" Where's the Bengal tiger, ma'am?" he asked, respectfully.

" He's setting the table, I believe," and she smiled.

" I was kind of afraid he wouldn't shrink back to household chores, Mis' Williams. But I'm sure glad he's on the job. I reckon you've got the trick of handlin' him, although offhand I'd say it must be kind of complicated."

Sally was not at all sure she had the trick, but said nothing.

" Mort, he's gone off ridin' fences," said Charley, after a pause. "He's feelin' sort of set back. I didn't see the start of it, but I come runnin' when I heard the crockery. Mort, he's a pretty fair hand, but he ain't very intelligent in his head when it comes to women bein' around. I'm sure sorry. He got what was comin' to him. Seemed to me like it was done efficient and prompt, although Mort was tellin' a couple of the boys afterward that it was on account of all civilized rules bein' ignored and obliterated."

" Was he hurt much?" asked Sally.

" Not bodily, ma'am; nothing permanent. He just sort of had his pride tromped on. It was a kind of sudden thing to look at, if I do say it, and I've seen various kinds. The boys say Mort is talkin' about askin' for his time. I sure hope the Nubian lion has finished his rampagin' for the present. I'm gettin' short-handed."

Sally bit her lip and looked in the direction of the pantry.

" The part of it that puzzles me," said Charley, " is whether I didn't quite understand you right yesterday, ma'am. I been goin' round with the idea that you told me your husband wasn't very strong."

" Why, he—" She did not know exactly what she wanted to say. " There are times when he has nervous strength, Mr. McSween."

Charley nodded thoughtfully.

" I reckon that's it," he remarked. " I hope he don't get nervous too often. Might I ask, ma'am, if he's got different styles of killin' cow-hands, or is he always partial to climbin' and clingin'?"

" I'm afraid he's rather versatile," said Sally.

" That's what I told Mort, so he wouldn't feel like any improper advantage had been seized and acted upon. Mort claimed if it had been regular rules he would have won. But the boys and me sized it up from all angles possible and figured different. We allowed that the Tasmanian devil was liable to wallop him any style, regular or volunteer."

The Wreck came into the kitchen and found Sally laughing. He looked suspicious at Charley McSween.

" 'Morning', Henry," said Charley.

" Good morning."

" You're lookin' excellent." There was a look of puzzled respect in Charley's eyes.

" Feeling all right," said the Wreck, shortly.

Charley hesitated for a few seconds, with a thought in his mind, but somewhat uncertain as to the expression of it.

" If it's just the same to you, Henry, we'll sort of keep the late unpleasantness confidential between us. The boss and the family would be liable to get the idea we ain't got the right kind of discipline. They've just come through an experience that has harrowed 'em some and they're kind of jumpy. I'd like to keep things as smooth as possible, barrin', of course, such times as questions of personal honor arises."

" You don't hear me saying anything," observed the Wreck.

Charley nodded.

" That's the right idea, Henry. That sure is satisfactory to me. And—oh. Come to remember, Mort told the boys that there wasn't anybody tipped him off the lady was married. It sort of surprised him when he found out what was the movin' spirit in bringin' about his downfall. He seemed to be kind of upset at not havin' due notice of matrimony."

" What good would that have done him?" inquired the Wreck, coldly.

" Mort says he'd have laid off if he had only knew."

The Wreck shook his head.

"I was going to lick him anyhow," he remarked.

Charley eyed him with renewed interest.

"Kind of a personal antipathy, I reckon," he mused.

"Kind of."

"H-m. I hope it don't happen, Henry, that you've took any wild longin' to overcome and abolish a humble instrument of Providence?"

The Wreck grinned, and Charley nodded his head, reassured.

"I'm old in sin and misdeeds," he said, "and it ain't likely I'm ever goin' to show any noticeable improvement. But somehow I ain't ready to be repealed. You young folks just keep on washin' dishes and cookin' and honeymoonin' for a while, and I reckon everything's goin' to come out nifty and proper."

Charley was drifting out the door when he remembered something.

"The sheriff phoned in a while back. It seems he's gettin' under way. The boss has sure got him stirred up."

Sally and the Wreck exchanged a long glance, she pursing her lips tightly.

"I suppose I'm silly," she said, "but I don't like it, just the same. Bob's an awfully smart sheriff, everybody says. He finds out all sorts of things."

"Stop worrying," said the Wreck.

"Oh, I'm not. It doesn't scare me the least bit. Only— Oh, well, of course he isn't supposed to know. He'd never dream of it, naturally. But it's not very nice."

There was a troubled look in her eyes all forenoon, but the Wreck did not know it, for he disappeared after the morning dish-washing. He hated to wash dishes; his very soul rose in rebellion. The only reason he endured it was because Sally would have to wash them herself if he did not. Women were always imposing obligations on people, even without making any demands, he reflected irritably. You had to do things for them, or you felt mean inside. The lesser evil was to do things.

Sally's day did not brighten until afternoon, when Charley made a suggestion. The Underwoods had ridden back into the hills to see some of the prize cattle; they might not be back until late. If Sally and the Wreck wanted to take a couple of horses and looked around a bit they could have their pick of what was left in the corral. Charley thought he could find a riding skirt for her; there were always some outfits for possible guests.

Sally jumped at the chance, but looked doubtfully at the Wreck.

"Henry is not very fond of horses," she said.

"I'm crazy about 'em," he retorted.

They discovered when they went down to the corral that Charley was going with them. It suited Sally, who felt that he would be useful if the Wreck got himself into trouble. She did not know that Charley's precaution lay in another direction; he was running no chance of losing a cook and a cookee. The Wreck merely scowled as he climbed grimly into the hated saddle. Perhaps there was a ray of sunshine in the fact that he was not riding a sorrel, but he was not very hopeful that grays behaved any better. Charley, however, said the gray was gentle and that anybody could ride him—that is, anybody within reason. It was plain that he was not optimistic as he watched the Wreck mount.

Setting off across a bit of undulating grass country, they were presently climbing gradually into the hills. Sally was athrill; she loved to ride and Charley had given her a mount that was beautifully gaited. But the Wreck rode with a single passionate determination—not to fall off. One hand tightly gripped the pommel, and he pulled leather even at a walk. All this was quite as Charley expected; he had seen them from the East before, and most of them were alike.

Sally, however, did not fit the picture he had fashioned in his mind. He kept an eye on her for some fifteen minutes before he said anything, watching the easy and confident sway of her body, the manner in which she used her hands, and all the unconscious tricks of people who are bred to the range.

"I reckon there must be quite a piece of ranch country around Pittsburgh," said Charley.

"Ranch?" echoed the Wreck, who was riding in the middle, with Charley bringing

up in the rear. "Not within a million miles."

"Honest, now? Watchin' your wife, I'd have been ready to swear to it. It's queer how quick people can pick some things up."

Sally turned an inquiring glance, swinging about in her saddle as she did so.

"I been watchin' you ride, ma'am," explained Charley.

She flushed slowly, then faced to the front again.

"I've been West before," she called. "And, of course, there are *some* horses around Pittsburgh."

"Yes, ma'am; I figured you must have been West."

She might have known he would, if she had stopped to think anything about it. But it was rather annoying to be caught unawares. Perhaps it did not make any difference, although it might awaken the suspicions as well as the surprise of Charley McSween. She was beginning to see how difficult it was to play parts; she had never tried, until now, to be anything except exactly what she was.

"When I was a little girl," she added.

"Yes, ma'am. That's the time to learn things, when you're little. Now, Henry, here—"

The Wreck's horse recovered himself from a stumble, and the rider recovered, too, but after an alarming lurch.

"Just kind of hold yourself loose," advised Charley. "As I was sayin', Henry, not bein' broke to it in early youth, is liable to be a little mite slower pickin' up all the habits and customs to which horseflesh is addicted. But he's doin' real well. I ain't claimin' he can ride like Mort— S-h, now!"

The Wreck had brought the gray's head up with a savage yank and was trying to turn in his saddle.

"Easy on him, Henry. I wasn't meanin' to cast any reflections. I reckon you'll be ridin' as well as Mort in no time at all. I was only considerin' the differences in human upbringin'. Now, as for fightin', free style and unrestrained, there ain't any legitimate comparison. It's kind of like a prairie dog tryin' to commit felonious assault on a coyote, Mort bein' the first named. But you got to admit that even a prairie dog knows *some* things. I reckon Henry—"

Sally interrupted with a question about the size of the Underwood ranch, and after that she kept up a flow of questions. She wanted Charley to let the Wreck alone, and after a while Charley took the hint, though reluctantly.

Up in the hills they met a couple of the boys, who pulled off the trail and made room for them, bowing to Sally and casting upon the Wreck glances of solemn but curious deference. If they had grinned at his horsemanship there was no telling the consequences; but they were wholly respectful until he passed by, and then their offense was nothing worse than a wink at Charley.

The Wreck did not enjoy his ride. He never did, although it would have been useless to expect him to admit it. The gray horse was as bad as the sorrel; all horses were bad. If only he knew where Charley had hidden the front wheel of the flivver he could laugh at every horse in Montana. But just now there was a certain method in his grim purpose to stay in the saddle. If things came to the worst, he and Sally could steal horses, and with that event as a possibility he was behooved to learn something about this painful and primitive method of travel.

Sally had just suggested that they turn back, certain that by the time they reached the house the Wreck would have enough for the day, when they encountered the Underwoods—father, son, and daughter. It was her first close glimpse of the family, and she studied them with interest, especially Harriet. Charley performed the introduction.

"Mis' Williams here is the lady who does our celebrated cookin'. There ain't anything further that needs to be said. Henry I reckon you've all met. He is likewise expert in his chosen line."

The Underwoods did not pay much attention to the Wreck, but they were frankly interested in Sally. Even Jerome Underwood was disposed to be gracious, for he was not unmindful of the dishes that came to his table. It was his first experience with a woman cook at the ranch,

and it suited him so well that he had forgotten all the admonitions of his New York specialist.

Charley and Sally and the Wreck trailed along with the Underwoods on the homeward ride. The three members of the family rode well, and the Wreck found a new reason for hating them. The only thing that gave him any satisfaction was the fact that nobody appeared to notice his horn-rimmed spectacles. Beyond that, he did not enjoy himself at all, even though Harriet Underwood, with all her blond charm, happened to fall in beside him as they followed the trail.

He was in no mood for appreciation of Harriets, for the saddle galled him and his legs ached and the gray horse had a viciously disturbing canter. Harriet herself was unaccustomed to gentlemen who washed dishes, even in the freedom of the West; but at that she would have been willing to chat with him if he was so inclined. But he rode silent and scowling, knowing that he was a grotesque figure—preferring to brood rather than to converse.

Underwood and his foreman rode together, talking of the ranch. That left Sally and Chester Underwood paired. Chester found himself in a state of agreeable surprise. He did not know that cooks were young and good to look at, and knew how to sit in a saddle. He did not know that they could laugh and talk and be unaffectedly interesting at the same time. But he discovered all these things, and he forgot that the ranch bored him. He had quite a gay time of it all the way home. People from the East always had an interest for Sally; she liked to hear about things of which she knew very little, being possessed of a healthy and enthusiastic curiosity. She led him to talk as much as he would, and found him willing.

Watching from the rear, the Wreck's brooding turned into a morose channel. Why was it that he couldn't talk to a woman in that fashion? He knew that he had none of the graces; he scorned them. But why were they given to the stripling sons of rich men? How did it come that he was always clumsy and ill at ease whenever a woman was about?

Even Sally Morgan bothered him. If she bothered him, why didn't she bother Chester Underwood? But she didn't; not a bit. Nor did Chester Underwood bother her. But Henry Williams did; the Wreck knew it. She was on an easy footing of comradeship with the newcomer in five minutes; it was always the same way with ranch hands, or anybody else. But with himself he felt that she was constantly under a constraint, even though she tried to mask it. She never understood him; sometimes she laughed at him; sometimes he was certain that she had a sense of pity for him, a realization that fairly sickened him. What the devil was the matter with him anyhow? And with her?

When the ranch-house came into sight, some idiot urged his horse to a gallop. The Wreck assumed that it was Chester, but he could not be sure. He was too busy. The gray galloped also; he had a brainless way of imitating other horses. Everybody galloped. The Wreck survived the gallop by some astonishing trick of fortune, but he did not survive the sudden stop at the gate of the corral. He went right on for a little distance, reaching the ground on all fours. As he slowly arose he became aware that Chester was grinning down at him.

His hands rolled themselves into fists automatically, and he took a step forward. Then Sally was at his side, gripping him firmly by the arm.

"Let go of me," he said savagely. "I'm all right."

"Why, of course you are, Henry." And then, in a whisper: "You come with me. You're not going to do any fighting today. I'm ashamed of you. Henry Williams, you're worse than a locoed steer. I don't know what I'll do with you."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHERIFF ARRIVES.

WILD, and yet wilder, were the tales that came from the Underwood family concerning the short and simple incident of borrowed gasoline. Even Charley McSween conceded that the West must be reverting to halcyon times. Jerome

Underwood stuck to his four bandits with a tenacity worthy of the best possible imagination. Harriet Underwood, at first disposed to be literal and to report only those things which she saw, remembered that she was clever enough to slip her rings down her neck, where they scratched but were otherwise safe. She had held her ringless fingers out for the inspection of the man with the gun, and he growled at her.

Chester confirmed the four bandits, because he had wisdom enough to see that his father might appreciate confirmation. There was a note of repressed heroism in Chester. Several times he had been about to leap; all that restrained him, it appeared, was a fear that when the shooting began others than himself might fall as sacrifices in the horrid fusillade. He told all this to Sally during the ride back to the house, with a gay nonchalance that surprised her. She had an idea that resourceful lying rarely came before middle age, so that she was driven to believe that Chester was either precocious or prematurely advanced in years. Chester was a large, strongly built youth, doubtless capable of bandits as well as football; but, knowing him for a liar, she found herself filled with an ungracious undercurrent of doubt concerning the precise status of his nerve.

The most surprising development involved Timothy, the Underwood chauffeur. Timothy had begun by being literal. He had been heard to say that there was but one bandit. But he multiplied by six, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps because he drew inspiration from higher sources. At any rate, he did not spoil matters; he magnified.

He ran the chance of denunciation by a determination to be with the progressives rather than the conservatives. There were six bandits, and even Jerome Underwood admitted that Timothy might be right; for chauffeurs had good eyesight, else they would not be employed as such. Six bandits, of whom Timothy personally observed five at close range and sensed the presence of another, standing in the gloom at the side of the road, with a sawed-off shotgun in the hollow of his arm and a disposition that yearned for provocation.

Sally and the Wreck discussed these matters when they were certain that nobody eavesdropped. The Wreck did not view the situation graciously.

"Liars," he said.

"But don't you forget yourself and say it," warned Sally.

"What do they need to lie for?"

"What difference does it make? And it's better for us, isn't it?"

He jerked his head in a familiar, irascible way.

"Four!" he said. "Six! They talk as if somebody turned out the army."

"Let them talk. I hope they run it up to a dozen."

"It makes me writhe."

"Well, stop it. You don't see me writhing. Henry, I believe you're jealous. I believe your nose is clear out of joint because they don't stick to just one. Why, I honestly believe you want to be *accused.*"

He made a gesture of angry dissent.

"You let them have as many as they want," advised Sally. "And if you've got any pride about what you did, swallow it. It 'll only get you into trouble—both of us. Anyhow, you ought to take it as a compliment. They've got you equal to six men."

"I hate liars," said the Wreck.

"Well, we're liars," she declared cheerfully. "Yes, we are. We've lied about ourselves by not telling the truth. That's the worst kind of lying. It's sneaky."

The Wreck stiffened.

"All right. We'll go and tell 'em," he said.

Sally shook her head.

"Oh, no, we won't. We'll just stand pat. If it was just you, you could do as you pleased. But part of it's me. And if you've got a New England conscience bothering you, I haven't—right now."

"Pittsburgh's not in New England."

"Yonkers, then."

"Nor Yonkers, either."

"Oh, stop arguing."

But they argued nevertheless; not in a very dignified way, Sally was ready to admit. It impressed her as being juvenile. Argument, however, seemed to be the only common ground on which they could meet.

She despaired of ever getting Henry Williams to agree with her about anything. His own frame of mind was exactly the same. There was no logic in her. Neither of them realized that it was inaction that galled, rather than suspense.

Timothy, the chauffeur, ate his meals in the kitchen. He was a respectful creature, although he came from New York. He always said "sir" and "ma'am," until Sally was in fidgets over his deferential speech. He had a mild glance that followed her wherever she went, which the Wreck observed, and of course mistook. So he formed a dislike for Timothy, who did not exactly cringe under his obvious displeasure, but who met it with a patient submission that was worse than defiance. There was no harm in Timothy; he merely lied through force of higher example. And if he admired Sally, he was not alone. So did the boys who worked on the ranch, although they were careful to remember what happened to Mort. Dudes were fair game, and the Wreck was one; but they observed a caution born out of a memory of what happened to the lady-killer. They needed no word of advice from Charley McSween. Mort was out on the range somewhere, recovering his beauty, and they remembered it every time they looked at Sally.

Most annoying of all the people at the ranch, so far as the Wreck was concerned, was Chester Underwood. Chester, having discovered Sally on horseback, was rediscovering her in the kitchen. If he had any previous ideas on the subject of caste, he forgot them in the democracy of Montana. He kept drifting in and out, on pretexts, and sometimes he sat down and watched her as she worked with her sleeves rolled up on brown arms. To Chester the Wreck was merely a person who washed dishes, waited on table, and fell off horses—quite uninteresting and not a claimant for notice.

The washer of dishes found himself growing surly, without knowing why. The able-bodied heir of Jerome Underwood was not worth bothering about, so long as he stuck to his own business and did not annoy the Wreck. He could talk to Sally, if he chose, and if Sally chose to talk to him, which it seemed that she did. He could even sit around and tell lies, glibly but clumsily, and there was no real reason for interfering with him. But he was an irritant, nevertheless, although the Wreck never clearly identified him as such. He thought that he was ignoring Chester, not realizing that his subconscious self was constantly aware of him.

Sally was growing restive. The labor of cooking for a large household did not dismay her, although it was not exactly recreation. She did enough cooking at the Bar-M, where there were not so many mouths to be fed. It was the fact that she seemed to have settled into a routine that apparently led nowhere. She wanted to be moving again, although the time and the means had not presented themselves. She did not know whether she wanted to go on to Chicago, or back to the Bar-M; but she wanted to go somewhere. It was her duty to be cautious; she did not forget that. But no matter how necessary it might be to remain in hiding, it was also irksome. Being young, she did not have the patience that comes with years. But she kept a grip on herself because there did not seem to be anything else to do.

Anything that broke the routine, however, was welcome, even an invitation from Chester for a ride over the hills. She went, and there were just two in the party. Nobody had invited the Wreck, and as it was not Sally's party, he could not fairly expect it. She did not believe that he cared to go, anyhow, for he hated horses. As she and Chester rode off he stood leaning against the frame of the kitchen door glowering at them. It would not have been a good time for anybody to offer him pleasantries.

He felt unaccountably lonesome as Sally's horse disappeared over a rise. All the way from Pittsburgh to the Bar-M he never suffered from lonesomeness, although there were days when he scarcely exchanged a word with anybody. But now it seemed that the world conspired to isolate him, and he resented the conspiracy. He knew that he could not ride a horse, and he did not want to try; but he hated to have anybody else recognize the fact. Not that he wanted to have a woman hanging around him, for

they always made him uncomfortable. Even Sally disturbed him, and he felt that he knew her better than any of the others. But she was an involuntary partner in certain affairs, and he had an uncomfortable sense of being deserted as she rode away.

He went back into the kitchen after a while, where Timothy sat in a corner reading a magazine. There were some dishes that belonged in the pantry, and the Wreck started thither with them. His foot tripped against a chair leg, and two of the dishes slid off the top of the pile and splintered on the floor. The Wreck stood scowling at them until he heard a snicker from the corner. Timothy was grinning with good-natured amusement.

"Huh?" demanded the Wreck.

"Comes out of your wages, I guess," observed Timothy. "I bet you must bust quite a lot."

The Wreck placed the remainder of the dishes on the table and selected the top one.

"I'm going to bust more," he said.

As Timothy dodged the dish he uttered a yell of surprise. It hit the wall just behind his chair. A second one was not so well aimed, for it went through a window. But Timothy did not wait for any improvement in the marksmanship. He bolted for the door, which he reached while the fourth dish was in the air. It crashed against the jamb and most of the pieces fell outside.

The Wreck surveyed the marks of his achievement, shrugged his shoulders, lifted the pile of dishes from the table, and resumed his journey to the pantry.

"Damn that Underwood pup," he said.

Timothy had not personally figured in the matter at all, so far as the Wreck was concerned. He was merely a symbol.

Late in the afternoon the Wreck went for a walk. He could have taken a horse if he wished, but he scorned such things. Horses were only to be ridden as a matter of necessity. His impulse was to take the trail that led back into the hills; it was in that direction Sally and Chester had ridden. But he sternly compelled himself to follow the wheel tracks that went toward the main road. Let her stay out riding as long as she liked; it was no affair of his.

He did not pay much attention to the trail. His mind was concentraed on the problem of where Charley McSween had hidden the wheel of the flivver. In odd hours he had been searching furtively, but without the least satisfactory result. The flivver was locked in a shed, into which he could have easily broken; but he knew that it was useless to search there. Charley would not have made things quite so simple as that. The wheel was somewhere else, and it would be time enough to break into the shed when he located it. Several times he considered the advisability of trying to thrash the truth out of Charley, but Sally always vetoed the project. She had respect for his prowess, but she was by no means sure that he could whip everybody on the ranch. Even if he did, there was no certainty that Charley would tell.

He was still walking slowly, his eyes staring at the ground, when a drumming sound caught his ears. Instinctively, he paused to listen. Horses. They were coming nearer, too. Probably Sally and Chester had been circling around through the hills, he thought. Well, if that was the case, he had no desire to meet them. He did not want Sally to get the notion in her head that he was eavesdropping or that he had the least interest in anything that she did. So he stepped off the trail.

There were clumps of young spruce on every hand, and he moved around behind one of them, where he could not be readily seen. The hoof-beats continued to grow louder, and the Wreck, crouching, peered through his screen for a view of the trail.

Only one horse, after all, he decided a few seconds later, but it was moving briskly. Then, around a turn in the trail, it appeared. It was a big, black animal, with a long stride, and the man who rode it was also big. A rifle in a holster hung suspended from the saddle. The Wreck, staring curiously, also had time to note that there were two guns at the belt of the rider. Then the black horse drummed on, out of sight.

"Doggone!" said the Wreck aloud, as he stepped from behind his spruce shelter and stared down the trail.

The rider was Bob Wells, the sheriff.

Not long did the Wreck stand in dismayed consideration of his discovery. He clenched his fists and set off at a dog trot toward the ranch-house in the wake of the black horse.

He did not attempt to analyze the situation very closely as he ran. There would be time for that later, if indeed it ever reached the point of analysis. The obvious thing to do was to get back to the house as rapidly as possible, and he was doing it. There was Sally to be warned, if ever he got there in time. He groaned as he thought of Sally suddenly confronted by the sheriff. If everything was coming down in a crash he wanted to be there when it happened.

The Wreck found himself running with a steadiness that surprised him. He did not try to sprint. He could not overtake the black horse, anyhow, and there would be nothing to gain if he did. Not being able to guess just how far he had walked, he conserved himself. Step after step he plugged away, slowing a bit on the upgrades, letting himself out on the downgrades, and fighting hard for his second wind. The main thing was to get there as soon as he could. After that it would be time to see what there was to be done about Bob Wells.

When the trail emerged at last from the spruce he came to a halt, panting sharply as he stared in the direction of the ranch buildings. The land was open all the rest of the way to the house, and there was no concealment, if he needed any, so he deemed it wise to make a reconnaissance. He had no notion of being headlong about anything, for his mind was cool, despite his anxiety about Sally Morgan. If she had returned from the ride there was no telling what might have happened.

He could see no sign of the sheriff or the black horse; probably they were around at the front of the house. He could not see anybody. So he struck out at a bold walk to cover the few hundred yards that intervened between himself and the kitchen door. By the time he reached the goal he had recovered his breath.

The first thing he did was to peer cautiously into the kitchen. Nobody in sight, not even Timothy. There was no kettle on the stove, which meant that Sally was still away. He was tempted to steal through the house and see if the sheriff was out front, but abandoned the idea, because he could see nothing to be gained, even if he made the discovery. After a moment of thought he turned his steps in the direction of the corral.

The black horse was there, still saddled. The Wreck stared grimly at the beast, which he had seen before at the Bar-M, and of which he knew the sheriff was uncommonly proud. Bob Wells was undoubtedly up at the house, talking to Underwood and hearing new lies about the hold-up. Sally was still somewhere out on the trail with Chester Underwood. There was nothing for the Wreck but waiting.

He sat on the grass and propped his back against the corral fence, keeping watch upon the trail that led back to the hills, and also upon the house. If he saw the sheriff coming for his horse he would disappear behind the nearest shed. If Sally came first he would be there to warn her. He found little comfort in inaction, but it was the only course for the present.

Half an hour later, still huddled against the fence, he thought he saw a dust cloud on the back trail. Polishing his spectacles, he restored them to his nose for another observation. Sure enough, there were two riders coming. They were coming at a gallop, too, and soon they were so near that he could identify Sally beyond any mistake. There was a fine grace and confidence in the way Sally handled herself in a saddle, and it was not lost even upon the Wreck, poor horseman that he was. She could ride rings around Chester Underwood.

He climbed to his feet as Sally swung herself out of the saddle, and she saw him for the first time. She flashed her quirt in salute.

"Hello, Henry. We've had a bully ride."

"Uhuh," he answered with a nod.

When she saw the look in his eye she knew instantly that something was going to happen. She hoped that he was not going to be so foolish as to have a quarrel

with Chester. She knew exactly what he thought of young Mr. Underwood, for he never made a point of concealing emotions. But a quarrel would be senseless. Besides, she had a right to go riding if she chose; kitchen hours were long enough, Heaven only knew.

The Wreck, however, was paying no attention to Chester. His gaze remained fixed on Sally. He was trying to give her a warning before she might betray herself into an indiscretion. Not being adept at expressing his thoughts, save in words, the best he could do was to fashion his features into a queer, baleful grimace. Sally was puzzled, and she showed it by a wrinkling of her forehead, which signified inquiry. What on earth was he trying to tell her?

Chester slid off his horse, so that for an instant his back was turned. The Wreck quickly laid a forefinger against his lips and jerked his head in the direction of the corral.

Sally looked, then stared, her mouth opening slowly. She knew the black horse out of a million. Bob Wells! Swiftly her glance swung in the direction of the house.

"Well," said Chester, "shall we go up to the house? I'll see you all the way home, you know."

Sally recovered herself and smiled.

"You go ahead," she said. "Thanks ever so much for the ride. I want to talk to Henry for a minute."

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN'S PLACE.

WHEN Chester was beyond ear-shot she turned to the Wreck and almost smothered him in an avalanche of questions. He told it rapidly, while Sally kept an anxious eye on the house. When he finished she sent another glance in the direction of the black horse, who was unconscious of having created a sensation profound and disturbing.

"You don't suppose he's tracked us?" mused Sally.

"How could he?"

"I don't see how he could either. But Bob's awfully smart when it comes to being sheriff. If he knows we're here, the jig's up, of course."

Scorn and defiance shone in the eyes of the Wreck.

"It's a hundred to one he doesn't know we're here," he said. "It's a thousand to one he hasn't any idea who he's after. He's probably come for some more information. And they're all lying so hard that he'll never find out anything."

"Hope so," said Sally doubtfully. "How long do you suppose he's going to stay?"

"Haven't an idea. Not long, I guess, unless he's loafing on his job."

"Oh, Bob never loafs. He's too active. He's a real sheriff."

The Wreck was tired of hearing the sheriff's virtues related, but he side-stepped an argument on the point.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he asked. "Go out in the hills and hide?"

"No-o. We can't do that. But do we dare go up to the house?"

"If we don't, who gets the supper?"

"Oh, I suppose we do," she said wearily. "But if Bob should happen to walk into the kitchen—" She finished it with a gesture.

"He won't. He's busy with Underwood. Got to take a chance, anyhow."

"Yes; we've got to."

They walked briskly to the house, praying that the sheriff would stay somewhere around the front until they reached the kitchen. Sally did not breathe comfortably until she made certain that the kitchen was empty. The Wreck moved over to the pantry door and bolted it.

"Only one door to watch now," he said.

"Unbolt it, Henry. Suppose he comes in the other way? I'm going through that pantry in one jump. And *vice versa*, if he comes in from the pantry. I'm not going to be bottled up."

He unbolted the door and Sally went nervously about the work of getting supper.

"You'd better be careful there's nobody in the living-room when you set the table," she warned him. "Take a good look first."

It happened there was nobody in the living-room. As nearly as the Wreck could judge, the sheriff and Mr. Underwood were

sitting out front. Every minute or so Sally went to a window that commanded a view of the corral to see whether the black horse was still there. It always was. She was overcoming her first dismay, and in place of it was growing angry.

The old unreasoning resentment against Bob Wells was returning. It made no difference if he did not know who he was pursuing; from the standpoint of Sally it was no less unpleasant. Nor was she any too certain that he would abandon the chase if he knew, for he was conscientious to the leaning-backward point—a regular bulldog. He had a habit of talking about enforcing the law impartially against all evildoers; he even boasted about it. She remembered when it seemed to sound very well; but that was before she had a posse on her trail. She wondered how far Bob Wells would really go, if he learned the truth. She was none too sure.

When Charley McSween came in she jumped at the sound of his step and a fork clattered on the floor.

"That's company," said Charley. "And it happens we've got company, ma'am. The sheriff of this sovereign and God-fearin' county has dropped in to get a little mite more information about these desperadoes that he's expectin' to exterminate. I just eased in to tell you he's stayin' to supper. Set another plate in the dinin'-room, Henry. He's goin' to eat with the family."

"One more doesn't make any difference," said Sally with an effort at lightness.

"It does with the sheriff, ma'am. He's a powerful eater. I've seen him work. He's a powerful talker, too. He's been workin' up a real good appetite, talkin' to Mr. Underwood. It seems he's aimin' to do great things in the line of makin' the county safe for democracy. He's been tellin' quite a lot about some of the things he has done already, and the samples is impressive. He's got a posse down the road apiece, waitin' for developments. To-morrow, as near as I can make out, they're goin' to raise hell among the wicked."

Sally winced inwardly. Charley was putting things in his own words, of course; but somehow it sounded strangely as if Bob Wells himself were talking.

"So you'd best get plenty, ma'am," concluded Charley, "for he sure has talked himself empty."

All this brought a grin to the face of the Wreck, which Sally observed, but did not dare resent. But she turned to him abruptly when Charley went out, her mind filled with another thought.

"If he stays to supper, that means you can't wait on the table, Henry."

"I'm not kicking."

"Maybe not. But who's going to take your place? *I* can't."

"I should say not. I guess we can get one of the boys."

Sally shook her head. She knew cowpunchers.

"Timothy!" said the Wreck suddenly.

"But I wonder if he will," she mused.

"He will; don't worry."

"Have you been fighting with Timothy?" and she eyed him suspiciously.

"Lord, no! Timothy won't fight anybody. But he'll wait on the table."

She knew that something had passed between the Wreck and Timothy. She might have guessed if she had counted the dishes.

"There'll have to be a reason for it," she said. "You'll have to be sick. You'll have to go down to the bunk-house and stay there."

"And suppose this sheriff comes in while you're up here alone?"

"Oh, I can take care of myself."

He did not like the idea of leaving her to face possible consequences, but he could see that it might be necessary. It would take a real reason to avert any possible speculations in the mind of Charley McSween, who still had a way of reverting to the fact that Henry Williams was not "very strong," and who always grinned faintly when he mentioned it.

The Wreck found Timothy in the shed where they kept the big car. He was passing the time in grinding valves. There was a faint look of alarm in his eyes as he beheld the thrower of dishes.

"You're to wait on the table to-night," said the Wreck bluntly. "Better go up to the kitchen now."

"*Me* wait on the table? I never did. I don't know how? What for?"

"Because I'm sick."

"You don't look sick," said Timothy. "And you didn't act sick a while back."

"I'm sick," repeated the Wreck. "How I look has nothing to do with it. It's nerves. One of my spells is coming on. It was beginning this afternoon—just beginning, you understand?"

The look that he gave Timothy bored him like an auger.

"I tried to walk it off, but I couldn't. It's coming on again. It gets worse. If I don't get to bed there's no telling—"

Timothy began wiping his hands on a ball of cotton waste.

"I'll wait on the table," he said gloomily. "Only if I don't do it right they haven't got any license to bawl me out. You better go get into bed right away."

The Wreck went off to the bunk-house, where he stretched himself on the blankets and tried to get interested in an old magazine. He felt like a man who had retreated under fire, but he knew there was nothing else to do. What worried him most was the possibility that Sally might face a crisis alone. If anything happened he wanted to be there.

Sally did not find Timothy particularly deft, although he seemed to be willing enough, once she had an apron on him. She instructed him in some of the rudiments, and had him practising at the kitchen-table, with imaginary guests to be served.

"It's only for this evening, I'm sure," she said. "Henry is almost certain to be better in the morning."

Timothy said he hoped so, because the boss was always fussy about how his meals were served, having lived in New York most of his life.

Sally felt easier in mind when he reported that the family and the sheriff were at the table. It gave her a breathing spell. She knew that Bob was not likely to get up from the table so long as there was anything more to be served. Eating, to him, was a pleasurable job of stoking, as she had learned from plenty of experience at the Bar-M. He was even slightly vain of his achievements as a trencherman; Charley had been entirely right about it. So she kept Timothy busy between kitchen and dining-room, carrying things that made him so hungry to look at that he could scarcely wait for his own turn.

In fact, he did not wait, for on one of his trips back to the kitchen Sally observed that he was munching something. He brazenly admitted that he had been "snitching" a biscuit or two.

"They look so good, ma'am," he said with an apologetic smile. "And I'm pretty empty. Besides that, it gets on your nerves to hear 'em boosting the food when all you're supposed to do is to carry it round."

Of course she could not be angry.

"Who is boosting it?" she asked.

"The boss and the sheriff are both doing it," said Timothy. "But you've got to admit they make good everything they say, by the way they lick into it."

It did not surprise her to hear that Bob Wells was enjoying himself. What a joke it was! If he only knew! It was some satisfaction to know that you were doing a good job, even if you were conscripted.

Timothy kept her informed of the progress of supper, and also made a report of the conversation.

"It turns out," he said, "that other parties beside us have been getting held up. The country gets awful wild when you're this far from New York."

"Other parties?" said Sally.

"Yes, ma'am. The sheriff has been telling the boss about it. There were two other automobiles stuck up somewhere around here within the past couple of weeks. As near as I can make out from what the sheriff tells the boss, it's a new sort of game. First they had Indians out here that scalped people; that was quite a while back. Then they ran the Indians out, or civilized 'em, and things went along all right until they had road agents holding up stages. Well, they got the best of the road agents after several parties had got killed, and the business sort of died out.

"And then—the sheriff has been going right into the history of all of it—there was a new bunch got to working on the trains. I can remember reading about them in the papers myself. They used to go through the trains and take everything that everybody had, and anybody that didn't give up

got shot. It took quite a while to get rid of all the train-robbers, but finally they did and everything looked peaceful. And now they've begun again on the automobiles."

"Really?" exclaimed Sally.

"Yes, ma'am. I don't mean the same bunch, understand? They hung most of the old ones. It seems, the sheriff tells the boss, that in the last two or three years there's been a lot of automobiles coming through this way; mostly rich people from the East, like the boss. They go clear on out to the coast and then drive all the way back again. Some of 'em carry quite a lot of valuables and these new hold-up gangs sometimes make a pretty good profit. The sheriff says they didn't get into his county until quite recent, but he's heard about their goings on outside of it.

"But now they've got into his county and he's quite stirred up. We're the third car in about two weeks. I guess the busines is getting good, because it seems the gang is taking on new members. There were six of 'em that stuck us up, you know."

He said it so blandly that Sally was half persuaded he believed it.

"Six," repeated Timothy. "The boss claims only four, but there was two more that he didn't see. I didn't like to contradict him in front of the sheriff, but there was six, all right. I'm going to tell the sheriff when I get a chance, because he ought to have all the clues, so he can get to work right."

"Certainly," said Sally in an absent way.

She was pondering over the surprising intelligence from Timothy and wondering how it affected the case of the Wreck and herself. If there was really a gang at work in the county—and, of course, Bob Wells would not say so unless it were true—it seemed to make their own case much simpler. The exploit of the Wreck would naturally be blamed on those who were in the business for a living. It began to look as if they were hiding from nothing at all.

It seemed to her that this was an important development, although she did not yet see how it facilitated their getaway from the Underwood ranch. She wanted to find out more about it, if there was anything to be learned.

"You stay here in the kitchen, Timothy," she said. "I've got some things to do in the pantry, and if they want anything in the dining-room I'll attend to it."

She slipped into the pantry and closed the door behind her. At the farther end was the other door, that opened into the dining-room. It was a swinging door, with a half-inch space between the edge of it and the frame. She tiptoed forward, brought her ear close to the crack and stood there breathing softly.

Underwood was talking, but not about bandits. He was talking about Sally's apple-pie.

"I'm going to take her back to New York with me and fire my French cook," he announced. "I don't know what sort of a job her husband can fill, but I'll find something for him."

Sally raised her eyebrows, for this was news. And then she heard the familiar, boisterous voice of Bob Wells.

"I don't blame you," said the sheriff. "The lady can certainly cook. You don't get a good cook once in a lifetime. When you get 'em the thing to do is to rope 'em and brand 'em, and then don't let 'em outside the corral. Cooking is a woman's natural job, but they don't all get to be experts. But now and then, if you keep your eyes open, you can find one. Why—"

He paused to chuckle comfortably.

"The fact is, I'm going to marry one," he said.

"Congratulations," remarked the heavy voice of Jerome Underwood.

"That's the way I look at it," said the sheriff lightly. "The fact is, *Mr.* Underwood, when I sat down here to supper I began to think of her right away. You know how ideas get associated. Well, that was the point. I saw what you had on the table and I tasted it, and she just naturally flashed into my mind.

"You take a lot of girls nowadays and what they don't know about cooking would make even a cow-puncher swear. Of course, your daughter understands I'm not saying anything that touches her. She's in a different position. But out in this country a girl that can't cook isn't worth a hoorah. It's her duty to cook. It's downright im-

portant and necessary. A man's got to be fed if he's doing much work out here, and he ought to be fed right."

Sally scarcely breathed.

"You take that chicken, those biscuits, that pie—I've got a girl who can cook every bit as well as that. Understand me, she can do a lot more than cook. She's a smart girl and she's pretty, too. But when it comes to cooking she doesn't have to take her hat off to anybody. After all, it's the main thing. It's the foundation."

"Absolutely," said the voice of Underwood, out of a full mouth.

"And I'll tell you another thing," promised the sheriff. "When it comes to putting up preserves—"

Sally, however, did not wait for a report on the preserves. She was tiptoeing back toward the door that led into the kitchen. She was afraid to trust herself in the pantry any longer.

Timothy looked up from his meal.

"You look all warmed up," he remarked.

"It is a little warm," said Sally.

He helped himself to another piece of chicken, then reached for a biscuit.

"You certainly can cook, ma'am."

She turned upon him with a blaze in her eyes that startled him.

"Cook!" she cried. "Well, is there anything extraordinary about that? That's what I'm here for, isn't it? That's what I am—a *cook!*"

"I didn't mean any offense, honest. But I just thought—"

"Don't think. Don't bother me. Go ahead and eat—but don't *talk* about it."

Timothy shrugged and attended to his business. He indulged himself in the original thought that women were funny. He could not see that he had said anything out of the way; for there was no doubt about it—she could cook.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE SON OF A GUN!"

THE Wreck, who had been keeping vigil from a window in the bunk-house, saw the tall figure of the sheriff striding down to the corral just as dusk was settling. Next he saw the black horse and its rider headed along the trail that led to the main road. He could hear the sheriff whistling; there was a complacent sound about it that made him scowl.

He waited until the man of the law passed from sight among the distant spruce, then set off at a rapid pace for the ranch-house. Timothy was still at his supper in the kitchen and Sally was busy at the sink. She flashed him a glance that signified a crisis had been passed without disaster.

"Feeling beter?" asked Timothy.

The Wreck nodded as he sat down and reached for a plate.

"Let me tell you something," whispered Timothy, leaning closer. "Don't say a word about the cooking."

The Wreck looked at the giver of advice with suspicion, then filled his plate and went to work. He was hungry. After a minute or two he glanced up at Timothy.

"Well, what's the matter with the cooking?" he demanded.

"S-sh!" Timothy made an urgent sign for caution. "That's just it. There isn't anything the matter with it. Only—"

He glanced significantly in the direction of Sally, who heard, but did not turn her head.

"If there isn't anything the matter with it, what's the idea?" inquired the Wreck.

"S-sh! Lay off. I don't know what the idea is, but your wife bawled me for saying she could cook."

The Wreck studied the set of Sally's shoulders and decided not to press inquiries. Evidently it was not a matter of importance, anyhow; Timothy had probably made an ass of himself and got what he deserved.

Sally had very few words for anybody during the evening. The Wreck vainly tried to maneuver her into a private conversation, but she kept aloof from him. He wanted to hear all she knew about the sheriff's visit, and it puzzled him when he discovered that she was deliberately dodging. Probably she was mooning about things, he figured; women had a way of getting sentimental when there was absolutely no sense in it. He was willing to

bet she was half sorry that Bob Wells had not discovered her, although she had been in a wild flurry for fear that he would. It would be just like her. Sentimentality! She wanted her sweetheart, and she didn't want him. If anybody could figure out what a woman really did want, the Wreck was willing to listen.

A couple of the boys drifted in for a late supper, along with Charley McSween. Timothy hung around the kitchen. The Wreck finally gave up the job and went out. He'd be hanged if he'd wash the dishes; let Timothy have a fling at it.

Sally finished her work and went off to bed. She was still angry. "Listeners never hear any good of themselves," kept running in her head. That was not exactly true in her own case. Probably the things she overheard were compliments; she had heard them before and always so regarded them. But—

"So Bob Wells is marrying a cook, is he?" she muttered as she turned off the light in her room. "I'm a smart girl, and I'm pretty; oh, yes. But the cooking is the main thing. It's downright important and necessary; it's the foundation. Oh, wait till I see him!"

Down-stairs in the big living-room there was an earnest conversation in progress between Chester Underwood and his father. It dealt with a discovery. Chester, roaming about after supper in hope of a word with Sally Morgan, and failing to get it, had drifted idly down among the outbuildings. He had observed before that one of the little sheds, commonly used for storing tools and various odds and ends, was locked. It was unusual to lock anything around the ranch, but he had paid no particular attention to the fact. Now it aroused his curiosity.

The padlock would not yield to a pull. He tried several keys, but none of them would manipulate the lock. Then he picked up a stone and began hammering at the hasp. Eventually it loosened under the attack and he managed to wrench it out of the wood. Rusty hinges groaned as he swung the door back.

A dusty flivver stood inside the shed. He stared at it for a while, wrinkling his forehead and trying to remember whether anybody at the ranch possessed such a thing. He stepped into the shed and walked slowly around it. The place was getting rather dark, which was not favorable for detailed observation. So far as he could see, however, it looked just like any other flivver. But no; there was a front wheel missing, on the left side. A soap-box had been placed under the axle. He looked around the shed, but could not find the wheel. It struck him as peculiar that anybody should put a flivver under lock and key, particularly one that had only three wheels.

Presently he stepped outside again and paused for another view of the rear end. His glance rested upon a license-plate and became fixed there. There was a vague stirring in his memory. Then, with a look of astonishment on his face, he hurried off in the direction of the ranch-house.

All this he had been relating to his father as they sat in the living-room, and Jerome Underwood had been shooting questions at him that began in incredulity and developed into genuine curiosity.

"You say you can remember the license-plate?" demanded his father.

"No; I didn't remember the number, of course. I never took any note of it; I wasn't near enough the other night. I didn't notice the State, either. But it just has the general look; I think maybe it's the color that stuck in my mind."

"And it's a one-seater?"

"Yes."

"H-m! Well, there are millions of them, of course. You ought always to remember license numbers in any kind of an emergency."

Excellent advice; but Underwood himself had omitted to follow it, and he actually had his hands on the bandit car.

"Get a lantern," he said. "Let's go down and have a look at it."

Chester fetched a lantern from the kitchen, and they went down to the tool-shed. Jerome Underwood examined the mysterious flivver with more attention than he had ever given to his own imported car. He studied the license-plate with a searching eye, trying to make himself believe that it awakened recollection. He could

not be sure, but the more he looked at it the more familiar it seemed to be. Unconsciously, he was creating a memory of it, which might, after all, serve just as well.

The missing wheel baffled him. He could not invent a reason for it. Had there been a smash-up which crumpled a wheel, there would almost certainly be other marks on the car. But all it showed were a few ordinary dents and a myriad of scratches, common to hundreds of thousands of other flivvers all over the world. Standing there on its three wheels, with a soap-box serving as a crutch in place of the fourth, the dusty thing possessed an uncanny faculty of annoying him. He was aware of a feeling of resentment toward it. He had hated flivvers always; the people who drove them, as he saw them, never had any road manners. It was useless to pass them on the highway and leave them spluttering in your wake, because there was always another one ahead. Now it seemed that his diffused hatred came to a focus on one solitary specimen out of all the millions.

He led the way back to the house, swinging the lantern and trying to make something out of Chester's discovery. When they entered the living-room he did the obvious thing.

"Go get McSween," he said. "And let me do the talking."

Chester found the foreman in the bunk-house, getting ready to pull off his boots. Charley was a believer in going early to bed when there was nothing else to do. He went up to the ranch-house, wondering what the boss wanted.

Mr. Underwood always tried to make it a practise of getting immediately to the point, particularly with subordinates.

"Who owns the car that stands in the tool-shed?" he asked.

"What car?" asked Charley.

Then and there he passed a Rubicon, and realized it. Probably he had passed it foolishly, too. But the question had taken him by surprise, and his own question in return had snapped itself out automatically. That was the worst of speaking without due reflection. Why hadn't he said that the car belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Williams and let the truth have its way?

"There's a car down there, a three-wheeled flivver," said Underwood. "Who does it belong to?"

"A three-wheeled flivver?" repeated Charley. "I reckon that's a new kind. It ain't any wonder they keep takin' chunks off the price."

Mr. Underwood stared at his foreman.

"Mean to say you didn't know there was a flivver in the tool-shed?" he demanded.

"First I ever heard of it," said Charley promptly.

Having inadvertently set a course for himself he proposed to sail it. He had a superstition about turning back. And what was all the fuss about anyhow?

"Well, we found one there. My son and I have been taking a look at it. Do you know what we think?"

"U-m! No, I can't say as I do, Mr. Underwood."

Charley was becoming cautious and curious. He scratched his chin and resolved to be deliberate.

"We think it's the same car that was used by the gang that held us up."

"Well, I'll be *dog*-goned! And standin' down there in the tool-shed? Why, I'll just be damned, that's all!"

"And you mean to say you don't know anything about it?"

"But I'm a goin' to," said Charley. "I'm a goin' to have a look."

He seized the lantern and hastened out of the room before Mr. Underwood could utter another question. Down near the shed he paused for thought. There was no need to go and look at the Wreck's flivver; he knew all about it. What he wanted was a little time.

Twice within the space of a minute he had been surprised, and he proposed to get himself in order before they did it again. It had never occurred to him that any member of the Underwood family would take the trouble to discover the flivver. That was the first surprise. It was entirely unnecessary, too, he reflected; he might as well have left the thing in the open. Nobody could use it, anyhow. But the other surprise—the suspicion that this was *the* flivver!

"The sons of guns!" he muttered. "The *sons* of guns! Stickin' up the boss and then buttin' into his own ranch and askin' for breakfast! I ain't sayin' they did! I ain't convinced. I'm always in favor of preservin' a judicial mind and bein' fair to all concerned. But when you come to think of it—h-m! There's Henry Williams now. It's always been puzzlin' me to figure him. Accordin' to his wife he's a kind of invalid. But accordin' to Mort, and things which I've seen with my own eyes, he's a rampagin' rhinoceros. I wouldn't pick him to be in the stick-up business, and yet I wouldn't say he don't possess qualifications. The main thing is, he's got all the required nerve. The son of a gun!"

Charley stood tweaking his ear and frowning at the tool-shed.

"Admittin' the indictment—which I ain't necessarily, but admittin' it for the sake of argument—what am I goin' to do? I said I didn't know there was any flivver here. If I go back and say I did, I'm a liar. There ain't anything I hate to be accused of worse than that. Besides, if I admit I knew all about it, and it turns out that Henry lives up to what may be justly expected, then I'm makin' myself a sort of accessory after the fact. Which ain't true and is damagin' to my reputation. I may be rough and untutored, but I ain't any Henry Williams—the four-eyed son of a gun!"

He picked up the lantern, turned toward the ranch-house and paused again.

"Furthermore, here I've been tellin' the boss how I got him a prize cook from out East, along with her obligin' husband. He's liable to form a kind of poor opinion if I admit he came near havin' no cook at all. It's a reflection on foresight and management. And it's too late, anyhow. I can't tell him it's Henry Williams's flivver. I can't tell him it's mine. I can't admit havin' any guilty knowledge appertainin' to it. It looks like I had to keep right on bein' innocent, which is one of my best points. But—the son of a gun!"

Deciding that he had been away long enough, he went back to the house, where he found Underwood and Chester waiting for him in the living-room.

"Well?" demanded the boss of the establishment.

"She's a flivver all right," remarked Charley as he set the lantern on the floor. "She's just what you said, a three-wheeler."

"And you don't recognize it?"

"No, sir. It's a new sight to me. It's an amazin' visitation, so far's I'm concerned."

"You mean you didn't know there was a car locked up in that shed?"

Jerome Underwood's eyes were fixed in a glare of incredulity, but Charley McSween gazed back with mild steadiness.

"Didn't know she was there. Didn't even know the shed was locked. Hadn't been any call for anything that was kept in the shed."

"But—damn it—how could it get there?"

Charley looked thoughtful.

"I've been tryin' to think," he said. "If she had four wheels I'd say she got there in the regular way. But she's only got three wheels and a soap-box. That puts her in a class by herself. I can't figure her."

"Anybody around this ranch own a car?"

"No, sir. One of the boys had a motorcycle once, but he couldn't learn to stay on the seat. We ain't had even a bicycle around here since."

Underwood continued to regard him with unwinking amazement.

"You're supposed to know what's going on around here, aren't you?" he demanded.

"Yes, I reckon I am," said Charley. "But it's a fair-sized ranch, and sometimes I'm travelin' around it."

"Do you want me to understand that a hold-up gang can use my place as a headquarters without my foreman even knowing it?"

"No, sir. I don't aim to be perfect, but I don't aim to be too careless either. I take it you're feelin' pretty certain it belongs to the gang?"

"I am now. I only thought so before, and so did my son. But when I'm told that you don't know anything about it, then I'm convinced."

"It looks reasonably convincin'," admitted Charley.

"What went on here the night before I arrived?"

"Nothin that I 'specially recall. I reckon we all turned in pretty early."

"Could they have run a car in here without your knowing it?"

"Looks like they did, Mr. Underwood. It certainly makes me feel kind of foolish, bein' such a sound sleeper. But there she is, settin' there on three wheels and a box. There ain't any argument about that."

Charley knew that he was looking sheepish, and felt that it was the right way to look.

"What gets me," he said, "is why anybody brought the damn thing here at all. What's the idea? And how did they get it here on three wheels? There ain't anything reasonable about any part of it. There ain't anything you can get a good start on for figurin'. Odd times I've seen things that surprised me. But this has got me laid sort of flat out."

Underwood made a restless gesture of impatience.

"I'm sorry the sheriff got away so early," he said. "He might be able to make some sense out of it. It seems that nobody around my ranch knows anything at all about anything."

"I reckon we all look stupid," confessed Charley. "I ain't denyin' you've got grounds for thinkin' so. If I was the boss, and anything like that happened around my place I'd just naturally take a few folks apart until I got the answer. That's the way I'd feel."

Underwood finished a calculating study of his foreman, then waved an arm in dismissal.

"We'll talk about this again in the morning," he said. "I wouldn't like to think there has been anything worse than stupidity."

"I wouldn't want to think so myself," said Charley. "Good night."

He went out with the lantern, passed through the dining-room and pantry and entered the empty kitchen, where he sat down and begin filling a pipe.

"Well, I've made a high-grade ass out of myself," he mused. "I got started that way and there wasn't anything else to do. How in blazes was I goin' to tell him that I picked up the first stick-up gang that came along and turned 'em into a cook and dishwasher, without askin' for references? And me believin' that Providence sent 'em!"

He tipped the chair against the wall and hooked his heels in the rungs.

"I lied the only way that was befittin' the occasion. If I'd lied excited and brazen it wouldn't have held good overnight. So I lied calm and foolish. I ain't so sure that I got by either. I was always brought up believin' that a lie well stuck to is as good as the truth. But I ain't sure. It's sort of disconcertin'."

He fell into a long reverie, which came to an end when he muttered earnestly:

"The *son* of a gun!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

TWO PICTURES

AN old farmhouse with meadows wide,
And sweet with clover on each side;
A bright-eyed boy, who looks from out
The door with woodbine wreathed about,
And wishes his one thought all day:
"Oh, if I could but fly away
From this dull spot the world to see,
How happy, happy, happy,
How happy I should be!"

Amid the city's constant din,
A man who round the world has been,
Who, 'mid the tumult and the throng,
Is thinking, thinking all day long:
"Oh, could I only tread once more
The field path to the farmhouse door,
The old green meadow could I see,
How happy, happy, happy,
How happy I should be!"

Midnight at the Junction

by Courtenay Savage

BARBARA ran up the walk, paused breathlessly to look back over her shoulder, and then hurried up the veranda steps. Again she looked back, peering through the heavy dusk, her whole attitude that of fear.

"What is it?" A man's voice came from the blackness of the end of the porch.

"Oh, Harry, I didn't know you were there! I thought I saw a man—crouching by the gate."

The other laughed lightly as he crossed the veranda to stand beside the girl.

"Nonsense, nonsense," he comforted her. "Poor little 'fraid-cat, that was only a shadow. You mustn't be frightened. Come over and sit down." He put his arms about her and her fears fell from her instantly, as a scarf might drop from her shoulders.

"It *is* foolish," she laughed now that she was not alone; "but you know how I am, Harry. Still, I'm better about being frightened at things than I used to be, don't you think so?"

He assured her that she was, and so they sat silent, contented with the company of each other. Presently, however, he took both her hands in his.

"I've been talking to Jimmy Chapman again," he told her. "I really believed he has a good proposition."

"In that oil stock?"

"Yes, I was thinking it over as you came along. If we invested the three thousand we've saved in oil stock, and it was to boom, we might make two or three times our investment in a few weeks—and—"

"But suppose it doesn't boom?"

"Oh, don't," he spoke sharply. "You're always supposing the unhappy things—just like that shadow that frightened you a minute ago. Lots of people have made fortunes from oil stocks, and so can we. I'd sell just as soon as it went up, and if we could make that three thousand grow to ten, why we could buy the Ellis place, stock it with the best fruit-trees, and make a fortune in a few years."

She nodded her head.

"But how long would it be before the stock became valuable?"

"Oh, I don't know. Jimmy says maybe a few months—or a year."

"And we'd have to wait another year before we got married?"

The man nodded slowly. He, too, had thought of that. They had been engaged for four years—the war, and then the necessity of adding to their bank account had made them wait—and now? Harry Dart told her that he thought that if they could start with a big place that was almost all paid for, it might be worth waiting for.

"But the old Wadleigh place is very nice," Barbara assured him. "And you can buy it right away. Then we can get married just as we planned. It's only four acres, and the house is small, but it's enough to start with."

"Oh—the Wadleigh place is all right."

"And you know how we planned we could pay fifteen hundred dollars down, and how it would only cost a thousand dollars to fix the place up wonderfully. Then you said that you could set out strawberry plants this fall, and transplant and cultivate that big tangle of blackberry-bushes—and we'd have a fruit crop next season."

He did not answer her, and she knew by his silence that he favored the larger place at the other end of the village. For several minutes they sat in silence, and when they spoke it was on another subject.

That night, however, after Barbara had turned out the light and lifted the shade, she stood by the open window looking down the road. She was thinking of Jimmy Chapman, wondering if they could really make a lot of money from his oil stocks. Barbara was afraid not. Something, best described as intuition, warned her that they should not invest, but be contented with the smaller place.

Barbara's greatest worry at the moment was that Harry would not listen to her doubts as to the wisdom of the investment. He would simply think that she was afraid, one of the ordinary qualms that had filled her since childhood, and pay no attention.

Her eyes grew wide as she thought of the childhood fears that had given her the name "'fraid-cat." She had always been afraid—of cows, horses, dogs, and older people. Then, too, there had been the terror of thunder-storms, of the dark, and of unusual things, such as her personal dislike for tiger lilies because she associated them with the beasts of the jungle.

Many of these fears had died with young womanhood, but even after that she had continued to be timid. After her graduation from the normal school she had taught in a district school just outside her home town of Cedar Hill, but she gave up the work after the first year. She was rather afraid of the children, and the spring afternoon a small hoodlum brought a live snake to the class-room she had fainted—to the accompanying shrieks of the girl pupils.

After that she went to work as a clerk in Brand's general store. Brand's was rather larger than the usual country store, and Barbara was given charge of the ready-to-wear clothing for women and children. It was not difficult work; she liked it, and the only thing that ever frightened her was when she wondered if she had given the correct change—or sold an article of unbecoming clothing. She had really succeeded so well that Lem Brand told her that he hated to think of her getting married.

Her aunt, with whom Barbara had made her home since she had been a small girl, had teasingly expressed her surprise that Barbara was not afraid of a man. But then Harry Dart was not just a plain "man"—he was quite the best of the young fellows in the village. Other people besides Barbara admitted that. Harry was in his middle twenties—tall, clever; his handsome face, weather-beaten from work on the large fruit farm where he was superintendent, clean-cut—a leader. They all agreed that Harry Dart would be successful with his own fruit farm—just as they agreed that a little later on he was bound to make his interest in politics carry him to an official position.

Barbara knew all this—and to-night, as she looked out on the darkened world, she knew something else, and that was that Harry Dart was too trusting—which can be a fault as well as a virtue.

There was Jimmy Chapman, for instance. Jimmy had been born in Cedar Hill, went to school there, and had hung about the town, holding first one position, then another, until he was twenty. He was not stupid, but he had not "made good" in the eyes of the town. Then, very suddenly, he had left home, and they had heard of him first in Detroit, then Chicago. He came home twice in the next five years, at the death of, first, his mother, then his father, and the second time he had impressed the townspeople with his affluence. He was well dressed, "city dressed," they called it, and he talked easily of the stock

exchange, of banks and bankers, of State Street, Chicago, and of his trip to New York City. Barbara remembered his visit, for when they met at a picnic, which quite scandalized Barbara, considering Jimmy's recent bereavement, he had laughed at her shyness, and told the others that she was afraid of him.

This time, however, he had come back to his native town on "business." He had taken a small office across from the store where Barbara worked, and he was boarding at Mrs. Tucker's, next door to Barbara's home. She saw him every day as he made his important way about the town, good-looking, well-dressed, always carrying the small, double-handled leather bag in which he kept his important papers. And each time Barbara met him—he was very polite to her now—she was filled with a vague distrust.

There seemed to be something that kept telling her that Jimmy Chapman was not altogether square. And she knew it was not fear. It was all right for them to say that she was a "'fraid-cat," but Barbara knew that she was a real business woman, her work at the store proved that, and she believed that she could judge the characters of men and women.

Still, however, she admitted that fortunes had been made in oil-wells, and when, a day or two later, Harry came over during his lunch hour with a pamphlet that Jimmy had given him, she read it very carefully. It told just how oil was found, how much stock was to be sold in this particular well, offered free shares of common stock with every share of preferred stock bought, told of the earnings that oil-wells had made in the past—in fact, gave a very simple, but truthful, story of the oil industry.

"Well—how do you feel now?" Harry asked her after she had read it through.

"I just don't feel it's safe."

He frowned.

"You see, dear." She put the booklet down. "If this stock should prove worthless we'll have to wait years before we can have a place of our own."

"Yes, but then, on the other hand, if we can sell our stock for ten thousand dollars in a few months—why, it won't be such a small start. Think of how much easier it will be for me."

"I am thinking of you, dear; I'm thinking of you all the time."

And he kissed her, and hurried back to his work.

That night, however, he was back again. At the stationery store he had picked up a weekly magazine that told of the tremendous oil boom. Also, he showed her a copy of a Detroit paper with a financial article about oil and oil stocks.

"Barbara"—he leaned close—"Jimmy Chapman says that he wants to make two or three good introductory sales among the right kind of people, and that if I'll buy three thousand dollars' worth of stock, and let him tell people that I investigated his company, and bought shares, he'll give me six thousand dollars' worth of shares. Just think—when the stock goes up, and we sell—we'll be rich, really rich."

Barbara's eyes grew wide.

"Really, he'll give you all that?"

"Yes."

"And—and it's perfectly square—and honest."

He assured her that it was, that the additional stock was being given him for the use of his name—and that such transactions were not unusual.

She nodded her head. In spite of all her vague distrust, Barbara felt that it was an opportunity they could not reject. The next morning she went with Harry to Jimmy Chapman's office to witness the purchase of the stock. When they left Barbara carried the legal envelope containing the engraved stock certificates. And she was frightened.

In the month that followed Cedar Hill talked nothing but oil. Jimmy Chapman found them a wary people, but gradually the lure of great earnings made them decide to buy, and cautiously, almost fugitively, they came to his office to purchase stock. Barbara, from her place in the store, would see them as they left, high in hopes, holding the long, legal-appearing envelope that contained their certificates.

Barbara had no idea of how much money had been subscribed, but she felt that it must be a considerable sum. She knew that

the majority of it must have been in cash, for it was almost thirty miles to the nearest bank, and few of the Cedar Hill people used that institution. More than once she wondered where Jimmy Chapman kept the money he collected in the double-handled bag he always carried, or if he sent it away. Also she wondered how soon they would begin to get a return on their investment. She spoke of it one night to Harry.

"Well, not right away," he told her. "You see, he'll have to go to Texas when all the stock is sold, and start to drive the well. Just as soon as the oil starts spouting—he'll sell out to one of the big companies, and we'll all be rich."

"To Texas." She had not thought of Jimmy's going away. It startled her when she realized that he would carry their money to a far-off place. Still she supposed that it was all right. Harry was not worried.

Still Barbara did a great deal of thinking in the next few days, and finally she hunted through the old magazines at her aunt's home, and found several articles about oil. As she read them eagerly they taught her a great deal. They told her, for instance, of the game known as "wild-catting" in which men made up fake companies to sell stock in oil-wells that had never existed. They pictured many frauds, and she grew uneasy. What if Jimmy Chapman was a fraud? One of the articles talked of land grants. She supposed that Jimmy had such a grant, but had any one ever seen it? Had any one in the back-from-the-railway village of Cedar Hill ever investigated to see if Jimmy really owned property in the oil district?

That evening, when she broached the subject to Harry, he told her that she was foolish to worry so continually. So she did not ask her questions, but still she pondered over them. The next morning as she stopped at the post-office to mail a letter, Jimmy Chapman was just ahead of her at the general delivery window. He did not notice her, for he was engrossed in the pile of mail the postmaster was handing him. One rather bulky envelope fell from the window-ledge, and landed at Barbara's feet. Jimmy hurried to pick it up, but not before Barbara could see the black type in one corner that proclaimed the envelope to be from a school that offered to teach Spanish in twenty lessons. As he stooped Jimmy saw Barbara, and for a fraction of a second he hesitated. His face grew ashen. Then, with a sudden smile, he said "Good morning," picked up the letter, and hurried away.

Afterward Barbara wished she had stopped him. She had never talked with Jimmy at any length about his oil, but she suddenly decided to question him. She felt that if she could talk with him she would be more sure in her own mind as to their chances of making a quick return on their money. At noon, before she had her lunch, she went boldly to Jimmy's office, knocked, and then remembering it was a public office, entered.

Jimmy Chapman was at his desk. He looked up sharply. Then, with a quick movement, he closed a book he had been reading, and put it in a desk drawer. But not too quickly to prevent Barbara from seeing that it was an atlas.

"Oh, hello, Miss Barbara!" A puzzled expression flashed over his eyes. "Is there something—did you want to see me?"

Barbara was slightly frightened, for all her resolve.

"Yes," she said quickly. "Yes, I want to talk to you about the oil stock. I want you to tell me, please, is it going to make a lot of money?"

"Oh, the stock? Of course it will make money, Miss Barbara."

"You're quite sure?" It meant a great deal to the girl.

"Yes."

"Then I'd like to ask some questions. I'd like to know just where the land is that you control; do you own it or lease it? And just how soon are you going to drill the oil-well, and how soon will we make money?"

Chapman hesitated.

"Why—you—you can make money—in—" He faltered.

"In six months?"

"I should say six months, not any longer. The value of the stock ought to start up any day now, and once the steady rise

sets in—why, it will grow more valuable every day. Now you take the history of the Standard Oil stock," and Jimmy Chapman, having found a familiar topic, hurried on with his story.

Barbara tried to listen. But her thoughts and her eyes wandered. She saw the steamship folder of boats from New Orleans that protruded from the side pocket of the coat that hung over the back of Jimmy's chair, saw the familiar " two-handled " bag beside the desk, and noted the list of names and amounts of money that lay on the desk itself.

Presently she rose and left. She had not understood all that Jimmy had said, but it seemed very businesslike. The truth was that she had been dazzled by the facts and figures he quoted.

That night, however, when she had gone to her room, she sat calmly by the window analyzing all that had been told her. And in the analysis Jimmy Chapman and his schemes were found to be wanting in reliability. The thoughts that came to her were not nice, they teemed with suspicion, with accusation. Jimmy Chapman had said a great deal, but Barbara realized now that he had evaded her direct questions. And that steamship folder, showing the departure of boats from New Orleans—the atlas he had put in the drawer—the " Spanish in Twenty Lessons " envelope! It was all quite clear to her. He was planning to run away. She must stop him—stop him the first thing to-morrow morning.

A light burned in Mrs. Tucker's boarding-house next door to Barbara's home, and she knew that it was the room Jimmy Chapman occupied. She watched it, thinking—thinking. A dozen little fears rose to confront her—fears that she might be wrong, that she had no real reason for accusing Jimmy Chapman. But she fought them all down.

Presently she began to grow drowsy. The town was asleep now, the hush only broken by the sudden barking of a house dog, or the very occasional passing of a late traveler.

Then suddenly something happened that roused her to complete consciousness. The light that had burned in Jimmy Chapman's room went out, and almost immediately a man's figure appeared, and leaned far out of the window. There were not more than a couple of hundred feet between the houses, and she recognized the figure. It was Jimmy. He seemed to be looking in all directions. Then he reached into his room, and brought up an object that was large and black. He lowered this object, evidently by a rope. Barbara decided that the object was two bags. What did it mean? She pressed close to the window screen, filled with curiosity. Then, from round the corner of the house, as stealthily as a thief of the night, came Jimmy Chapman. He untied the rope, picked up the two bags, and went noiselessly across the grass toward the road.

In a flash Barbara understood. Jimmy Chapman was running away. He was going—where? For the New Orleans boat? Her keen mind followed the trail that Jimmy must take to get away from Cedar Hill that night. He would not dare hire an automobile; that would be too open. He would probably go on the next interurban trolley to the junction. The junction! She thought for a minute. The night flier stopped at the junction about twelve—or a few minutes after, and it would land Jimmy in Chicago by the middle of the morning. From there he could work his way South.

In the next few minutes Barbara alternated between terror and calmness. Her first impulse was to tell Harry, but instantly she knew that Harry would not believe her. He would laugh and say that she was frightened. No—it would take time for her to convince Harry, and there was no time to be lost. She looked at her wristwatch. It was ten minutes past eleven. She could not catch Jimmy before he left Cedar Hill, and the interurban trolleys only ran every forty minutes.

Gradually a plan came to her. She must get to the junction and stop him there. She must not let him get away with the money.

How she would get to the junction she did not know—any more than she knew how she would make Jimmy give her the money. She paced the floor. A possibility,

one so daring that it startled her, flashed to her mind. Why not use Harry's motorcycle? He kept it in her aunt's barn, and she had ridden in the side-car a hundred times, always afraid, but always proud that Harry owned such a vehicle. And her keen eyes had watched him as he had manipulated the machine.

She spent a minute in tense thought. Then she slipped out of her skirt, put on a pair of heavy bloomers, wool stockings, a tight hat, and she was ready. She took the stock certificates that Harry had given her to care for, and hurried to the barn. She pushed the motorcycle down the drive, then along the road for a short distance. She did not want to make too much noise. She was quite calm, though she was wondering if Jimmy would give her back the money. She felt that he would not—that is, not just for the asking. And to make him give it to her—well, she really—she really ought to have a gun.

A gun! She knew where she could get one, but it meant a trip back to the house for the keys of the store. Leaving the motorcycle under a tree she went quickly, noiselessly, back. Then she wheeled the machine three blocks to the store, let herself in, and fumbled her way to the gun-counter. The first one she touched was a stocky, double-barreled shotgun. She hurried back to the motorcycle.

She put the gun in the side-car, and tried to start the engine. It did not start at once, but she was not excited. She had seen it balk with Harry. Her next attempt was successful. She was on her way. As she passed the clock on the Methodist Church tower she saw that it was twenty-five minutes to twelve—and she had nine miles to travel. She speeded up the engine.

The junction toward which she raced was not a place of importance. There was really no town to speak of, but the tracks of two great railway systems crossed at the point, and there were switches, signal-towers, water-tanks, a repair-shop, and a small train-shed for passengers. The fast train stopped at the junction for water and any orders that might have been flashed over the wires. Also it was a place where passengers for local points left the express trains.

Barbara, thinking of this, wondered if there would be other passengers for the Chicago train. She hoped not, for she felt that if she could be alone with Jimmy she stood more chance of getting her money.

Fears, more realistic than she had ever known, came to her as she raced through the night. Suppose there was not enough gasoline in the tank? Suppose something was to break, and she did not reach the junction? What would she do if she had guessed wrong, and Jimmy was not there? Once, when a farm dog rushed out and barked at her motorcycle she screamed in terror. But she kept madly on.

So great was her speed that she neared the junction without realizing it. She did not recognize the familiar country through which she passed, but suddenly she found herself going down-hill. As the hill curved a new stab of terror shot through her. She was on Dead Man's Hill, the winding slope that led for more than a mile into the junction. She was too frightened to shut off the engine. She took a corner at top speed. She went over a rut that almost threw her off the seat, and she wondered if the gun had fallen from the side-car. She was nearing the bottom of the hill. She was safe on the flat road—and hurrying past the huddle of houses that made up the town of Junction. She turned the machine toward the railway-shed.

When she had stopped the engine, and climbed down, she found the shotgun safe in the side-car. She held it close to her body, so that it was not noticeable in the darkness. She went rapidly to the platform. Her wish that there would be no other passengers than Jimmy Chapman was granted. She saw him shrink back in the shadows at the sound of her footsteps, saw that he was peering toward her, fearful of who might be coming toward him in the dark. She did not speak, however, until she was quite close.

"Oh—Jimmy Chapman!" Her voice was quite calm. "I wanted to see you before you went away. I want to sell you back that oil stock right now, I don't want to wait until it gets to be valuable."

There was something so simple in her request, so strange, that Jimmy laughed.

"Well, this is hardly the time to do business," he said flippantly. "Wait until I come back."

"I want the money now," with an emphasis on the last word.

"Don't be foolish; people don't transact business on a station-platform at midnight. Run along home now; I'll do business with Harry."

"You'll do business with me—now."

"But—you don't suppose that I carry money—" He was trying to find a logical excuse.

"I don't suppose anything," she said calmly, "I know that you have money in that bag, and I know that you're taking the flier to Chicago, and that you're going to try to get a boat at New Orleans. Now you give me my money."

For an instant there was silence, broken only by the long, far-away whistle of the flier as it came out from the small range of hills five or six miles away, and by the sudden activity at the water-tank, just beyond the station, where lights flashed in anticipation of the train's stop.

Barbara stepped back a pace. With deliberation she raised the gun to her shoulder. The steel barrel rested against Jimmy Chapman's chest.

"I want that money," she said. "You know just as well as I do that you're a crook."

Jimmy Chapman's bluff had been called.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot!" he said anxiously. "I'll give you your money; just let me count it out. Don't shoot! I've got to bend over to reach in the bag."

He reached for the small bag with the double handles, and opened it. Barbara drew a long breath as, under the light of the single station lantern, she saw the bundles of currency.

Quickly Jimmy reached for a package and counted off several bills.

"Here's thirty one-hundred-dollar bills," he said.

"Put them in my hand, the one under the barrel of the gun, and then—" She stopped suddenly. It came to her that others in Cedar Hill besides Harry Dart had bought stock in the fictitious oil-wells. And many of them had only done so because they believed it right to follow Harry's lead. If Harry had considered it a good investment it must be so.

"Jimmy Chapman, I want the rest of that money. I want all the money you've collected from the folks at Cedar Hill. You haven't got any oil-well, and they ought to have their money back."

"No—no!" he cried.

"Yes—and don't you touch that bag. If you do I'll pull the trigger. It's just the same as if you'd stolen that money. I'm going to give it back." She pressed a little closer so that he could feel the gun-barrel against him. "Here's the train, Jimmy. Have you any money of your own?"

"A little."

"Here"—the train was pulling in now—"here, take this." And she gave him one of the hundred-dollar bills. "You're not a regular crook, Jimmy, or you'd be more careful about time-tables and maps, and things like that. Don't be a crook, Jimmy; let this be a lesson to you. You can't get away with it. If you'd got out of here with the money you'd probably have been caught and sent to jail. Quick, Jimmy, get aboard."

Just for a second longer he hesitated. The lights of the train as it came to a standstill lit both their faces, and there was an expression of mingled fright and gratitude on his.

"Gee, I guess you're right. Harry Dart is lucky in having a girl like you. Thanks for the hundred. I'll send it back to you some day." A minute later the flier, puffing and snorting, pulled out into the night. Barbara watched until a curve swallowed the last racing light.

Then she picked up the bag of money, and ran quickly for the motorcycle. She was afraid of the men at the switch-tower. One of them might come along and question her. She started the machine, and raced over the roads toward home. Half a mile from her destination she slowed down, dismounted, and wheeled the machine the rest of the way. She crept into the yard, and to the barn. She slipped off her shoes be-

fore she entered the house. Once she reached her own room she was trembling.

The money was quite safe now; she and Harry could get married. She set the bag on the floor, and placed the gun across it. Then, with a low moan, she flung herself across the bed. Now that her adventure was over she was terribly frightened. Tears came to her, and she sobbed piteously. It was a long time before she could get up and undress. When she finally went to sleep her fatigue was so great that it was hours before she recovered consciousness.

"Barbara—Barbara," came her aunt's anxious voice, and when the girl opened the door she looked at her strangely. "I thought maybe you were sick. I came up here twice, but I didn't hear a sound, and I grew frightened. Hurry and dress yourself; Harry's down-stairs. He's got something to tell you." And Barbara knew by her aunt's expression that Jimmy's absence had been discovered.

It was scarcely ten minutes before Barbara was on the porch.

"Good morning, Harry. What is it?"

"Barbara, he's gone. Jimmy Chapman's gone. Mrs. Tucker sent for me. He must have sneaked off in the night—he never spoke about going. I guess you were right, Barbara—we've been swindled."

Barbara smiled.

"What are you laughing at?" he stormed without giving her a chance to explain. "Don't you—"

"Yes, I understand. Jimmy Chapman's gone. I know it; I said good-by to him at the junction. He went on the midnight flier."

"You—said—"

"Yes, and before he left he gave me all the money—the money he owed us—and everybody. It's up-stairs in my room, in the two-handled bag."

"You've got the money?" Harry could hardly believe his ears.

She told him a hurried version of how she had visited Jimmy, of what she had noticed in his office, of what she had seen from her window, of the race to the junction.

"And you got the money?" Harry hardly let her finish. "You wonderful, wonderful girl!" He put his arm about her and drew her close. "And to think we called you a 'fraid-cat."

"But I was afraid—terribly afraid!"

"You must have been; anybody would have been frightened. But I can't imagine how you did it." He was trying to picture this nervous girl on such an errand. "Do you mean to say that he just gave you the money because you asked for it?"

"Oh, no. He wouldn't give it to me until I raised the gun right against his heart."

"The gun!" Harry almost shouted. "Gee whizz, did you have a gun?"

"Oh, yes, I felt sure I'd need a gun, so I just borrowed one from the store. I had to point it at him, but when I did he got quite afraid of me."

The man laughed joyously.

"Barbara—you're more wonderful all the time. You were right about that oil stock; every one will call you a heroine. And to-morrow we'll go and close the sale on the Wadleigh place. Then we'll get married—how soon?"

"In September," she said promptly. "I thought about it last night. I can be ready by September. And, Harry"—a little half-ashamed smile came over her face—"Harry, I'm not brave at all. I was terribly scared; I'm scared even now, but I had to have that money so that we wouldn't have to wait to get married. And the gun, Harry, the gun wasn't loaded at all."

Gipsy Heels

by George Noble — Part IV

CHAPTER XV (*Continued*).

WATCH YOUR STEP!

IT wasn't much to say, but it was enough to tell the girl standing before him what he thought of her—and that he was glad. She blushed, and the black fringe drooped over the gray eyes.

"When—how?" he began. "Tell me—"

"Here?" She glanced at the people coming and going.

Without answering, he led the way to the door.

"Ah, yes, of course! The very place!" she exclaimed when they were in the street. She pointed to the cathedral. "We can talk in there."

They went on toward the statue of rather corpulent royalty, past the stone recording Queen Victoria's stance, and so, up to the stone steps and into the vast, shadowy place which people often have called cold and bare and barnlike; but which to Frenchy was the anteroom of paradise, because of the girl at his side.

"Do you want to look at these?" She swept the monuments with a gesture. He didn't answer. She turned round to see why, and found his eyes fastened upon her.

"No," he said calmly. But in that word she read, "I want to look at you, and nothing but you." Her reading was correct.

"Do you want me to tell you how it is I'm in London?" she asked. "Well, come over here and I'll tell you. I came to London to find Jed Courtenay. Dick found out that he left Buenos Aires in the bark Elizabeth Lazenby, which was bound for London after stopping at Galveston. Of course there was a chance he might have left the ship in Texas, but since the men were all signed for London I thought it best to come straight across here. I arrived yesterday at Southampton in a Royal Mail steamer, and sent a man to inquire for Mr. Courtenay, but haven't found him yet."

"But he doesn't use that name in a ship."

"I know. I told the man to inquire for Mr. Long Slim. What a ridiculous name! But that's just what might be expected of such a creature!"

"You don't seem to have reconsidered your former opinion of him," he said with a smile.

"No. I've had no reason to. He's a great, uncouth, odious person. I detested him from the moment I saw him, and even before—when I saw"—her eyes wavered in confusion—"when I saw how he treated you."

"Why, he didn't do—"

"Oh, please don't defend him. I know all about it. I know that he was in great danger and trouble, and you delivered him from that, and because he was afraid that

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 26.

same danger might threaten again he made you take an oath never to leave him."

"How do you know all this?" Frenchy asked, dismayed at the figure Jed Courtenay was made to cut in all the distortion of facts.

"Dick told me part, and the rest I have put together by what I have seen and heard and guessed. But, you know, this sort of thing must not go on. I am only a woman, but I am going to be the instrument which will free you."

"Free me? You?"

"You'd like to be free from that absurd agreement, wouldn't you?"

"Above all things."

"There! I knew it! Don't try to defend him after that admission."

"But—"

"There's no use in your saying anything. I know we both despise Jed Courtenay. I am frank enough to say so. You would rather not. Very well. It doesn't matter."

"But how are you going to free me?" asked Frenchy faintly, anxious not to hear any more of her feelings about Jed Courtenay.

"Oh, yes, about that! You know the conditions of his father's will?"

He nodded, and she continued: "Well, here is the only decent thing I ever knew him to do. He has refused to marry me."

"What!" Frenchy's tone was not exactly suited to the interior of the cathedral, even though no service was going on; and several people halted in their sight-seeing and looked at him. A gentleman in gaiters turned a reproving face toward him, and had it not been for the well-dressed girl beside him, assuredly he would have asked him to go outside.

Ethel Waterford pretended to be deeply interested in the tablet in front of her.

"Hush!" she whispered.

"What was that you said?" Frenchy gasped.

"I said 'hush!'" was the calm answer.

"But before that?"

"I said Jed Courtenay had refused to marry me. To be sure it was only after I had told him nothing would induce me to marry him. But, still, I owe him a debt of gratitude for signing a formal declaration to that effect. If he had been so disposed he could have placed me in a very embarrassing position."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were the lady mentioned in my fa—my friend's father's will?

"Yes."

"I—I thought it was Miss—a lady in Virginia."

"Miss Gassaway? Yes, I know what you're thinking of. Colonel Courtenay did want his son to marry her, but she was already engaged at the time, and so the absurd old man nominated me for the proud position of Jed Courtenay's wife. I suppose he thought no woman living would marry him of her own accord, and I respect his intelligence for so thinking."

The girl was so busy with her camouflage of making people think she was a "tourist" that she didn't raise her eyes from the tablet. If she had seen Frenchy's face while she was saying this she couldn't have continued.

"The curious thing about the affair," she went on, "is that since Mr. Courtenay declines the honor of my hand, what would have been his share in his father's estate comes to me. Of course that isn't fair, and, since it's mine unconditionally, I'm going to give him half of it."

She paused. But, since she got no word, she went on wistfully: "Do you think I ought to give him all of it?"

"No," he replied promptly; "you oughtn't to give him any of it."

"Oh, yes, I must give him half of it," she said firmly, "but, since legally I'm not obliged to do it, I'm going to exact something in return on his part."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to insist on his freeing you."

"Don't!" he begged miserably. "I'm not worth it."

"Not worth it? Of course you're worth it."

"But I can't let you. Don't you see that one can't exactly accept such a great favor from a woman's hands?"

"That's the joke of it," she laughed. "It isn't any favor to anybody at all. You see I *mean* to give him the money in any

case, but I'll make him believe he's *earning* it."

Frenchy had no reply for this, but his gesture proclaimed him unconvinced.

"We'll see," she said, "what Mr. Courtenay has to say when I meet him. And *you?* When shall I see you again?"

"I—I don't know."

"I'm going out of town to-morrow for a few days. Can you bring Mr. Courtenay to see me at— No, I was going to say bring him to the hotel, but I think it would be better to see him at the offices of Mr. Parcher. He's a solicitor, and has done some business for Dick—at least, some one connected with him in Buenos Aires has, and Dick has given me a letter to him. I suppose he can't transfer the property, but he can draw up papers of some sort that will bind me to deliver it later."

She drew a card from her handbag and wrote an address on it. "Bring him to that place," she said, "at three this afternoon. You will find me there."

"But he may not be willing to come."

"Oh, if you tell him he is to receive money without being burdened with a wife along with it, I think he'll come."

"I wish you didn't think so badly of Jed Courtenay."

"How can you defend him?"

"I don't defend him. He's—he may be all sorts of a 'bad egg,' but I feel sure he isn't as bad as you think."

"For instance?"

"Well," he began, "he thought—that is, I understood he thought he was supposed to marry a lady he'd never seen—"

"That couldn't be, for you remember he talked with Dick before coming to the house in calle Rivadavia."

"Yes, but he wasn't told by his brother that their father had changed his views."

"How do you know?" she asked, and was puzzled at his confusion. "Oh, yes, I remember now. You told me you were present at that interview."

Frenchy was relieved. He had forgotten he had told her *that*.

"But then, you see," she continued, determined to condemn Jed, "I told him that morning that I wouldn't marry him. So, you see, he must have known."

"Y-yes, but you're grateful to him for doing that."

"I am! I am!" she cried fervently. "But, then, I don't count it in his favor," she added inconsistently.

"He was the means of your having a fortune in your own right," urged Frenchy gloomily, finding it uphill work to rehabilitate a man in a woman's esteem, contrary to that woman's convictions.

"He didn't know he was doing that," was the reminder. "But let's not talk about him any more. We'll dispose of him finally this afternoon. Now I must go."

They went out of the cathedral and he put her into a cab, she chattering gaily all the time and he scarcely answering. He felt it didn't matter now whether Long Slim married or not. Nothing mattered—save that she must never know that he was the much-despised Jed Courtenay.

"At three o'clock," she was saying.

"At three o'clock," he repeated and then, remembering that though the Heavens fell he would not be coaxed, dragged, or driven to that solicitor's offices, he added as a saving clause: "If he'll come."

She smiled as if to say she knew he could manage to carry out her wishes. The wheels began to turn, and she was gone.

To Frenchy all of life seemed to consist in standing still and watching her disappear.

Frenchy now had money in his pocket to pay for a bus, or even a cab to his lodgings, and breakfast, too; but he thought of neither and walked all the way back to Limehouse, unconscious alike of his tired legs and empty stomach.

He tried the door of the room and found it locked. His knock got no answer.

"Slim!" he cried petulantly.

"Aye, lad," came a cautious whisper from within.

Frenchy presented his compliments in the approved manner of tall-water A. B.'s, and asked to be allowed to enter the room.

"Ary man there with ye?" was wafted through the keyhole in a very still and very small voice.

"No fear! Who should be with me?" Frenchy was intensely annoyed, and, determined to stand no more nonsense, put his

shoulder to the door, intending to stave it in. It opened unexpectedly and he found himself lying on the floor with his head under the bed.

"No harm, lad, no harm," murmured Long Slim reassuringly, as he turned the key in the lock.

"No harm!" roared Frenchy, tenderly nursing his bruises. "What the h—"

"Easy does it," whispered Long Slim, with his knotted fingers on his lips. He took a step on tiptoe, but hearing the squeak of his boots, he dropped to his knees and crept to the window, whence he took a surreptitious observation of the street.

"Will you tell me what ails you, you lantern-jawed bean-pole?" asked Frenchy.

"Dan Canary has been here whilst we was gone," explained the tall mariner.

"What of it?"

"Wot of it!" gasped Long Slim.

"It's only natural that he should call on his sister-in-law's young man, isn't it?" Frenchy had forgotten his bruises in the pleasure of baiting his shipmate.

Long Slim felt he was being cruelly treated. His situation was unpleasant enough to justify him in expecting a little sympathy instead of jeering flippancy. He pulled out his handkerchief, and sought inspiration by fingering the half coin in the corner. He found it.

"Have ye got another five pound odd ye'd like to send arter mine?" he asked politely.

Frenchy clutched his pocket apprehensively.

"After whose?" he asked indignantly.

"Mine."

"All that money was yours, was it?"

"Whose, then? Didn't I work for it?"

"I didn't work on the passage over from America, I suppose?"

"Did old Joel P. Airth give ye a blue slip?"

"He didn't, thanks to you. But half of that money's mine, and I mean to have it."

Long Slim laughed. "How'll ye git it, my son?"

"You had six pound eleven coming to you. Well, that makes three pound six for me."

"Aye, do it? I make *that* a tanner (sixpence) too much. But if ye'll show a pore sailorman how ye're a-goin' to git it, I'll be obleeged."

"Well, this is how. I got the 'shinplasters' changed. Twenty-one quid they brought. Your share would be ten pound ten. I'll deduct my three pound seven—"

"Three pound *six*, ye swab!"

"Well, there's nothing here but sovereigns, so I'll just let you have seven quid, and the matter's settled."

"That 'ere is sheer, clear robbery!" expostulated Long Slim, but he hastily annexed the seven shining coins lest they, too, might dwindle before his eyes.

"What now?" asked Frenchy. "Shall we go up and call on Miss Judith Lamb?"

"Frenchy, lad," Long Slim's voice trembled, "I'll say nought about the three pound six if ye'll gi' me a hand for to git outen this."

"Out of what?" said Frenchy in surprise.

"Outen this 'ere Judy business, an' ye savvy well enough wot is is, without sayin' wot."

"D'you mean to say you don't intend to marry the lady after all you did and said last night—"

Frenchy ducked skilfully, and allowed Long Slim's cap, which had been cast at him, to sail gracefully past him, and settle in the unemptied wash-stand.

"Lookee wot ye done, ye swine!" Long Slim roared, as he got up and rushed across the room to rescue his property.

"The landlady will savvy now that we're in, if anybody calls," was Frenchy's only comment.

"Frenchy, my son, wot's to be done?"

"You really want to get out of it?"

Long Slim simply glared at his interlocutor.

"Then I think we'd better got out of this blessed town."

"But if, so be, we takes a ship yon Canary'll hear of it, likely."

"Aye, but there are trains."

Long Slim beamed. He hadn't thought of trains.

"Let's go to Cardiff," he said, as if by inspiration.

"Why Cardiff especially?"

"Oh, I dunno. They's ships at Cardiff. I know a boardin' house there where I lost a bag o' clothes an' a Bethel Bible about ten year agone. Morgan's cook-shop it were—in Tiger Bay."

"Right you are! Go and get the tickets while I stow the dunnage. Fetch a cab when you come back."

"What for?"

"To take us to the station."

"To-day?"

"Why not? But make it next week if you'd rather say good-by to Miss Judith Lamb first. It may take you as long as that to say it."

That hint decided the Dublin-Australian, as Frenchy intended it should.

"Wot if, so be, I should meet Dan in the street?"

"You're bigger than he is," he was reminded.

He disappeared and returned two hours later with a cab, two third-class tickets to Cardiff, and nothing but a little silver in his pockets.

Inside his shirt, however, was a handkerchief, and tied in one corner of it were half a sixpence, and a ring with an extremely gorgeous red stone. He hoped to soften a lady's heart with that ring, and he felt that if he succeeded in making her forgive him for not keeping his tryst with her, four pound ten was none too much to pay for the ring.

"Slim," said Frenchy solemnly as the train moved out of the station, "if you ever tell anybody that I'm Jed Courtenay I'll choke you."

"Why, lad, there's money for ye if, so be, it's savvied who ye be."

"How d'you know that?" asked Frenchy harshly.

Long Slim bent over his bag, which was at his feet, and busied himself with its lacing, which was already in quite good enough order to pass navy inspection.

Frenchy reviewed the situation thoroughly in his mind, and, assuring himself it was impossible for Slim to know anything about the matter, said more gently:

"What makes you think that, Slim? Because the toff in Buenos Aires gave me the 'shinplasters'?"

"'Course!" replied Long Slim, looking straight at him.

"Well, that's all over," sighed Frenchy with an air of finality.

CHAPTER XVI.

BARNUM WAS RIGHT.

"BUT just at that moment the old tightwad croaked, and there ye be!"

The speaker was Yank, of whom we have seen a little at the Dutchman's pub in Galveston, and, who, on the strength of twenty-four hours' residence in Cardiff, was doing the honors of the place to Frenchy and Long Slim. He had abandoned the name of Robin Paradise, also the hard hat of dingy purple.

Yank had given them news of the docks and of Tiger Bay, where the boarding masters and their cohorts ruled, assured them that no windjammer was down for sailing for "quite several days," and remarked on the fine taste, raw, of the eggs of peafowl which made their nests in the shrubbery surrounding the lake in Sophia Gardens, thrown open to the public by the Marquis of Bute.

Long Slim, feeling the lump in the corner of his handkerchief, rejoiced.

Yank pointed out, too, the pubs where tick was the most probable, and had further entertained the travelers by telling them several of the stories of his life.

An impressive silence followed the foregoing tragic conclusion.

"Without telling you where that money was hid?" asked Frenchy sympathetically.

Yank solemnly nodded his head.

"An' d'ye mean to tell me as how they nary found it?" put in Long Slim incredulously.

"An' d'ye mean to tell me as how I'd be tryin' to hold down a four-post bed in the sea parlor o' the first limejuicer * as heaves in sight if, so be, we'd a found it, my son?"

* British ship, so called because of the limejuice served each noon according to an Act of Parliament.

Yank's imitation of Long Slim's tone was little short of insulting, and was about to be resented, when Frenchy pointed out that much should be forgiven a man who had the misfortune to be heir to a miser of such irritatingly secretive instincts.

"Aye," said Yank lugubriously, "if I'd had that coin in Philadelphy I'd a been first mate instead o' just plain Johnny Haultight."

"My son," sniffed Long Slim, divided between anger at the mimicry and pity at the mariner's calamity, "I'd like to see any queer fellar hide my pay-day so's I couldn't find it."

"I'd admire to see you go to that cottage, and find the mazooma that old party hid from me," retorted Yank scathingly. "I don't mind mentioning that you'd find it worth your while."

"I'll tell ye, my son," answered Long Slim grimly, "I don't know's I'd undertake for to locate a pot o' gold at the end of a rainbow, *nor yet* to find the peas in the soup aboard a limejuicer, but if any sailorman can hide money belongin' to me so's I can't find it, why, I'll"—Slim looked out over Bristol Channel, seeking inspiration for a convincing declaration—"I'll eat it!" he concluded triumphantly.

Frenchy laughed.

"Wot ye laughin' at?" asked Long Slim truculently. "D'ye suppose you could hide anythink so's I couldn't find it?"

"Of course not. I was just wondering how you could eat anything you couldn't find."

"Well, then, he should have the money to keep for his own self."

"Is that so? How much money have you got, Slim?"

"Never ye mind, lad!" said Long Slim, very busy with his pipe.

"Come on, bo!" urged Yank. "Let's see how much your shipmate 'll have when you come to own up that you can't find it."

Long Slim, carefully avoiding Frenchy's eye, put his hand in his pocket and fished up three shillings and two farthings.

"That all?" queried Frenchy mildly.

"I bought both tickets," declared Long Slim belligerently, "an' paid for your dinner as well as my own last night."

"Still, that didn't take seven quid, to say nothing of eighteen bob you had when you got through with—"

"*That'll do you!*"

"I don't believe, Slim, you could hunt very hard for three bob and a couple of browns, but I'd like to see what you can do. I'll take my money. Here it is, fifteen quid—"

"One pound four o' that 'ere belongs to me," growled Long Slim.

"Right you are! We'll settle that later. I'll hide my money, and if you can find it inside of twelve hours you can have half of it. If you can't find it you must promise to give me your wheel in the next ship every time there's any holystoning going on. Churning salt water with the rudder is better than scraping the prayer-books over the deck in a mess of slush."

"Pay Paddy Doyle for his boots!" cried Long Slim, licking his lips in anticipation of the larks to be had with the half of fifteen sovereigns.

"Done, my son! Right y'are, lad! Let's go an' have our evenin's evenin'."

Yank at once piloted his two former shipmates to the bar parlor of the Queen's Hotel, and Long Slim began a close watch on the walking savings-bank who was beside him.

Ten minutes went by, and there was no response to their order. Frenchy with annoyance sprang up from his chair. "Let me see if I can't make these sojers bear a hand!" he said.

Seizing Long Slim's hat, apparently by mistake in his impatience, he clapped it on his head, and started for the tap-room. Long Slim was for following at his heels, but when he saw a reflection of himself, wearing Frenchy's hat, in a near-by mirror, he laid off. Also he felt a sense of satisfaction, because Yank happened to be occupying a seat which commanded a view of the bar through an open door.

"Can ye see 'im?" whispered Long Slim nervously.

Yank nodded his head without turning his face.

Frenchy, outside in the next room, asked the barmaid if she would give him a couple of bank-notes for all the loose silver he

had in his pockets. She did so with visibly increased respect.

Yank had been steadily watching events in the tap-room, without missing a detail. Suddenly, on perceiving in the mirror Frenchy's final move, his eyes opened with amazement. Next instant a look of comprehension swept over his face. He discreetly forbore from speech. But a monstrous wise and knowing look came into his eyes.

Since Frenchy, by virtue of his nochalant money-changing, had become a person of consequence, too great haste could not be made to fill his order.

Long Slim's composure was restored when Frenchy carelessly tossed back the missing hat on the table. Pinioning his regained hat with one hand, he extracted Frenchy's hat from inside his belt where he had wedged it.

He held it gingerly at arm's length, the edge of the brim between his thumb and forefinger, then, as if in fear of contamination, flipped it across the table. With care he inserted his own hat in the same secure resting place. That comedy work was a little too much overdone to have insured him a tryout on the stage of the Empire Music Hall, a few blocks up the street.

"Ye ain't hid it, have ye?" the tall mariner asked uneasily.

"I took the money with me to the tap-room," replied Frenchy, choosing his words carefully, "and I brought it back with me."

"Leave us have a look."

"D'you think I'm going to show it to you every five minutes?"

"But ye've got it yet?"

"Didn't you hear me say I'd brought it back with me?"

All signs of trouble vanished from Long Slim's face, which was at once lowered gracefully into his glass.

Yank's heart made glad by the substantial brew of the Queen's Hotel, he lapsed into reminiscence and imparted to his Texas friends, under cloak of secrecy, fragments of his illustrious past life, and conjectures as to what he might have been if his disreputable relative had had any sense of fair play.

It seemed, according to his own statements and calculations, that some of the most startling experiences of his varied career must have come to him at a tender age before he was invested with the dignity of knickerbockers. Another some — the last he disclosed—must have happened, by any species of reckoning, even before he learned to talk or walk.

Long Slim, as dusk approached, grew exultant. At intervals he would appear to be struck with a sudden idea, and would question Frenchy with great concern as to the most profitable and satisfactory manner of disposing of a trifling handful of money—"eight pun or such a marter." He expressed himself in doubt as to whether to buy shares in a public-house, or to purchase outright a merry-go-round at Weston-super-Mare, a watering place Yank had heard of on the Channel, or possibly to deposit it in part payment for a Welsh baronetcy.

At length, with some boisterousness, he let it be known that were he to come into possession of any tidy sum, if Frenchy were his son, he would lay out the money in paying a premium to the owners of a deep-water ship for taking the lad along as an apprentice, and teaching him the art of becoming a good sailorman. Waxing enthusiastic, he exclaimed:

"My son, if I still had a ship o' my own, an' hadn't of retired from salt water, I'd give ye a chance in half a moment, an' never ask any pay *nor yet* any questions. If, so be, lad, I run afoul of any o' the shipmasters I used to be comrades with, I'll put in a word for ye, my son, for to see wot can be done, as the man said."

When, soon afterward, he began to pat Frenchy on the shoulder in a fatherly way, the occupants of the bar-parlor who had overheard, eyed him approvingly, and the sentiment in the place regarding the kindly-disposed mariner was unanimous. Many questioned him, not without asking him to share a friendly glass, about his past voyages.

Frenchy, distrusting Long Slim's ability to invent stories that would be new to him, and disinclined to listen again to adventure which never had happened to anybody, and never could happen to anybody, joined a

group of landsmen on the other side of the room.

He got little amusement out of them at first, but listened patiently, and presently, learning that the town was somewhat upset over a series of grave robberies that had been committed recently in a near-by cemetery, he felt that his afternoon had not been wasted.

He asked some questions, and waited long enough after they had been asked to convince his companions that he was not particularly interested in the matter. Then he rose and stretched himself, yawning as if a good sleep seemed the most important thing in the world to him just then.

Aware that it was in his power to keep Long Slim at his heels until the twelve hours had passed, he sauntered toward the table where that worthy was occupied, and, putting on his hat, stated his intention of taking the air. Long Slim was at his heels in an instant.

Frenchy was moody, and said nothing while several hundred yards were traversed. As the pair neared a large open gate, he turned in and made in the direction of a thicket of small trees at one side. Moss and shrubbery were beneath the trees, which served as a protection of some sort for a number of gravestones.

The spot appeared decidedly tempting to Frenchy at the moment. Deigning no more explanation than a few broken words about needing a nap, he flung himself down on the moss. Almost directly he was curled up like a ball, with his head on his arm, snoring evenly and loudly.

Long Slim watched his shipmate narrowly for a while, until he became convinced that the sleep was deep and sound. His mind was filled with a great joy, because he felt that the money was safe for some little time in any event, and only a few hours more would have to pass before he could claim his wager.

He settled himself for a comfortable smoke, but found, to his chargrin, that his pipe was missing. Then he remembered clearly that he had left it behind on the table at the Queen's Hotel, when he had raced after Frenchy.

Another careful examination of his slumbering shipmate satisfied him. Licking his lips, which, yearning for tobacco, had become dry, he ran from the cemetery as fast as he could to the hotel. It cost him his last shilling to refresh the memory of the boy who had served them to such an extent that the latter could find the missing pipe.

Returning, Long Slim described a figure moving on all fours in the thicket in the dusk, and stopped short. Gradually he could distinguish the outline of Frenchy, who was busily engaged in smoothing the earth with his hands and patting it down firmly. For a few moments Long Slim was puzzled. Thoughtlessly, meaning to light his pipe in order to make his brain keener, he struck a match.

At the sound, the figure abandoned its work immediately, and curled up into a snoring ball. Long Slim smiled in his glee, and could hardly refrain from crying aloud with exultation. His almost inaudible return to the cemetery had, he perceived, completely discovered Frenchy's ruse to outwit him.

"Let him give us a hocus doss, or stand on his head for all I care," muttered the Dublin-Australian. "I savvy Mr. Frenchy's little game now, an' as for him, he can't say whoever it might of been as made the cracking noise wi' that 'ere match."

Long Slim, with many contortions, tiptoed back to the entrance of the cemetery. Then, singing aloud and scuffling his feet to disarm suspicion, he made his way in again to the thicket.

Frenchy lay motionless. Indeed, had it not been for certain sounds issuing from his mouth, his shipmate might have believed him dead, and would have been alarmed. Long Slim took up his position near by, and smoked contentedly for some time, until finally Frenchy sat bolt upright with a groan, and asked plaintively of the stars where he might be. When he espied Long Slim, calmly sitting by, his natural confusion and alarm at waking suddenly from a sound sleep were relieved.

Patiently Long Slim soothed him. All Frenchy's efforts to induce his benefactor to go back to the Queen's Hotel for a friendly glass were futile. Long Slim sat

stolidly and smoked. He did not appear so eager to dog Frenchy's steps as he had been in the early afternoon. With expressions of regret and complaints of unsociability the younger mariner walked out of the cemetery, and away.

After letting five minutes or so elapse, Long Slim shook himself and rose to his feet. Without much trouble he found the spot where the earth had been disturbed, and where a semblance of smoothing had been made. In groping around for a stick with which to loosen the ground his hand came in contact with a spade, the handle half buried in the underbrush.

Of this he made good use, and began an energetic attack on the patch of ground in question. He was so eager at his work as to be unmindful of the loud crackling made by his feet in the underbrush, and the regular thuds of the damp earth as he cast them aside by the spadeful.

When he had excavated about enough to create a pit nearly a foot in depth, he laid aside the spade, and went down on all fours in order to grope in the loose earth for the fifteen golden sovereigns he felt sure of finding there. He struck a match to help him, and, as he huddled himself together to shield the flame with his body, a smart thump between the shoulders lunged him head first into the pit.

In the darkness Long Slim, spitting the earth out of his mouth, cursed roundly, kicking with both legs and laying about him blindly with both arms.

It was a short piece of work for three men, one of whom carried a bull's-eye, to overpower him and slip handcuffs over his wrists.

"I'm 'arter my money," he began, letting up on his struggles.

"In course ye be, but it's no use, Jack, no use," interrupted one of his captors. "Better keep a close trap. Everythink ye say wull be used agin ye in court. As it is, ye're like to get a stiffish bit in stir (prison) for this rowdy-dow. This work's been going on a deal too long to satisfy the Lord Mayor. Come along of us, now, sharply!"

Before Long Slim could collect his confused wits, or furnish himself with any explanations of the proceedings, the party had passed out of the cemetery.

Outside a figure glided past them in the deepening dusk, and seemed about to enter the place they had left. One man jumped back, and halted the figure with a harsh challenge: "What d'ye want, there?"

"What do I want?" repeated the figure, approaching the group. "Why, I had it in mind to walk about the cemetery in search of the grave of my grandmother. I've been out of England for fifteen years, and was told about her death in Australia."

"It won't do!" broke in the man who had challenged him. "You will have to come to-morrow. Against rules to enter the cemetery after sundown. Lucky for you that you didn't come here fifteen minutes earlier, or you'd have fallen foul of this pretty fellow here. We've had a bit of a struggle with him. He's an ugly customer, and wouldn't be likely to stop short of murder. We've been hunting him about the town for several months, and to-night we nobbled him for fair in the act, with his spade beside him, and himself digging with his hands.

"It's likely to go hard with him, for the Marquis of Bute, who lives in Scotland the year round, has said he'll put a stop to this body-snatching here in Cardiff, for good and all, if he has to spend five and twenty thousand pound."

"Seems to me," said the stranger, ignoring the winks and grimaces which the captive was bestowing on him, "that I've seen that face before. Aye, the fellow used to work for me years ago in Melbourne, but I had to give him the sack on account of his habits.

"From his rig now I should take him to be a sailorman, if I didn't know he hasn't wits enough to fill even the meanest place aboard a ship. He probably came to the British Isles a stowaway, and the kind sailors gave him some clothes. I shall come around to court in the morning and see him, for if he's acquitted I can put him to work—good work for a strong fellow like that—a billet that doesn't require any headwork. I've just bought an interest in a merry-go-round at Weston-super-Mare, and we need strong oxen of his stripe to

help in putting up and taking down the tents."

As Long Slim sat in prison next morning, gloomily imagining that hanging, or even transportation, might be his fate if he were found guilty, a visitor was brought to his cell.

It was Yank. Long Slim related the events of the previous evening in detail, but carefully omitted mention of the real reason of his digging in the cemetery, explaining he had jarred his head against the bough of a tree and knocked the fire from his pipe. He said he feared the live coal might set afire the underbrush, which was dry and brittle, and he had been groping and scratching with his hand to locate the spark, with a view to stamping it out.

Yank professed the deepest sympathy, and declared his intention of going to the magistrate and telling him Long Slim had arrived in Cardiff only the day before. This idea whisked Long Slim's cares away. Absent-mindedly he began to finger Yank's hat, a brand new and gaudy one, and to voice his admiration.

"Odd thing," said Yank, "I liked the cut of it and bought it. But it won't stay on my head at all. Blew off in the street four times on my way from Tiger Bay here. Ten shillings I gave for it, but I can't change it as I forgot where I bought it—and well disapp'inted am I with the hull works."

Long Slim put the hat on his head, and, crossing the cell, leaned down to catch a glimpse of his reflection in the dipper of water that stood in the corner. Then he returned to the board, which served as a bed, and sat quietly and primly while he smoothed his rebellious red locks with his fingers—ready to be surveyed.

"It fits you all right, Slim," said Yank in admiration. "Man! I wish I could have your luck. But that's the way of things. You see if it hadn't been for that old grandfather of mine—

"Oh, well! Now, there's a good cady of yours on that nail. Nothing showy or swell, of course, but a good, quiet, sober, clean cut hat that won't go kiting across the street every time one of your stage-drivers makes a draught by trying to palaver with another one." He took down Long Slim's hat and tried it on.

"Man alive!" cried Long Slim. "If, so be, ye could see yourself. Ye look as snug an' trim as the head of a Bethel."

Yank hastily snatched off the hat, and glared at it critically.

"But not in the same way—not any way at all," urged Long Slim hurriedly. "That 'ere cady sets off your good looks an' your figger. If ye had a penny walkin' stick an' a gold toothpick, an' that 'ere cady, ye could make the millingtary stare a bit, my son, as the man said."

"How'll you swop, Slim?" interrupted Yank. "This nice ten bob lid without a single out, only one—the fit—will be a comfort to you here in this prison cell until we see about getting you out. Now I'm going to see the beak, and put in a word for you. It might be a help if I had a tidy hat like this when I saw him. Will you give me a shilling boot money, Slim, to get a tidy cane with?"

"I've only got fourpence, lad," said Long Slim sorrowfully. "Will ye take that?"

Yank took it reluctantly, and hurried away on his mission of friendship.

In the course of the morning Frenchy came to the cell. Long Slim for several minutes frowned at him and would not speak. Then he delivered a tirade of abuse for desertion and injury to his reputation "afore the 'tecs" on the previous evening. At length he paused for lack of breath, but no word came from Frenchy, who sat on the edge of the board and grinned amiably. The grin became, in time, contagious, and Long Slim's thunder-cloud features relaxed. Bursting into a roar of appreciative laughter, he exclaimed:

"Ye figgered as how ye was proper clever, Frenchy, my son, ye did. But didn't ye savvy how allus whilst ye was a tryin' to make a fool o' me afore them 'ere peelers, I knowed where the money was? I didn't say nothink, but I knowed—I knowed for fair."

"Did you, now, Slim?" asked Frenchy admiringly.

"That same I did, my son. An' if so

be I tell ye precise where ye hid it, it's allee same as if I'd of found it, ain't it?"

"Aye!"

"Lookee here, then, my son. Do you slip up to that 'ere cemetery smartly an' git out them fifteen quid buried in the thicket. I savvy where they 'm hid, so now they belong to me, accordin' to the articles—an' all them 'ere deceivin' tricks was no good. As quick as ever ye git 'em ye'd better buy this pore sailorman a good beefsteak an' summat o' porter. This ship's a oncommon hungry one."

At the mention of the word "cemetery" Frenchy curled himself up in a ball and began to snore loudly. It was so exactly a reproduction of his conduct on the previous evening that Long Slim experienced a strange bewilderment.

"Aye," said he, "ye needn't to go if ye ain't no stummick for the game. I'll take a *pasear* thataway myself soon's ever Yank comes an' gits me outen this 'ere chokie."

"*Yank* gets you out!" cried Frenchy, starting up, annoyed at the thought of credit which was his due being passed on to another. "Yank's got nothing to do with it. I've fixed it. I've seen the beak. You'll be out of chokie in half an hour."

"Thankee kindly, Frenchy," said Long Slim loftily. "I sent Yank abaht it an hour agone."

"I told Yank more than two hours ago that I'd done it," Frenchy exclaimed in his most superior manner. "However, if you want to owe it to Yank that you got out, why, all right. I'll take my fifteen quid and move on. And I'll lend you my fancy knee-board, with Calcutta pants strapped on, for holystoning, in the next ship."

He held out his hand. Long Slim, supposing he meant it for a farewell, ignored it scornfully. "*Your* fifteen quid?" he roared.

"Aye, my fifteen quid," said Frenchy with malicious triumph. "Look sharp, now, and hand 'em over."

Long Slim's bewilderment increased.

"Frenchy, lad, didn't ye hide it in that 'ere cemetery?" he stammered.

"Cemetery!" snorted his shipmate contemptuously. "Cemetery your grandmother! They're in your hat. In the tap-room of the Queen's Hotel, when we first went in, I changed the thick uns for a ten-pound note and a five-pound note, and tucked 'em both in the sweat-band of your hat, which I carried away from the bar-parlor with me by mistake. *And that's where the money is now.*"

"My—my what?"

"Your hat. Where is it?"

Long Slim cast a piteous glance at the memento Yank had left behind him, and Frenchy, following the glance, asked:

"Whose is that?"

"Mine. I shifted with Yank," sighed the tall mariner gloomily. "An' I give him fourpence to boot," came as a mournful afterthought. Then all the events in the Queen's Hotel passed clearly through his mind again.

"Shifted with Yank?" Frenchy sprang to the door of the cell and began to pound the bricks with the drinking dipper to call the turnkey to let him out.

"Where away, my son?" asked Long Slim.

"To find the lubber and get it back," screamed Frenchy, kicking the barred door with his heels.

"Aye, ye'll git it back—*with a hook*," said the prisoner ironically.

"Why not? He doesn't savvy."

"Oh, no, my son, 'e doesn't savvy. Not 'im! No, not at all! No fear! Not one tuppence! Listen, lad! Arter ye slides out into the tap-room he were able for to watch ye from his chair, an' I told him partic'lar for to keep a sharp eye onter ye through the door."

"I reckon he obeyed orders," said Frenchy slowly and thoughtfully. "What a pity it is that old miser grandfather of his croaked without telling the secret, and forced such a fine young man as that to go to pulley-hauling for a living.

"Now I understand," the young man went on, "why Charles Dibdin once wrote:

> "There's a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft,
> To watch for the life of Poor Jack."

"Aye, my son," responded the Dublin-

Australian, "ye've been had. An' had proper bad, as that lad Char-lus Dibbin said. But dang them 'ere holystones!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN TAFFY'S LAND.

JUSTICE is said to be blind, but her ministers observe many little formalities in doing her work. They make their little figurative bows and genuflections before her just as if she could see every little thing they did, and would hold them to account for the slightest slip of ceremonial.

Consequently, the day was well advanced before Long Slim was pushed into the street "without a stain on his character," and gruffly admonished by a flat-footed bluecoat to "mind what he was about in future and on no account to let it happen again"—an advice that was gratefully received and exchanged for firmly expressed intentions to be blameless henceforth.

Frenchy, hungry and disgusted, was waiting for his tall shipmate at the docks. "Well, you've arrived, have you?" he grunted as Long Slim came alongside.

"Aye, lad, wi'out a stain on my character," replied Long Slim, using the phrase with unction.

"Also without a penny in your pocket."

"Ain't ye got a brown, Frenchy?" asked Long Slim blankly.

For answer Frenchy turned his pockets inside out, showing their pitiable emptiness.

Long Slim collapsed rather than sat down, and stared out on the sparkling water, sprinkled, like everything else in Cardiff, with coal dust. He produced his pipe, and stuffed in the very small portion of tobacco that remained to him. He had two matches, one of which proved a failure, but with the second he set his pipe going; and then, he never knew just how the exchange was made, he found himself firmly grasping the bowl of Frenchy's empty pipe, while his shipmate smoked contentedly.

"Lookee here!" the tall mariner roared indignantly. "I ain't smoked since last night."

"Aye, and I've not eaten since before that," replied Frenchy calmly.

"Wotever be we a-goin' to do, my son?" asked Long Slim plaintively, after a pause.

Frenchy shrugged his shoulders.

"Frenchy, lad, would anyone as left Lunnon this mornin' have time to git here by now?"

Frenchy frowned at the irrelevancy of the question.

"It depends on what you call this morning. Leaving London at what time?"

"I dunno."

"Are you expecting a friend?"

Long Slim scrambled to his feet, with his face carefully turned away, and coughed.

"Hope the smoke doesn't trouble you, Slim," Frenchy said solicitously.

"Hope it chokes ye," said Long Slim venomously, as he started to walk away.

"Might one, without impertinence, ask where you are going?"

"I'm a-goin' to git some Tommy (food, rations)," bellowed Long Slim. When Frenchy was overly polite he didn't like him.

"In that case, I think I'll come too."

The two fell into step—at least, they traveled side by side, for nobody could keep step with Long Slim. To Frenchy's mystification they went to the railway station, where he was left alone for half an hour while Long Slim held a whispered conversation with a gentleman in a cap, who vented his spite against Fate by trying to break, smash, crush, or otherwise destroy boxes belonging to inoffensive railway passengers.

"Not any use waitin', Frenchy, lad. Come on!" said Long Slim, rejoining his shipmate, and leaving the spiteful gentleman in pursuit of his life work.

"What did you think of waiting for?"

They had gone the length of the street before Long Slim remarked with significance that Yank wasn't at the railway station, and in all probability, wouldn't *be* at the railway station.

Frenchy agreed with him, and asked again what he had thought of waiting for.

"Ain't I been a-tellin' ye?" growled the tall mariner with more heat than the occasion seemed to warrant.

Thereafter he maintained a sullen silence until they reached a grimy little shop festooned with human habiliments in various stages of decrepitude, and rearing over its dirty window a symbolic device revered by certain medieval dukes.

"Ye'd best go back to the docks an' wait for me, my son," advised Long Slim, looking at everything in the neighborhood except the shop.

"I think I'd rather wait at the station, Slim," said Frenchy innocently.

"Ye won't do that nohow!" Long Slim was visibly uneasy.

"I'm sure I'd better. Yank might be there, after all, you see."

"But I've been a-tellin' ye as how he won't."

"How do you know?"

"The man told me so, says I."

"How can he tell? Does he know Yank?"

"*He* know Yank? How the hell do I know?"

"Didn't you ask him?"

"Me!"

"What did you ask him, then?"

"I axed him — wot business is it of yourn?"

"Aye, and what did he say then?"

"You can go to the Devil, for all I care."

"Did you report him?"

"Wot!"

"I suppose you're too bashful. Well, never mind, Slim, I'll do it for you. You can catch me at the station. So-long."

Frenchy turned to go back the way he had come, but Long Slim ran after him and, clutching him by the arm, dragged him into the doorway of the grimy shop.

"My son," he said solemnly, "if ye're expectin' for to take any Tommy aboard this day, ye'll stand right in that 'ere spot an' nowheres else ontil ye see me come alongside agin."

Frenchy was glad to be alone, for the muscles of his face ached from the restraint he had been obliged to put upon them. They did as they pleased now, and his shoulders shook.

In an astonishingly short time Long Slim reappeared, heralded by a string of oaths that made Frenchy glance hastily up and down the street, fearing the presence of a constable.

Before he had time to say a word of remonstrance his shipmate had his arm in a preventer-brace grip, and was marching him along at the double quick. His questions were unanswered — apparently unheard—and the flow of profanity continued unchecked until another pawnshop was reached. Then he was propped up against the wall, threatened with cruel and unusual punishment, and left to himself.

Five minutes later, Long Slim came back with a set face, and a grimly-closed mouth. A sorrow too great for words seemed to have settled on him. He took Frenchy's hand within his, as if he had been a child, and went back to the first shop where he had been so enraged.

This time he seemed to have forgotten that Frenchy ought to have been left outside. At any rate, he still held his hand when they entered the abominable little hole. Within he held out a ring to the lost tribesman behind the counter. It was a ring with a gorgeous red stone.

The Jew took it, looked at it, looked at Long Slim, sniffed, looked at Frenchy, was about to say something, and looked at him again.

"Who eesh dat?" he demanded, pointing an accusing forefinger at Frenchy.

"Never ye mind who he is," returned Long Slim. "He's a henchman o' mine. Come on, now! Hand over them three bob, as that 'ere Char-lus Dibbin said!"

"T'ree bob!" exclaimed the Jew. "T'ree bob? Vat for?"

"For that 'ere ring. Bear a hand, now!"

"For dat! You t'ink I am crazee? Vat? I gif you eighdeen bence."

"Eighteen pence!" Long Slim was doing the screaming now. "Why, ye blue-fanged old he-shark, ye said three bob not five an' twenty minutes agone."

With characteristic shrewdness, this one of the Chosen People saw the amazement in Frenchy's face, and made up his mind to take advantage of it.

"Vere did your frient get it—dis ring?"

Frenchy, afraid of saying the wrong thing, looked enquiringly at Long Slim.

"Aha!" chuckled the Jew. "He eesh a

henchman of yours? Soh? And he not be avare vere you get it—dis ring? Mabbe you steal it. Shakey!" he called to his apprentice, "go for de boleece."

Long Slim, in alarm, took a step backward.

"Vill you dake eighdeen bence?" pursued the Jew.

The word "boleece" alone would have done it; an empty stomach alone would have done it; but the combination was irresistible—and Long Slim slouched out of the shop with Frenchy's fingers in one hand and eighteen pence in the other. He walked to the end of the street and then sat down and burst into tears.

"Where did you get it, Slim?" asked Frenchy, with pardonable curiosity.

"I paid four pun ten for it in Lunnon," the tall mariner sobbed in rage.

"Four pound ten?" Frenchy gasped. "What did you want of it?"

"Come on, now, an' git summat o' Tommy!" replied Long Slim fiercely.

Eighteen pence is not a large sum with which to buy food for two able seamen, but our friends were not particular in their tastes. Also there's a tidy little place at Bute Road and Custom-house Street, presided over by an ex-sergeant of infantry, who sports a peg leg, where pea soup is "tuppence the bowl—together with two *thick* slices of bread." In consequence they contrived to get a good meal, besides tobacco, together with many words about the advisability of "taking the Queen's shilling." *

Long Slim was satisfied with things as they were, as he usually was when not hungry. He wanted no more buried treasure—Queen's shillings, or sovereigns.

It was Frenchy who always remembered that a few hours hence they might be hungry again, and, as he did not suspect the Dublin-Australian of having more rings or gimcracks concealed about his person, he proceeded to investigate the possibilities of finding some work to do.

Long Slim declared somewhat gruffly that he had done "his turn" for the day, and declined to share in the search; but said he would stay where he was.

Frenchy affected not to mind, and went on his way seemingly quite content, but when he had turned a corner he changed his route and took up his position where he could see his shipmate rise cautiously from his seat on a coil of rope, and, after peering at every point of the compass for possible spies, hurry off in the direction of the railway station.

Frenchy nodded to himself as if the expected had happened, and made his way to a coasting schooner — an old-fashioned "taups'l Geordie"—which he had had in mind since morning. Coasting was not just what he wanted, but beggars never have been able to choose, and a short run to Ireland, or Spain, or Liverpool, or somewhere, in a weekly boat, was better than taking up quarters in a sailor boarding-house.

He had the sailorman's hatred of boarding-houses, but, more intelligent than most of the deepwater men, he tried to keep clear of them—which is not so impossible as they believe. For that very reason he had stowed the two bags in an out of the way corner, and slept at "the inn of the silver moon" † on the previous night.

The skipper of the schooner was not aboard, but the mate said they would be short two men, and the new hands must be aboard before dark, as she would cast off in the middle watch.

He was relieved to find that they would not be required to sign articles at the Board of Trade Office, since this schooner, the Alexander Dowie, was a weekly boat. It was already very near closing time at the office, and he knew that Long Slim was not to be found in the vicinity of the docks. It was a happy chance that had secured them food and a bunk for this night, but if it had been a tall-water ship they must have missed it by reason of Long Slim's disappearance.

What was the reason for the disappearance, anyhow, Frenchy asked himself as he stowed their dunnage in the cramped

* Enlisting in the British army.

† With only the sky for a roof.

fo'c's'le of the Dowie. Exasperated at the mystery which seemed to surround his shipmate, he decided to go to the railway station and investigate.

He found the spiteful gentleman enjoying himself. A train had evidently arrived only a few minutes before, and many boxes and bags had been deposited on the platform, among which he was spreading devastation. One trunk, plainly of American architecture, had been hoisted to his shoulder, and then allowed to drop to the ground. It had not burst open, to the intense annoyance of the spiteful gentleman, who gave it a vicious kick, and, picking it up, flung it on top of a cab.

The cabman, seriously alarmed for the property in his care, protested as cabmen have been known to do, receiving the retort discourteous from the spiteful gentleman, and an invitation to come down from there and have "every bone in his rotten carcass broken to smithereens."

Jehu, the son of Nimshi, cracked his whip in the spiteful gentleman's face, which was interpreted by the "gee-gee" as a signal for departure—a sort of Blue Peter—and acted upon. The result was a well-defined trail of luggage left behind for the hundred yards, or so, that he traversed before realizing his mistake.

When the cab had been brought back to its starting place, after being drawn over a bundle of rugs and a handbag, the spiteful gentleman was in very good humor. Without saying a single insulting word, he picked up the scattered articles and put them where, for the moment, they belonged.

Frenchy felt inclined to laugh at the incident, thinking the cab empty, and wasting no time on the absent, or at any rate invisible, owner of the property. But his mirth vanished when he saw the head of an irate female appear at the window.

Certain words were addressed to the spiteful gentleman, who was in view, and to the cabman who was not; and, though the words were unintelligible to the outsiders, it was perfectly apparent that they were uncomplimentary.

Frenchy was not familiar with Spanish, but he was able to recognize rage in any language; and discreetly moved away, in fear lest the gale might catch him unawares and set his sails aback. He tucked himself securely behind some piled-up luggage, and peeping between a Gladstone bag and a bundle of golf-clubs, saw a woman get out of the cab. Talking faster than she could move, she ran to the extreme edge of the platform and picked up a brown paper parcel, which all eyes but her own had overlooked.

Possessing herself of the parcel, which had burst open at one corner and unfeelingly disclosed a thing dear to feminine hearts, known as a "rat," she straightened up and found herself face to face with—Frenchy rubbed his eyes and looked again.

He was not dreaming as he had at first thought. He was standing on a railway-platform behind some piled-up luggage. He touched the Gladstone bag and the golf-clubs to make sure, then peeped again, and saw—his Dublin-Australian shipmate talking to a strange woman.

But was she strange? Had he never seen her before? It seemed to him for an instant as if he had. But where?

She had been speaking Spanish. He did not have the language, but could recognize it when he heard it. A Spanish of sorts is spoken in Buenos Aires.

Ah! Frenchy remembered the whole bag of tricks. This was the girl Long Slim had taken for a Paraguay Indian at the house in the calle Rivadavia.

But what was she doing in Cardiff, Wales? Answered in a very few words. She was, at that instant, slapping Long Slim's face.

That "pore sailorman" folded his long arms about his rebellious red hair to ward off the sharp little blows, leaving exposed only one tuft of his thatch. This the termagant seized and pulled enthusiastically, while her victim groaned, but there was a humility about that groan which puzzled Frenchy.

It wasn't a manly, angry groan. There was no indignant note in it. Instead, it seemed to say, "Please do it again. I deserve all this. I'm only surprised that you let me off so lightly."

And when she had got tired of pulling that red tuft, and started to go back to the

cab, he followed her in a supplicating attitude, as if beseeching her to begin all over again; but she was evidently done with him.

She was still talking, but this time it was in English she relieved her feelings. Such terms as "Peeg!" "Arneemarl!" "Descendant of yellow cheekens!" were thrown over shoulder; and still Long Slim seemed entreating her not to leave him.

Once she paused, and Frenchy thought his shipmate had won. But it was only for a minute, during which she drew something from inside the front of her dress, cast it in Long Slim's face, scurried back to the cab which was ready to start in good earnest this time, entered it, slammed the door, catching her skirt in it, and was driven away—talking volubly to some one beside her.

Long Slim picked up the something which had been cast in his face, and gazing at it, wagged his head sorrowfully from side to side. He drew out his red handkerchief and carefully untied a knot in one corner of it, put the something inside, and retied the knot. Then he stood staring into space, until the spiteful gentleman asked him if he thought he would know it next time he saw it.

The tall mariner ignored the question, called the questioner "twelve stone of undried blubber dressed up to look like a man," and took his way to the docks, seriously thinking of adopting the ex-sergeant's advice about taking the Queen's shilling.

Frenchy gave him a good start, and laid a course for the same latitudes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE SKIPPER'S BUSINESS.

FRENCHY and Long Slim were back in Cardiff after their run to St. Nazaire, France, in the Alexander Dowie. Both were glad to be back, or at least, to be out of a boat that, to their way of thinking, wasn't a boat at all. Both felt they had suffered a lapse of dignity by shipping in anything other than a tall-water ship.

A landsman, in his ignorance of the true poetry of the sea, believes that any one who makes his living on the sea is a sailorman; but he is advised, for his own good, not to voice that conviction to Johnny Haultight. If he does, he will have it pointed out to him with pitying scorn that a sailorman is a sailorman, but that the poor, miserable wretches who make contemptible runs to Ireland, France, or Spain in coasters are, in all probability, "fair-weather piano-movers," or "chimney-sweeps out of a job."

One degree worse than these are the unspeakable parodies who get their pay out of "tin tea-kettles"—even "flash mail-packets" and men-of-war are included in this invidious class. A tall-water man never knows them; never sees them. He hears of them occasionally, but if cruel Fate compels him to speak of them he passes them over as "brass-polishers," "soochi-moochi deck-hands," or "cattle-pushers."

As well imagine Robert Burns composing "Sweet Afton Water," or Thackeray describing the death of Colonel Newcome on a typewriter!

If the estimable, aforementioned Johnny Haultight's sense of humor more nearly approached his pride and his scorn for steam there'd be more canvas than ash-hoists and donkey-engines on the Western Ocean, the horse latitudes wouldn't be peopled by Scandihoovia and Scowegia, and there'd be less stock fish eaten on the high seas.

Watt and Fulton have a good deal to answer for!

Frenchy, a bit of a philosopher in his way, didn't feel the disgrace so keenly as Long Slim, but, nevertheless, the first thing he began to think of, after the Dowie picked up the Scilly Isles, on her run home, was a bunk in the fo'c's'le of a *real* ship; and he was now counting the hours before the sailing of the American clipper Cyrus Wakefield for Shanghai with a load of shiny black rocks from the Welsh collieries.

Aboard her, he and Long Slim, who'd signed articles in the Board of Trade office, would be doing men's work, and drawing man's pay of three pound ten a month. Furthermore, the Dublin-Australian would have as much holystoning to do as the decks might require.

Frenchy had hoped for great things when he landed at "Lim'us" Basin. He had seen himself, in his mind's eye, free from his bondage to Long Slim. Once the future had held many possibilities. But his hopes had melted into thin air and all he wanted was to be putting space between himself and the United Kingdom. To be sure, London was some distance from Cardiff, and there was no reason to think that the girl he had talked with in St. Paul's Cathedral would have any idea of looking for him in Wales—still, he felt he would be more at ease on blue water.

The mysterious incident of the railway-station remained unexplained, for Long Slim had never referred to it, and of course Frenchy had no intention of confessing himself a spy, and could ask no questions.

The Dublin-Australian had become subject to fits of deep abstraction; and, when he was not eating or sleeping, spent a good part of his time fingering with his hands a red handkerchief which had something knotted in one corner, since on getting ashore he had been back to the pawnbroker's and redeemed his pledge.

He had acquired a habit of eating Spanish onions, which rendered him offensive as a companion, and produced some bitter remarks from the hands in the Alexander Dowie. When Frenchy exercised his privilege as a friend, and pointed out that this unmistakable weakness on his shipmate's part was the cause of their unpopularity in the fo'c's'le of the coaster, Long Slim, with a superior smile, assured him that it was neither to be required nor desired that "crows wot perched on the bulwarks o' washtubs as was pushed inter a duck-pond of a mornin' an' fetched in outen the wet at sundown *could* like real sailormen."

Long Slim, in spite of his recent sorrow, was looking and feeling more cheerful since Frenchy had arranged for their going back to their proper business, and they were all set to unmoor from the British Isles in the windjammer Cyrus Wakefield that night.

"Frenchy, my son, it makes up partways for a fortnight in a coaster to sit here an' look up an' down the street again, don't it, as that 'ere Char-lus Dibbin said?" queried the tall mariner.

"Aye, that it does!" assented Frenchy heartily.

"My faith, lad, I got so sick o' the sight o' the watch that I'd be willin' for to sit here allus, just to be shut o' the faces of all aboard the Dowie," said Long Slim solemnly.

"You won't be clear of 'em if you sit here long," replied Frenchy. "This pub's in the main street of Cardiff, an' they'll all pass by sooner or later. Look there now!" He pointed to a figure that was approaching—a figure that a fortnight of close association had made familiar to the pair.

"That 'ere skipper!" cried Long Slim in awe-stricken tones. "Would ye ever 'a' thought it of 'im?"

Frenchy spread out his palms with the air of one who would say there is no judging of a skipper's shore conduct by his deportment at sea.

"He's been a decent skipper to us, Frenchy," went on the Dublin-Australian, determined to lay stress on whatever excuse there might be. "Let's turn our head away an' pretend not to see him."

If a man who, in spite of being so unfortunate as to be the skipper of a (sanguinary) coaster, could still be decent to his subordinates, was bent on so extraordinary performance as walking down the main street of the town with a good-looking young woman, at any rate the sailormen who had worked for him would have the decency to make him think it unknown to them.

They valiantly lowered their eyes, busily scraping their knives in perfectly new briar pipes, immovable statues save for their nimble fingers.

But an instant later a shower of liquid mud, flung upward from the street, spread itself over Long Slim's face. The next moment Frenchy's pipe was swished out of his hand by something that closely resembled a feather in everything except weight, and a musical, feminine voice cried out:

"Oh, you beauty! Captain, isn't he a beauty?"

The man addressed, in spite of sadly besmirched clothing, stoutly maintained that the frisking bundle of tan-colored fur

that was bouncing about his feet was a beauty, though Long Slim afterward offered to take oath that he heard him mumble something negative about a condemned spectacle, also about a mongrel of cloudy ancestry.

"He's just the kind of dog I've always wanted to own," the musical voice was heard to say as the skipper and his companion turned the corner. A sharp whistle recalled the cause of the trouble to his outraged and forsaken master.

If their ethics and consideration for the skipper's feelings had not induced them to keep their eyes glued to the street these tall-water men might have been interested in a little drama being enacted round the corner.

The good-looking young woman, as soon as she had hurried out of the main thoroughfare, stopped abruptly and faced her companion:

"Captain—"

"Whatever you're going to say, I won't listen to you unless you begin differently," the person addressed said firmly.

"Well, then, Harley," said the good-looking young woman, with a blush which made her more good-looking than ever.

"That's better."

"But I'm so proud of your being a captain that I like to use the word."

"All very well when there's anybody but me to hear it, but not when it's just ourselves. The handle may help to make your mother feel you're not throwing yourself away, but—"

"Now, now, don't think of mother. She'll come round in time."

The good-looking young woman was trying to reassure him, but a gloomy frown disfigured his handsome, sunburnt face. "There! We mustn't talk about *that*. It's about those two men I wanted to speak."

"Two men? What two men?"

"Sitting outside the public-house. Didn't you notice them?"

"I never notice anything but you when I'm with you, and I don't see how you could find it in your heart to notice any one else when you're with me—to say nothing of *two* men." The skipper was hurt and indignant.

"Don't you see, you goose—" The skipper's head went up angrily at this appellation, and she hastened to add, "You *dear* old goose, that since it was *two* men I noticed it's all right?"

"I didn't notice any men at all," he said stiffly.

"Well, peep around the corner, and have a look at them right away!"

"They're probably gone by now."

Since he would not move she edged close to the wall and satisfied herself that the objects of her interest were still where she had seen them.

"They haven't gone. Look at them!"

"Why should I peep around corners, and look at two men you take an interest in?" he asked sullenly.

"Have you got a knife?"

"Yes," he answered. "Why?"

"Give it to me!"

He handed her his knife, and she threw it from her. As it sailed out and landed in the middle of the street they'd just quit, she said:

"There! You won't have to peep around corners now."

With rather bad grace he went after his knife.

"Why!" he said. "They used to be two of my men. They were with me on my last trip to St. Nazaire. Deep-water men, I fancy."

"Really!" said the good-looking young woman eagerly.

"Now," he snapped, "perhaps you'll tell me what this is all about?"

"Of course, Harley, dear. Let's walk on. They'll be wondering at home where I am. You know I told you my friend, Ethel Waterford, is visiting me and—"

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," he interrupted tartly. "American heiress who'll be putting ideas into your head about looking for something better than the skipper of a coasting schooner for a husband."

The good-looking young woman laughed.

"If you only knew it, Harley, dear, she is the last person in the world to put such ideas into my head. I think she'd like to do far worse herself."

"What do you mean?"

"She hasn't said so, but I think she's

in love with one of those two men." She waved her hand over shoulder to indicate Frenchy and Long Slim, though as a matter of fact, she was pointing to a crowded ferry-boat coming up the Bristol Channel from Penzance. "If they're the men I think they are," she added.

"One of those two men? Why, they're common sailors."

"Maybe so and maybe no," said the good-looking young woman with an enigmatical smile. "One of them is her brother-in-law—at least, he's her sister's brother-in-law."

"Good Lord! Which one?"

"The tall one."

"It isn't possible her sister could have married the brother of that man. He's a fool—just a plain, common, every-day fool!"

"Mother says there's no accounting for tastes."

"And she's got me in mind when she says it," snapped the skipper.

"She wants to see those two men."

"Who does? Your mother?"

"Of course not. Ethel."

"You can tell her where they were when you get home."

"But they may not be there when I get home."

"Probably not. What can you do then?"

"I thought, perhaps, Harley, dear, you could find some way—"

"I? Some way of what? Do you think I'm going to have it on my conscience that I helped some girl make a fool of herself with a God-send-Sunday fellow like that?"

"You don't understand? There's no question of her making a fool of herself. Mind you, she hasn't said she cares anything about the other one. That's only my fancy. But the father of the tall one left her the money that ought to have gone to him, and she feels that it wasn't fair, and she wants to give it back—or part of it."

"She'd better keep it," growled the skipper. "Money would go through that idiot's fingers like water through a sieve."

"Oh, but you *are* a goose," cried the good-looking young woman, nearly crying with vexation. "Don't you see, Harley Hittinger, that if you manage properly you can prevent the money from slipping through his fingers?"

"I? Whatever do you mean? It's none of my business."

"Harley, you're as blind as an owl, and if you hadn't *me* to look after you I don't know where you'd end." She walked along stiffly, the very set of her shoulders proclaiming her indignation.

"I don't see at all what you mean, Miriam. I suppose I am blind and stupid. I wish you'd explain," said he, somewhat forgetting for the moment the coaster's usual code of omniscience.

Seeing him so humble, she relented.

"What you want to be is something better than the skipper of a coasting schooner, isn't it?" she asked.

"You know I want it more than anything in the world. I'd feel more worthy of you then."

"Very well, then! Here's just the chance for you. When this brother-in-law—or sort of brother-in-law—of Ethel's gets his money, your part is to get him to put it into a ship and make you master of it. You can teach him navigation, and in return for *that*, and your experience, he *might* give you an interest—a thirty-second or two—in it."

"Miriam!" he exclaimed, enraptured, completely forgetting his code. "However did you think of that?"

"I thought of it before Ethel had half finished her story, and that's why I've been looking for those two men ever since she told me. But I never saw them until today."

"Of course not, because they were with me," said he, getting back into his stride. "But, how did you know they were in Cardiff?"

"Ethel's maid saw one of them at the station when she arrived, and where one is the other is sure to be not far off."

"Now, what do you think I'd better do?"

"Find some pretext for sending them out to me with a message, and I'll arrange that Ethel Waterford shall see them. If they're really the men she's looking for—as

I'm sure from her description they are—I'll send you back a note; and you make friends with them. You must begin at once, and not wait until he has the money."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"Now you'd better be getting back. It won't do to lose sight of them."

"I wonder what I'd better send them with?" queried Harley Hittinger.

"Oh, anything you like. A letter, I suppose. Only don't let it be a long one. They may slip away while you're writing it." After her last explanatory sentence, with a wave of her hand, the good-looking young woman went on her way.

The skipper wanted to stand and watch her trim young figure until it was out of sight, but he felt his future was at stake, so, denying himself that pleasure, he turned about and retraced his steps.

He hesitated in front of a flower market, thinking of buying a bouquet, and of finding Frenchy and Long Slim; but in a trice he recollected that a deep-water man would probably drown himself in a drawbucket before he willingly would make himself ridiculous by walking through the streets with a bunch of flowers in his hand—and passed on.

That is, he tried to pass on, but the yellow dog with the long, bushy tail, which had been so approved by the good-looking young woman, appeared and signified its desire to engage the skipper in a game of tag. The beast was a beautiful creature and some day doubtless would develop into a sober, self-respecting, and master-loving dog. But just now it was simply an irresponsible mass of activity, caring for nothing but the joy of exercising its muscles.

Since its encounter with the good-looking young woman some one had attempted to deprive the dog of its liberty by tying it up, but the knot had proved unworthy, and the animal was jumping about with almost a fathom of cord trailing astern of it.

Captain Hittinger's acquaintances could have testified that he was an honest, upright man. Even the good-looking young woman's mother, bitterly as she resented his desire to become her son-in-law, was obliged to admit that he had always been considered respectable, and had thoroughly respectable parents. But the best of men and women have their moments of weakness—temptations strong enough to overthrow the training of a lifetime and the traditions of generations. Such a moment, such a temptation came to the skipper now.

He was in sore need of an excuse to send two men to Cowbridge Road. There was no time to write a letter. Here was a dog—a dog which seemed to be entreating the skipper to find some one who would love it and appreciate it. A good-looking young woman, who lived in a house in Cowbridge Road had seen and admired this very dog, had even gone so far as to say it was just the kind of dog she had always wanted to own. And not only was the dog there before him, but it carried, attached to its neck, the leash which formed the finishing and irresistible touch.

He put out his hand to pat the shaggy head. He said so afterward himself. Without knowing exactly how it happened, next instant he found himself at one end of the cord, and the dog at the other.

Nobody can truthfully affirm that there is anything inherently wicked in holding one end of a bit of cord. Even so, he was intending to let go of it. He remembered distinctly he was about to open his hand and let the cord drop, when, by chance, he raised his eyes and saw two men coming toward him—one tall and angular, with fiery-red hair; the other of more than average height, but looking almost short beside his companion.

Nobody could have expected Captain Hittinger to drop the cord then. He would have presented the appearance of guilt if he had done so.

Instead he assumed a magnificent air and explained to the gay animal that the proper place for a dog's feet was on the ground, and not on the shirt bosom of the skipper of a coaster.

The dog cocked its head on one side and grinned as if to say it understood a joke when it heard one, and it considered this one particularly good; but having exhausted the enjoyment of its friend's wit, it turned its attention to Long Slim's heels. It soon discovered that there was something about this individual that it liked—though

not his boots—and if it did not know exactly *what* that something was, it at least knew *where* it was.

Without any waste of time it raised itself on its hind legs and began to paw at the Dublin-Australian's shirt. It was rewarded by discovering a little nest of sweet cakes, which it swept to the ground and swallowed.

The skipper was politely distressed at the rudeness of the beast, but complimented both men on their ability to engage the affections of the dog, which was an unfailing sign of nobility of character and integrity of purpose.

It was no surprise to him, however, he said, to know that Frenchy and Long Slim were possessed of those attributes—that fact must have been apparent to any one who had had the good fortune to pass a fortnight in the same boat with them—even if that boat were only a coasting schooner, owned by a company of screws who wouldn't allow a skipper to do as much as he would like to do for his men.

Frenchy eyed the skipper in frank amazement, but Long Slim hardly heard him. The tall mariner had affairs of his own on hand. His attitude when the dog sniffed at his heels had been one of wild panic, but when he saw the beast had no intention of eating him he pretended that he had not been frightened at all. Craftily he converted his shrinkings into a series of capers, which he performed, keeping time with the dog, the while snapping his fingers boisterously and chirruping to indicate the bond of sympathy which existed.

"It's beautiful hereabouts," the skipper was saying, addressing himself perforce to Frenchy, and lurching occasionally as the cord—which he was till holding—received a more than ordinarily strong pull. "I suppose you haven't seen much of it?"

Frenchy contented himself with a shake of the head. The skipper was acting in so unskipperlike a manner that he shrank from saying "No, sir!" to him.

"Oh, but you should have a look at it. Look here! I've got to send this dog out to—to some one in Cowbridge Road. Couldn't you take him for me? You'd be doing me a favor; and you could see what a beautiful country this is. Here! I'll recite the directions for you, 'White house, green shutters, pretty garden, good hedge. About two miles out.'"

"Wot!" exclaimed Long Slim apprehensively.

"Right you are!" said Frenchy, taking the leash, and moving along.

"Lookee here, my son," muttered Long Slim, standing still.

The skipper was in a quandary. What if they wouldn't go, after all? He put his hand in his pocket, and then blushed furiously.

He had nearly made the mistake of offering money to this man who was to buy a ship and make him her master.

Long Slim didn't see the blush, and wouldn't have understood it if he had. He did see the hesitation, though, and to put an end to it he frankly stretched out his paw, received five shillings, and overtook Frenchy and the dog.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

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WIND SONG

IF all the world were a violin,
And the four winds were the strings,
With love for a bow I would make you know
What my heart sings.

The north would be loud, the east would be keen,
And the west like a passion driven;
But the sweet, warm south, like a kissing mouth,
Would carry you into heaven!

A. Hugh Fisher.

Getting a Girl in Brazil

by George M. A. Cain

ROVING at large somewhere on this Western Hemisphere—if they haven't yet been caught—are two claimants of American citizenship whom I hereby warn to give me wide and ample room. I am willing to admit that any man who goes into foreign lands with the large and wholesale ignorance I owned that night, is fair game for a certain amount of legitimate fun. I would forgive them for the drink they mixed with due respect to my total abstinence principles, insisting that it was as temperance a thirst-quencher as prohibition near-beer—and what it did to me. I'd forgive them for telling me the people up in this section were mostly cannibals under the feudal dominion of Portuguese and half-caste bandits—and the way that scared me.

But they told me I'd be rather over than under dressed in a suit of pajamas, and they queered me with the one and only girl I've ever wanted to marry, and fixed things for me to take my choice between letting her brothers shoot me in the back or making a couple of duels of it. I think I may some day forgive the other chap who said my freshman year Spanish would be Portuguese enough, if I talked it through my nose. Mine is a forgiving disposition. But those two fellows in Balgua are past it. Their idea of a joke would be giving a candy-box full of mice to their grandmother.

I needed cheering up that night in Balgua. I'll say they did a job of it. Balgua, let me explain, is a village of some four to six hundred population, up within a hundred miles of the limits of steamboat navigation on the Tapajos River. About thirty miles up a creek of a tributary, and twenty odd more inland, lies the cattle ranch my Uncle William started down here nearly forty years ago. It is my firm conviction that Providence made me for these Brazilian plains and fixed it all up to get me here; and those two emissaries of the evil one put the Indian sign on for me.

Of course I ought to have known a little of things myself. That was one respect in which Providence left an opening for the mischief. I was reared very carefully in the family of a minister in a well-to-do church. My education was of the broad type suited to fit me to follow my father's vocation. I was not quite religious enough for that.

Luck and a general decorated me with a medal near the end of the big scrap, and I came home some little hero. It landed me a very comfortable job, which went to pieces six months after I got it. My mother was just comfortably fixed with a pension the church gave her after my father's death. The church didn't pension me much.

And Uncle William wrote me—the truth. He said this is still a fairly wild country, with some mighty fine people in it. He has no children of his own; he is getting old. I could learn to run a ranch that was big enough for a small kingdom, be a regular prince for life, his heir to the whole shooting-match if I made good. Enclosed I could find a credit for the best there was in the way of passage. If I didn't want to come, I could take the money as a present.

I came, I saw—but things mixed up on the conquering stuff. I saw the wrong outfit. The steamboat was a day and a half behind its schedule; but had made up twelve hours at that. When I looked for Uncle William I saw only a note from him, saying he'd be back for me the next morning. So what I saw further was Balgua in the throes of the festivities of its patron saint—and those two Americans. They were stuck overnight in Balgua, too.

I told them all my prospects. I felt lonely enough to tell anybody anything. Since I wouldn't take beer, they mixed me up that temperance drink to refresh me for a *paseo* to look over the festive customs of the natives.

In the morning I knew they had lied about that drink. I was foolish enough to think that the other things they had told me where true. I was hot enough to find pajamas just one thickness too heavy for comfort. The front porch of the dirty little hotel had all the feeble breeze there was. My informants had told me pajamas were perfectly proper attire. I had seen natives wearing things that didn't look so very different from pajamas. So there I sat astride one of the infernally universal hammocks, regardless of the fact that the feast was still on and all the population passing up and down the plaza in front togged out in holiday attire.

Of course I felt a bit conscious of my undress. But nobody seemed to pay a lot of attention to me, and I was too sick in my head and too sore at heart over the prospects to care what any half civilized bandits might think of my clothes. My eyes hurt so badly I had them half closed most of the time, anyhow.

And then I saw her. I'll go right along with you and grant that one out of every two American girls can beat the best of a hundred girls from anywhere else on earth. But this girl—oh, well, I was clean gone on her the moment I saw her.

And she looked at me as if she felt some interest. I had a vague recollection of meeting some natives of the country the night before. That I had actually been drunk enough to see that girl and not remember her seemed improbable. But that I should miss a chance of advancing the acquaintance was impossible.

I forgot all about my dress or lack of it. I bounced right off that hammock. I stood and bowed as deeply and cavalierly as I could, with a sweep of the big sombrero hat I was holding in my hand that nearly trailed its crown in the dirt on the stone floor of that porch.

Just for a fraction of a second she looked glad to see me. Then that wonderful olive complexion of hers turned a deep red. She wheeled right around. I had thought she was alone. But she had just stepped ahead of the three she was with.

An old man and two young ones—they were all in rather everyday attire if you compared them with the crowd around. Right then, all circumstances considered, I thought they looked pretty dangerous, though I would have sized them up for aristocrats if I had taken time.

But I didn't take time. There was a door open right behind me, and I think I took that. I had realized the break I had made. I kept right on through the empty dining-room of the joint and upstairs to the place where I had slept last night.

That had settled pajamas for me. I started right in to clean up, get a quick shave, and dress myself like a human being. But I hadn't made a lather for my face before the fat old proprietor of the shack was after me.

Long since I had found out just what my high school Spanish was good for as a conversation medium with Portuguese-speaking people. I could catch about four words in a row, if they were spoken slowly enough. I was never sure I could make

anybody understand more than one word at a time. But I got what the hotel gentleman had to say to me—

"Three *caballeros* to see me!" That was the idea of it. And one of them had sent up a little note. It wasn't all the fault of my last night's mixed drink that my hands shook as I tried to read it.

II.

SPANISH isn't so bad for reading Portuguese. You can imagine my relief when I'd waded about half-way through this:

> MOST EXCELLENT SENHOR AND COUSIN:
> By lamental misfortune your illustrious Senhor Uncle is temporarily afflicted with a slight fever. It necessitates my assumption of the honor to conduct you to his residence. I await your commands. I have the further honor to be your Senhor Uncle's brother-in-law, and, with my sons, most humbly at your service.
>
> PAULO DE VICENTE MEDENAO.

Glad? Not so you could notice it. Of course I figured that these were not the three men from whom I had just hastily escaped. I had been hoping I'd have to stay in Balgua long enough to find that girl and apologize and get well-acquainted with her. Now—

I swallowed my disappointment and got myself dressed as quickly as I could. The old boss of the establishment was waiting to lead me to my friends. He took me and presented me like a duke, to—

The three men to whom that girl had turned back after my indecorous attempt to flirt with her, and to the girl herself.

I couldn't say that that made me any gladder. But I was all wrong again. The girl did not denounce me a single ounce. She made a pretty convent school curtsy, and got off one of the Portuguese equivalents for "Pleasetermeetcher" or "How do, Mr. Brown."

Of course she gave it away that things weren't just as they should be. But I was all wrong about that, too. My pajamas hadn't bothered her any. She'd spent her life in that nun's school, and didn't know a pajama from what might be American evening-dress. But she knew I had been mighty fresh to bow to her. Her brothers would have used their knives on me for it.

It just shows how we were really meant for each other; that, in spite of my offense, she didn't say a word to them about it at the time. And, though I doubt if she had got a bit of my explanation and apology, I know she'd made up her mind long before that day's canoeing was over, that nobody but ourselves would ever be the wiser about that break.

No, I'll never forget the rest of that day—or ever have one quite like it. Unless you've been the object of it, you couldn't guess what such people's hospitality is like. If I'd suggested to the three men that it would afford me pleasure to see them take the whole trip standing on their heads in the canoes, I guess they'd have gone that way.

Nothing they could give me to eat or drink was good enough for me, to hear them tell it. It was not possible to try their patience by any number of repetitions they had to make to get me to understand some question as to my wishes or comfort.

But the best of that came in connection with the two canoes. One, they seemed to think, was a little easier to sit in than the other. As their guest, I must ride in that one. Inez rode in it, too, as the lady of the party. We were the only passengers. Our three Indian paddlers were our sole chaperones. The three Mindanaos crowded into the other boat. Of course they kept us in sight. But—

Well, that didn't hinder me from holding Inez's cute little brown hand for the two last hours of the afternoon's voyage; or looking into the deep pools of ink that are her eyes; or laughing like kids on a holiday over our efforts to make each other understand all sorts of things that were clear beyond my Spanish or any other language we could try to talk. Just made for each other we were—we didn't need any language.

Some folks might think the course of true love would run smoother for not being able to talk much together. But ours would have run better, surely, if I could have understood her tongue when it was spoken by some of the rest. I wasn't

through with that pajama exhibition yet by a long shot. It was just hanging off long enough so I wouldn't know what it was all about when it did come.

We stopped at a deserted native village by the banks of the little river for the night. Only one shack—a long shed affair with one side wide open—was in any sort of condition. They partitioned off one end for me and shut off the other end for Inez with sheets of matting.

Much to my sorrow they were so convinced that I must be tired out with the terrible voyage, they insisted on my retiring immediately after their dinner. The young folks sat up and played some kind of game of cards, while the father dozed in his hammock—the ordinary Brazilians never sleep in anything else.

I was too happy to sleep right away. I could hear them talking in the middle of the shack. I lay awake listening to Inez. It was like music. Anyhow, that was the way I felt about it.

I heard one of the boys go out past my end of the place once—to settle something with the Indians, I think. I heard them arguing in one of the other shanties and him telling them to be quiet. He came back. I was just losing myself. I thought he made some remark that started a little mirthful talk; but went right on to sleep. They did most of their talking in whispers not to disturb me.

I didn't sleep long—not so long as I supposed at the time. I woke up with a start. Inez's voice was crying in terror—

"Nao—nao!"

There was some sort of crash. I had leaped to the floor. I thought, before I had time to move, that the girl was just having a nightmare. One of the brothers—Paulo, the elder, named for his father—was trying to quiet her. Then I heard the old man apparently demanding what the trouble was.

Both boys tried to talk at once. One of them stopped to let the other do it. The girl screamed again:

"They will kill him now—they will kill the American now!"

There wasn't any doubt that she meant me to hear it and understand it—she got it off too slowly for any other purpose. The boys angrily tried to silence her.

Everybody was in the argument that followed. I couldn't make anything out of it, unless it was that the two boys both wanted to do for me then and there, but the father counseled delay until to-morrow. The girl seemed to second that idea, and to be satisfied with it when the sons were prevailed on to wait.

Did you ever try to guess what was being said in some language of which you could get about one word in ten? Ever try it with the idea that the right guess might be a matter of life and death for you? That was what I was up against.

If something like that had started the moment we had met in the morning I would have figured that I was the object of quite just resentment at an insult not much less real because I had not intended it. Now, after a whole day's friendly treatment from every one I could not make head or tail of it.

I tried to put meanings into their tones—tried to recall the syllables of whole sentences and to repeat them slowly enough to get more sense out of them. Had this tone indicated that this was said—or that? Would he have said it just that way if he meant just what I guessed. Or—

In about two minutes of that I would have the whole business where I didn't know any more about the music than I did about the words. I was as apt to substitute my own inflections for my guesses as those actually used.

Of just three things I could be certain. They wanted to kill me—those two brothers of Inez's. They had been persuaded to wait until to-morrow for some reason. The father actually had no objection to doing the job then. The girl pretended to the same attitude.

Pretended? How did I know it was pretense?

I didn't know. I was just a lot more certain than I am of most of the things I do know. I wasn't so certain the next morning.

But why—why should any of them want

to kill me? I guess I asked that of myself a million times. I built up a hundred possible theories. Suddenly I recalled the words of my gay friends of last night as they cheerfully pulled my hopes away from me—

"The *rancheros?*—the big *jefes?*—gentlemen? Ba-a-ah! Whenever one of those fellows begins to act extra nice to you go bury your money and your watch, if you can. Otherwise just give it up to him peaceably. It's what he's after. Let him have it before he gets around behind you and sticks his knife in your back.

"The Indians up there aren't so subtle. They'll only shoot you with poisoned arrows out of a blow-pipe, then eat your meat. They'll do that from behind, too; but, at least, they'll spare you their pretended friendship."

"But my uncle—" I had started to protest. "He says—"

"Oh!" the warning voice broke in. "I've known men who fought everybody until they got the reputation of being too dangerous to monkey with, and then lived so peaceably with the damned bandits they got to thinking they were all right."

Suddenly I saw a great light. I just remembered that I had taken this bunch entirely on its own recommendation, without one single line or word of my uncle's to prove they were one of the things they said they were.

I had been so relieved to discover they were not after me to avenge the insult to the girl, I took everything else for granted. Anyhow, I would have walked right into the front door of Gehenna after that girl. I didn't pretend that I wouldn't.

Had her father and brothers figured that I would?

III.

ANYHOW, I wouldn't believe the girl had been a willing partner to any scheme to trap me. Since I had to make up my own facts with regard to what had started the fuss and to fill in blanks for the whole parley that had ensued, I got what seemed a pretty fair theory of things. I decided that the two young men must have had a bottle or two with that game of cards.

The booze had loosened their tongues after a while. Perhaps it had started by the girl's saying something nice about me. They had boasted what they would do to the nice young man from America. She had protested; they had gone quarrelsome about it. And I figured it would not be at all unlike a drunken young man to start to prove his point by doing then and there what he was being told he should never do.

Then Inez had screamed her warning for my benefit. And her father had insisted that they wait—probably there was some reason why this place was too risky for a murder. And they would lure me on up the creek to a less frequented spot and finish me. They probably thought my uncle's nephew had a lot more money than was left about me.

Of course, now that I knew, I would put up a fight. If possible, I'd get hold of the two pistols I had packed in a trunk. Or I'd manage to get one of the rifles Uncle William had bidden me bring with me. Anyhow, I'd had some boxing lessons. And boxing is one thing I knew they didn't go in for down there. I was a lot heavier built than any of them.

Why didn't I try to escape? Of course I couldn't lose my way, all of it downstream. But there were two good reasons, I thought. One was Inez. I made up my mind that I'd save her somehow from a family that might use her just once too often for luring victims to their robbers' lair. The other was more practical. I could smell the smoke of one of the brothers' cigarets all night as he sat up and watched.

Of course I was all wrong. I saw right off in the morning that the luring business was entirely over. Not one of the bunch would bother to speak to me. And the rescuing prospects didn't look promising. Inez didn't favor me with so much as a look.

The real trouble was those infernal pajamas and my brash attempt to make Inez's acquaintance without formal introduction. It had been Matteo, the younger brother, who had passed the front of my end of the porch. The moonlight had given him a pretty good look at my nightwear. My

pajama-shirt was one of those high-collared affairs. He thought it was something military.

"He walks a mere man; he sleeps a general," had been his amused comment.

"But," Inez had exclaimed, "he wears that in the daytime."

And, in two minutes, Paulo had got wise to the first sight she had caught of me. He had been about a little—had seen pajamas before, knew them for exactly the nighties they are. I had insulted his sister.

What had saved me had been the father's punctilious honor. He had promised to take me to my uncle. He insisted upon keeping that promise. They would just show me up on uncle's front lawn, shoot me there, and then give the abundantly satisfactory explanation to him.

I really would never have found out the difference if it hadn't been for the change from canoes to horses. Here was more phase of my blank unpreparedness for the life I was going in for. I guess I had expected I'd be taken over that last twenty miles in a limousine. I had a vague idea that I'd have to learn a lot more about riding than I know, to make a successful rancher. I rather figured on taking a nice, safe old horse to a lonely spot and practising an hour or so a day for a week or two.

And my longest ride thus far had been on the back of a riding academy nag for half an hour, during some three minutes of which the beast broke from a stately walk into a trot that nearly threw me.

I looked over the assortment of animals the Indians gathered in from somewhere near the spot where the canoes were finally hauled out. There were four or five donkeys—they strapped the baggage onto those. There were five horses with saddles. As they pranced around I concluded that they had just been captured from the wild state. The ones the Indians rode in bareback were the same, only more so. They kicked, ran, bucked. The Indians couldn't really guide them. One got thrown; another came in, clinging to his mount's neck.

I guess I looked as I felt. I caught a wink flashing from Matteo to Paulo. Paulo suddenly grinned. They began to talk in an undertone. They called one of the Indians to their side.

He unsaddled one of the five horses that was wearing some gear. He put the saddle onto a rangy-looking brute nobody had as yet mounted. And Paulo came smiling up to me with the first word he had given me that morning:

"Better—horse—for—you," he got off with great deliberation that I might thoroughly comprehend.

He didn't fool me a bit. I started to tell him where he might ride that horse himself. I stopped. Inez was looking at me—for the first time that day. I think she wanted me to show them something. I suddenly resolved to ride that horse or die in the attempt.

I didn't do either one. Twice I got my foot into the sirrup while they held the beast, and got it out again as he jumped away from me. The third time I put my foot in too far. I sat down with a jar that set the earth rocking for some moments.

When things steadied enough I got up again.

"I'll help you on," Matteo volunteered cheerfuly. Paulo helped Matteo; an Indian helped them both. Somehow I managed to sprawl into the saddle.

One of them gave my mount a sounding smack on the rump; it was Paulo who emitted a wild yell. I went straight up into the air. When I came down the horse was not under me. Things began to whirl darkly before my eyes.

I gave up the idea of riding. My last strength should vent my rage upon men who would deliberately torture me to death. I struck out at Matteo.

He wasn't where I thought he was. I toppled over again. I hadn't a punch left in me.

Beaten, licked, helpless, hopeless, ridiculous, I could have wept like a mad baby. I wished they would shoot me and be done with it.

Then I saw Inez looking at me again. I don't know how she looked—I was half blind by now. But I got the notion that she was amused. And that made me just one shade madder. Sillier, too, I think now.

I didn't love her then. But I was going to show her.

"Bring him back here," I snarled huskily. I said it in English. Then I repeated it in broken Spanish.

The boys started to get the horse. I heard Inez say something to her father. The old man was beside me in a moment.

"Perhaps you could ride this one," he said gently. I think he said that, anyhow. And he told them to help me on. I was too weak to resist.

It was his own horse—the gentlest of the outfit. Perhaps, with practise, I could learn to ride such a horse comfortably. I managed, as it was, to stay aboard him after they got me there.

But I wasn't long in wishing I had taken one more fall from the bucking beast they tried on me first. We had four hours of stiff, hard riding before us. And it would have been a crime to ride a horse no better broken than my own on the streets of a village. An hour had me sick as well as sore. The second hour was broken by a stop for some lunch. I swallowed three bites of food and a mouthful of the thick coffee. The third hour found me growing indifferent to pain, wondering how much longer it would last, yet hardly caring one way or the other. The fourth hour had me numb entirely.

If I had gained any favor with anybody by my gameness I had yet to learn of it. It was a sort of wholesale runaway that led me into the news that I was to have the blessed privilege of fighting for my life, instead of getting shot or stabbed from behind.

My horse didn't run away. I was a persistent laggard. A limb blew down from a tree behind those horses ahead of mine. Why Inez's horse was the other to remain in control I don't know. She had been leading the bunch. Perhaps she was far enough ahead to escape the original scare, and to get her mount from out of the way of the others.

Anyhow, I came up with her, halted at a fork in the trail. We could just hear the clatter of the hoofs and the cries of the Indians thudding over the plain. There are a good many trees in this section.

Inez did not speak to me for some moments. I had neither strength nor wish to speak to her. Then:

"We wait here," she pronounced slowly for me. "We go there," she added, pointing to the fork the runaways had not taken.

"Ah," I managed to grunt my comprehension of our failure to follow the others. All I cared was for the chance to sit still.

Suddenly I thought she was sobbing. I looked up at her. She was in tears.

"Oh, *senhor—eu—io sono—lastima—*" She tried to talk real Spanish. "I should not have told—I should not have told."

"Told what?" I asked when she had repeated it three or four times, and I had the idea.

And she told me enough of the way she had stumbled into giving me away the night before, so that I knew about what I have already related. I certainly felt better than I did before. I couldn't blame any one for resenting an insult to his sister.

"But," I asked with the feeling that her answer might make it decently easy to die, "you didn't think I meant an insult?"

"I don't now," she answered my second repetition of my query.

"Why—why don't you?" I urged as best I could in that infernal hodge-podge talk of mine.

Maybe I didn't get it. It certainly doesn't sound like logic. Yet—I liked it—

"Oh, I am so sorry for you now. To see you try again to ride that brute horse! My heart aches for it. You are too brave. Yes, I know now; you did not insult me. You could not.

"And they will not kill you now, like a dog. You shall fight. One duel—two duels—maybe, three. Oh, *Dios!* I don't want them to kill you; I don't want you to kill them."

And she started to weep some more. I had got off my horse. She seemed to me to be swaying from hers. I caught her, let her gently to the ground.

What could I say? Just nothing. I tried—I hadn't a word left in my Spanish vocabulary. And so—

I kissed her.

Comfort her? Well, it brought her out

of any weeps in a hurry. Her hand came across my cheek so quickly I staggered.

"*Bruto! Savage! Now they shall kill you!*" she was screaming at me.

"Great Heaven!" I cried in my futile English. "I didn't mean—"

Bang! And then *bang* again! They were coming back; they had seen what I had done. And the three of them were cracking their pistols at me at once.

"*Anda! Anda! Pronto!*" That little girl fairly threw me into my saddle. Then she gave the horse a crack that started a new runaway then and there. I couldn't look back. I heard the thud of hoofs so close behind I was sure it was her horse.

But if she intended to protect me she failed. Her going with me made her a partner in a crime that disgraced her beyond any worthiness to live. Bullets whined until all the pistols were empty.

I thought they would pause to reload. They didn't. Those two boys could ride a thunderbolt and play cards on its back. They loaded as they came. And they gained fast. A good horse under control is faster than any runaway of no better speed. And theirs were faster horses than their father's.

"They're gaining!" I guess she said that. It told me that she still lived. I couldn't know it otherwise.

The pistols started their cracking again. My hat jumped from my head. My sleeve gave a sharp jerk as a big sting shot up my elbow.

"Get ahead of me!" I urged, trying to pull my horse a little. I know she didn't get the words—I spoke them in English. But she somehow managed to get ahead within the next hundred yards. I had slacked a little. We were passing a long row of trees that formed a high hedge. I prayed that no low branch should catch her and drag her from her horse.

My stirrup was shot out from under my right foot. My horse caught a grazing shot that brought from him a squeal of pain and a renewal of effort. I thought I must pass her again. I saw that my protection was not saving her. There was a little stain of blood on her sleeve.

And then she swerved, wheeled half around with a single jerk of her reins. She blocked my horse's way completely. Up the beast jumped on his haunches. For one horrible moment I saw her head fairly beneath his pawing front heels. Then he turned.

And I saw that the hedge covered a fence. I shot through a gate. Straight ahead a wide door opened into the white face of a massive building. My horse stopped when he got inside and could go no farther.

Wheeling, he faced—and I faced—the rush of the girl's mount close behind. Dizzily, I watched her an instant. She sagged to one side of her saddle.

I tried to jump. I succeeded only in landing in a heap on the floor.

A big, bronze man, with his white beard trimmed to the extreme of native fashion dashed from somewhere in the darkness of the big room—it was really the carriage house of his stable.

"*Tio Guilhelmo!*" the girl cried weakly. And I realized that I had got to my uncle's home.

Outside the angry voices of Inez's brothers were calling for him. He went out—closing the big door behind him. I heard them talking fast and hotly and hard.

But I got to Inez's side. I began to chafe her wrists. Her wound was hardly worse than the scratch I had suffered. Her eyes opened just as Uncle William came back. And I saw my doom in his stern features.

"Is this true?" he demanded fiercely of me. "Did you show yourself before my niece—in your night-clothes?"

"I—I—they told me," I faltered, "that—"

"Then you did it," he snapped. I had failed to deny the accusation. "And you had the audacity to salute *her—to* insult *her! Dios!* And they let you live to get here! Well—get out again. Get out and let them shoot you. Go!"

He lifted me by my limp, tough collar of khaki. I had no strength, no will to resist. But he halted as he started to propel me toward the door.

"No—I don't like duels, but I'm damned if I'll put you out there unarmed. Here!" He thrust a big pistol into my fingers.

"But—but I don't want to kill them. Oh, God—no! Her brothers! No! Let them kill me if there's no other way out of it. I'll do anything—I'll die before I do that."

"Well," he snarled sternly, as if taking me up—as if trying to call my bluff, "will you marry her?"

"Marry her! Marry her!" I couldn't believe my ears.

"Yes—you kissed her and put your arms around her. Even your death won't wipe out her disgrace. If you should marry her—"

"Good Heaven!" I gasped. "Don't you see that's just what I want? But—will she marry me?"

Well, he didn't seem to think that a very important question. I had to get the answer to it for myself while he went out to tell her father and brothers how nobly I had solved the difficulty. They've fearful and wonderful customs down here. Perhaps they're all right, if you get used to them. Anyhow, I'm learning as fast as I can.

I had another lesson in about five minutes. I learned just whom you should kiss in getting engaged to a real lady of the Llanos.

It is the father and brothers and any other male relatives of your would-be bride.

And I lived through that lesson. I think I was made for this country.

Stay Home

Part V by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Regular People," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN SCORNED.

VIBRATING, very lovely indeed, Carmen stood before him—and the second or two of instinctive terror had passed, and James Berry grew warm with anger.

"Yes, I see that you have come!" he said briefly.

"You are glad?"

"I am not!" replied the chief.

"Jimmee!" the young woman said reproachfully, and she seemed to have adopted his first name for general use in the interval since their last meeting. "That is not nice! Or—oh, you fear for me?"

"I can't say that I do," James sighed. "How did you get here?"

"I rode! Who could stop me?"

"I had an idea they had a sentry out there when I came in and—"

"But who is he? To stop *me*! When my father—"

She halted. James opened his eyes wider.

"You don't mean to say your dear papa's connected with this gang?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 19.

"As you mean—no! That is of course absurd!" said the girl, with her quick laugh. "Still—this is not New York, Jimmee! This is not America. Here one has many enemies and the law—poof! Sometimes one uses people such as these. That cannot be helped in our country."

"Then do I take it that he hired 'em to kidnap me?" James pursued, interestedly.

"But, no. Or yet—perhaps!" Miss Huera said, lucidly. "See! I have heard a little talk, between my father and the Señor Dawson, you understand. And you have disappeared, and I knew all the rest and—"

"As to *why* I'm here, for example?"

"No, that I do not know, but this I do know," the girl hurried on. "You do not comprehend, but you are in greatest danger!"

"From what?"

"From El Pavor, Jimmee! You do not know; perhaps you laugh. But he is terrible—cold blooded, willing to murder for a dollar or two! A man without mercy or soul. When he returns—"

"You've never seen him?" asked James.

"No!" said Miss Huera, and crossed herself.

With entire enjoyment James shaded a yawn, and then jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"Look him over now, then," he said pleasantly. "The messy-looking one with his head between his knees. That's old El!"

Miss Huera looked—and shuddered—and looked back at James, with great, incredulous, flashing eyes.

"Who—has done this to *him?*" she gasped. "Not—not *you?*"

"Well, it always makes me feel sillier than sin to brag about anything, but I guess I did most of it," said James.

"But—but—" the girl stammered, and clasped her hands. "Oh, Jimmee! You are wonderful! You are wonderful!"

"Thanks," said the chief, and looked up to where an interested dozen were edging nearer; and then waved his hand and lifted his voice in: "Hey! Get back there! This is a private conversation!"

The little company retired.

"They obey you!" breathed Miss Huera.

"They have no choice about it; I'm the new boss here," James responded.

"You—you command them?"

"Customary, after you've beaten up the old boss, they tell me. Don't worry, though; I'm not going to continue the business at the old stand, if that's what you're thinking about. And now I think we'll drop the comic opera aspect of the thing, and get down to your case, Miss Huera. If this is a social call, I appreciate it a lot, but I don't think it's judicious. They must have some conventions down here, and all that sort of thing. Look over the camp, if you like, and then the thing you're going to do is: start right up that trail, go straight home and stay there!"

"You—do not want me?"

"I—er—wouldn't make it as strong as that, but you're going home, nevertheless."

With entire firmness and commendable calm, he faced Miss Huera. And the black eyes grew deeper and deeper, now flashing, now melting; and a tender hand was laid upon the new chief's arm.

"Jimmee, you of the north are so different—so brave—so calm. I do not know how to say it, but—all this, you do not realize what it means. It is to you a joke, I think. That I understand. But to this Pavor it is not a joke; he is beaten—not dead. That means everything among these people. He will recover, so soon, and kill you!"

"I doubt it," James smiled. "But that has nothing to do with—"

"But it is so! It is so!" the young woman cried, and shook his arm. "This—this joke, it will be so brief. And in this country you have other enemies. Your friend, your partner, he is false to you, I think. He talks much with my father, who says that you are in the way, Jimmee, and not willing to do as they wish—whatever that may be. And in your home this would be a matter of business — no? — and you would dissolve partnership, and each forever say unkind things of the other? But here all is more simple, more primitive! You must go quickly from Orinama!"

"Yes, I had every intention—"

"See! We will go at once—you and I. These men dare not touch me or you, if you go with me. And at Santa Maria the *padre* will marry us and—"

"*Wait!*" gasped James Berry. "Are you proposing to me?"

The lids dropped suddenly. Something like a twinge of the old conscience stabbed at James. But the lids opened again with the same old whisk, and he caught his breath.

"This I have never done before," the girl said softly. "But I would be of your country and you—you are wonderful, Jimmee!"

"Notwithstanding—"

"And I? Am I not beautiful?" the young woman asked breathlessly, and her bosom heaved quite emotionally. "Have I not great wealth of my own? Shall we not be—oh, so happy in your country? Have I come to save you, to—to humiliate myself—"

"It looks very much as if you had and I'm very sorry you've done it, and now the less said about it the soonest mended," interposed the junior partner. "You're a very charming young woman, and—and probably they do this kind of thing down here, and I suppose a lot of men would be tickled to death. But I'm not, and there's no use trying to decorate the fact with a lot of pretty words. I'm not; that's all. I'm engaged to a very lovely girl back home, and all I want is to get back and marry her. That's blunt and rude and ungallant and all the rest, I suppose, but it's the best I can do on short notice!"

Covertly, even the new James dabbed at his brow and waited. At this point the old James would have fainted. There would be an eruption, very likely. Lord! what a remarkable race of young women they bred in these parts, if this one was a sample of the élite. Or possibly his own charms, hitherto unsuspected, were quite overwhelming? James did not know, but he wished the eruption was over and done with.

Two minutes, and still it had shown no signs of beginning. Miss Huera, her bosom still heaving, studied the ground between them, saying absolutely nothing and tapping at the turf with a riding-crop which certainly hailed from Fifth Avenue. Then:

"It is well, *señor*. You have made me understand!" she said, very softly indeed.

"Well, the—the last thing I'd want to do is to hurt your feelings or your pride—"

"Let us say no more of this, *señor*," advised Miss Huera, and her voice grew even smaller.

"I'm satisfied, if you are," James sighed, and shrugged his shoulders in quite the approved local fashion.

"But let us remember that old thought—about the fury of hell!" pursued the girl, and this time he could no more than hear her.

"*What!*"

"And the woman scorned, you know!" Miss Huera concluded and suddenly faced him again.

The eyes had frozen! They were blacker than ever, and less fathomable, but they held several new qualities of which James could not have believed them capable—an icy fury being chief among them.

"I suppose that's a—er—a threat?" James sighed.

"It is what it is, *señor*." With that Miss Huera turned away and walked toward her grazing pony.

"I'll send a couple of these men down with you," James said uncomfortably.

"That is not necessary."

"It'll be dark long before you get home, you know."

"I thank you for the tender concern. If I chose, I shall sleep at the convent at Santa Maria."

"But—why—that'll get you home tomorrow. And your father—he doesn't know where you've gone?"

"I had expected to telegraph him from another country," the girl smiled, remarkably, at James, and, quite ignoring his proffered knee, swung into her saddle. "*Adios, señor*. Or better, *hasta la vista!*"

"Why—er— good-by, of course, if you won't let me send—"

That last blaze of the eyes cut him short! It was a brief blaze, too, and as it was turned from him Miss Huera's spurs went into the pony's flank and the startled little beast bounded forward—and felt the spurs

again and headed for the trail at a full gallop—and vanished abruptly into the thicket!

And there, it was safe to say, ended an experience unique in the annals of Orinaman bandit chiefs. James Berry stood quite still for a time, listening to the hoofs, as their echo died out in the forest, eventually to turn back to his clearing with a shrug.

Well, it would have been a rather embarrassing experience to a less hardened James; this one it worried very little. What was the idea of that last threat? Did it mean that the rest of her days would be consecrated to vengeance and—bah! It meant nothing. Miss Huera, who doubtless could find her away around this part of the country at any hour of the day or night, who seemed to be *persona grata* with the hill people, would jog along home, hand her pony over to a groom, have some sort of plausible tale ready for her papa, if he inquired of her wanderings—and then forget it and look around for another American citizen to vamp into taking her back to the only real country so far invented!

James yawned and wished he had not dined so recently. The gang were sitting in a circle, consuming their evening meal from aged tin plates, chattering like so many lively monkeys, laughing their very heads off.

Discipline or no discipline, he would have liked to join them.

As it was, there seemed really nothing to do but stray back to the old log hut and wait for time to pass—or possibly have a chat with El Pavor, who seemed to have no appetite. James paused beside the bowed figure.

"Feeling a little better?" he asked brightly.

The late chief glanced up, touched his lips, shook his head, glanced down again.

"Sorry to have to do it. Brought it on yourself, you know. Maybe if you put some cold water on that eye it'd feel better."

The late chief glanced up, touched his lips, shook his head, glanced down again. From the circle the boy detached himself and came forward, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.

"He not—spik English! Not—word!" he stated. "You say to me—I say to him—he say to me—I say to you, *jefe*. What—you wish?"

"Oh, that'd be too much like work," the new chief yawned, disgustedly. "I haven't anything to say to him, anyway. When 'll they be back?"

The boy bared his teeth in a smile and pointed aloft.

"*Con fortuna, jefe*—when the moon—she so!"

"All right. Nothing to do but wait, then," grunted James, as he wandered on toward the hut.

Night was coming swiftly, after the ridiculously inadequate twilight they affected in Orinama. The new chief strolled into his hut, found his matches, lighted the candle on the rude table and grunted again. Well, it was all very picturesque and crude, the couch especially. Nothing but complete weariness ever could have lured him within a yard of that couch; as it was, he twitched off the dubious blanket, considered the more dubious one beneath and finally, with a snarl, stretched himself out.

Presently, with a louder snarl, he arose and blew out the candle; and gigantic bugs whined and buzzed and crackled their disappointed way out to the firelight; and James stretched out once more. Except for an occasional hair-raising screech, the forest had gone to sleep. So, for that matter, had the band, if absence of sound meant anything. James rose wearily and inspected them from the doorway; yes, they were all strewed around and mainly snoring—all except El Pavor, who seemed inclined to sit on that one spot and think it over till the crack of doom. Even again James reclined.

Well, this thing of being a bandit chief was about the deadliest job the mind of man could conceive! This absolute quiet was just plain awful! Why, any little third-rate back street in Wallington was livelier at this time of night than the headquarters of the gang which had scared San Palo into hysterics. James rolled over on the uncomfortable couch and watched the moon

drearily as it climbed into view and up and up. If he had ever foreseen this utter monotony, Howard and revenge and all the rest of it could have gone to blazes and he—

"*Jefe!*" cried the boy's voice, from the doorway.

"Yes? Wh-what?" James said, starting up.

"So far away—I think I hear!"

"They're coming in?"

"I think!"

"Well, that's something like!" The chief arose and stretched. "Whereabouts?"

"You listen, *jefe!*"

James listened. One really never understood how much simple pleasure can be gained just from listening until one had put in an evening at the bandit business in the dull season. And the boy was imagining things—or no, he wasn't, either. Away off in the forest somebody had shouted faintly. Somebody else had answered; and by straining the ears to their very limit it was possible to fancy that one heard soft hoof-beats.

"Say, kid," said James, quite excitedly, "when this crowd goes out after anybody, they don't come back till they catch him?"

"You mean—without?"

"Exactly!"

"That — never, *jefe!*" the boy said serenely.

"I guess it's all right, then," James chuckled happily, as he stepped out. "That's a wonderful moon, isn't it? Darned near daylight now it's up. Hey! By the way! Where does El keep his spare clothes, young one? I want a nice noisy bandanna handkerchief."

He followed as the boy dived into the hut. He frowned as, quite ruthlessly, the boy dumped the contents of a small and ancient duffel-bag upon the floor. It was not just the collection to appeal to a fastidious person; but that yellowish-red affair would do. James knotted it about his head and grinned cheerily.

"Looks all right, eh?"

"This, *jefe*—was needed!" commented his young friend.

"Yes, it'll probably hold him," mused the chief, as he stepped out into the glorious night and sauntered across the clearing.

The hoof-beats were much nearer now; they seemed to be just coming over the ridge, in fact. Pure merriment claimed James Berry for a moment; it was not that he felt more kindly toward the partner who had come to hate him—but that face of Howard's, gazing on this make-up after his ride, was going to be worth seeing.

So James drew still closer to the mouth of the trail, and the hoofs drew still closer to James. And they stopped, and there was quite a gasping and muttering, which indicated that they were unloading a gagged Howard Dawson. James squared his shoulders and posed effectively, unsmilingly. In point of fact, before Howard left this encampment, James intended to do some rather mean things to him by way of squaring accounts; he had no idea at all of greeting him with a warm handshake.

The boy had darted ahead and into the thicket. Now the emotional child darted back again, his hands clasped raptly.

"Oh, *jefe!*" he cried. "So pale—so beautiful! As the moon—"

"Yes; wonderful night," James agreed. "They got him all right?"

"I—I spik not of the night!" the boy said blankly. "I spik—"

The thicket was parting. James's faithful retainers were forcing Howard through to judgment and—well, what the dickens was Howard wearing? James peered. Howard must have bought that white suit to-day; he'd never owned one before or—a sudden shrill, high scream split the night. The white figure struggled and broke from its captors, and stumbled toward James Berry; and James's voice, which had been tuned to a clear, derisive laugh of welcome, turned to a thick croak of:

"D-Dorothy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERIL FROM A NEW QUARTER.

ON stumbled little Mrs. Dawson, to an unsteady standstill within ten feet of James Berry.

"Take me back, I say!" she cried.

"Take me back! How dare you—" and her voice trailed off and, confronting James squarely in the brilliant moonlight, little Mrs. Dawson behaved much as one is supposed to behave when running unexpectedly into a disembodied spook; which is to say that she screamed faintly, and, trying to back off, seemed incapable of motion, and that her eyes almost protruded, and her slim hands came up and clutched her slightly disheveled head.

"Jimmy! It—it isn't—Jimmy?" she faltered.

"It's Jimmy, all right!" the new chief snapped. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Jim—Jimmy!" breathed Mrs. Dawson.

"Did you bring your husband with you?"

"N-no!"

"Well, I sent for your husband, not for you!" the junior partner cried savagely. "What's the matter with this gang? Hey, you!" He snapped his fingers at the boy.

"Ah, *jefe!*" the boy intoned. "To have —love of this—so *bella señora—*"

"Shut up!" roared James. "Who'd you tell 'em to bring me? Did you tell them to catch this woman?"

"No—no, *es la* Señora Dawson?" the boy gasped.

"Of course it is, but I don't want any *señoras,* you poor boob! I want this woman's husband—Dawson—Howard Dawson—man—*marido!*"

"But—*jefe!*" stammered the lad. "I have—not understand this! *La* Dawson—*si.* This is to be desired—the beautiful *señora,* of—which you have the great love, as it is said. Yes! As you say it—of the course! No *es?*"

"You bet your life, no *es!*" James snapped. "Kid, I was beginning to like you a whole lot, but if you're as dumb as all this we're not going to be friends much longer. I—want—Dawson—see?"

"El Señor Dawson, *jefe! Si!*"

"Yes!"

The boy all but prostrated himself.

"Sleep, *jefe!*" he said. "When you—awaken he—be here."

"Well, send down a fresh gang, kid—other men—men not tired out," James sighed. "Have you got it straight now?"

The boy just stifled a sob as he sped away, followed by the grim stare of the new James. Men roused and muttered; three or four of them, then, stretched and shuffled philosophically over to the clearing, and there was much low-toned cursing of probably inoffensive burros.

And Mrs. Dawson paused in the process of stroking her hair back bewilderedly, and forced a faint, thin voice:

"Jimmy, what are you talking about?"

"I'm giving orders!"

Little Mrs. Dawson's hands clasped and unclasped; she nodded, with a wild, dreamy little smile.

"Yes, but what—are you doing here? Howard said that you'd—started home!" she managed. "He said—oh, I don't know! I can't—think! And he went out, and the strange man came and said Howard was ill—somewhere! And I hurried to him and—they threw something over my head and put me in a car, Jimmy, and then—on a mule, I think, and—"

"I know; they did the same thing to me," James laughed shortly. "It was a mistake; that's all. I suppose accidents happen in this business, same as any other. I didn't want you here, believe me."

"What's that on your head, Jimmy?"

"Eh? Handkerchief, Dot. We chiefs all wear 'em; makes us look a little tougher than otherwise, I guess, and—"

"Jimmy, what do you mean? What is it you're saying?" Mrs. Dawson cried in a distinctly hysterical gasp. "You're not a —a chief of anything! What is that pistol for in your belt—and the knife? What is this—place?"

There was obviously forced patience in James's smile.

"Dorothy, don't get excited over it," he advised. "It may be a little hard to grasp, but this is a bandit's camp, and I had a little argument with the leader, and came out on top, and they've elected me in his place. See?"

"No, I don't see! I—you've gone mad!"

"That's quite possible, but I don't feel any symptoms of it myself. In fact, I don't know that I ever felt— Well, what do *you* want now?"

"*Jefe*, it is not well," the boy reported softly. "Note, *jefe!* Pontida and Rocco and Mastina, the Snake. All—spik with El Pavor! It is not well!"

His newest guest quite forgotten for the moment, James turned and scowled down the moonlit stretch. He grunted, too. There seemed to be something in what the youth was trying to impart. Down there, grouped around the retired terror as he sat upon his pet and particular spot, three of the band were squatting and chattering feverishly. James Berry beckoned his interpreter and strode in their direction; and the trio glanced up and fell silent, while El Pavor continued his eternal study of the ground.

"Tell 'em the meeting's broken up!" James directed. "Tell 'em to keep away from this bird in future, too!"

The boy spoke swiftly and with apparent satisfaction. El Pavor muttered. The trio sat quite still.

"What is it? Little insubordination?" the new chief snapped.

"I think, *jefe*—so much they love El Pavor—"

"You there!" broke out the new chief, and rapped the nearest member smartly upon the skull with his knuckles. "Beat it!"

The person rose quite as a steel spring might have uncoiled, and crouched and slapped a hand to the hilt of the knife in his wide belt and snarled—and the James Berry fist came up beneath his chin, and he grunted sickeningly, whirled over in the air, and rolled and lay still. And James spun about and swung savagely at the second gentleman, who leaped backward, hesitated one small instant and walked swiftly away. The third whined oddly and smiled ingratiatingly upward at James, as he rose cautiously and backed quickly. El Pavor moaned softly and clasped his hands.

"That the end of it, kid?" James inquired with a puzzled frown.

"This—who can say?" the youth muttered with a rather worried smile. "The most—they follow you, *jefe*. These older men—"

"You go tell 'em that the next man I catch talking to your blasted old El Pavor's going to be shot dead! Got it? All right! Tell every man in the camp, kid!"

He strode back to Dorothy. That charming young woman shrank from him.

"Don't—come near me!" she gasped. "I'm afraid of you!"

"Dot, is that the truth?" James asked quickly.

"Yes."

"Well, that's fine! That's what I call getting somewhere!" the remarkable junior partner murmured and drew a long, happy breath.

"Because you're—you're not yourself! You were never like this. You—oh, let me go, Jimmy! Please let me go! I want to go back to Howard! I—I—"

Merciful tears came to her, torrential tears with great sobs that shook her slender body. Mrs. Dawson sank to her knees on the soft turf, covered her eyes and rocked and wept; and James Berry merely waited until the first violence of the storm had subsided, then sat down beside her.

"Dot, you might as well get a grip on yourself," he said quietly. "It is all just a shade unusual, but your dear husband evidently didn't feel that it would hurt me, so very likely he'd feel the same way about you."

"W-what?"

"Yes. Howard had me brought up here, my child, and I'm not quite clear yet as to whether he meant to have me slaughtered or not. Anyhow, that doesn't matter. He will be here presently and—h-m!"

"If he—if he really is—is brought here, what—"

"Am I going to do with him?" James smiled pensively. "I haven't decided that yet, Dot. Something that 'll make him remember that I'm a human being and have to be treated accordingly—you can gamble on that. He always seemed quite fond of me before this South American bug hit him; I had sort of a notion I'd toast the soles of his feet on some hot stones till his heart changed back again or—well, good Lord! what are you howling about now? That's nothing to what he tried to hand me, is it?"

The weeping continued. James shrugged his shoulders and grinned to himself.

Doubtless it did sound a trifle blood-curdling to her; it would have sounded that way to James in the old era, before events and meditation had proven to him just what a mild nature can earn one.

She would probably weep all night. What if she did? The gang didn't seem to mind, and there was nobody else. The gang, in fact, slumbered sweetly, for the most part. James himself yawned and contemplated El Pavor, who gazed upon the moonlit turf. A little later, possibly, he'd take a chance on a nap himself.

First he would put Dorothy in the hut and— Well, what was the Paul Revere effect? James pricked up his ears and gazed in that direction; the boy, who had been reclining at a distance, popped to his feet and then strolled away toward the trail.

It couldn't well be Howard Dawson. It sounded more like just one horse. Then could it be the damsel he had scorned? James also rose suddenly and walked after the boy, some time since vanished in the thicket—and all but collided with the latter as he raced out, wild-eyed!

"*Jefe!*" he gasped. "It is *policia! Soldados de caballo!*"

"Troopers?"

"*Guido*—he who watched, *jefe!* A friend has come to him—with news! They approach—they seek us! They cannot find —trail! This, *jefe,* is—great danger, for it is promise—every man shall hang when caught!"

"I—er—see," muttered James somewhat thickly.

Some few seconds a series of most familiar chills traveled over James's anatomy. Plainly, he had not considered all the angles of the bandit business, even as a temporary occupation or a diversion or a means of dealing with Howard Dawson. Plainly— He stared at the hunched figure of El Pavor. Well—he had taken a chance on El Pavor, who had terrorized the whole community!

"Get the gang together!" he ordered.

"*Jefe!*" cried the boy. "We do not flee?"

"Kid, we never flee. Tell 'em to get out their horses and so on, and oil up the guns, and we'll settle this affair and then try to get some sleep."

"Jimmy, what are you going to do?" Dorothy cried through her tears.

"Just drive off some local cops, I guess," James said gently. "You'll have to stay in the hut. There's a big bar on the door, and old El Pavor isn't more than able to walk. Everybody else 'll be with me. You'll be safe."

He would have strode away, but that little Mrs. Dawson clasped his knees!

"Jimmy, don't do it! I don't know what's come over you, but please be sane now—please don't try to do anything like that! Jimmy! If the police really are coming, they'll rescue us! They'll take us back to San Palo, and we're Americans, Jimmy, and—"

"Say, Dot," James said patiently, "I do wish you'd get into that hut and see if you can fix the bar before we start. I'd like to feel that you were all right, you know."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN DAWSON CAME.

PAST three o'clock some one knocked on the door of the log hut. From within came a sudden sharp scream: "You can't come in here! You sha'n't come in!"

On the rough step James Berry scowled once more in the direction of El Pavor. Sentenced for life, as it seemed, to that one spot, he showed no signs of having budged.

"Has he been bothering you?" James inquired.

"Is that—Jimmy?"

"Yes. Has that son of a gun—"

"No, he—he hasn't! But I've been so afraid—" came past the scraping of the heavy bar. "Oh, Jimmy, you're back! I'm so glad to see you back!" cried Mrs. Dawson as she opened the door.

James smiled meditatively.

"I suppose that's the first time you've been genuinely glad to see me in quite a while?" he remarked.

"Yes. Or—no. I don't know. Were you hurt?"

"Hurt? Naw!" James spoke quite dis-

gustedly. "Didn't amount to anything at all, Dot. I have a sneaking suspicion things rarely do if you just gallop up to 'em. Nope. We found this dozen of mounted cops, or whatever they are, four or five miles out, hunting for the trail in here. Fired a couple of shots over their heads, and they ran like mad. Absolutely nothing to it!"

He seated himself on the steps with a weary little grunt. Little Mrs. Dawson, a strange figure, with much straggling light hair lending a weird effect to her queer, pleading smile, huddled nearer to him.

"I'm so glad they—didn't kill you!" she choked. "Listen, Jimmy. Jimmy, please listen!"

"All right. I'm listening. What is it, Dot?"

"I've been thinking here. It's all so queer—so awfully queer, everything. I think it's the terrible heat down here or the air—something. Howard hasn't—been himself, either. You know that, Jimmy. And this—this about you being a—a bandit chief!" gulped Mrs. Dawson, and a wild, tremulous little laugh came from her lips. "Jimmy, just—just sit still now and try to think of all—all the old things. That 'll help. Oh, I know it will help, Jimmy. Think about the factory; don't you remember the factory? And think about the little Rialto Theater, where we've seen all the pictures? You remember the Rialto, and how we always had to argue with Howard because he wanted to sit off on the side and—"

"Say, what's the idea of it, Dot?" James demanded irritably. "What do you think's the matter with me? D'ye think I've gone crazy?"

"Yes, Jimmy!"

"Well, I haven't. I've just changed!" snapped the chief of the bandit band.

He laughed angrily, and Mrs. Dawson, with a final gulp, shrank away from him.

"Yes, you've—you've changed!" she breathed.

"I'll tell the whole world I have! Dorothy, I've got to stretch out here and get a nap. Will you stay awake and shake me up if anything happens?"

"Yes, Jimmy," Mrs. Dawson whispered.

"Sure you won't go to sleep?"

Mrs. Dawson's wild laugh came again.

"Do you think I'm made of stone, to be able to *sleep* when—when—"

"Well, if you can't, I can, Dottie!" and James reclined.

The broiling sunshine roused him eventually. He sat up, rather stiff and much refreshed, and for a second or two winked quite amazedly at the surroundings. The fact was that, having dreamed that he sat in the Rialto Theater, holding the tender hand of Betty Carson, there was something momentarily startling about the dozen or more figures loitering about and the old cook-stove and the pots—ah, yes, and El Pavor, who had rolled over on his spot and, apparently, still slumbered.

James squinted into the shadows of the hut. Mrs. Dawson still sat there, hands clasped, eyes rather glassy, hair straggling, beautiful, but very white and haggard.

"Ah!" said James. "Good morning!"

"Good morning—Jimmy!"

"Had quite a sleep!" James yawned.

"I know that. I've been—watching you!"

"Nothing happened?"

"Nothing!" Mrs. Dawson shuddered and ran a distressed hand through her hair. "It was so still, so—oh, it was beastly of you, to snore like that while I sat and trembled and—"

"Just one second, Dot," James interrupted firmly. "I don't want to be impolite to a lady, but I made a new rule yesterday: I'm not taking any abuse from any one hereafter, and that includes both sexes. I beg your pardon for calling your attention to it, but that's the rule—Howard in yet?"

"No!" Mrs. Dawson replied thinly.

"He ought to be here pretty soon," observed James. "I'll send the kid over with something to eat, Dot."

He walked briskly to the little brook and thrust his still sleepy head beneath its cool surface. He came up spluttering and revived, found handkerchief and pocket-comb, and a pool to serve for a mirror and completed his toilet. He moved on to the culinary department, pausing only to inspect El Pavor—who opened one eye and

gazed upward with surpassing malevolence for an instant and closed the eye again.

They had stew for breakfast—stew and something dark to drink which must have been intended for coffee, but which was uncanny stuff to find in a coffee country. They seemed to run a good deal to stew in this camp. James finished breakfast without great relish. If he intended to remain here, the cook would have to be jazzed up considerably—only he didn't intend to remain. Wh , then, did he intend to do?

James s led. His head was pleasantly clear this morning, and the stimulus of his altered being was just as strong as ever.

First, he'd get Howard, the little troublemaker, into camp. Then he'd leave Howard in custody of the band, with instructions to keep him tied for at least one week. Then he would go home and marry Betty Carson out of hand! Absurdly simple when one looked at it that way—and anything that got into James Berry's path during the execution of the program was due to find itself seriously injured!

And there, at last, was the Howard Dawson expedition!

James bounced up at the first shout in the distance and advanced, quite as he had advanced before. Only there was no doubt about it this time; judging from the commotion of hoofs and voices, they were bringing Howard in with a rush. A burro slid into sight with its rider still in the saddle; and the rider dropped off in a state of the most obvious and uncalled for excitement, and instantly directed at the nearest member of the band a tornado of native words. Whereat the member started and darted forward, exclaiming, and other members came running.

Really, that was no way to act. The band had been positively insouciant when they brought in James. Or perchance Howard had been kicking up a rumpus all along the route? That would have been like Howard. Well, the shock Howard was about to receive in the sight of his old friend with kerchief and pistol and dagger would hold him for a little while! James strolled on — and Howard Dawson appeared, abruptly and afoot.

He was offering no resistance to the disturbed-looking bandit who hurried along at his side. He was looking around with a black scowl. James patted his dagger into a little more conspicuous position and folded his arms.

"Welcome!" he cried.

Howard stopped with a jerk.

"Ha! You, Berry!" he cried. "Is my wife here?"

"What? Yes, of course. But—"

"Damn your welcome!" Howard Dawson shouted. "Where's Dorothy?"

He looked around. He spied the log hut, and a flash of white just leaving the doorway. He started toward it, and James caught him quite roughly and whirled him around.

"None of that, Dawson!" he barked. "You'll have to learn manners now. I'm chief of this band."

"Yes, I heard all about your being chief!" Mr. Dawson said astonishingly and without so much as one small start. "You know what's coming your way, don't you?"

"Eh?"

"Well, they've ordered out the whole blamed regular army to get you and your band, and when they do get you they're going to line you up against a wall and blow you to smithereens!" cried the newest captive. "Lemme go!"

CHAPTER XX.

A CHANCE TO CHOOSE.

HE went.

Momentarily, James's iron hand had turned limp. Mr. Dawson was free and speeding across the clearing, and Dorothy was speeding toward him; and they met just on Dorothy's side of the brook and there was a little scream from Dorothy, and then she was in Howard's arms, and—still James stared.

This meeting of the partners should have been dramatic and should have staggered Howard Dawson completely. It had done nothing at all like that. Nay, it had done almost anything but stagger Howard; and abruptly James's cheek turned to an angry red and he strode after his partner.

They were fairly cackling at one an-

other, Howard and his bride, in the joy of their reunion. James sought to cut the process short with a strictly banditlike bark of:

"Dawson!"

"And when I knew that you'd really disappeared, sweetheart, I combed the whole neighborhood for you—Huera lent me his secretary and a couple of servants and they knew where to ask and what to ask, I suppose. They said you'd been taken away in a car—they found somebody who had seen it happen and—" Howard was rushing on.

"Dawson!" cried James.

"Dearest, they said you were ill. That was why I left the house and the—the man looked so honest and so worried. And they threw something over my head—" Dorothy contributed.

"Yes, they did that same little thing to me, but they rapped me on it first for good measure!" Howard babbled. "Lord, what a whack that was! Thought for a while they'd fractured my skull, Dot. And then—"

"*Dawson!*" roared James Berry. "D'ye think I'm going to stand here all day and yell at you?"

Slowly the senior partner released his bride and considered James; and it struck James suddenly that Howard, too, had changed since their last meeting. His plain weariness and generally unkempt appearance had something to do with it, but there was a more subtle difference, too. Across that breakfast-table, following the amazing duel, Howard had glared at his old friend with all the hate of a soul on fire. Well, he was not glaring now. And his features had been contorted—and they were not contorted now. Howard Dawson endeavored to scowl and ended with the most peculiar, shaky little smile, which astounded his captor if it did not quite disarm him.

"What seems to be troubling you, chief?" asked the prisoner.

"I want to know how you found out about—about me?"

"You can't guess."

"None of the men that I sent after you know any English."

"Possibly not, James, but there is a lady who knows a lot more of it than any other lady I've heard about recently. You turned her down cold yesterday afternoon, I think."

"D'ye mean that that Huera girl—" James began.

"Let your whole band stand around and listen, do you?" Howard asked.

James whirled about. They did seem to be gathering. They were chattering among themselves in a rather surprising fashion; it appeared that they had something to say to their new chief, but the chief waved them off impatiently and the band retired, chattering still. Over on his favorite spot El Pavor hunched down and conferred with the rasping person and another. James headed toward the hut.

"Come in here!" he said shortly as he led the way.

They were half a dozen paces behind when he entered. He waited impatiently until Howard and his bride had entered, and then jerking a thumb toward the couch, himself sat down in the one rude chair and faced them. Howard leaned back and smiled in a strange, weak way.

"Jimmy, you've gathered a lot of ginger since the last time we met, haven't you?" he muttered.

"Probably. Tell me about—"

"I'm going to tell you about a lot of things!" Howard interrupted. "What's going to happen after that, Heaven itself only knows—but it 'll be bad, I can tell you that much now. And before I start, Jimmy, in case of accidents later, I may as well own right up. I guess you were right and I was wrong. This is no game for a Wallington business man to buck!"

James frowned wonderingly at the monotone.

"Say, Howard, I got you here—"

"Never mind why you got me here; I can guess most of it. Partly revenge? I thought as much. I don't blame you, Jim!" Mr. Dawson caressed his doubtless aching forehead with one hand and nodded, smiling ever so oddly at his associate. "It doesn't matter now, anyhow. We're in for it! In fact, so long as Dot's here I'd rather be here than elsewhere; have a chance to look at some scenery and get a

breath of air before the rest of it happens. Say, who'd ever think there could be such a difference in people, just coming a couple of thousand miles south?"

"What—what's all this about?" James queried.

"Eh? Sure enough; where was I? Oh, about your little vamp friend—yes. She came into town about half past eight last night, Jim. Horse nearly dropped dead when she got there. She was loaded for bear, and her sweet papa was all ready to help her pull the trigger. She said you'd insulted her in about every way known to man. It took 'em about ten minutes to start the whole State police force, or whatever it is, up in this direction!"

"I know. I drove 'em off," James muttered.

"So I gathered," Howard replied, rather listlessly. "They had orders to shoot you on sight, I think. I never saw a woman go on like that before, Jim! I never heard a human being able to say so many things and such things without actually cussing. I had a terrible row with her father, you know."

"I didn't know it."

"Yes, about you. Sounds curious, but it's a fact, Jim. You see, Huera was the boy who suggested having you kidnaped, and it looked like a good idea to me; you seemed bent on keeping everything in a stew, and I thought you'd be better out of the way till I got the branch started. That's what I thought, but after you were gone Huera showed his hand all of a sudden!" Howard's rather bewildered smile flickered for an instant and died. "I'll be frank with you, Jim. He had you sized up for an honest man and he had me down for a born, accomplished crook! His scheme was to lose you in the hills for good or have you shot—I didn't get that point clearly—and then he and I were to double-cross about everybody in Orinama and a few more points, sneak three or four million dollars, wreck Gardez, and then—Lord, I don't know! Eventually grab off the government or something like that. I am no angel, James, but this stuff was a whole lot too strong for me. I told him what I thought of it, after I got my wind, and we had some rather warm words. In fact, before he was done he'd promised to have us all executed—something like that. It was just there that your inamorata dropped in, fretful."

James Berry, temporarily the junior partner, leaned forward interestedly.

"Well, you played the thing straight? You went to Gardez and—"

"Gardez?" Howard croaked. "We're not even acquaintances of Gardez's any more. Nope—solid fact, Jim, after all the time we've been doing business with him, too. Something about the conduct of that duel didn't please him, I believe. It didn't measure up to the traditions of his family, and the more he thought about it the sorer he got. He spent most of yesterday afternoon weeping over his grandfather's swords and apologizing to them for what they'd been through. When he was all done with that he was so plumb disgusted with you and me that he severed all business and personal relations forever. He said it in so many words."

"Humph!" grunted James.

"Well, naturally, I started out to look up a hotel of some sort, and while I was gone the gang came and gathered in Dot." The senior partner sighed. "That was something of a shock, you know, and—what was that?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"I thought it was a shot. I thought maybe—where was I?" The senior partner relaxed again. "Oh, yes, I'd had the little scrap with Gardez and the big one with Huera was coming, only I didn't know that. Well, I went mad and got all the help I could to look for Dot—Huera's mainly—and finaly it seemed that this same gang had gathered her in, and Huera's solid with them, and finally he made me believe she wasn't in any danger and he'd get her in the morning, and he got me home to dinner with him. And then he tried to corrupt me, and we had the rumpus, and when I'd virtually been kicked out of the Huera house with a billion assorted threats yelled after me, I went back to Gardez to remove our effects to the rottenest hotel in the world, and the best one they've got down there.

"Well, Gardez knew how bad it is, and he had a terrible attack of purely Castilian politeness as well about that time; he insisted that I stay till morning, at least. Like getting an invitation from an iceberg, and I half expected to get a knife between my ribs as soon as I fell asleep, but I was too darned fagged to do anything else. Along about daylight that rah-rah secretary of his shook me up and said a man was waiting with word from Dot, and I fell for that, quick! I'm thick, Jim! I was just as much surprised when they whacked me over the head as if the thing had never happened before in history. I—that *was* a shot!"

"It was not!" James corrected, frowning. "Why this anxiety about—"

"I'm saving that for the last; it's the best!" Mr. Dawson stated with a thin smile. "It's about the army, Jim. I got some of the gossip from Gardez's secretary as we went looking for the messenger; seems that Huera runs the army and most of 'em were ordered out after you'd licked the police, and told to get you and the band or never return. Couple of scouts—they must have been—met us on the way here with the same news, I think, because the boys just about went wild with excitement. We did the last two miles in about four minutes.

"Sit down, Jim; there's no ducking it. From what I could gather, your little lost love has given the army the inside dope on how to get in here. We're up against it, good and hard. Huera's out after my scalp; he'll frame me in fifty different ways if he can—and he can! And you're to be executed, I believe, too. Oh, all that won't happen, of course, because they simply wouldn't dare to do it; but we'll be chucked into jail, good and plenty, and we'll probably put in a good many weeks there, at the very best of it, before our consul here, whoever he may be, can get us past all the red tape that 'll be wound around us and—"

"Weeks?" James cried.

"And more likely months!"

"Bah!" cried the chief. "I'm not going to stick around this country for any weeks or any days! I'm going home and marry Betty Carson. I'm starting to-day!"

"You get some quaint notions, Jim," his partner smiled sadly. "If you'd heard all the things Huera promised me, all the little things that gentle maid suggested about you, all the things Gardez looked at me and didn't say—"

"What do I care about all that stuff!" James cried savagely. "I'm going back and get Betty, if they run the navy up here and start a bombardment! I—"

Head inclined toward the door he paused suddenly. Above the morning turmoil in the trees there floated from a considerable distance the sound of a bugle—and died—and came again and once more died out.

"Army, eh?" muttered James.

Howard Dawson, rather white, rose from the couch.

"It's the army all right," he said hoarsely. "It's all over but the shouting now, I think. Maybe—maybe it's better to be taken with some style. I don't know. If Dot and I were down there we'd have been pinched before this, I suppose, but—where you going?"

"Going to lick the army, of course!" answered the chieftain.

"*What!*" gasped his partner.

"*You* don't have to mix up in this," James sneered. "I'll look after it. I've got a tough bunch out here that eats armies, you know."

"Yes, but—for the love of Mike! You're not going to—to try to *fight* the army?" Howard Dawson cried with real difficulty. "Jimmy, you—you're crazy! You don't understand, Jim. It *is* an army, on the level! Gardez's secretary was telling me about it. Hundreds of men—mounted men—with rifles and machine guns, and all that!"

"Aha!" James snapped out his long revolver, and having examined it, jabbed it back into his belt again. "Well, you stay here where it's safe and watch me put a great big curly crimp in the army, old-timer, if it happens near enough to see. Just sit tight now and get ready to start immediately after the scrap, if you're going with me."

He turned and strode toward the door.

"What's the matter with you?" Howard cried dumfoundedly. "Jimmy Berry, you can't—"

The chieftain strode on, smiling grimly—out of the hut—into the clearing and stopped.

And his eyes opened and he ceased smiling and his jaw dropped. Over there was the cook-stove, with pots still steaming; and over *there* was the little brooklet and the spot El Pavor had occupied so tenaciously; and the forest was still there and so were the sky and the turf. But the bandit crew had turned to the thinnest of thin air!

Several seconds James no more than glowered at all the emptiness. It was impossible—and still it was so! From the top of a particularly tall tree a parrot addressed James, derisively and offensively.

"They've—gone!" James gasped quite superfluously.

"They were wise," his pale partner contributed from the doorway. "I don't know how much good it does us, but it 'll probably save some bloodshed, Jim. We'll be pinched in a nice, orderly fashion and taken down—"

"*I'll* be pinched when I'm starting home to Betty to-day?" James roared. "You watch 'em pinch me, Howard! There's six shots in this gun and I've got a knife after that; and when the knife smashes I've got my fists! Only I'm starting home this morning, and say, you've told me a lot about the Dawsons. I'll show you how a Berry does these things!"

"Can't you jump on his shoulder from behind?" Dorothy whispered.

"No! He's got that gun and he—he—I never saw the time before when I wouldn't have jumped on him cheerfully, but I—I'm not going to jump on him now!" Howard managed to stammer from the corner of his mouth.

"*Jefe!*" hissed a voice from the thicket behind the hut. "*Jefe!*"

"Why—it's the kid!" muttered James.

"*Jefe!*" repeated the youth. "If you—please come—great speed—here?"

Growling, James stalked over to him. Howard Dawson and his bride gazed at one another.

"Is it really as bad as you said?" Dorothy breathed.

"It's worse, Dot!" Mr. Dawson confessed, and his lips trembled slightly. "Huera's like a madman because I turned him down, and he was ten times worse after that daughter of his came along, yelling to have old Jim boiled in oil. He'll do all he can to hurt us, and he can go some distance. Gardez—queer duck Gardez is!—will never raise a hand to help us. And, as nearly as I could make out from what Gardez's secretary said, the American consul's away down the coast somewhere, and the Lord only knows when he'll be back. Oh, at the very best of it, we're in for two or three months of jail; and if they put us in that awful hole where I was, I—I don't believe we'll live through it. About you—you, dear—I don't know whether they mean to—Heavens! I hope they *do* put you in prison!" Howard gasped. "That 'll be the safest place for you."

The bride caught a frightened little sob.

"And if you'd only listened to Jimmy in the first place, about starting the old branch—"

"Yes, I—I know, Dot," the senior partner muttered, and strangely there was only wretchedness in his tone and no anger at all. "If we ever should see the old town again I'm—I'm likely to listen to Jim. Don't cry, Dot. Don't!"

"I'm leaving in three minutes," James announced from the doorway. "Coming with me or staying behind?"

"What's—that, Jim?" Howard croaked.

"Gang got cold feet and hit the trail for the big timber. Kid's fond of me and he stuck," the chief went on briskly. "They had to leave four or five burros, and there's a hidden trail, straight downhill, to Molara—twenty-nine miles. Kid knows the way, and he says it's one holy terror! Couple of places where you have to slide down rock for a thousand feet or so—fifty-fifty chance of doing it alive. Two or three swamps to be crossed that may or may not hold us up at this time of the year. If we get to Molara the kid says he knows some people—crooks, I assume—and after that we take a chance on the rest of it. Coming?"

"The—going is dangerous?" Howard asked.

"The worst in the world, according to the kid."

"My wife—"

"I see. Better stay right here with her," James advised, and turned and hurried toward the boy, who had just crossed the brook with four of the weary little animals. "Good-by, and I hope they don't shoot you, and I hope you both get home some day." He stopped for an instant and pointed a hard finger at Howard Dawson, the while looking him directly in the eye. "And, by the way, if you ever should, I want you to have one thing fixed in your mind and keep it fixed: *you're* the guy who suggested coming down here!"

He strode on. He inspected the little animals with keen and appraising eye, selected one and mounted. The boy, chattering animatedly, leaped upon another. In the forest the bugle call came again, distinctly nearer; James laid a hand upon the butt of his pistol, and for a moment gazed almost wistfully in the direction of the sound.

"Giddap!" he muttered.

"Jimmy!" Mrs. Dawson shrieked suddenly. "Jimmy! You're not going to leave us?"

"Jim! Hey, Jim, old man! Wait! Maybe that trail's better than— Hey, wait, will you?" her husband cried out with a low, labored breath, dragging Dorothy forward quite frantically.

James glanced at his wrist-watch.

"I'll wait just one minute," he said. "If you're coming with me you'll have to be moving by that time."

EPILOGUE

Wallington has not always been a city.

In the allegedly good old days Petter's drug-store was one of the twenty business establishments on Main Street; and at night, around the big stove in the back room, a chosen circle was wont to gather and settle the fate of the nation. Petter's, wedged in between the New York Store and the new vaudeville house, nowadays occupies what used to be three stores, and it has a snappy manager from the city and three clerks with white coats, and a luncheonette, and you can step into Petter's and buy anything from a quart of paint to a reasonably square meal. But Morton Petter himself still spends most of his time tinkering about the establishment, and the old back room and the old stove are still there, and such of the earlier circle as have been spared gather quite regularly. Of these Joel Lynch, who conducted the old feed-store so well and hoarded the dollars so carefully that the automobile's invention was an incident rather than a catastrophe, is perhaps the most faithful.

He was on hand this evening, which was the ninth of Wallington's nine days' wonder, the wonder itself being the matter under discussion.

"You got it wrong," Morton Petter grunted past the stub of his cigar.

"I got nothin' wrong!" Mr. Lynch snapped. "My daughter-in-law—Larry's wife, that is—was *there*, Mort! She says Jim Berry let off a sorter whoop when he come into the church and pushed everybody outen his way. 'Stop this ceremony!' he yells. 'I'm here to—'"

"Oh—pooh!" grunted Morton Petter. "Wa'ant my Henry setting right in the third pew? Don't he write all the s'ciety stuff for both papers, y'old fool? So darned much crazy talk about that weddin' that—where *is* that week-ago Toosday's *News*, anyhow?"

Puffing, he reached under the old discarded walnut counter, now the back room's junk-table. Puffing, he shook out one of the dusty sheets and grunted and spread it on the old table and shook down his spectacles.

"Here! Here's the piece Henry wrote about it. Where is that place, now? I got it:

"'Before the ceremony many had observed with wonder that the'—hum—'bride seemed much depressed and some there were who claimed to have seen'—hum—'tears on her cheeks, ill-befitting a beautiful'—hum—'girl on the happiest day of her life and especially one so vivacious as the popular Miss Betty Carson,'" he read slowly and scowled. "That ain't what I'm looking for. Oh—here 'tis!

"'At this moment, as Dr. Frane was

about to begin, the door of the church burst '—hum—' open and, alone and excited, down the aisle of '—hum—' the church ran Mr. James Berry, our popular fellow townsman. Several ushers followed him, but none '—ahem—' could catch him. He stopped when he reached the altar, and laying one hand upon Mr. William Potter's arm, he said to the supposed bridegroom in a low and threatening tone: "Beat it! You are in the wrong church!" There was the greatest excitement.' Hum! I sh'd say there might have been; I'm *damn* sorry I didn't go to that weddin'!" muttered Mr. Petter, and continued:

"'The bridegroom started back in amazement. Miss Carson, with a '—hum—' scream of joy, threw herself into Mr. Berry's arms, stating that she would never be taken from them again. "That," Mr. Berry said, "is the time that you said it all! Parson, go on with the ceremony, but to avoid confusion ask this other person to step to the rear. I am about to marry Miss Carson myself."

"'Mr. Henry Mason, uncle and guardeen of the bride, would have interposed, but Mr. Berry made a short speech to him, mentioning the fact that Miss Carson was of age and citing the Constitution of the United States. Mr. Mason seemed abashed, and the ceremony, after Mr. Fred Wallace, our genial license clerk and a friend of the bride's family, who was present, had altered the license to suit the new conditions, proceeded to its conclusion without further incident. The happy pair at once left town upon their honeymoon, although Mr. Berry had returned from a business trip to South America but fifteen minutes before his unprecedented appearance at the church. Mr. Potter had left the sacred edifice before the conclusion of the '—hum—' ceremony—' Well, we know all about that. But *them's* the facts!"

"Yeah—mebbe so," said Mr. Lynch. "But my daughter-in-law—Larry's wife, that is—says that—"

This argument, proceeding now for perhaps the tenth time, was mercifully cut short by the entrance of elderly John Wilbur. He, you know, failed in the hardware business seven years ago. When Dawson & Berry took him in as assistant head of their shipping department it was a simple godsend. Rather wearily, as always, John Wilbur dropped into his chair and packed down his pipe.

"We were speaking of the way Jim Berry busted in and got married to the Carson gal," Mr. Petter explained. "I 'spose her uncle 'll cut her off for that, eh? He was sot on having her marry young Potter."

"No—I dunno's he will," Mr. Wilbur reflected. "Fact, I doubt if he does, Mort. I see Henry yesterday; talked to him quite a spell. He said it was an awful shock at first, but after he'd cooled down; durned if he didn't like the way Jim walked in and took the gal. Y'see, Henry can appreciate gettin' licked, after all. He tried to rush her into that weddin'—and Jim moved faster'n what he did."

"Jim's changed wonderful!" Mr. Lynch muttered.

"Changed?" Mr. Wilbur chuckled. "Never see anything like it in my born days, Joel. He's been another man since they took that trip—them three."

"They didn't start their branch, after all, hey?"

"Nope. Just looked things over and turned around and come back, as I take it. They don't say a word about it, either of 'em. I guess they just hired that young feller and come back."

"The young colored feller, y'mean?" said Mr. Lynch.

"He ain't colored."

"What is he then?"

"Well—" Mr. Wilbur chuckled. "I asked Jim Berry what he was and he just said he was a souvenir and walked on. That was day before yesterday—day he come back from his honeymoon. Why, I guess he's part Spanish and part Indian."

"Queer!" muttered the druggist, who spoke generally.

"*Queer?*" echoed Mr. Wilbur. "Why, he ain't queer, Mort. He's plumb crazy—that Mike is. We call him Mike, y'know; his regular name's about a yard long. Queer. Say, I've had him in my office a couple o' times, trying to pump him. He speaks some English. Hard to catch. Follows Jim Berry around like a dog all the

time. Calls him 'hayfay' or something like that. What 'z I saying? Oh, about pumping him. Mort, that Mike thinks he was a pirate or something. He tried to tell me the darndest gibberish about being in the woods with Jim and Howard Dawson and his wife and riding some jackasses down mountains, and Howard falling a thousand feet and then getting stuck in a swamp."

"Sho!" commented Mr. Lynch.

"Oh, that ain't all—not by a long shot," said Mr. Wilbur. "Once get him started and they's no end to his ravin's! Why, he tried to tell me a long one about how they was arrested by some health officers, near as I could make it out, and how Jim chased 'em with a gun. Boy never handled a pistol in his life! And then, according to Mike, they stole a boat and got out to some freight steamer and turned the boat adrift and then come up to the Isthmus of Panama and got a fruit steamer and—pshaw! I dunno what more he said. Willing, you know, that young feller. Never see any one willing to work the way he does, and strong as a bull. But queer! He ain't just queer. He's *gone!* I dunno why Jim ever brought him; I wouldn't have the crazy cuss around five minutes if I had anything to say about it."

There was a long silence.

"Understand Jim bought the Carter cottage for cash, give 'em two hours to get out and then moved right in with Betty," Mr. Petter said.

"He done that, too—yesterday morning," grinned Mr. Wilbur. "They was billin' and cooin' and kissin' each other and gurgling about it in the office, him and Betty, just as if they wasn't a soul in miles. Happy! Why, that gal worships the ground he walks on—her and this loony Mike!"

The elderly trio reflected at some length, much smoke rising to the ceiling, while out in the modern part of the establishment glasses clinked and soda sizzled and young girls laughed.

"Howard's changed a lot, too!" Mr. Lynch observed. "See him yesterday."

"Changed?" smiled Mr. Wilbur. "I sh'd say he had. He used to be the boss of the whole works. He ain't any more."

"He don't take orders from Jim, does he?"

"He don't do much arguing, anyway," replied Mr. Wilbur. "But he's got a darned short tongue with everybody else, all the same. Used to be so you could talk to Howard. Can't now, though. Why, here, just last week, I was in his office and I thought I'd find out about that South American business, and I—oh, I b'lieve I asked him what he was going to do now he was home. Well, he just scowled at me. 'Stay home!' he snaps. That's all."

"Didn't quiz him no further, hey?" Mr. Petter chuckled.

"Matter of fact, I did. I asked him just what happened to the business proposition down there and why he dropped it and so on."

"Yeah?" said Mr. Lynch. "What 'd he say then?"

Mr. Wilbur leaned back, drew upon his pipe and frowned.

"Well, sir, I'm a man sixty-eight years old," he said slowly, "and while I ain't no better than the next feller, I will say I never cussed much more than a 'damn' here and there, pretty infrequent and always with big provocation, as you might say. Kinder like to keep my mouth clean, by cracky! No, sir, I ain't going to repeat what he said!"

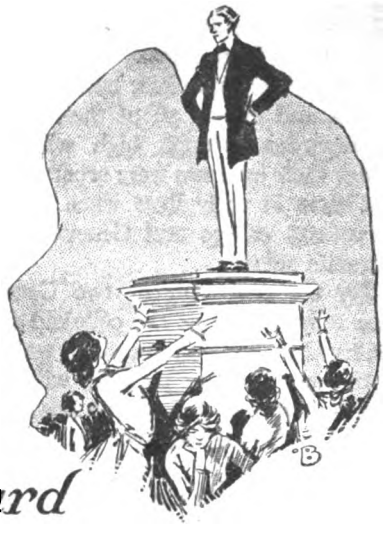
(The end.)

WHERE IT STARTED

WHEN Columbus's flag-ship had burst
Through the mists that the men thought accursed,
To a query aside,
The lookout replied:
"I'm seeing America first!"

Mary Carolyn Davies.

Clay Feet



by *Florence Woodward*

WHENEVER I pick up one of those magazines which specialize in peppy stories and read one of their inevitable best bets; the one about the Handsome Young Actor or Moving-Picture Star who eventually meets the Beautiful Young Woman who has worshiped him in secret for many long years, and he discovers that she is the Wonder Girl, whose image he has always carried in his heart, a precious dream he has never hoped to realize, it always brings to my mind the time that little Geneva Moore met up with her movie hero.

Not so long ago I was stage electrician with the big production, "The Occult Code," which was starring the handsome young actor, Harley Hamilton. Hamilton, for the last two or three years previous to this, had been the leading man *de luxe* for the Bright Star Film Company out on the coast. Strawss, the big Broadway manager, made an arrangement with the Bright Star people to take out Hamilton a few weeks in the big sensation, "The Occult Code."

The moving-picture star had a wonderful popularity everywhere, and Strawss felt that dividing the box-office receipts three ways, one for the Bright Star people, one for Hamilton, and one for himself, he wouldn't do so badly—and he sure didn't. The sixteen weeks the show was on the road it simply coined money. The piece itself wasn't worth a dime, but nobody cared for that—what the women wanted to see was the handsome Harley. And I'll tell the world he was easy to look at: big, broad-shouldered, six feet and one or two, brown curly hair with the least bit of gray at the temples, square-jawed, and on top of all this he had a brand of caressing smiles which absolutely seemed to hypnotize every woman who came in contact with one of them. I had read in the film fan magazines about the hundreds of letters and mash notes which Harley received every day at the studio, but I put it all down as press dope. But, believe me, I have never doubted it since I was out with "The Occult Code," for the sisters certainly fell for him. Actually, I have seen hundreds of them waiting outside of the stage door after a matinée, to see him walk from the door to the waiting taxi, every one in breathless anticipation: little, big, old, and young.

He would hand them one of the famous brand of caressing smiles, which seemed to include them all in its radiance. Then they would all dash for home to write in their diaries that they had at last met their ideal face to face: he had glanced deep into their eyes, and their souls had communed. Or if they didn't have a diary they would have scrap-books like Geneva Moore had, and they would go home and add more clippings and newspaper cuts to their collections. These collections, of course, including noth-

ing but what pertained to Harley Hamilton, the screen's handsomest actor.

My home is in Kansas City, and Geneva Moore and my kid sister had been intimate friends and chums all of their lives, from kindergarden through high school. Last winter their interests were separated for the first time in their lives when sis went to a business college and Geneva went to a dramatic school.

For the past year or two Geneva had been a worshiper at the celluloid shrine of the handsome Hamilton. The walls of her room were literally papered with pictures of him in every conceivable pose and part around which he had ever draped his wonderful personality. Hamilton as an aviator, priest, honest bank clerk, cowboy; in a Roman toga, oilskins, soldier's uniform, in a dress suit.

She had a dozen scrap-books, each filled to overflowing with reviews of films in which he had appeared, interviews which had appeared in the different film fan magazines, and bits of news of all kinds concerning him which she had picked up at various times.

Geneva was fully conversant with absolutely everything about Hamilton: the colors which he preferred; the books he read; the food he preferred above everything to eat; the parts he preferred to play; his personal friends; his sports, and his views on anything that could be mentioned. His famous interview given to the New York paper and copied everywhere entitled, "My Idea of a Perfect Wife," Geneva had framed and it occupied the place of honor on her dressing-table, flanked on one side by a splendid likeness of Hamilton at his summer home, and on the other side by one of him taking his morning dip during his vacation.

She studied the newspapers with absorbing care, and would no more have missed seeing any pictures of him showing in town than she would have omitted her dinner.

It was a great joke in Geneva's family about her whole-hearted devotion to Hamilton; only Geneva herself never laughed, she was far too serious. Hamilton was the reason for the dramatic school. Geneva felt that was the only way she would ever be able to meet him on common ground. Somehow—somewhere—they would meet, and her great devotion could but inspire some answering response.

There was a boy, too, who had grown up in the same neighborhood with Geneva who thought the world of her, but Geneva could never see Charley as anything else but Charley after she had got one glimpse of handsome Harley Hamilton. Geneva's folks all laughed indulgently at what they called her long-distance crush and at her dramatic school. They felt sure that she would get tired of it all and settle down and marry Charley and make him the nicest kind of a little wife.

This is the way matters stood when I went home for a few days before I opened in "The Occult Code." When Geneva learned that I was going to work near the handsome one she was deeply interested, and made me promise to send her our route from week to week. She wanted to get all of the newspaper notices from the different cities we played for her collection. When she learned the show was to play Kansas City she was limply tickled to death and said that she would count the days.

I joined the show in Chicago, and I hadn't been on it a week until I found out exactly the kind of bird that Hamilton was. Of all ugly, overbearing, selfish and conceited brutes I ever saw, he was the peer and premier. I simply can't go too strong on that guy. My mother always says there is always some little good somewheres in everybody, if you can only find it, but I'll tell the world Hamilton was the exception. He was very unpopular with the members of his company. He never spoke to one of them away from the theater. We would meet him on the street or in the hotel lobby, and he would hand every one of us a blank stare. He hadn't a single friend on the whole show. All the time quarreling, constant bickerings and general unrest back stage, and out in front, great crowds of fool women who came night after night to get a look at their hero in the flesh at five dollars top.

By the time the show was headed toward Kansas City I was sick and tired of the whole blamed business, and was good and

ready to hand in my two weeks' notice. I was all fed up on having Hamilton saunter over to me every blessed night of the world after the third act and find fault with something or other. To hear Hamilton tell it, one night something would be wrong with the drops, the next time it would be the foots, and the next time the ambers would be the ruin of the whole production.

The Sunday morning before the Sunday night that we were to open in Kansas City Milly Dorrin's husband came to the theater with the good word that Milly had just come down with the appendicitis, and he was on the way back from the hospital where Milly had been taken. Her part was a short one, but very important, and there was no understudy for it. It was only two or three sides long and all in the third act. We of course had to have a woman for the part for the opening performance.

I heard Dan Mitchell, the director, talking about it, and as Dan and I are pretty good friends, I told him about Geneva and suggested getting her to play the part. I told him she was only a student, but I felt sure she could fill the part until Strawss sent a woman from New York or Chicago.

Geneva was just tickled almost pink when I went to bring her to the scene rehearsal. She just couldn't thank me enough for bringing about the opportunity of seeing and being close to her idol. I told her to thank Milly Dorrin, not me. Certainly I had a motive in doing what I had; I wanted her to get a good view of Hamilton in action at close range. Of course it really wasn't any of my business when you look at it one way, but it just naturally made me good and sore to see that nice little kid simply crazy about that big stiff Hamilton. Her imagining him to be just like the parts he played in pictures, and all the time he was the lowest down—say, when I get on that guy, I can't let up.

If I had told Geneva the truth about Hamilton, Geneva would have never believed me in the world, and right here was the best chance ever for Hamilton to show up his clay feet, with me sort of stage managing the whole affair, and being Johnny on the spot to call Geneva's attention to any little bets she might overlook.

The spell started to work Sunday night after the third act. Geneva got through with bells on—I was sure proud of her. As Hamilton went down the stairs to his dressing-room he yelled at Dan to have that idiot in the pink dress—meaning Geneva—to stand a little farther away from him in their scene, and to ask her if she couldn't put a make-up on that would make her somewhat resemble a human being. Poor little Geneva had looked so rosy and happy after her triumph, and it made me perfectly furious to see her lips tremble trying to keep back the tears. But I never said a word, as this was the only possible way to cure Geneva of her rabid case of Hamiltonitis.

Monday afternoon Hamilton put on one of his shows with Dan Mitchell. He usually pulled one off once or twice a week. He called Dan everything in the catalogue, and then fired him. Dan never paid him one bit of mind, he was used to Hamilton's little ways. He should worry a minute about what the handsome Harley thought about him—Dan had a five-year contract with old man Strawss. That night Geneva didn't look at Hamilton's picture before she went to bed.

Tuesday, the leading woman, Mary Adamson, who had a big following in Kansas City, got a bigger reception on her entrance than he did. That sure brought calamity on her head. Hamilton called her out on the stage after the act was over and told her that the gown she was wearing was simply a disgrace to the production, and to wear another one at the next performance, and so on and so on along the same strain for fully fifteen minutes.

Wednesday his artistic temperament got the better of him and he gave us all the benefit of a snappy spell of the hysterics on account of his Jap valet misplacing his shirt studs. Geneva wasn't in on this, but I called her and placed her where she could get a nice view.

Thursday the character woman, old Mrs. Robbins, was the goat. She didn't happen to hear her name called, and Hamilton immediately launched into a long tirade of thirty minutes or so, the text of which was: old, decrepit women who always insisted

upon ruining a production. Geneva was pretty quiet all the way home that night.

Friday he kicked his Airedale down the stairs because the laundry had lost one of his dress shirts. That evening as Geneva walked by Hamilton's dressing-room, the door was open, and she got a swell close-up of handsome Harley standing in front of his mirror, bowing and smiling the famous old caressing smile.

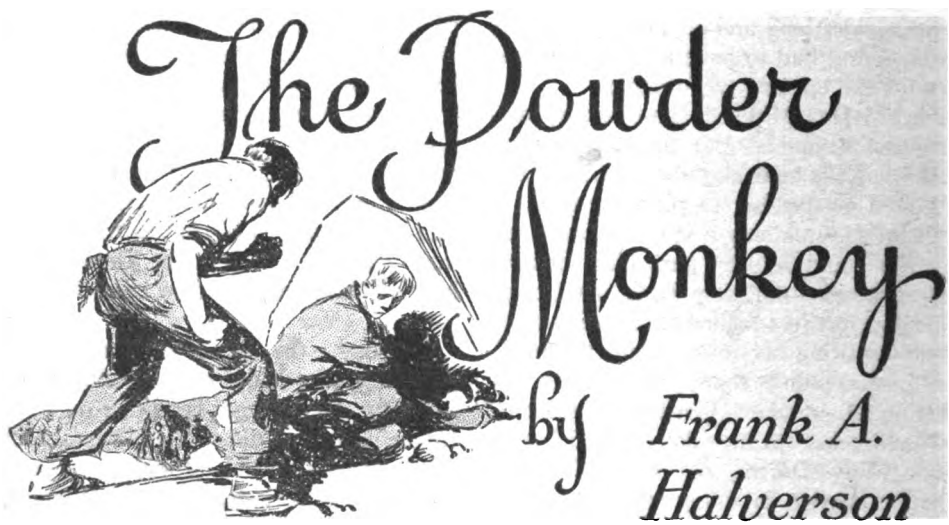
The finish of a worthwhile week came on Saturday night when Hamilton toddled over to the switchboard and started to step on me. I won't linger over the gruesome details—only to say that I trimmed that guy, I sure did trim him proper. And then I quit the job.

Geneva said that Hamilton looked far more interesting to her with a broken nose than he had ever appeared on the screen. On the way home she said she would tell me a secret, if I would promise not to laugh. All handsome Harley's pictures and the scrap-book went into the furnace the first of the week—which day she wouldn't tell.

In the story that I referred to at the beginning of this—the Beautiful Young Woman who is in love with the Handsome Actor or Movie Hero always has a true blue sweetheart in the background.

Did Geneva ever appreciate Charley's devotion and marry him?

I'll say she did—I'm Charley.



The Powder Monkey

by Frank A. Halverson

"GET out o' here, ye road rat!" Paddy Harrigan, boss of the Quemahoning tunnel, grabbed the dirty, unkempt imitation of humanity by the neck and flung him back against the cook's shanty.

With a thud the road rat landed sprawlingly and stopped by the side of the wall all but knocked out.

"What do ye mean, takin' me basin and me place at the bench?" demanded Paddy, striding over to the hobo menacingly.

"Didn't mean nothing," replied the road rat, sitting up and taking a quick squint at the tunnel boss's face. "I didn't know you had that place."

"Ye know now, don't ye?"

"I do," answered the hobo, rising to his feet. "And I know, too, that when I get a few square meals under my belt, I'm going to lick you for being a bully. Get me?"

Harrigan stepped back, astonished. He folded his massive arms across his muscle-pleated breast, and the look of contempt that had been perched on his face disappeared in a smile as he met the steel-gray eyes of the other. In them he noted a fighting spirit, and it was unafraid like a cornered rodent putting up its last battle.

The hard rock men of the tunnel gathered around the two. They were of the

fighting clan, two fisted fellows by whom a scrap was always relished. Up and down the earth they are to be found, hard workers, good spenders, always playing the strong man's game.

"I'll take ye," replied Paddy Harrigan, "and it's a sportin' chance I am givin' ye. Ye'll get yer square meals, and when ye're fit, by the Lord Harry, I'll make ye eat those words or me name ain't Paddy Harrigan. Ye heard what he said, boys," continued the tunnel boss, "and the sooner he's ready, the sooner we'll have a happy Sunday. When I hired the rat to-day he told me that he was a powder monkey, and he understood how to shoot the hard conglomerate rock, how much powder to use in each charge, so that the timbering of the tunnel wouldn't be jarred like our other powder monkey has been doing in his shooting. Watch him! Don't let him shoot too hard. Mike and Tim, keep yer eyes on him."

Mike and Tim, Harrigan's assistants, eyed the rat critically and he winked at them surreptitiously.

"The nerve o' him," confided Mike to Tim, when they were walking into the commissary eating house. "A-winkin' his eyes at us as if he was goin' to have a picnic. If he knew Paddy, it isn't so cocky he'd be. Paddy'll break every bone in his body, and if he's wise, he'll dig out afore many suns has set on him in this camp."

"That buckaroo ain't one of the runnin' kind," replied Tim. "He's a stayer. Paddy ain't figurin' on one thing that the powder monkey's got in his make-up and that's nerve. He's full of it. 'Twas that which made him wink at us. Nothing else. I've seen men like that before and I'm telling you, Mike, Paddy had better get in trim himself."

"Here's yer place!" shouted Harrigan, when the hobo stepped into the mess-room. "Right by me side. I'm goin' to see that ye chuck the grub under yer belt. That's what yer needin'. Pitch in, Mr. Powder Monkey, and see that ye do Hop Sing's cookin' justice. No hard rock stiff is goin' to say that Paddy Harrigan didn't give ye a chance afore fightin' ye."

In the days that followed, the hobo was christened the Powder Monkey, and he didn't object nor did he pass up any opportunity to do full justice to the victuals of the mess-room. Harrigan kept reminding him that he was in for a trimming such as he had never received before. The monkey smiled and nodded his head in compliance. The drillers and muckers looked with pity upon Harrigan's victim, all except Tim Scollins. He had caught the glint in the Powder Monkey's eyes, and he felt that the weak, ambitionless hobo of a few days back would give Harrigan a run for his money.

Tim, red-headed and big-hearted, had gone through the hard rock man's school, and he had learned that brawn and muscle didn't always count when it came to stamina and the fighting spirit; and Tim was sure that the Powder Monkey had those requisites.

"The timbering here is a bad job," said the Powder Monkey one day when he was going into the tunnel with some of the rock men. "It's a contract piece of work, all right, done cheaply."

"Who's askin' for ye'r opinion?" demanded Harrigan who was walking behind the powder man. "I guess the engineer on the work knows his business, and it is not for the likes o' ye to find fault. When ye've stuck the powder in the drill-holes and touched the spark to it, ye're done."

"No, I'm not," shot back the Powder Monkey. "I'm not wanting the hill to come in on us while we are at the working face."

"It's a lot ye know—"

"Right for once, Mr. Harrigan," answered the Powder Monkey promptly. "See here! The weight is too heavy on the timbers. They're giving. The conglomerate is crumbling at the roof, and the bottom is heaving up. That means the strain is too great for the strength of the supports."

"Say, what do you know about tunnel drivin'?"

"Oh, not much. I've forgotten a great deal about my engineering experience. In France I had a chance to pick up some ideas with the sappers."

"I say," broke in Harrigan, "is that

where ye learned the job of gagin' dynamite?"

"Slightly," replied the Powder Monkey, "but this tunnel is a bit of play in comparison to that job over yonder. Under Vimy Ridge we used aminol with a Cordeau detonant. That was powerful stuff. The few who survived the blast were deaf, dumb and blind, but that was some job."

"Didn't I tell ye," whispered Tim to Mike, "that the hobo had seen more in a few days than we have in all our life?"

"What the blazin' fire were ye doin' as a hobo?" demanded Harrigan wrathfully.

"What a lot of other doughboys are doing—trying to get a start again."

Ahead the jack-drills were singing the song of work. Their rat-ta-tat machine guns in action made an ear-splitting noise. The air pumped in by a small compressor from the outside was filled with small particles of dust that was dancing in the bright glare of the rockmen's lamps. The concaved heading, leading to the face of the tunnel from the outside seemed no larger than a pin-head in the distance; while rails, bits of timber and large rocks were flung out by the heavy powder blasts that lined the entrance, and over these the Powder Monkey and the bosses stumbled on their way into the working face.

The drillers were finishing up their rounds. The holes were set like a large V, some pointing upward to the roof, others straight into the rock, with the last ones of the line aimed down to the bottom; others, systematized in the same manner, met them at the back of the cut, and when the powder was placed in them the whole burden would be lifted out at the bottom.

Gradually the pounding of the drills ceased. The holes were finished and the hissing of the compressed air from the pipes took on a shrill harshness, the steels clanked when they were thrown by muscular arms from the holes to the helpers who gathered them in their arms and carried them out to safety—a square place, cut out of the solid rock at a sharp angle where the tools would be protected from the flying stones of the charge.

At the tunnel's face the Powder Monkey was supervising the unloading of the explosives. Box after box was lifted out of the big muck car and deposited at the base of the holes. A smile was hovering on his face while in his hand he held a bit of paper soiled and worn. From its appearance he had read the words many times, but he was now perusing them again. On his face the rock dust had settled and the hue accentuated by the bright gleam of his lamp made the conglomerate grime sparkle like filings from diamonds. As he looked at the words of his letter an oppressiveness began to steal over him. A strange stillness was in the tunnel's atmosphere. Something was happening. A hard pressing smote his ears. The air was being pushed into the entry face with a violent force.

The Powder Monkey staggered back, holding his hand to his eyes as if to ward off a coming blow. The letter crumbled in his fingers nevertheless; he clutched it as if it were the dearest thing in life.

"The tunnel's caving in," shouted a frightened voice from down the track.

The Powder Monkey knew the horrible truth of the cry long before it reached his ears. He had read the signs in the poor timbering. The cracking of the stone, the splintering of the rock had told his experienced eyes that the tunnel was a death-trap. Like a hunter reading the tracks in the snow, he knew the danger signs, but the letter and its contents made it necessary that he should find work without delay, and he was taking a chance on the bad roof holding until he could receive his first month's pay. After that—

With the voice of thunder the entrance to the tunnel closed. The daylight was shut out. Huge boulders of rock falling thudded crashingly. Block upon block came in a steady downpour. The sides piled in, tier upon tier slid out, boom upon boom rang in the dull dust—choked air that was forced into the tunnel's remaining space.

The first blast with a hurricane's power hurled the working-men like atoms of dust against the base of the working face.

Boom! Boom! Echoes vibrated like lingering drums beaten by mountain giants, rockmen, drillers, muckers and the mighty Harrigan with his two assistants, Mike and Tim, were thrown against the rock face by

the air forced into the vacuum of the tunnel face. Here the roof held. It had not been exposed to the weight of the top burden as long as the outer portion, and therefore it remained intact, the cave-in breaking about twenty yards away from its back. Stone slabs splintered in breaking, block upon block tapering upward almost in a series of steps came as thunder blows. The grinding of the huge boulders continued until they settled into place. Late falls crashed, the small splinters rained down through the cracks, and the rattling sounded like frightened mice scampering away in the still hours of midnight. Silence reigned in the heart of the mountain.

Men, broken and scattered, lay in all directions, their bodies bruised and their faces streaked with rock dust, thrown viciously by the force of the cave-in. Minutes passed and an occasional groan stole in upon the hectic stillness. A cry of pain, plaintive as a child in distress, broke from one corner of the tunnel. Other voices answered. A match flared. It was in Harrigan's hand. For an instant it shone in the oppressive darkness, but it showed the Powder Monkey, his body wedged into a V-cut of the tunnel, a bruise streaking his face, yet he was moving his body, and the next minute his voice rang out:

" Don't strike any more matches! The air will be foul soon enough."

The Powder Monkey knew that the great danger of the shut-ins was for air. The lungs couldn't pump without it. The small amount of oxygen would not suffice very long. There was work to do before the deadly after-damp gas would get them in the death trap. Harrigan struck another match.

" Damn you!" exclaimed the Powder Monkey, " polluting what little air we have with sulfur smoke. If you served in France you would know better."

" I got to see," wailed Harrigan.

" Wait and get your senses," cautioned the Powder Monkey.

Harrigan struggled to his feet. Fear had him. It gripped his vitals. He was trying to get out. He bumped against the wall of rock. Sinking down, he panted for breath, flailing his arms and working his strength away to no avail. Other voices joined his frightened cry, rising in a chorus of moans.

" Men, be still!" advised the Powder Monkey. " We're in a tight place, but we are not dead, and as long as we have life there's a chance."

Only the enveloping silence, dismal in its opaque thickness, answered his words of encouragement.

Another fall of heavy stone echoed from the tunnel's entrance; with its rattle Harrigan cried out, the fear of the doomed in his soul. Drillers and muckers were clamoring for what they could not receive—freedom, the liberty of the outside, sunshine and air, air, air! Their throats were parched and their lungs were bursting from the scant oxygen that they were breathing; their hearts were pounding trip-hammer blows against their ribs, perspiration was oozing freely out of their pores and a nervous grip held them in death's grim embrace.

Another match in Harrigan's fingers bloomed out its sulfurous glow. A blue cloud of smoke filled the little chamber where the men were huddled closely. In its gleam, ghostly and unreal, shining on the pale faces of the trapped men, the Powder Monkey staggered to his feet, crouched low, and while Harrigan held the burning match up against the massive blocks of stone, he crept behind him. A wild cry rang out startingly. The light flickered in Harrigan's fingers. Backward he tumbled. The Powder Monkey pinned his arm with a powerful grip. Down he bore him.

Harrigan, crazed, struggled with a demon's power to break loose, but the Powder Monkey held him securely.

" Listen, Harrigan," he said, " I've got some square meals under my belt and now it is you or me for it. We'll fight it out here in this death-hole, according to the rockmen's code. I promised to fight you for being a bully the first day I came to the tunnel, but that is changed now. We're all prisoners of the mountain and we are in here to stay until our bones rot amid the rocks. We have a few hours left. You're trying to shorten them by striking matches

and polluting the little air that may be in this chamber. You're killing us before the mountain is ready."

"Ye rotten road rat!" shouted Harrigan desperately, breaking loose and springing up. Even in his last hour he would fight to be the boss. The strongest and the hardest of rockmen always held that position.

In the darkness the two men gripped and struggled, their heavy breathing coming in short, gulpy gasps. Harrigan, the stronger of the two, was seeking to get the death grip on the Powder Monkey's throat. The latter, slippery as an eel, evaded Harrigan's efforts to destroy him. The Powder Monkey squirmed out of his grasp. Time and again, Harrigan had him fast only to find that the other was working loose.

With a sickening sensation the Powder Monkey found another hand trying to grip his throat. It did not belong to Harrigan, because his arms were entwined around the Powder Monkey's body. One of the other men was coming to Harrigan's assistance. The Powder Monkey realized that his finish had come. He could not cope with a new adversary. Harrigan had him nearly done and one more meant the end. The new fingers found his windpipe. They were closing tightly and completely over his throat.

The Powder Monkey's thoughts were transferred from the hopeless struggle in the darkness of the mountain to the baby scrawl on the letter that he had been reading when the cave-in came; and he realized that his baby's prayer for him to come home would be unanswered. That little mite of childish supplication had changed the hobo to a workingman, and it was with the hope of going back with a decent suit of clothes and some money in his pocket that he had accepted Harrigan's job in the Quemahoning tunnel. But the mountain pierced through its heart had taken revenge. The engineers had erred. The lives of men was the price of their mistake. The width at the entrance was too great, and, therefore, the insufficient supports had crumbled under the weight of stone and dirt in its steady, downward pressure.

When the fingers had nearly closed his windpipe, the Powder Monkey managed to stammer:

"I was trying to get the matches."

"God curse me!" broke out a terse voice. It was Tim's. He was helping the Powder Monkey. His hand on the Powder Monkey's throat was withdrawn and the next moment he felt Harrigan being lifted off his body.

"Here's the matches," said Tim in the darkness; "I've tied Harrigan so he won't strike any more."

The Powder Monkey found Tim's hand, and before taking the matches, he gripped it tightly.

"Tim," whispered the Powder Monkey, "see if you can find a lamp."

"I've got mine," said Tim.

"Light it." Tim struck a match. The flare lit the small space where the men were lying.

"Here, Tim, raise the light along the cave. That's it; hold it up."

The flame shone on the broken edges of fallen stone. The blocks were sharply cut and tapering upward. An open space showed, between the big boulders, where they had broken off from the solid body that composed the hanging roof above the men.

"Climb up," commanded the Powder Monkey.

"What's the use?" asked Tim, pausing on a large ledge.

"Not much, only a fighting chance. We haven't any now. Suppose we could crawl to the dome of the cave, carry the dynamite up there, block it in securely and let it go, do you think, Tim, that it might blow a hole through to the outside?"

Tim swore, but his curse was almost a benediction.

"If it doesn't shoot a hole in the side of the mountain, the back charge with the powder fumes will kill us quickly. Think it is worth trying, Tim?"

"By the saints, yes!" shouted Tim, coming down from the ledge of broken stone in a reckless jump. "Hey, ye hard rock stiffs!" he shouted. "Wake up. There's a chance of gettin' out!"

The men straightened up and Tim explained. He had caught the Powder Mon-

key's idea. There was a possibility of escape. The desperate men rallied to Tim's command. The dynamite was their hope. It shone in the hearts of the entombed men like the lamp on Tim's cap.

"The lightest man in the bunch must climb between the rocks and place the dynamite."

"That's me," answered the Powder Monkey. "I haven't enough square meals under my belt to fatten me, and I think I can make it."

Like a rat the Powder Monkey scaled the bottom rocks. Upward he wormed his way, sending his body through the narrow places, struggling to reach the dome of the cave-in. Big slabs of stone, jagged and as sharp as broken glass, cut his fingers, but no bodily pain could deter his efforts to reach the top. The higher he went the better he realized was their chance of placing the dynamite charge so that it would carry through to the outside.

Below the men were watching the dim flicker of his lamp as it kept going higher and higher over the broken mass of stone. Faintly they caught his shout that he had reached the highest point. It was the top opening of the cave, probably three feet in height and two feet wide. This was the apex; he could go no further.

How far was this last open space from the outside? The Powder Monkey could not calculate the distance. Up above the solid formation of stone that had not fallen, there was the outside world and air. Yes, air! The Powder Monkey was choking for the want of it, and his companions below were gasping from the scant amount they were breathing.

"In France," said the Powder Monkey when he joined the hard rockmen at the base of the cave-in, "we could estimate the amount of burden above us and place a sufficient amount of aminol in the sapper's tunnel to lift the enemy and their gun emplacements from off the ridges and mountaintops. Here we can't. We don't know how deep we're in under the surface, nor have we the explosives. Twenty-four cases, twelve hundred pounds, and God help us if it isn't enough."

The dynamite boxes were broken open and the round sticks were lashed in a bunble and hoisted up through the gaping aperture to the Powder Monkey, who placed the explosives in the little chamber, pile upon pile, like cords of kindling wood. He packed the dynamite tightly, taking care that all open spaces were closed. Finally the great charge was ready, the cap set and the fuse hanging from the dynamite. As the Powder Monkey slid down from loading the charge, his lamp caught on an outjutting stone and the flame was extinguished.

"A match," called the Powder Monkey to the others.

"You've got 'em," said Tim Scollins.

The Powder Monkey felt his pockets. Not a stick could he find, only a gaping hole told its terrible story. The matches were lost. Every one joined in the hunt. Never have men searched more diligently, but they were doomed to disappointment. Not a one was found. Every foot of flooring was gone over, but with no light on the lamp's wick and in total darkness, the doomed men culled every bit of the bottom with their fingers. Prayers and low curses mingled in the words that came from the frantic searchers. With the loss of the matches their slim chance of effecting an escape from the heart of the mountain was gone entirely. The explosives were ready, but fire was needed to touch off the fuse, and it was impossible to secure it.

"They worked out of my pocket when I was climbing up with the dynamite and are hid amid the cracks of the big rocks," moaned the Powder Monkey weakly.

"Tim," swore Harrigan, "ye took them off me an' gave them to that scut of a road rat an' he's lost them."

"Ye're crazy, Harrigan," answered Tim. "Do ye think the Powder Monkey is wanting to kill himself? Didn't he think of the dynamite? Shame on ye, Harrigan, for the smallness of yer heart."

"Men! Men!" called the Powder Monkey gladly. "I've found one! It was in my shoe. It must have worked down my pant's leg—"

He struck it instantly. The bursting flame caught the wick, and although the air in the chamber was foul, the light man-

aged to live and to spread a dim, yellow glow in the death-hole of the mountain.

Cautiously the Powder Monkey set the lamp on a shelving rock, and under his directions the men built a shielding barricade in the lower part of the tunnel. When the charge of explosives detonated the back-kick would be terrific and probably it would finish them; still the huge stones that they pulled and rolled into a protecting circle might save them from the blast.

The men crouched behind the barricade. The Powder Monkey touched the lamp's flame against the fine powder of the fuse. A spitting and hissing lit the darkness in a shower of sparks. The inky-blackness of midnight followed as the fire crept up the powder train toward the twelve hundred pounds of dynamite.

The Powder Monkey stumbled behind the barricade and sank down.

"Not here," boomed Harrigan's frightened voice, "get out!" His craven soul wanted all the protection, and he had secured the safest place.

While the fire in the fuse crawled upward, the Powder Monkey crept down by Tim's side. The big rockman's arms stole over the Powder Monkey's shoulder as he said, "Lad, have you kith or kin on the outside?"

"Wife and baby," whispered the Powder Monkey.

Big Tim, without a moment's hesitation, rose to his knees and pushed the Powder Monkey under his body, despite his violent protest.

"Ye're worth more than me," said Tim as he held the struggling Powder Monkey under his body. "I ain't got any one who cares a damn."

The explosive let go in the voice of thunder. The detonation was mighty in the pent-up chamber of the tunnel. Hurtling stones rained in showers, catapulting big boulders downward while the fumes, white, blue, and gray rolled in a dense cloud, choking and poison-laden, into the men's barricade. The mountain roared; echoes thundered and vibrated while new falls of stone let go in mighty crashes that were reinforced by the grinding of huge boulders in their downward descent. The back-kick was terrific. The blast rang deafeningly. The hot fumes were burning the lungs of the living men.

Tim's mighty body shook over the Powder Monkey. His lungs were filled with the poisonous smoke. He breathed with difficulty. The Powder Monkey scrambled to his knees. Tim's body sank limply to the bottom.

A deep grinding sound became audible to the Powder Monkey's ears. It had its inception at the top of the cave where the dynamite had been exploded. The rumble increased, grew louder, and it was coming closer to the barricaded hard rockmen when the Powder Monkey, grasping Tim in his muscular arms, pulled and dragged him to the upper side of the tunnel. A deafening thud! The heavy rock struck. The barricade crumbled under its impact like a cockle-shell.

The stillness of the dead brooded for a few minutes in the space where the men had been huddled. A low, pained gasp wailed in the darkness.

"God help Paddy!" muttered the Powder Monkey. "He took the best place and that's where the stone is resting. It's his tomb."

"Lad, try it," whispered Tim weakly. "See if ye can get out. Never mind me. I'm only a hard rock stiff."

"None of that," responded the Powder Monkey. "We're buddies! We go together."

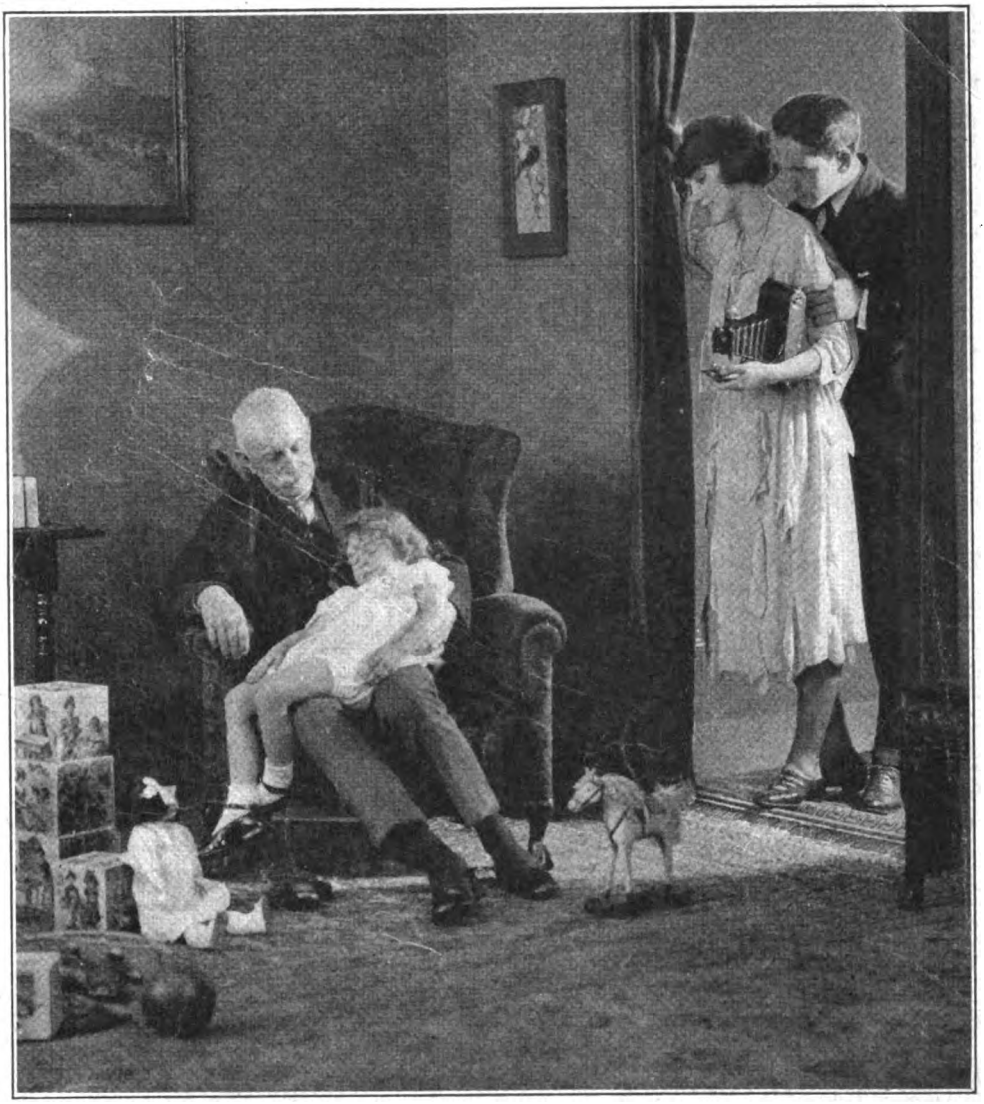
Pulling and partly dragging Tim, the Powder Monkey began to worm his tedious way up the narrow hole, crawling, going by inches, edging onward to the top.

"Leave me, buddie," implored Tim.

"Never!" shouted the Powder Monkey. "I feel air! Fresh air! Sweet air! Tim, the dynamite's gone through!"

Tim raised his head. A blue speck of the sky peeped in from above the round hole far overhead.

Silhouetted against the bright sun of the afternoon the Powder Monkey and Tim Scollins stood for a moment above their prison, victors from the wrath of the mountain and the engineers' error. And it was Tim who managed to mumble, "Buddie, ye licked death itself."



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