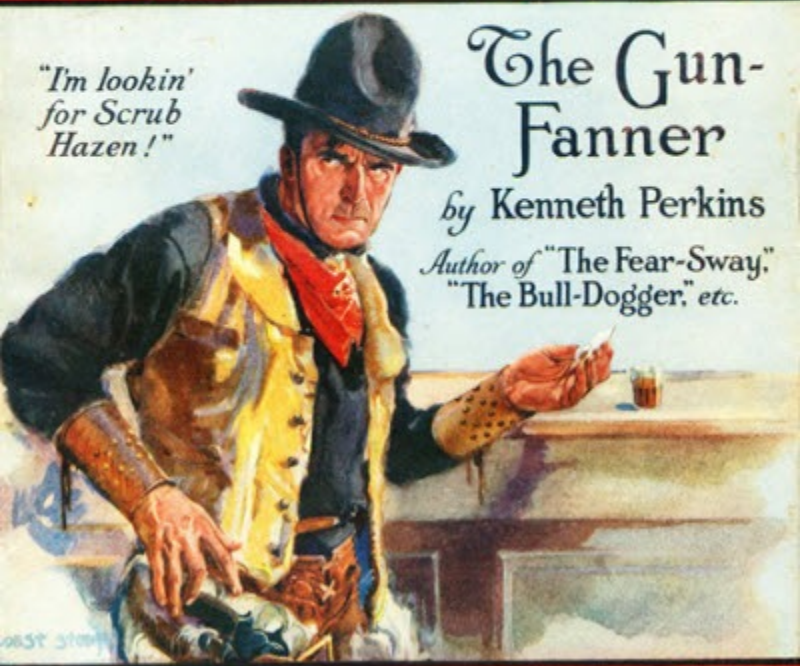
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Gun-Fanner

by Kenneth Perkins

Author of "The Fear-Sway," "The Bull-Dogger," *etc.*

10¢ PER COPY — JUNE 10 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

You Might Call It Luck

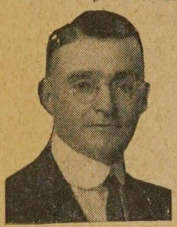
If Only One Man Had Jumped to Such Amazing Earnings

-but Hundreds Have Done It!

WHEN a man steps from a $50 a month job as a farmhand to a position that paid him $1,000 the very first month—was it luck?

When another man leaves a job on the Capitol Police Force at a salary of less than $1,000 a year and then in six weeks earns $1,800—is that luck?

Probably the friends of Charles Berry of Winterset, Iowa, and of J. P. Overstreet of Denison, Texas—the two men mentioned above—call them lucky. But then there is F. Wynn of Portland, Ore., an ex-service man who earned $554.37 in one week—and George W. Kearns of Oklahoma City, whose earnings went from $60 a month to $524 in two weeks. And C. W. Campbell of Greensburg, Pa., who quit a clerking job on the railroad to earn $1,562 in thirty days.

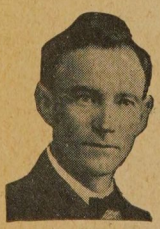


"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400." —F. Wynn, Portland, Ore.

There is nothing exceptional about these men. They live in all parts of the country—they had been engaged in all kinds of work. Many had been clerks, bookkeepers, mechanics. Some had already achieved successful places in the business world.

No Limit to the Opportunities

And then in one swift stroke, they found themselves making more money than they had ever dreamed possible. The grind of routine work—the constant struggle to obtain even a slight increase in earnings—the discouraging drudgery of blind-alley jobs—all this was left behind for careers of immediate and brilliant success. And great as are their earnings to-day, they are looking forward to increasing them constantly—in fact, there is no limit to the amounts they may earn—only their own efforts can determine that.



"I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $306 and this week $218." — Geo. W. Kearns, Oklahoma City.

The remarkably quick success of these men sounds like luck—the sheerest kind of luck. But of course it cannot be that—not when hundreds have found the way to such amazing good fortune—*all through the same method.* There must be a definite, practical, workable plan behind their sudden jumps to big earnings.

The Back-Bone of Business

And there is. In the first place they discovered a vital fact about business. They discovered that the big money is in the Selling end of business. Salesmen are the very life blood of any concern—upon them depends the amount of profits made.

And for the men who are in the "Star" class—who are Masters of Salesmanship—there is practically no limit to their earnings.

And that is how the men whose pictures you see and hundreds of others like them, found the way to their present magnificent incomes. *They all are Master Salesmen now!*

New Way to Enter This Field

Yet previously they had no idea of becoming Salesmen—many didn't even think it possible to do so. But they learned of an amazingly easy way by which any man can quickly become a Master Salesman—and in his spare time at home!

Secrets Only Master Salesmen Know

"The very first month I earned $1,000. I was formerly a farmhand." —Charles Berry, Winterset, Iowa.

Salesmanship is not a natural gift—it is an art and science that is open to any man. There are fundamental rules and principles that anyone can put into practice—there are Secrets of Selling that put any man who knows them into the "Star" class.

The proof of this is in the wonderful success achieved by men who, without any previous Selling experience, have suddenly become Master Salesmen thru the National Salesmen's Training Association. Step by step—in their spare time at home—they were taken through every phase of Salesmanship. Every underlying principle of sales strategy was made as simple as A-B-C. Thru the National Demonstration Method every form of Sales problem is solved.

"After ten years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change . . . My earnings during the past thirty days were more than $1,000."—W. Hartle, Chicago, Ill.

Startling Proof Sent Free

Whether or not you have ever thought of becoming a Salesman, you should examine the facts about the tremendous possibilities for big earnings in this fascinating field. Read the extraordinary stories of others and see how easily you can do what they are doing. Let us tell you about our Elective system that enables you to sell any line or proposition. Simply mail the coupon below. It will bring you by mail the whole wonderful story, and in addition a great Book "Modern Salesmanship" and full particulars about the remarkable system of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service of the N. S. T. A.

Right now—tear off the coupon and mail it to-day. It costs you nothing to do this—it obligates you in no way.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-G CHICAGO, ILL.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-G, Chicago, Ill.

Please mail me Free Proof that I can become a Master Salesman and qualify for a big money position. Also send your illustrated Book "Modern Salesmanship" and particulars of membership in your association and its Free Employment Service. This is all free of cost or obligation.

Name .....

Address .....

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

Age ..... Occupation .....

"They got it all!" he managed to say, and sank into a chair.

And Now Their Cashier Carries a Colt

SATURDAY A.M. Pay day! At eleven o'clock precisely, methodical John Morse, cashier for Keith & Company, took the small, black bag in which he carried his payroll and hurried over to the Merchants' National Bank.

"One hundred and fifty tens, one hundred and fifty fives, one hundred twos and fifty ones this time, please."

"There you are, Jack," said the teller as he placed the various piles of greenbacks under the wicket, "twenty-five hundred dollars."

John Morse dropped the package into the black bag as he had done on a hundred Saturday mornings before and left the bank.

Five minutes later, breathless, speechless, pale and disheveled, he burst into Mr. Keith's office *minus the bag*.

"They got it all!" he managed to say, and sank into a chair. "I did my best to save it, but they got it all!"

"Only last night when I read about that Everett robbery," said Mr. Keith, glumly, "I was thinking 'it might happen to us.' It might happen to anyone—*once*. But we'll take no chances again. Here, John, run over to Stevens' right now and get the best Colt revolver they carry. Hereafter you and the payroll will come back together—safe."

The newspapers are full of stories of payroll robberies. It happens every day—everywhere. Yet you need not fear. You can go and come in safety protected by a trusty Colt.

A Colt revolver may save your money and your life. A small investment for a great protection. Your dealer will gladly show you various models of Colt's revolvers and automatic pistols.

If you write to the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co., Hartford, Connecticut, they will send you free "The Romance of a Colt," an interesting book giving the historical details of the World's Right Arm.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

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A MAP showing the location of the accumulated gold of an African warrior tribe is stolen from the safe of an American trader. How the thieves ally themselves with the enemy and, on their quest of treasure, kidnap the American's daughter and destroy the trading post are but a few of the incidents in

THE JUJU-MAN

a five-part serial of adventure, romance, and mysticism by

THOMAS H. GRIFFITHS and ARMSTRONG LIVINGSTON

The initial installment will appear next week.

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"I Knew You'd Make Good"

'I ALWAYS felt you had it in you to get ahead. But for a time I was afraid your natural ability would be wasted because you had never trained yourself to do any one thing well. Yes, I was afraid you would always be a jack of all trades and master of none.'

"But the minute you decided to study in your spare time I knew you'd make good. You seemed more ambitious—more cheerful—more confident of the future. And I knew that your employers couldn't help but notice the difference in your work.

"Think what this last promotion means! More money—more comforts—more of everything worth while. Tom, those hours you spent on that I. C. S. course were the best investment you ever made."

HOW about you? Are you always going to work for a small salary? Are you going to waste your natural ability all your life? Or are you going to get ahead in a big way? It all depends on what you do with your spare time.

Opportunity is here—this time in the form of that familiar I. C. S. coupon. It may seem like a little thing, but it has been the means of bringing better jobs and bigger salaries to thousands of men. It will help you to get ahead, too.

More than 130,000 men are getting ready for promotion right now in the I. C. S. way. Let us tell you what we are doing for them and what we can do for you. The way to find out is easy. Just mark and mail this coupon. It won't cost you a cent or obligate you in the least, but it may be a first step toward a bigger, happier future. Don't lose a minute. Mark this coupon and get it into the mail right now.

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Without cost or obligation, please send me full information about the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

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City..... State.....
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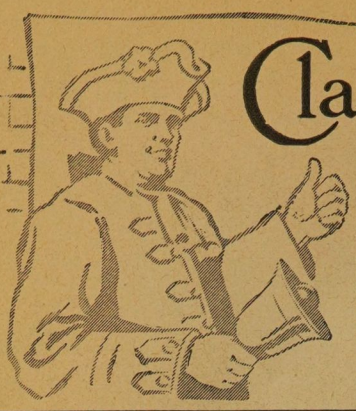
Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



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
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Minimum space four lines.		

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AGENTS—EARN $50 TO $100 A WEEK SELLING MARQUETTE TIRE TOOL. Simple demonstration sells it. Removes tires in a jiffy. Every owner wants it. Thousands in use. Exclusive territory going fast. Agent's sample $1.25, retails at $2.50. Write for full particulars or send $1.25 for sample and particulars. MARQUETTE MFG. CO., Dept. E, 218 S. Wabasha Avenue, St. Paul, Minn.

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$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.

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AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

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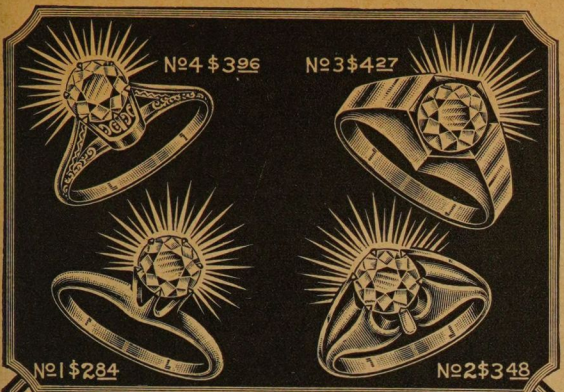

Get This Wonderful Ring. If You Can Tell It From a Genuine Diamond Send It Back

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Out Every Thursday—Ten Cents

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ONCE when picked teams, representing various national armies or guardsmen, met at Bisley, England, to shoot for the Palma Trophy, the United States team was furnished with Stevens barrels.

When the American team won the Trophy, however, there was bitterness expressed. The English claimed that it was not the man behind the gun—but the gun behind the man which carried victory.

In this brief incident is packed one of the big secrets of Stevens success—*accuracy.*

The secret is in the barrel

Stevens uses a special process, slow scraping system of rifling, removing less than the 30th part of a thousandth of an inch with each pass of the rifling cutter.

It's a slow method of drilling a barrel; it takes long, painstaking work. But when it's finished the barrel is accurate. No flaws, no protruding hard spots.

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Every firearm turned out by J. Stevens Arms Co. has attached a tag carrying the Stevens guarantee. This tag is your insurance for Stevens quality and workmanship. Read carefully this guarantee.

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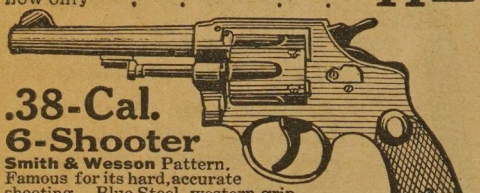

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WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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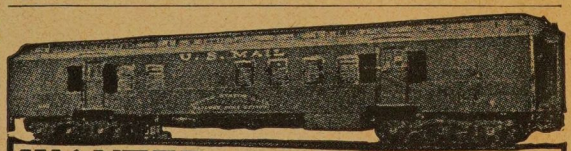

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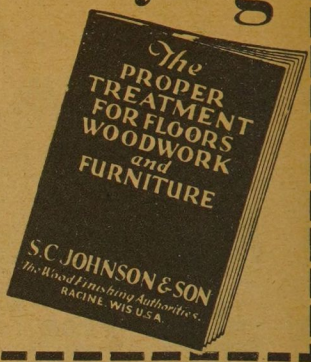

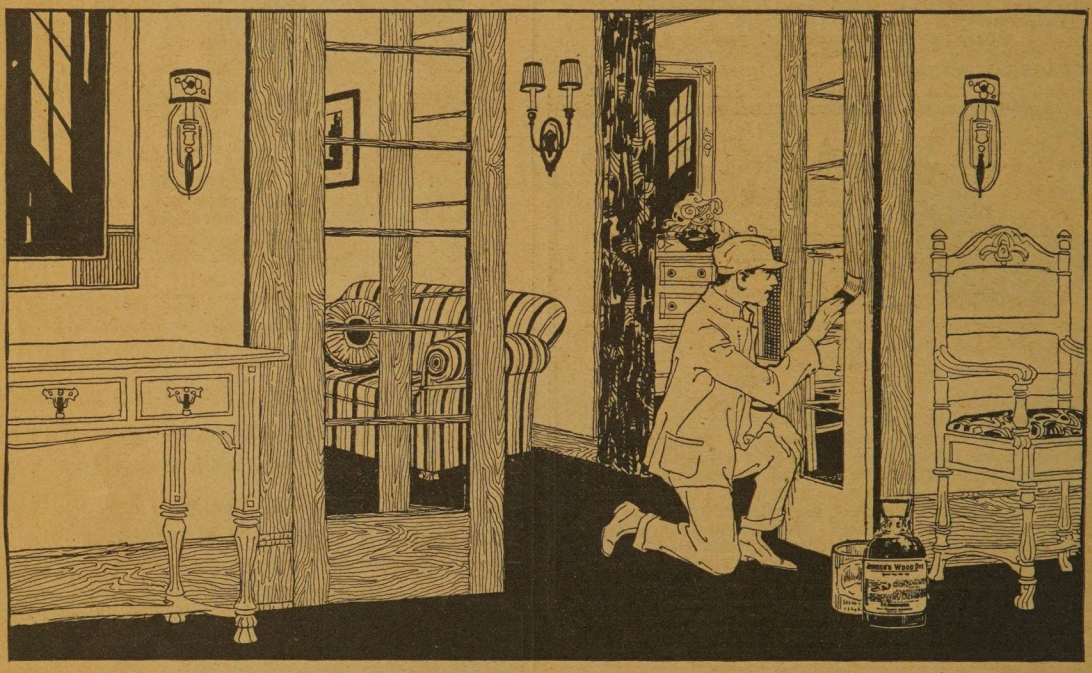

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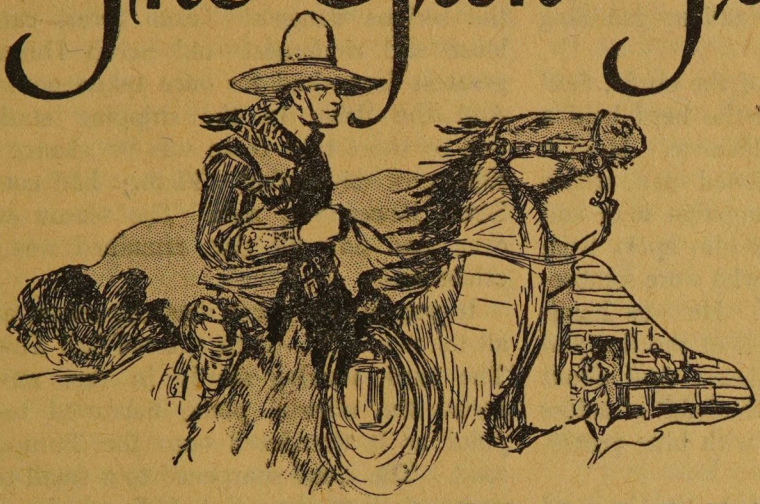
The Gun-Fanner



Part I

by Kenneth Perkins

Author of "The Fear-Sway," "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE HERD.

"YOU marry Nan Harvess, and half of that herd is yours!" Those were the words that rang in Saul Meakin's ears as the herd was brought down out of the mountains. The two men—Meakin and the owner—rode ahead, keeping just a little beyond the cloud of dust which the army of steers churned up. Behind them was the constant rumble of hoofs, the shouts of the vaqueros, and at intervals a thudding of horses' feet as the drags which had bolted were punched back into the main herd.

Meakin's destiny—as well as the destiny of all the riders—was bound up in that limitless mass of steers and yearlings, calf-brutes and meaters. For days the low thunder had beaten into the consciousness of every man. Hour by hour the sound had grown as new bunches of strays were rolled in, until—just before they reached Red Town—it swelled to a triumphal storm of dust clouds and shouting.

The steers perhaps knew nothing of what was going on, but certainly the horses did. They felt something of the thrill and victory which was beginning to enthuse the men as the herd was brought down across the final stretch of sage plain—the thrill and victory of a round-up.

The horses knew they were going back to the home corrals after a killing two weeks of night riding, of beating over rockbound ranges, of heeling to mad steers in smothering dust storms, and of loping interminably under desert suns.

And the vaqueros were going back to a riot of dancing, fighting and drinking which Red Town and their season's riches would give them. Red Town and Scrub Hazen, the owner, would give them all that their hearts desired—a harvest.

But to Scrub Hazen the event was like

a life's victory. From the time the herd came into the little cow town for the round-up until it was driven eastward to the shipping station Scrub would be king of Red Town. The sheriff would slink back into some saloon booth and give the freedom of the streets to Scrub and his men. Thus eagerly the old cattle baron jogged on, knowing that the privations of cow camp and night riding were drawing to a close, and looking forward with as much joy as his humblest cow-puncher to the youth-giving elixirs of the old familiar gambling room and bar.

To one other member of the outfit, Saul Meakin, the round-up of the herd held a peculiar and vital significance. Meakin was a tall, finely proportioned man, whose propensity for Stetson campaign hats and Cordovan puttees marked him apart from the rest of the cattlemen, who wore sombreros and sheepskin chaps. He was handsome except for a weakness of the lips and the inevitable fringe of desert dust about his eyes, which suggested the habit of actors who darken their eyelids with blue grease-paint.

As his friend had pointed out, the herd meant much to Meakin—for half of it was his if he married Nan Harvess, the owner's ward. When Meakin looked over the dim sea of horns and backs, withers and loins, the herd moving into Red Town did not suggest the riot and drunkenness of a round-up. It suggested money! Money for the best bunch of meaters brought down out of Hazen's cattle run; money for the biggest crop of calves; money for the mavericks, the stray bulls, the steerlings. Dollars! Gold! Riches!

This was the way the home-coming of the herd affected the horses and men. To every one it meant something different—but to every one it meant victory. True enough, victory was not yet perfect. There was a chance of something happening after the two days' rest and the branding and watering in town. After this the herd was to be driven to the shipping station. From the time the outfit left Red Town until it arrived at the end of a seventy-mile drive at the shipping station there was a slight chance of a slip-up somewhere.

But Hazen had ceased to worry, now that they were about to enter the cow town. There was no indication of any trouble. Heel flies had pestered the steers; bulls had given some trouble, and would have to be cut out and penned; some of the calves had died because maggots had eaten them; some of the mothers had hidden their calves in the sage brush, and loboes had picked them off. But these were minor losses, and during the whole round-up there had been no evidence of any of the serious dangers: Texas fever, cattle louse and rinderpest—old Scrub Hazen's greatest fear—had for once taken no toll. And the drive to the shipping station was so short that there was no chance of rinderpest developing. Victory had come. Scrub Hazen was rich. The season was over, and now all that remained was to celebrate.

It was in this spirit that the owner and all the men of his outfit entered Red Town. The herd, moving slowly in vast waves across the alluvial plain, narrowed to a point as it thundered onto the Turnpike road. The cloud sharpened to a small tornado—dark at the point, fading to brown, to yellow, to mauve. And then as the vanguard was punched up the long rise which terminated in the main street the thunder of hoofs reached the ears of the residents of the town.

Then it was that the townsfolk came out like people expecting the return of a victorious army. Ranchers and stockmen left the saloons; gaming tables were deserted; the sheriff waddled out of his office, buckling on his holster, anticipating gun fights, and yet knowing he would be requested to keep his hands out of the game; the barber ran out of his little shack on the corner, and from the empty lot behind him came the Chinaman who kept a public chow cart; and his guests—Choctaws, mutton men and cowboys who were munching at their "hot dogs"—followed him.

It was thus that Red Town turned out to greet the coming of the herd. And old Scrub Hazen, while his cow hunters were packing the brutes into the show yards on the outskirts of the town, rode down the main street to receive the plaudits of

his subjects. Scrub Hazen knew that for two days he would be king.

CHAPTER II.

THE COW PSYCHOLOGIST.

IN that mob of red-necked, shouting buckaroos, of sun-warped, tight-eyed Indians, and stove-in cowboys, there was one person who struck a violent contrast. It was a conflict of color and personality more violent than the red blanket of Hopi squaw or the buzzard feathers of Choctaw chief against the background of dun-colored shacks. It was as if a brown, slender, big-eyed doe were found suddenly in the middle of a churning herd of Texas steers. Scrub Hazen's ward, a girl of eighteen, had come to town from the Lazy-H cow outfit to celebrate the home-coming of the steers and cowpunchers which were hers.

To describe Nan Harvess as a doe among the steers of Red Town falls far short of the impression she really created in the minds of every one. It being spring time, the minds of Red Town would probably evoke the picture of a waxlike white flower which appears almost like a star on the highest prong of the ugly sojuaro cactus. Nan Harvess was all that was needed to transmute that mob of rough, sun-tanned, heat-wizened people into something as picturesque as the sojuaro in spring. She was a slender girl of medium height, without much color to her cheeks but with ringlets of auburn red hair that turned to reddish gold when she bared her head to the desert sun.

When Scrub Hazen rode up to her buckboard and dismounted she stepped down to the street and threw her arms about the leathery neck of the old cowman. Upon the stumpy little cattle king Nan had lavished the affection of a girl upon a man whom she regards as her only parent. But Scrub Hazen had little room in his dried-up, miserly old soul for such affection. His whole life and hopes were bound up in the big beef herd. The little girl who had been bequeathed to him by a former partner was loved by every one—and naturally by old Scrub as well. But it was scarcely more than the love of a stocky, range-fed bull for some little white calf that wanted to be recognized.

"Wal, gal, I brought you back your meaters!" was his usual greeting after the long ride on the range. "You can go back to the dipping pens and take a look at your stock. Tom Caborca will show you." He turned to one of his herders who acted as foreman. "Show the gal around, Tom."

Scrub's young chum, Saul Meakin, drove up, acknowledging on every hand the greetings of the townsfolk. In the month that Saul Meakin had been in the county as Scrub's guest he had obtained favor in the sight of the ranch people. They understood he was looking over the country preparatory to entering the cattle business himself. It was also understood that he was eligible as a husband for Scrub Hazen's ward, Nan Harvess. Nan herself was as enthusiastic as any one in her greeting. Meakin took the hand she held out to him.

"You have the best beef herd I've seen in the West, Miss Nan," he said. "And you've got a fine outfit. Those puncher boys know how to tuck the old steers into the corrals in a hurry. And if you want to know my idea of the toughest job in the world, it's separating the cows from their young in the calf pens. But work of that kind when they're working for the most beautiful girl in the country must be pleasure of the keenest sort."

"While the gal's lookin' over the stock, Meakin," little Scrub Hazen here broke in, "you and me can go and put a little hootch under the belt. My throat's chuck full of alkali."

Meakin squeezed the girl's hand and stared earnestly at her face. While his friend was talking he was noticing her deep-brown eyes and the pretty gleam of teeth. The picture of the sojuaro cactus which he had seen all over the range came to his mind. He looked up, realized that he was standing in a ring of grinning stockmen, released her hand, and followed old Hazen into the Jackdog Saloon.

"Do you think she'll have me?" Meakin

asked when they stepped up to the sud-covered bar.

"Keep the crowd out, Jo," Hazen said to the barkeep. "We got some important business matters to talk on." He turned to his friend, and the two tossed off their little glasses of red-eye. "Saul, old boy, I'm coming right out with what's in my mind. I've knowed you for a long time, Saul. I remember you as a little shave learnin' to ride on a sunfishin', cake-walkin' jackass. I seen you poppin' at sage hens with your ole airgun. I learned you how to fan a trigger, and I learned you how to twirl a lass rope and also how to fill into a four-fiush. Ever since you was knee high you been my disciple for ways that are good and ways that ain't. And now comes a chanst for you to repay me."

Saul Meakin knew what this chance was to be, and he answered accordingly: "Anything you say, Scrub, as my best friend in the world, I'll do."

"All righto, Saul, and here goes. I'm gettin' old. I want to retire. I cain't leave that Tom Caborca take care of my outfit, although he's the only man on the range as can handle a herd the size of mine. I got to go on workin' and slavin' until some one comes along who'll go on buildin' up the business with the same interest like I got.

"I don't mean the interest of a paid foreman; I mean the interest of some bird who knows the herd is part hisn. Now, bein' as I am without a heir, the only chanst we got for adding a man to the family is to glom onto a husband for Nan. I've figured that the man to take charge of the outfit as I retire should ought to be Nan's husband. If that thar husband is some one who can handle men and cows and the adversities of drought and rinderpest and everything else that's good or ornery, then, I says, ole Scrub gets up on the shelf and retires for a life of rest and red-eye."

"Then the favor you ask of me," Saul Meakin laughed, "is that I marry your ward? That's not a favor. I've told you all along that I want her."

"Then you got to get busy and corral her. Any one in town knows—and so does the gal herself—that you're the only eligible bridegroom in these parts."

"But has she a mind to marrying?" Saul asked.

"Ah-h! Now you've hit it! 'Has she a mind to marryin'?' Well, let me tell you this: she has! She's the all-firedest romantic gal who ever got stranded out among a bunch of red-necked buckaroos. She's as romantic and lovelorn as the old-time ladies who sent their knights out to punch up each other with redwood poles. You know what I mean; you see pictures of them on almanacs and King's sheep-dip and on books relatin' to pink eye and other hoss troubles. She's all fed up with readin' and dreamin' romance. Her idea of life is them bronc-twirlin' contests which they used to call tournyments."

"I know all about them," Meakin put in, "but what the Sam Hill has this got to do with my marryin' your girl?"

"It's got everything to do with it. The point is we got to approach her romantic like. I figured she's probably got her eye on you, but she ain't experienced enough yet. You see Nan is really only a little gal, bein' as she's lived on a cow farm all her life. You take a gal in the city who's eighteen, and she knows a thing or two—even a gal in a village. To my mind a gal in a village knows considerable more. But these here womenfolk on ranches, they don't get much of this thing you call experience. Once in a while they get a holt on a woman's magazine and read about love matters and such. But take Nan, for instance—she ain't never shined up to any of our cow hands. She thinks she's better than they are—and damned if she ain't right, most of them bein' smirched with a bit of Mex in their blood.

"But you're different. And she knows it. You talk English and shave your neck—and *that's* important with wimmenfolk. A man don't heed another guy's neck, but a woman for some consarned crazy reason does. Nan likes you. She knows you're the only man around, but she's young, as I say, and don't know her mind."

"I'll go to her and ask her. I'll make her know her mind."

"You cain't make that gal do nothin'!

I've tried it myself. She's plumb independent, and we've got to work this here suit of yourn right. And if you want to know my opinion, now's the time. Now that that mob of greasers and cow-punchers are out thar whoopin' her up and the whole town's goin' on a drunk to celebrate the comin' of the herd, I reckon the gal herself is fired with some of their enthusiasm and all set for a little excitement. That excitement is goin' to be a proposal."

"I'll get her alone—right now," Meakin suggested.

"Hold your hosses, now! Dammit! You got to do this thing my way. I'm consentin' to the match—and only on condition I can stage the whole business. As I was sayin', the town's crazy for a big celebration. And I'm goin' to give it to 'em. It's goin' to be an engagement party. And let me tell you, it's goin' to be such a party as has never been give in these parts. My name will go down in history on this range as the best giver-away of a bride as ever appeared at a weddin'. This here engagement party is to be celebrated by a round-up."

"How can we give an engagement party without my being engaged?" Meakin asked dubiously.

"You'll be engaged."

"Yes, I reckon she ought to have me."

"I reckon so. You're good lookin', and you know it. But at that we cain't go frightenin' this gal of mine into a weddin'. We got to frame it up so's it 'll look like a ole-time tournyment with a bunch of knights ridin' for a gal's hand. You know all that stuff!"

"Sure. But—"

"I'll announce to the townsfolk that, bein' as how the herd is brung in all fit for the shipping station, and bein' as I'm to pay off my men, and every one wants to get drunk, I intend for to give 'em somethin' real to get drunk about. I'll say to them: 'Ladies and gents!'—no, I won't say 'ladies'; this game applies only to gents—I'll say: 'Gents! Here's your chanst to ride in a rodeo and show your prowess. They's goin' to be a day of bronc bustin', lass ropin', chariot racin', pony express ridin' and every other sport ever pulled out in the West, and the bird who comes out ahead—that 'll be you, of course—is to have the hand of my foster daughter, Nan Harvess! Old Jim Harvess's daughter, who is the purtiest gal west of Santa Fe and south of Pike's Peak. That ought to get 'em!"

"Will it get *her?*"

"Try her. Propose to her, and then I'll follow up with my little rodeo."

"It's a go!" Saul Meakin said enthusiastically. "If she can't make up her mind to have me as I am—wait till she sees me tip a lasso and bust a few buck-jumpin' bulls!"

"You mention a point thar, Meakin," the cattle-owner said seriously. "I'm goin' into this with the understandin' that you'll win."

"There's no doubt about it—you know that."

"I want you to understand that I ain't goin' to offer that thar gal to no greaser who might by chanst beat you out!"

"There's no one in the county can beat me out, Scrub. You know well enough I can outshoot and outride every one."

"I'm doin' this thing you must remember because I think it's for the gal's good as much as it is for anybody's," Hazen went on. "I'm her guardian, and I ain't aimin' on betrayin' my trust, as the saying goes. I never had much use for old Harvess, her dad, I will say, but at that I ain't exactly figurin' on throwin' the gal to the winds."

"Certainly not. It's got to be done with her permission," Meakin rejoined. "You point out to her that the man who can win a rodeo is the sort of man she ought to marry — provided of course he isn't a cook—like some of these cowdogs around here. You yourself hint to her that there's no chance of my losing. We'll only have such events as I can win hands down: roping, bronc-busting, maybe driving a stage."

"Sure! That'll fix it! That'll fix it. I'll sort of explain to her that this here rodeo is what you might call a formal announcement of her engagement—and we'll let the boys sign up to compete just for the romance of the thing—you know—romance!"

"Sure that'll get her!" Meakin said.

" And put in a word or two about my being an ideal husband and all that—aye, chief?"

" S-h! Leave it to me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE RED TOWN KNIGHTS.

HAZEN waited in the street while Saul Meakin left to play his first move in the game for Nan Harvess's hand. The old rancher waited in much the same manner in which a mother cow waits outside a corral while her calf is being roped, hogtied and marked.

After twenty minutes of this nerve-racking suspense — during which Nan and the young suitor were lost in the remoter and cloudier limits of the stockyards—Hazen saw his girl hurrying to him.

Nan was flushed, excited, joyful, and frightened. She found her foster father waiting for her at her buckboard, with a crowd of old stockmen about him who were indulging in street speeches. The girl asked to see Scrub alone, and accordingly the two stepped into Sheriff Pickering's office across the street.

" Saul Meakin has been talking to me," she said breathlessly.

" About what? Why are you so fussed?"

" About me," the girl stammered. " He—he wants me to—"

Scrub opened his eyes in exaggerated surprise: " Ah-h! That's it! Wants you to marry him. And what did you say?"

" I said I wanted to see you."

" You waren't taken too sudden-like?"

" Yes—I—"

" You been thinkin' of that thar young feller ever since he come to town. Come now! 'Fess up!"

" Yes, I have—but—"

" What did you tell him?"

" I said I wanted to see you."

Little Scrub scratched his bald head thoughtfully. Finally he cleared his throat and said: " Now look here, gal. It appears to me you don't know much about these matters. You're only a little gal at heart and mebbe you don't realize that it's time that men begin fallin' all over theirselves tryin' to get you for a wife. The thing for you to do is to set your heart on the right man—"

" I don't know if Saul Meakin is the right man," the girl said uncertainly.

" No; of course you don't. It ain't for you to judge entirely for yourself. What I want you to do, gal, is to trust to my judgment. Let me advise you in this here affair and I'll do what I think is best for your happiness."

" I know you will, Daddy Hazen," the girl rejoined. " That's why I have come to you now."

" And you figure what I say ought to go?"

" Yes."

" Wal, then, listen to me. I know that you ain't quite made up your mind about this here handsome young feller, Meakin. And I don't want for you to hurry you up. By all means it ain't right that you should turn him down. He's too good a catch. All the ranchers' daughters in the county is anglin' for him. He's a big fighter, a leader among the cowmen. He talks English, which I'll say is rare in these here parts. In fact he talks as good English as you learned from that ole schoolmistress of yourn at Jackass Creek. As a husband he shines up as good as a double-action Colt—well-balanced with a cylinder of six chambers full of common sense. Since you say you'll take my advice, I say, take him. And in order that you won't be throwin' yourself too suddint at him, I'm goin' to frame up a little engagement party which will make this here county sit up and take notice the rest of their days. I'm goin' to announce a rodeo—races, contests and all. And the man who's goin' to win these here contests will be Saul Meakin. Because he can outshoot, outfight, and outride any one on this range." Scrub saw the girl's eyes light up, and he went on fervently: " I'll announce it so's it'll look like the old fairy-tale contests where the king gives his daughter's hand to the suitor who goes out into the royal corral and bulldogs some snortin' dragon!"

Nan Harvess burst out into a silvery laugh. It was not a laugh directed at old Scrub, but a burst of joyful anticipation. A direct proposal on the part of Saul

Meakin could not evoke the proper response within her—and she knew that it was impossible for her to give him a direct acceptance. This contest, she felt—subconsciously—was an escape from a sudden engagement. Somehow she felt that the few hours of the rodeo which would give young Meakin a chance to exhibit his feats of strength and skill and horsemanship would be all that she needed to make up her mind to accept him.

"But is there no chance that some one else might win this contest?" she asked.

"That I would not allow!" Scrub assured her. "It must be a frame-up. I'll announce just certain events—the events which Saul can win hands down. You know yourself he's got every one in the county beat. In fact, he's got 'em beat in everything. And for that matter every one knows it. But we'll announce the contest bona fide—as a game with you as the prize. It'll be like the story I once heard old Buck Saunders, the sky-pilot, tell of. He said it happened in Greece where I understand the cattlemen was outnumbered by shepherds. And, says he, some Jane or other had so many suitors that she don't know what to do. And there bein' a lot of cattle-rustlin' goin' on she wants a husband as can shoot a bow-and-arrow. In them days they didn't have no guns, but went around pluggin' each other like the Sioux up Cheyenne way. So this Jane has a bow-and-arrow contest and gives her hand to the winner, who turns out, as I recollect, to be a President by the name of Ulysses Grant!"

"And she kept her word?"

"Damn right! Though as it occurs to me there was some ball-up at the end. The winner had already been married to her, which in my mind should orter have disqualified him. But that's the story anyway."

Nan Harvess again burst out into a merry laugh which she cut short suddenly: "Daddy Hazen," she said with a serious note in her voice, "I want to have you understand one thing first: if I give my word that the winner of this contest is to win me, I want you to know that I will keep my word. Once you announce this contest there will be no way out."

"Ain't no cause for bein' a way out. You just say the word and I'll go out and announce to the mob out thar just what the game's to be, and you listen to the cheering!"

The girl was afire with enthusiasm, and again the contest seemed to come as a relief. It would at least postpone her engagement to Saul Meakin, and although she did not actually realize this was her greatest desire—to keep the engagement and the marriage off—she knew that she now felt a curious sort of freedom from Saul Meakin. At any rate—she said to herself: Meakin could not claim her until he had gone through a trial by combat.

"Daddy Hazen," she said; "you always know best and I have always put my trust in you. Remember what I have said—that there will be no way out, once the people in the town have heard us give our word. It will be a matter of honor then."

"So you do give your consent, gal!" Hazen cried. "It'll be the greatest celebration ever pulled off! There ain't no fairy-tale ever writ by Greeks or gringos or Hopis that will equal it!"

"Yes, I give my consent."

Little Scrub put on his laced gauntlets and his old lop-brimmed sombrero and hurried out into the street. He had a firm conviction that he was going to electrify the town, and he was right.

CHAPTER IV.

A GUNFIGHTER COMES TO TOWN.

BY a little before noon the whole town had heard that there was going to be a big celebration. As far as they knew the event was to be held in honor of the rounding-up of Hazen's beef-herd. A rodeo held enough of excitement apart from its significance to work the ranchers and their cowboys into a fervor of excitement. Betting would be wild—all odds favoring Hazen's foreman, and aside from this suspense there would be the dangers of the bronc-twirling and roping contests, dear to the heart of all cowtown citizens. And to add to this, the rumor began to insinuate itself into one saloon after another that old

Scrub Hazen was going to offer a reward—the greatest reward ever offered at any Wild West Show—for the champion. At high noon in front of the Jackdog Saloon—so it was understood—Scrub Hazen was going to make a speech, announce the reward and draw up a list of the contestants.

By twelve o'clock the little cowtown street was jammed with people. At every snubbing-post saddle horses were hitched, buckboards of the visiting ranchers lined the street on both sides for the entire length of the town. Hopis, Choctaws, Mexicans and half-breeds "bellied the bars" with roisterous cow-punchers and buckaroos. Every one for miles around, in fact, had declared a holiday — except the barkeeps. And the drab dusty little town had suddenly blossomed out into a veritable little circus of color and noise and life.

The climax came when little Scrub Hazen, amid a hullabaloo of cheers, stepped up on a buckboard and bared his bald, sweating head preparatory to making a speech.

"Ladies and gents!" he bawled out in a high-pitched voice. "You-all and me is goin' to have one hell of a big time from now on until my herd is drove up to the shipping station to-morry! We're goin' to celebrate proper. And from the noise some of you bullwhackers has been making I reckon you've caught the spirit of it already. But what I'm up her to make a speech about is this: you-all haven't got the slightest idea of what you're celebratin'. Oh, yes, I know when a herd comes to town it livens things up a bit. Life in one of these here cow-stations ain't got much excitement except maybe a draw-poker game now and then and a Mex shot for havin' some gal's picture in his pocket, which is all as he needs to fill into a queen-high straight! But all that ain't nothin' compared to what I'm goin' to give you!"

Cheers broke in on him, and Sheriff Pickering yelled out: "You're always givin' us somethin', Scrub! Your boys buy the town dry! That's somethin'! Plenty of kale in this town after the herd passes through!"

"Now listen to this, gents!" old Hazen went on. "You men in a cowtown don't know what a real time is. You ain't been awoke yet to the kind of a time you can have—like they had in the good old days, as Buck Saunders says: 'when knights was bold!'"

"That-a-boy, Scrub!" the cowmen yelled. "A tournyment is what we want!"

"That's it, ladies and gents. A tournyment! They's goin' to be knights ridin' bronchos. We'll have buckboards instead of chariots, and steers instead of dragons. But it'll be a good old-time, fairy-tale for all that—like the tale our wimminfolk tell the yearlings in the winter season. And to make this a bona fide ole fairy-tale, I'm goin' to offer a reward for the puncher-boy as wins this here rodeo, and it's goin' to be a reward like them we heard when we was kids. It's going to be the hand of a beautiful princess!"

A murmur went through the mass of upturned faces—a murmur which swelled to a roar of questions: "What you handin' us, Scrub? Where do you get that? You-all been takin' too much jackass brandy, Scrub! You're stuffin' us, Scrub!"

"I ain't stuffin' nobody! The reward which I am offerin' to the winner of this here rodeo is the hand of my foster daughter, Nan Harvess! And if you don't believe me—ask her! It's all arranged. The rodeo is goin' to be a engagement party, and Nan Harvess is the prize!"

The volley of questions over which Scrub had pitched his voice for the last part of his speech swelled again into cheers and whoops until the crowd, beginning to see the seriousness of the announcement, suddenly fell silent.

"They's to be a little preliminary bronc-twirlin', racin' and sharp-shootin'," Scrub went on to explain in a voice which was now hoarsely excited. "Then they's to be three finals. The gents as gets into these here finals will compete in three different ways: First we'll have a lass-throwin' contest—and in order to cut out the guys that has no nerve we'll turn in a bunch of stallions and make a bird go in and rope one of 'em!"

"That'll fall to Saul Meakin!" one of the crowd yelled out.

"Yes, Saul Meakin will get the gal without no argyment!" another shouted.

"Maybe Meakin can win the lass-throwin' contest," the cattle king admitted. "But in order that everything is fair we'll have another contest: a race with three stage-coaches!"

"He'll win that, too!"

"No, maybe Tom Caborca has a chanst at that!" Sheriff Pickering said placatingly. "It'll be some fight anyways!"

This last sentiment was acclaimed by loud yipping on the part of everybody until Scrub raised his hand for a final bid for silence.

"Now then, gents, they's going to be a menu pasted up in Jo's red-eye parlor, and on that there menu you birds as wants to compete for my gal will sign your names. I'll give you one hour to make up your minds concernin' whether you wants to git married or not. One hour, men! And that's all any honest cowdog wants for to consider matrimony!"

Scrub's speech was broken by a wild stampede for Jo's saloon. Every cow-puncher who would twirl a lasso or stay on a horse considered himself available for the big came, and every rancher who had ever had his hands on the reins of a three-team deadwood coach, pictured himself as the hero of the final entry.

Before one o'clock the town was in a turmoil of expectation. And when the excitement was at its height Sheriff Pickering, noticing the jam of cowmen about Jo's Jackdog Saloon, approached old Scrub Hazen.

"It appears to me every one in town hopes to have a hand in at the finish, Scrub."

"We didn't figure my gal was so popular—aye, sheriff?"

"She's too popular, if you want my opinion."

Scrub glanced up angrily at the lumbering figure of the sheriff. "What and the hell can you mean by that, Pick?"

"Just this: you see them sousing buckaroos goin' in there to sign up?"

"What of it? They ain't none of them goin' to have a look-in."

"Perhaps not. It's goin' about the town that the gal's engaged to your friend, Saul Meakin, and that everything's goin' to turn out all right. It ain't spoilin' your game, because the boys prefer thinkin' it's all in fun. They know Meakin will win. But have you stopped to think, Scrub, there might be a slip-up somewheres. What if Meakin didn't win?"

"He'll win all right. We figured on that first. That's why I picked out the games he was best at."

"But if he didn't. They're dangerous games. What if he got trampled on by one of our showbuckers?"

Scrub scratched his wet forehead and then shrugged his shoulders. "If you want to know the truth, sheriff, I'll tell you. If Meakin didn't win, I don't figure the gal will cry her eyes out none. She ain't made her mind up any too certain. I'm putting this here game acrost so's she'll see there's something to Meakin. He's a good bird—will make a good husband and a good manager. And I want for her to come around to his side."

"That's all right—that part of it. We all know Meakin and her will make a good match, and the town's kind of gettin' into the spirit of it and celebratin', knowin' damned well this is really only a engagement announcement, and not a contest at all. But you're argufyin' two ways. You say if he don't win it's all right, too. What if some greaser won? There wouldn't be so much yipping and cheering then—aye, what?"

"Then there'd be fightin'."

"That's what I thought. And that's why I'm axin' you to call this here game off."

"I ain't going to call it off. The gal give her own consent, and I made the announcement afore the whole town. A fine sport I'd be backin' out now—aye?"

"Well I'm warnin' you, Scrub. She's too good a gal—"

"I know! I know! It's her doings as well as mine. And if you want to know the truth, get this: there ain't nothin' in the world would make that gal take the offer back. You might persuade me, but if I understand her — and she's damned ornery at times when her mind's set—I tell you she ain't goin' to back out for you nor for me—nor for nobody!"

Scrub Hazen turned into the saloon to make the announcement that the preliminary events would begin at two that afternoon in Cow McGintry's corral at the north of the town.

Sheriff Pickering was about to follow him and take a look at the contestants—the suitors who were to bid for Nan Harvess's hand—when he was interrupted by a horseman—a sheepherder, riding at a breakneck speed down the crowded street of the down and calling the sheriff's name.

The man drove up in front of the saloon and dismounted before the sheriff. He was a little bow-legged man with lop-brimmed hat, moleskin vest, torn canvas overalls and hobnail boots.

"I come to warn you, sheriff!" he said breathlessly. "They's a gunfighter coming to town—a bird by the name of Cal Triggers!"

"You say it's a gunfighter?" the sheriff rejoined calmly, twisting his cigar between his thick lips. "Maybe it's a gunfighter, Mr. Muttonman, but it ain't Cal Triggers!"

"Yes, it is Cal Triggers, sheriff! I ain't made no mistake! He's wearin' that tall-peaked hat with the thongs around his chin. You can't mistake that thar chin, sheriff. Nor you can't mistake his black hair and his black flannel shirt."

The sheriff's eyes which had narrowed slightly to the sun, opened.

"Black shirt and black hair and the thongs—how about his horse?"

"A big calico hoss—the outlaw he busted down to—"

"Yes, I know. A calico outlaw, I know. Well, I'll be damned to the blackest, bottomest, cussingest pit of hell's fire!"

"I thought you'd like to know, sheriff. Particular afore he comes shootin' the place up."

"There's going to be hell to pay now—with that hell-bustin', hoss-bustin' gunman comin' to town."

"He'll shoot up everybody, sheriff!"

"No, he won't! No, he won't! You've got me all wrong. I didn't say he was goin' to shoot up nobody. I wisht he would, that's all. If he'd only draw his dirty six-shooter and start pottin' somebody it'd be all right. But he won't."

"Well, what and the hell then, sheriff! I thought you kind of turned pale when I mentioned his name."

"Sure I turned pale. I felt my blood runnin' out'n my face down to my jackboots, like I had a nosebleed. That's how I turned pale! And it's because I'm plumb scairt that this here is one time he'll make up his mind not to shoot. Thar's somethin' much worse. And it's this: Cal Triggers is going to ack peaceful-like in this town—and that's the worst thing that hell-bender can do!"

The sheriff hurried into Jo's Jackdog, and the sheepman stood dumfounded in the middle of the street, scratching his red nose and swearing with every word in a sheepman's vocabulary that the sheriff was crazy drunk. He turned to the crowd.

"If the sheriff won't listen to me, I'll tell all you men instead. Jump to your mounts! Loosen your holster flaps! Get the women folk out'n the way! Cal Triggers, the gunfighter, has come to town!"

CHAPTER V.

TRIGGERS BELLIES THE BAR.

THE town, which a moment before the arrival of Cal Triggers had been a scene of holiday-making and riotous festivity, changed as suddenly as a sunny sky before the advent of a cyclone. It seemed as if the gay noisy little street were suddenly darkened by a blanket of clouds. Women called to their little children to stop playing and squealing; visiting sheep ranchers slunk into the protection of saloon and dance-halls; horse-owners who had tethered their mounts in the open hurried them to snubbing-posts in the back of buildings, fearing that stray bullets might lodge in their favorite pets. In short, the whole aspect of the cowtown changed as abruptly as a scene in a play from carnival to a funereal background of waiting and fear. Cal Triggers, who had killed four men, was coming to town. Cal Triggers, who was invincible with his six-gun, invincible with his fists, and the greatest horseman that had ever been heard of in those parts, had suddenly come down from his distant

mountain lair to play a hand in Scrub Hazen's little game.

He was a large athletic-looking man, riding his vicious, hook-nosed mustang with a care-free swing, and wearing a tall-peaked sombrero which threw his big jaw into the sharp relief of sunlight. A miniature cinch and latigo buckled under his red chin gave the face a harsh almost military aspect. Laced leather wrist guards and sheepskin chaps did not alleviate this impression. Furthermore, he rode in as if he owned the town, and for that matter there was no one in the whole street who seemed inclined to dispute such a claim.

The crowd was appalled. Their first thought was that this well-known gunfighter had come to start some rumpus with Hazen's herd. But this idea was apparently ridiculous. He had ridden in alone and in broad daylight. If he had wanted to do some rustling, he would have had plenty of opportunity when Hazen and his little hand of night riders were on the range. Furthermore, this Cal Triggers had never been known to indulge in cattle-rustling. His name had grown as a killer—not for money, not for cattle, not for gain of any sort, not even for revenge, but just—as the story went—for the mere joy of killing. He was, according to Sheriff Pickering, the worst type of criminal. But what other reason he could have for coming boldly into the town where he would meet a sheriff in the open, no one could guess. The last supposition possible was that he had come as a man of peace. And yet this supposition was the most disastrous of all. What was to become of the rodeo and the glorious contests for the hand of the prettiest girl of the county? Was old Scrub Hazen brave enough to call it off? Was Nan Harvess brave enough to stick to her word?

Nan Harvess herself was waiting for her foster father, sitting in her little buckboard when the gunfighter cantered down the street toward her.

"I guess the game's all up now, ma'am," one of the ranchers said to her. "Scrub Hazen didn't figure on this here gunman coming into town when he offered you as a prize at the rodeo."

The girl looked up and saw the horseman slow to a walk, glance about at the silent crowd and press his ugly horse on toward the Jackdog Saloon. Nan saw his great shoulders, and their free, powerful movement as if there were a connection between the muscles of the horse and the rider. Those shoulders seemed the shoulders not of a man, but of a great animal, half man, half horse. Cal Triggers's gaze passed across the glum faces of the men on the board sidewalk and met the girl. He only looked for a moment. He had no expertness in flirting. But the one second of his stare went through the girl's frame like a slight chill, and the crowd saw it.

"Now there's goin' to be hell to pay," a cowboy muttered.

"I guess the rodeo is all busted up before it ever started," some one said to the girl. She turned to see Saul Meakin at her side.

"Why? I have not said it was to be called off."

"But that horseman is Cal Triggers. You've heard of Cal Triggers? Killed two men just a month ago down in Texas. Shot another in a fight up in Albuquerque and beat up a Mex in Nogales so that he croaked in an hour! That's who he is!"

"If he's a gunman, the sheriff will take care of him," Nan replied coolly.

"No sheriff ever took care of *him!* And for that matter no United States marshal and no posse of gun-deputies. No man has ever gotten away with the murders that crook has since the old days of moonshine wire and pony express! In these civilized times you'd think the bad were all thinned out, but they aren't."

This introduction of the gunfighter—as well as the appearance of the man, and the way he had looked at her, struck a sudden terror into the girl's heart. Fearing that Cal Triggers was actually going to ride toward her Nan jumped out of her buggy and hurried to the refuge of the nearest door, which was the door to the sheriff's office.

But Cal Triggers rode on, and when he came to the Jackdog Saloon he dismounted, tied his horse to a snubbing-post, around which an open space had miraculously appeared in the crowd of ranchers and sheep-

men. Then, hitching up his chaps, he stalked to the veranda of the old shack and banged open the door.

The guests of the Jackdog having been apprised by the sheriff of the gunfighter's arrival were waiting in uncomfortable suspense. Some of the more peacefully inclined citizens had sneaked out the back-door, and others, eager to witness a fight, had slipped into the protection of booths—others in the dance hall.

"I ain't goin' to say nothin' to him." Sheriff Pickering turned a moist and rather pale fat face toward the big audience. "I want for him to show his hand first. Let him start sometin', then—bingo!"

The sheriff himself—in order not to precipitate an argument — explained that he would better watch the proceedings without actually showing himself. Accordingly he invited Scrub Hazen to sit in to a hand of draw-poker at one of the gaming tables. "I will have my back to the lousy crook," the sheriff said, "and I can hear everything that goes on without him knowing I'm here."

"He's cussing quick at the draw, sheriff," Scrub said. "Do you figure if he starts a fight you can draw, turn and get up from the table quick enough?"

"I ain't goin' to start a fight yet. Not until I have something on him," Pickering rejoined just as Cal Triggers banged into the room.

Men tried to look unconcerned as the stranger walked into the open space which had been cleared for him. A few remained at either end of the bar, but when Triggers stepped to it, the long wet mahogany was covered with half-filled forsaken glasses. Most of the crowd merely glanced over their shoulders pretending unconcern, or watched the stranger out of the corners of their eyes, or followed his reflection in the cracked speckled mirror above the bar which distorted the gunfigther's face horribly. He peered out at them from the mirror like a big lopsided giant, and the scar which was cut across his temple seemed the wound of a huge scimitar which had all but cleaved his head in half.

But most of the crowd preferred to keep their backs to the newcomer, following the example of the sheriff. For every man had a curious fear that Triggers would ask him for a smoke or invite him to drink or start a quarrel with him. In Red Town men said that it was easier to get into conversation with a stranger than to get out.

Old Jo, the bartender, was the only one to look directly into Trigger's face, and this feat was probably facilitated by the fact that the barkeep had only one red eye. Besides this, old Jo knew Triggers, and there was a bond of sympathy between them.

"I'm glad to see you, Cal," Jo said in a surprisingly cool voice. "You look kinder like you been ridin'!"

"Been riding like hell," Triggers answered, his voice, although pitched low, going into the farthest, silent corners of the saloon. "There's no water in the mountains between here and Devil's Cañon, which means I'm dying of thirst."

"Have a split of champagne on the house, Cal."

"I will, like hell! You know what I stick to, and you drink with me, you shag-gutted old woman. Alkali whisky for the two of us."

The barkeep poured the drink so that the sound of the gurgling bottle could be heard through the door of the saloon, over the dance-floor, past the gaming-tables, into every recess of the room.

"What are you-all doin' in town, Cal?" Jo asked casually.

Despite the natural, friendly tone, every man in the saloon gasped at the little, one-eyed barkeep's audacity. Gunfighters generally answered a question like this decisively with oaths and lead. But Cal Triggers believed in the friendly tone of little Jo's words, and his answer was not in any way decisive. He looked around at the crowd as if wishing some one else had asked that question, then took off his big sombrero and beat it on the bar, shaking up big clouds of white alkali.

"Well, Jo, you've asked me something!" he said. The audience having held its breath during this terrific moment of suspense, sighed now in audible relief. Actually Jo had gotten away with the most dangerous move a man could make.

"He likes old Jo," they said in their minds. "That's the point! He likes the damned little one-eyed skunk."

And now came another expectant moment. Just why had the gunfighter come to town? And how was he going to answer the barkeep's question with that big crowd of witnesses at his back?

"Well, Jo, strange as you may think it, I haven't come to town to plug anybody." Cal laughed. "Just why I've come is a hard question to answer, but I'll make a bluff at it. Once in a while up there in the mountains where I've been prospecting—"

"Sure, I know you been prospectin' up thar, Cal!" the barkeep put in enthusiastically. "We all know that, Cal!"

"Well, the mountains get damned lonely once in a while—particularly at this time of the year when the heel flies begin to make love to the cows, and that damned stinking cactus begins to bloom!"

"Damned if you ain't got the soul of a poet, Cal!"

"And a man gets lonely up there. I've been figuring just how damnably lonely I am. I said to myself, 'Guess it's time to go into town, Cal, and meet a few of your old friends!'"

The barkeep felt this remark too serious for comment, particularly as Pickering—all sheriffs being particular "friends" of Cal—was in the room.

"And I said, 'I guess it's time for you to be getting a girl, Cal!'"

"*You said what?*" the barkeep cried, for the first time completely losing the modulation of his voice.

"A girl, I said. A girl! I've come to town to get a girl—the prettiest girl you've got—whoever she is. I want a girl! That's what. So that I won't be nosing about the desert like a blind coyote without a friend in the world. I want a mate! Do you get me, Jo? And this lousy town is where I've come to get one!"

Jo opened his mouth, but the movement was something like a fish gaping when it finds itself out of water. The old barkeep had made a brave—a heroic attempt to pass off this visit with a little casual hobnobbing. But now he found he had leaped like a mountain trout—straight out of a torrent into the dry suffocating air of land! On the very day of the year when a rodeo was being held with a prize which was the town's prettiest girl, who should the devil send out of the uttermost depths of hell, but this gunfighter who came riding into town with the intention of getting a mate!

"A girl, you say, Cal?" Jo's voice had changed completely now so that it was high and choked. "Why, sure, that ought to be easy enough. I got some girls. Some damned pretty ones, too. Wait till you see 'em, in their spangles and short skirts and silk stockings, Cal. And dance? Holy smoke! You'd orter see 'em dance. They'll give you the time of your life—and I'll see to it that they play up to you, Cal. They'll treat you like you was a cattle-buyer and they'll—"

"You don't quite get me, you little seed-wart!" Cal Triggers replied. The crowd, expecting a certain culmination now to the meeting, turned to look unabashed at the stranger's face. Men got up from their tables; others peered around the partitions of booths, intuitively picking out the nearest exit. There was also a perceptible movement of many toward the front door of the saloon. "I said you don't quite get me, but that's because you're a filthy little barkeep," Cal Triggers went on. "What I want is a mate. That's clear. The girl I've come to town to pick out is going to be mine for good and all. In plain, honest-to-God terms, Jo, I've come riding into town to get a wife."

This was the bomb which Scrub Hazen, the sheriff, and old Jo were expecting, and it had been thrown into their midst with a definiteness that admitted of no misunderstanding. The question had now resolved itself to this: Was there a man brave enough in that saloon to pick that bomb up and throw it back?

CHAPTER VI.

THE BARKEEP WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN.

LITTLE JOE realized that the climax had came, and that, for a moment at least he was expected to deal with it. If he could do nothing then it was obvious

that the sheriff would turn around and pick a fight with Cal Triggers, and that the latter would probably blow the whole place up. There had been fights of that sort before in Jo's bar, and when the underlying cause had been some woman, they were anything but pleasant. In one of these brawls Jo had ducked under the bar for protection, only to be potted in the shoulder by a bullet which came splintering through the mahogany. If a romantically inclined woman had not wanted her two lovers to fight for her, Jo would never have been wounded. At another time a stray shot, from the uncertain aim of a dance hall girl, had smashed a bottle on the bar and a piece of the flying glass had cost Jo his right eye. And now the imminent fight between Cal Triggers and a roomful of men was something the little barkeep was most desirous of avoiding. Jo had no inclination to risk the furnishings of his saloon—not to mention his remaining eye—in a one-sided fight between Cal Triggers, his friend, and a mob of frightened men.

"Look here, Cal," he said, assuming once again his first casual tone. "You-all must be hungry after your long ride. What do you say to you and me havin' a little lunch of chile-and-beans together?"

"That sounds all righto," Cal rejoined, relieving the tensity of his own feelings by rolling some Bull Durham.

Accordingly the barkeep ushered him into a little anteroom betweeen the bar and the dance hall which served as an office and a repository for beer cases, and the Jackdog's more favored stock. The moment that the door was shut on the back of the two the crowd in the saloon broke out into a babble of excited remarks.

Scrub Hazen, who had the most at stake, was the most excited. He jumped up from his chair frantically, and ran up to the bar with the sheriff. "Look here, Pickering," he cried choking his voice to a hoarse whisper. "You got to take care of this bird. Any minute he's going to hear of the contest for the hand of my gal and then there's going to be hell to pay proper!"

"I'll fix him, Scrub. Don't go yowling about something that hasn't happened yet. I'm going to fix him afore he has a chanst to sign that there list of contestants. There's not a man in the town will allow for him entering the contest."

"Put him under arrest. That's all as you have to do, sheriff!" Scrub pleaded frantically. "If you just stand by and listen to him there'll be a big fight. You know damn well he'll plug everybody within range and not hesitate at nothin'!"

"I cain't arrest him—not until he's done something. The gunfights he's been in before this he's been cleared of. The whole trouble with this hellbender is that the law ain't got him. He's sneaked out of his other murders—and juries has cleared him—why the hell, I don't know! Except I've an honest opinion that he scares a jury to death afore they have a chanst to put in a verdict."

"He ain't going to scare us to death, sheriff. You arrest him and we'll trump up something." Scrub was so concerned about the advent of the gunfighter that he talked now so that the whole room could hear him.

"Look here, men," the sheriff said, turning to the crowd that had pressed in about them. "We got to get this bird—but you-all know that as sheriff I never done anything yet that was crooked. And I ain't going to do nothing now. If you men want to start a fight go ahead and I'll step in and stop it. I won't ax no questions as to who started it. Public opinion is agin this bird, and any way I choose to stop a fight will be considered all jake by the town."

The men broke in enthusiastically: "Sure it will, sheriff. We're all behind you, sheriff. Get him, that's all. Get him before there's any murder committed!"

"But who's goin' to start argufyin' with him?" Scrub asked in dismay.

The answer to his question came with the entrance of the local hero, Saul Meakin, who had finally made up his mind to enter the saloon and find out how the newcomer was being received.

"You're the man we're looking for, Saul!" Scrub cried joyfully. "Cal Triggers has went in to have a conflab with the barkeep, and when he comes out we want for the sheriff to arrest him and keep him out of the rodeo. The sheriff ain't got cause—so it's up to some one to plant a

fight on him. Pickering will then step in and finish it. Get the point?"

"You aren't standing there and telling me that this gunfighter is going to get into the rodeo?" Saul laughed.

"Damned right I'm telling you that. He don't know about it yet. But when he finds out—good night!"

"Let me talk to him!" was Saul's quiet challenge.

Meanwhile the barkeep and his guest had shut themselves in and were sitting down to a helping of the hot pungent mess of meat and beans which Jo kept constantly on the fire for free lunch.

Jo threw off his mask of mediator and casual acquaintance and hurriedly set about the task he had on his hands.

"Look here, Cal," he said. "I got something definite to say to you. You better bust out'n this town in a hurry. The whole county has heard how you potted them birds down in Texas—and they think the jury let you off because of some frame-up. Your rep in this town is the pure and simple rep of a road agent who kills whenever he has a mind to. And I'm telling you this, you've stepped into the wrong pew. Get out of this town or you'll have a dozen fights planted on you and a lynch party besides!"

"I told you I was lonely, Jo," Triggers laughed. "And it looks like I've come to town for a good sociable time."

"It sure does. Git, before you plug anybody else! Slip out this window; jump to your hoss and git! That's all I'm tellin' you."

"You mean to say I can't ride into town as a man of peace without being pointed at as a bandit?"

"I sure do mean to tell you just them very words! You're a gunman—whatever you done down there to Texas ain't my business and I don't care. But the town cares and they're calling you a gunman and they'll receive you according!"

"Jo, I'm going to tell you something. The time has just about come—as it comes to a lot of men spending their lives on the desert—when I've made up my mind to go bad. I'm like these freak buckers you hear about who serve a lifetime in the harness and then suddenly when no one's expecting it they start in killing the stable *mozos*, ranch-hands, their owners, and everyone else. Everything in me is working that way, Jo. I feel it coming like some men feel a conversion coming over them—and they 'see light,' as they say. Well, if you want to know what I see, I'll tell you. I see red. That's what! I don't see the light of heaven. I just see the blistering red of hell!"

"All right, I'll take your word for it, Cal. You're bad. I ain't disputin' you. But as a ole friend—a ole sidekicker that's fought with you in barroom brawls and that's kept your whistle wet with hootch when you was busted in bygone years—I'm advisin' you now wunst and for all, drift out'n this place and drift out'n this town. Take a trail that leads as far from this here burg as you kin get."

Cal Triggers scraped up his bowl of chile-and-beans, took a gulp of whisky and then went on talking as if he had not heard his companion's last remarks. "Furthermore, Jo, I want to tell you something very important. As yet I'm not a gunman. I've never held up anybody. I've never got a red cent from anybody, and I've never even killed anybody in a fight. The two men I killed down in Texas were drunks and I caught them attacking a woman—one of their ranch-hands. They had a clean record down there and I already had some murders chalked up against me. I didn't belong on the ranch—was just passing through asking for a chance at my old business of cow-punching. Those men fought me when that girl of theirs called me to help her. They used gats on me and shot me—look at this gun-wound."

Triggers bared his huge arm, showing muscles which looked like molded brass. "And I fought those sousing dogs and killed 'em—not with guns—with my hands. Of course it looked like downright murder. The girl kept her mouth shut—was bribed, of course, and I had one hell of a time convincing a jury that I wasn't a murderer. In fact, those twelve men on the jury were about the only men in the State who believed I wasn't a black, hell-twisting cut-throat."

"But the fellow in Albuquerque, Cal.

You never did tell me what the trouble was there?"

"It was a woman again—and you can't tell everything you know when a woman's concerned. But in a word it was this: she got into a hell of a brawl with her husband and I helped her out. The jury figured it was all right. The world doesn't have to know about those things. I was cleared."

"Leave women alone after this, Cal. Let a woman set in on a game—and it's good-by forever! I know. I been there!"

Cal went on: "Then there was that Mex. Well, I will admit I treated that Mex rough and I don't believe I could have gotten by a jury that time. The Mex rustled a horse of mine—a damned spry old nag, too, that had taken me through desert and storm when I was a cow-puncher. The filthy Mex rode her over the border—a fifty-mile race when the mare was about to foal. And it killed her. What would you have done, Jo?"

"I'd have skinned the whelp alive so's the coyotes for miles around would have smelt him rotting!"

"And that's just what I did! The Mex's family raised a rumpus about it and I got a lot of notoriety. And I'll tell you what. I'd do it again twenty times."

"But don't do it here, Cal. Maybe in Texas you got away with it—but not here—"

"That's my record, Jo, and I'l admit it's not any too white. But I've been thinking over these things back on my claim there in the desert, and I figured the world oughtn't to brand a man for scrapes like that. I figured if I came back to civilization now the world would take me back. So I did, coming as I said with the sound of the blowfly buzzing in my ear — which means spring. I came back feeling damned lonely and forlorn—and this is the welcome I get. Everyone sneaks out of my way. Mothers get yearlings indoors. Riders get their broncs out of the street. Muttonmen hide their heads behind troughs and the only one who gives me the glad-hand is a lousy one-eyed barkeep—which is you! That's the reception I get!"

"You haven't got it yet, Cal! The reception's coming later. What you don't understand is the feelings of this here town which is as a cow, suckling her calf, who sees Mr. Puma step into the front door of the corral. The town don't know the real facts of the case. Strangers is strangers. And if they're murderin' strangers then the next guess is they're gunmen, road agents, outlaws and such. Now that you've told me the real facks I can see that you ain't a gunman at all. But as you say, I'm only a one-eyed barkeep, and my opinion never bought nobody nothin'. If I told the town you was jake, all as that would mean is that you're worse than they thought. 'Aha!' they'll say, 'so he's a friend of ole one-eyed Jo—aye!' You know what I mean. You know!"

"I don't reckon your introduction is going to help me bust into Red Town society, Jo," Cal laughed. "But I'm going to stay here just the same, and if they want me to fight, I'll fight. I'll be a gunman if that's what they want. And I'll tell you what, Jo. It's a lot of fun coming into town and knowing that the men all around you are holding their breath. It must be like the feelings of the old conquerors who came into cities demanding a tribute of a thousand longhorns and a thousand sheep and a thousand beautiful women!"

"Beautiful women—aye! Ah-h! Yes! Women—damn them! That brings me to tell you just why your coming into this here town at this particular time is so powerful unpleasant; you said—so's everyone in that thar saloon could hear you—that you was goin' to pick out a mate for yourself and start in gettin' married. Now, don't do it, Cal! Don't do it. As a friend, I'm tellin' you, don't never git married! It 'll finish you! That's all! Look at the man I am to-day, Cal! What do you think is the cause? *Women!* That's what!"

"But Jo, even though you're a terrible living example against it, I've made up my mind that I want a woman. And as an old acquaintance of yours, I don't mind telling you that I had a glimpse of the very girl I want—that is, provided she's not married already."

The barkeep's brown forehead wrinkled upward like a surprised monkey's. Delight suddenly flitted over his twisted old face.

"Ah-h! Then you've picked her out, you say. Then that makes things look much better."

"Why—what has that to do with it?"

"If you've picked your gal out—and stick to it—then I'm thinkin' a good lot of my worryin' has been for nothin'. But look here, Cal. First I want to know: Just who is this gal you've gone and picked?"

"I saw her sitting in a buggy talking to a spick-and-span young lady's man as I rode through the street."

"And who was she? You don't remember just what she looked like?" Jo asked with a growing apprehension.

"She wore a natty little sombrero like a campaign hat, and under it I could see some silky hair blowing—the color of pay dirt—brown, with strands of gold."

Jo threw up his hands and let out a long gasp of profanity.

"I knew it!" he wailed. "You've gone and picked out the one gal in the world who's goin' to mean your finish!"

"Married—aye?"

"Hell, no! I wisht she was! But she's Scrub Hazen's foster daughter—that's who she is!"

"Well, that's not barring me. I don't care who her father is. And as for Scrub Hazen, I never heard of him, so he can't be a hindrance, good or bad."

"Well, Cal," the barkeep said gloomily, "keep your shirt on and let me tell you the game. If this here whole town was made of dynamite and you was a match, your comin' at this particular time couldn't be a worse tragedy. That there gal is the ward of Scrub Hazen and the way I figure he's been hankerin' for to get her married so's he can retire comfortable-like and leave her husband take care of his cows. And she bein' a innocent sort of sage-hen, has been made love to by a guy who it's my opinion is a double-dyed coyote. His name is Saul Meakin and he's the ole-time friend of Scrub Hazen. Wal, it's come to a sort of showdown, and they say Saul has been hot on the gal's trail—after her money, is my opinion. And she thinkin' he's the only bird in town who's got teeth enough in his head so two of 'em is opposite each other—she figures she'd orter take him up and ride double harness with him the rest of her life. So old Hazen gets up and announces that there'll be a rodeo, and whoever wins it is to have the hand of his daughter. But the whole town knows it's only a sort of engagement party for Saul Meakin and the gal—bein' as there ain't no doubt in anybody's mind about who's goin' to win that rodeo—"

"But there's doubt now—aye, Jo?" Cal cried, taking a final gulp of whisky and jumping up from the table.

"Look here, Cal, let me explain. The whole town has sort of went into this rodeo with the understanding that Saul Meakin is to win the gal—"

"What's the gal's opinion?"

"No one knows. I been figurin' from what I hear acrost my bar—and a bartender hears lots—that the gal has sort of stove Saul off by this here rodeo because she don't fancy him quite enough to git married to him. That's only my opinion, mind you. And I don't know everythin'. Never talked to the gal myself. But as for the opinion of the town, it is that the two orter get hitched, and they're playing the rodeo game just for the fun of it. They'll be contests and all, but everybody knows that the events which is to decide the best man in the town is events which Saul Meakin can win hands down. Every buckaroo in town has signed up, knowing he ain't got a chanst, but they're doing it just for the sport of it all! *You* know. And bein' that's the case it don't look just right that you should horse in and bust up the game."

Cal Triggers broke out into a laugh. As he stood up with a flushed, eager light on his face, the barkeep suddenly thought that the gunfighter had grown a shade handsomer—which, as Jo remarked, was certainly possible. The large nose, the big strong chin, the steel gray eyes were converted from the features of a gloomy, vindictive face to that of a new and exultant man.

"What you said about the girl not knowing her own mind has made me decide what I'm going to do, Jo. I'm going out there to find Scrub Hazen and tell him I want to compete for his girl—and if any man turns me down—"

"Then you'll pot him. Yes, I know. I

know only too well. You'll pot him! Well, keep out of it, Cal! Don't mess into Hazen's game. He's a hard character."

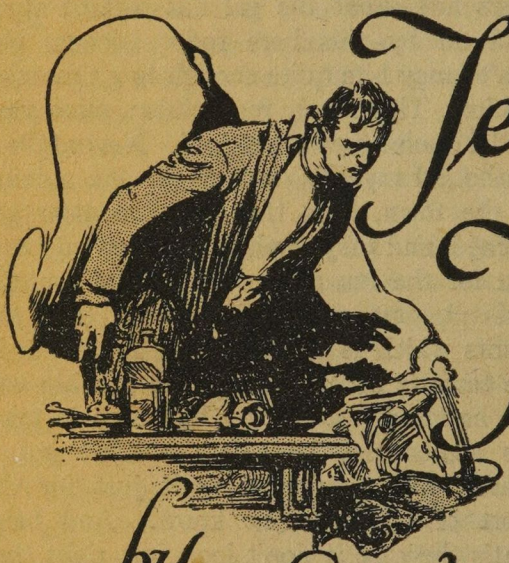
Cal's hand was on the door, but the barkeep went to him. "Before you go signing up for this contest, Cal, let me tell you something. The gang out there will pick a fight with you. I know it! Take my word."

"If that's the case all I have to do is to go into the saloon with my hand on my holster and ask peacefully for Mr. Scrub Hazen," Cal rejoined.

The barkeep clung to his arm, started again to warn him, but in another moment Cal had shaken him off and walked out of the little anteroom onto the saloon floor.

He knew, as any fighter would intuitively know, that some one had been planted in that crowd to pick a fight with him. He looked around the circle of silent grim faces, and in order to give himself time enough to get a good understanding of the situation he started in to roll a cigarette. A silence on the part of every man in the room accompanied this movement so that the noise of the brown tissue paper as he tore it out of his cigarette book was faintly audible. The snapping of his fingers to dry them, the crumpling of the paper and the striking of the match concluded this introductory performance, and Triggers, after blowing a whiff of thin blue smoke toward the ceiling, faced the men and said: "I'm looking for a gent named Scrub Hazen."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Ten Seconds Too Soon

by Gardner Weeks Wood

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

ROBING'S secretary looked up from the telephone.

"A lady—a Mrs. Whitney—wants to speak to you, Mr. Robing."

Robing was busy and preoccupied, and it was with an abstracted air that he repeated the name. "Mrs. Whitney—Mrs. Whitney? I don't know any Mrs. Whitney. Ask her what she wants, please."

He then turned his half interrupted attention back to the grand jury minutes of the Shotwell murder case.

After a moment's low talk into the telephone his prim little secretary again turned to Robing, with her hand over the mouthpiece. "She won't tell me what she wants. She seems excited—but says it is very important. She says you knew her a long while ago, as Mabel Stenter."

Robing gazed blankly at his secretary's bland, blue eyes for the fraction of a minute, repeating the name, "Mabel Stenter—Mabel Stenter," under his breath. Then his eyes cleared of the mist of preoccupa-

tion and his forehead wrinkled, his eyes contracted in what little Miss Townsend assumed to be annoyance.

"Mabel Stenter." Robing repeated the name, more to himself than to Miss Townsend. "What can she want, after all these years? Here, I'll talk to her."

His hand automatically grasped the instrument which his secretary pushed toward him. Through habit, Robing's right hand pulled within easy reach a small pad of paper and picked up a pencil. Queer telephone calls stray into the district attorney's office at times, and it had become habitual with Robing to have means at hand for catching instantly any information that might be passed over the line. Sometimes these wire conversations had been cut off with extreme abruptness. There had been, for instance, the case of Mary Ralston, an important witness for the State against Henry Brock.

Mary had called up Robing of a late afternoon, such as this day, and in the midst of their talk she had screamed horribly once, and then the crash in Robing's ears had told him that the instrument had fallen to the floor.

A detective, racing to the hotel address jotted on Robing's pad, had just succeeded in catching "Little Harry" Mack, an accomplice of Brock's, just as he was slipping out of the hotel. Quick investigation by the detective and an astounded hotel management had discovered Mary lying on her tumbled bed in negligee—strangled—the telephone broken on the floor beside her dead body.

So it had become Robing's habit always to have pencil in hand when answering the carefully sifted calls that came to him. And, as always, blond Miss Townsend sat quietly at his side ready to listen in on the extension at a signal from Robing, should the message be such as to require two memories. Robing took no chances.

There was no signal from Robing as he placed the receiver to his ear, his brow still furrowed with puzzled irritation. As she sat listening to the one-sided conversation Miss Townsend thought that Robing's annoyance was perhaps restrained evidence of some stronger emotion.

"Yes, this is Henry Robing speaking. . . . . I certainly do remember you, Mabel. . . . . No, I never did expect to hear from you again. . . . I don't believe so. I can't see that it would benefit either of us. . . . . Well, think of my side of it! Fifteen years is a long time. Wounds heal slowly, but they close after a while. . . . . I know. Telephone reunions are never satisfactory; but what use is there in reopening a closed door?"

At this point Miss Townsend watched Robing as he listened to a long monologue by the woman at the other end of the line. The muscles of his jaw worked as if he were laboring under some excitement. Twice he opened his lips as though to interrupt, but refrained from speaking. With the pencil in his right hand he tapped nervously on the glass top of his desk. Miss Townsend was interested.

Not more than a half dozen times in the three years of her service to the district attorney had she seen Robing lose any portion of the calm poise, the sure grip on himself that was one of his outstanding characteristics.

In addition to this, Miss Townsend assailed her memory in vain to recall any previous time when a woman's voice had come to her asking for a personal talk with her chief. She had early decided that Henry Robing was as a bachelor an established quantity, or that if romance dwelt in his heart it was allowed to emerge only after he had left his desk in the grim old gray stone Criminal Courts Building, where for three years he had so relentlessly, remorselessly pursued those who were aiming their efforts against the peace of the State. Miss Townsend had finally concluded that Robing was a Juggernaut of Justice rather than a man—and yet at times within her virgin breast, in the still hours of the night, Miss Townsend sighingly confessed to herself that Robing was a man—and, to her, an enhaloed hero.

But to him, unconscious of this flattering adoration, Miss Townsend was only a neat, efficient, sweet-smelling assistant, a sexless mechanism that forgot nothing, and was by that token an invaluable cog in his mill of crime.

Here Robing's voice again broke in on Miss Townsend's semidream.

"Why, if it is important, I can do it; but—I have a dinner engagement with Bernap to-night. You remember him? But later, perhaps. Hold the wire a moment, please."

Robing put down the receiver to look at his watch; then he turned quickly to Miss Townsend.

"Why, it's half after five," said he. "I hadn't realized it was that late. I needn't detain you any longer, Miss Townsend." As she rose demurely to go he added: "I'll be in early to-morrow morning. The Shotwell case goes to trial on Monday, you know."

His tone was casual—forcedly so, she thought; he wanted to continue his telephone conversation without her presence. Upon leaving the room to don her coat and hat, after having bade him a not unconstrained good night she heard Robing again renew his talk with the unknown Mrs. Whitney.

"I can drop in to see you at about nine o'clock to-night, if that is convenient for you. . . . . Yes, I think I should enjoy it. . . . . Do you remember—"

And then Miss Townsend closed the door. She did not like the tone of his voice.

When she returned fifteen minutes later to retrieve the book she had in her confusion overlooked, Miss Townsend found the office deserted, the low light on Robing's desk still burning, his pad of paper and the pencil lying under it. The pad was marked with the small geometrical figures; squares, shaded triangles, pentagons, which his abstracted pencil had traced. Among them were words repeated: "Mabel—Mabel"; "Sky 15204"; "59W80"; "China"; "Mexico"; "Woolwich Univ."; "'05"; "Whitney?"—an incomprehensible jumble of words.

With instinctive neatness Miss Townsend rearranged the articles upon the desk and placed the sheet of paper bearing the pencil notes in the upper drawer of Robing's desk—to which she and he were the only possessors of a key—turned out the light, closed and locked the door, emerged into the fast emptying downtown street, and through the slush of an unexpectedly warm night of the late winter started toward her boarding-house home.

II.

Henry Robing had replaced the telephone receiver upon its hook and for a moment or two sat in silent reverie, eyes directed down a long road marked by the milestones of the years. A companion who had started out with him upon his journey up that road, who had become so easily diverted and left him to continue alone, had at last overtaken him—arriving by devious routes and detours.

To Robing's memory she reappeared as an intoxicating perfume—heavy, perhaps, but heady and dizzying. That had always been Mabel Stenter's attribute. To define her more exactly it is necessary to say only that women disliked her and men crowded to her side. She had been serpentine in her coiling lissomness, and in her dress she had not evaded that physical issue. She had been tall. Robing remembered that when dancing with Mabel her massed, dark-brown hair had lacked but a little of being level with his own.

He had had to bend but slightly to look into her strangely blue eyes—eyes that were darkly baffling, splendidly alluring, and set with slight obliqueness above softly rounded, delicately tinted cheeks. Her lips—Robing drew a sighing breath as his memory brought the vision to him—her lips just missing a too sensuous fullness that had held a madness for Robing.

All her lines had been long in those far days. Her slender white arms were long, her fingers tapering threads of beauty. Slenderness, and yet a singular smoothness of contour and surfaces, had distinguished her among the more robust feminine types at Woolwich University. Mabel had had the qualities, and she arrested the vision as would a tiger lily in a bed of violets. She had been electric, and Robing had received a full charge.

Crude, almost uncouth, he had been when, a year late, he had entered the class of '05 at Woolwich. Mabel Stenter was

a member of that class. He had first seen her in the classroom of the Midwestern college; their eyes had met—hers had clung, not boldly, but with studied subtlety. A new man! Awkwardness could not cloak Robing's vigor and youthful virility. Lack of experience did not hamper the sudden passionate appeal he made to her. His silent, rugged manner, his strength, his irregularly handsome face had caught her instant interest.

For a time his shyness baffled her. She had not known that his heart beat double time if she but looked at him; that the blood surged through him until his fingers tingled and his body was atremble if only her hand touched him. He could not believe that he could ever aspire to such a royal creature. Oh, but she was a burning flame then—and what a typical moth he had been!

As he sat alone at his desk in the gloaming of that winter day the Mabel of fifteen years before flashed colorfully to Robing's vision. The delirium of her, the all-absorbing power of her, the whirling ecstasy of her. Robing smiled grimly within himself at the Robing of '05—the simple-hearted worshiper of her divinity. He had thought the smiles of his classmates were born of envy—jealousy of his being singled out by Mabel Stenter.

No one had told him that in her freshman year Mabel had exhausted the list of male eligibility, and that he had been labeled "Next." His shyness had spelled aloofness to her—she had moved to the attack. His holding back had increased her desire for victory—built up beneath that smooth, creamy breast of hers something that was, to her, new. She wanted to clutch him. Her passionate heart panted with the retreating days. Her urgency was but loosely concealed. Every one but Robing could see it. His eyes were filmed.

The climax had come upon a night in the early spring of their sophomore year. Its memory was the most vivid in Robing's life. The Junior Ball had been held as usual in the armory of the college, and Mabel had literally seized him as her escort. He was nervous, surcharged by the visible significance of the honor. Never before had he seen her in evening dress, and the glory of her to his eyes was irresistible. He still remembered her gown—dark-blue silk so covered with tiny blue steel sequins that they seemed like scales. It was close fitting—the gown was like a silken scabbard to the flaming sword of flesh within it. Her long, velvety arms unadorned; her soft, bare throat with a single small sapphire pendant resting within the faint suggestion of the gentle curves of her breast; the beating of her heart close against his; her quick, warm breath on his cheek as they danced the first waltz; the consuming appeal of her physical femininity had been overwhelming.

Robing recalled that at the end of their third dance they had strayed out of the ballroom to a balcony overlooking the campus, ostensibly that Mabel might have a breath of air. The balcony was vacant on that chill night. The moon was high. They were alone.

Mabel had shivered slightly and pressed close to him, looking into his eyes. In one mad instant his hungry arms were around her, his thirsty lips searching for hers. It was like the meeting of quiescent alkali and acid. A seething, soul-shaking tumult of passion. Robing could still feel the tight winding of those white arms around his neck, taste the heat of her hunting mouth upon his, hear the murmured, tumbled words of straining, impassioned lips. They were lifted—borne away in that tempest of the body. There was a thunder in his ears, an insanity of delight in his arteries. They were fused in an incandescent crucible of the senses.

For over a year this romance had lasted. They did not marry. Mabel had not wished it, although Robing had urged insistently. Sentimentally, Mabel was a pirate rover. She had a predatory soul inside her white body. That she did not tire of him earlier was odd; but it was not until the beginning of his senior year that disillusion smashed its way into Robing's reeling brain.

Robing looked at himself in that mirror of the past, and was not ashamed of the image. What he had done was to pour out

a single-hearted devotion at the slim feet of a Delilah. He was of the type best known as "one-woman men." Mabel had been his all—first love and last. There had been no open break. Their last day together that June was one of close-pressed lips, enlacing arms, unforgettable words.

Then they had separated for the summer holidays—Mabel to her home in Des Moines, Henry to add to his slender means as a surveyor's assistant in Arizona. They wrote every day to each other—at least Henry did; and up to the very end Mabel preserved her pose and the screen of loyal affection. A similarity to her action had once occurred to Robing in the trial of two yeggmen who had erected an accurate painting of a safe, and behind this deceiving imitation, in the full light of electric lamps, had blown open and rifled the real strong-box.

So had Mabel operated behind the mask of affection. Came a letter of endearment one day from Mabel to Henry in the arid places—a letter which he had secretly kissed; he was young in those days; a little meant much to him. And then there had been no more letters.

In the fall Robing's return to Woolwich had been met by no Mabel. She had eloped with a cattleman, and a comparison of dates showed that the last letter and the elopement had practically coincided. Thus had that beautiful and deceptive vision faded. Disenchantment, clenched and uplifted hands, bitter heartache, were followed by a determination—the determined plan of a strong man—to let no other woman play havoc with him. "Entrance forbidden!" And he had remained in that mind.

But those who knew him said: "Mabel will have a bad half hour if Henry Robing ever sees her again."

Robing had never again heard directly from Mabel until that afternoon. It had been said that a divorce followed not far behind the heels of the elopement. After that, nothing. On his graduation Robing had gone East and entered the New York Law School, finished there brilliantly, begun his law practice, entered politics, and risen rapidly.

A dream of practical success replaced the glamour of half-shut eyes and half-parted lips. A concentration undiluted by intangibles made the dream a reality. Not money, but a chance to make an impress upon the metropolis, was his desire. His election as district attorney had been followed by a spectacular series of convictions. Robing became known as the "Blood Hound," and he richly deserved the title. Indefatigable, inexorable, incorruptible, his name became a fearsome thing in the underground lairs of life. The death-house at Sing Sing was seldom untenanted by noisome objects of Robing's grim methods of justice. Into his cases he put a scowling ruthlessness that seemed almost a desire for personal vengeance.

Fifteen years will grow thick sod over the graves of blasted hopes. Fifteen years of unremitting labor had been piled upon the distressing episode of Robing's college days. Its poignancy had faded, but its result persisted. The memory of it was, as it were, a headstone over some dead thing. In passing out of his life Mabel Stenter had taken something of Robing with her and had left his heart immune. She grew less, but her effect remained.

And now that memory was to be materialized. Mabel was to be reprojected—the woman whom he had last seen pulsating upon his breast was again within reach of his arm. Robing sat for only a moment after he had replaced the receiver upon hearing:

"At about nine, then, I'll expect you, Harry."

"Harry!" Robing was not the sort of man whose "Henry" could be easily transmuted to "Harry." As he deliberately donned his overcoat and picked up his hat and stick he smiled to himself at the recollection that Mabel had been the only person who had ever called him by that diminutive. To the rare number of his intimate friends he was always "Henry." One would not dream of calling District Attorney Robing "Hank" or "Harry." It would be like calling a mastiff "Fido."

Robing proceeded by way of the Elevated to the uptown club where he lived, arriving there at quarter after six. Entering its portals, he was given a half dozen

slips of paper, descriptive of telephone calls which had come into the club for him. One slip merely bore the announcement that "Mrs. Whitney" had called; another, arriving at four o'clock, requested him to call "Schuyler 15204."

Robing held these pink slips in his fingers as he turned to the office desk for his key, and then on his way to the elevator was greeted by a small group of his club friends. With them he had a few words until his elevator was ready to ascend, then, excusing himself abruptly, he made his way to his rooms, sending back word by the elevator boy to the doorman that when Mr. Bernap arrived he was to be escorted directly to him. Bernap was expected at a quarter to seven.

On reaching his rooms Robing laid the contents of his pockets on the chiffonier preparatory to changing for dinner. Among them he laid the telephone call slips. Contrary to his usual custom of dining in business clothes in the club grill, he, that night, donned dinner jacket with its accompanying dress shirt—one whose bosom was composed of multitudinous fine linen pleats. After a quick bath and change of clothing Robing restored to his pockets their usual contents, leaving the pink paper slips lying on his chiffonier.

Why Robing should have decided to wear dinner clothes that evening he could not himself explain. It was probably due to an unconscious and unconfessed desire to appear at his best before Bernap and before Mabel Stenter. Had he not risen by sheer force of ability to his present position? Was he not justified in appearing in the appropriate garments of success? Robing knew that in the conventional black and white he was an impressive figure. The man whom those two people had known only as a struggling student in a fresh-water college had seized life by the throat and conquered it. He would dress the part.

He approved his reflection in the mirror as he adjusted his collar and tie. His dark hair was becoming—flecked with gray at the temples, but it was as thick and heavy as in the days when Mabel Stenter had delighted to run her slender fingers through it. A dominantly aquiline nose, strong if irregular, widened the space between his steel-gray and piercing eyes, giving to Robing the true eagle aspect. His mouth had stiffened with the years and his lips become more compressed and uncompromising. As he stood there he decided that the winter of toil now nearing its end had not treated him well—his face had a pallor that must be corrected; his collar was too large. He must have been losing weight. He tried it and found that his finger slipped loosely between his neck and the linen band.

Robing's well-schooled mind had put Mabel Stenter aside for the moment. He would, as usual with him, take up matters as they rose. George Bernap, his old college chum, came first that night. He had not seen Bernap more than a half dozen times since graduation. Chicago had absorbed his classmate, who had taken his law course at Northwestern and was now a prosperous lawyer in the Loop district. He was in New York on business for a client, and the two men had fixed upon that hour for dinner and a short renewal of their old-time friendship.

III.

About seven o'clock—fifteen minutes late—Bernap knocked at his door and was admitted cordially.

"George, come in! I'm glad to see you!"

"Well, Henry, how are you? But why all the robes of state?" Bernap laughed. "I'll bet you've gone out and got yourself a girl—all right; fly to it. I must leave you flat after dinner to go into a conference with a couple of your piratical townsmen—so you can run along on your romantic philanderings."

Robing came as near blushing as he could. "I'm no ladies' man—you know it." He hesitated. "But a lady did phone me to-day, asking me to call on her this evening—on business. So if you have an engagement I think I'll do it."

Robing unlocked a closet door. "I'm not the person who should do it, you know; but I have something in here which I can't sell you or offer to you; but if you should steal it from me I won't telephone headquarters. There are two glasses and ice in

the bathroom—when you have completed your criminal task don't leave more than one full glass standing around—I might find it."

His friend rose and fervently shook Robing's hand. "Henry, all is forgiven. Whatever I may find in that closet, I repeat it; all is as it has been with us—and more; you may go to Utah and become a Mormon. I'll dance, clumsily, at your several weddings—where's the corkscrew?"

They went in to dinner. Bernap was in New York to break a deadlock between clients of his in Chicago and a concern in New York. Both were manufacturers of an automobile device with patented features and identical use. A merger was advisable in that day of low business pressure. It had been discussed favorably, and then there had occurred a cessation of negotiations. Bernap's clients had seen what they thought to be evidences of bad faith in the other parties. Agents of the other company had been seen in deep talk with their representatives. A letter had come to them that cast an ominous shadow of deception somewhere. Their patents had been assailed by a man whom it was possible to locate near the offices of the New York concern. The smoke of the unseen fire was thick.

"But I have insisted to my people," asserted Bernap, "that I believe they are mistaken, and I'm here to prove I'm right. I'm convinced that a series of coincidences has occurred that has no basis of reason. I believe we can get together. My clients have been scared by a ghost."

"No, sir; they have not," retorted his host. "I hate to snatch the wreath of victory from your brow, George, and I don't know your New York company; but I'll bet you the price of a dinner that you're wrong. Your clients are right. Believing in coincidences is a pussy-footing game. There is something wrong, and I'll gamble that it is worse than even they think. If they have stumbled on what you have described and call coincidences take it from me that back of the ones they have seen there are four times as many that they haven't seen. It's a plot. Coincidences? Hell!

"You are going to lose that dinner, George. I'm sure of it. Why, you bloodthirsty old criminal lawyer, you; I know you and your methods. Your hardened soul believes every man guilty until he is proved innocent. I'd hate to have your blackened record," and the other lawyer grinned at Robing.

"Now, listen to me a minute, George," and Robing leaned across the table. "You're a nice fellow, and I like you; but you business lawyers are a lot of pink and white flower girls. You are weak-kneed. You palter with facts. You concede. You have too strained an eye on your bookkeeper—it distorts your vision of the main issues. Just for the sake of your peace of mind and the large fee you hope to get out of this fallacious case of yours, I'll concede that one coincidence can occur—and that happens but rarely—in a case. Two coincidences are improbable—three are impossible. I know they are popular—folks like 'em—they appeal to the imagination. Cases are built up from the ground on them at times and marvelous chains of so-called 'circumstantial' evidence are forged out of coincidences. Bunk!"

"Just a minute, Henry," broke in Bernap. "You're too literal-minded—"

"Wait till I finish, George, please. What I want to say is that evidence is evidence. There's no such thing as 'circumstantial' evidence and 'series of coincidences.' The 'fortuitous' and the 'accidental'—when they occur too often—are to my mind cumulative evidence of deliberate crime plotting. I have always acted upon that theory, and in ninety-five per cent of my convictions it has been borne out to my perfect satisfaction. I have nothing on my conscience. Behind the circumstance lies guilt—*always*.

"Here is this Shotwell case for an example," Robing illustrated. "It comes up on Monday, and as sure as there is a sun in heaven I'm going to send that young man to the chair. I don't care about his previous good record, the apparent lack of motive, the testimony of his neighbors or his story. He was seen coming out of the basement of Grosbeck's house, carrying a hammer, an hour before Grosbeck was found in his third-floor bedroom with his head beaten in. Young Shotwell swore he

went only into the basement, and without asking, borrowed the hammer from Grosbeck's tool chest. No one saw him go above the basement, to be sure, the old man and he had been firm friends, and the hammer when found was clean; but what in the name of common sense does that amount to when we know that Shotwell possessed two hammers of his own! He killed Grosbeck. The evidence is conclusive. There was a motive and we'll sweat it out of him."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Bernap, "that you would ask for conviction—callously see a man go to the chair on such slender evidence as that? Why, Henry, you're a modern Jeffreys!"

"I'll ask for it, George, and I'll see him go up!"

Thus the arguments passed to and fro across the board. Friends of Robing's drifted over to his table for a word with him—of serious matters or a bit of cursory talk. Even Sam Wollan, the first assistant district attorney, in whom there was no love for Robing and who, it was rumored, coveted the right to strike out the "first assistant" from before his title, paused for a chat with his chief, just before they had finished their visit. In all of them Bernap could see the respect, almost trepidation, which the redoubtable district attorney inspired. "Bloodhound" was right! And Bernap was glad for himself that his paths lay in the more peaceful fields of the law.

They dallied over the coffee and tobacco—Bernap's cigar and Robing's inevitable Turkish cigarettes, which, using a long amber holder, he smoked almost continuously.

At eight thirty Bernap looked at his watch and reluctantly rose. "Sorry, Henry, but I must be on my way—my people are due at the Commodore at a quarter to nine. It's been bully to see you and right here I want to remind you again that in July you are expected up at the lake. Elsie won't forgive you this time if you fail to make it. If your thirst for blood on your holiday is insistent I'll give you one of the children to gnaw on."

"Well"—and Robing lifted himself heavily from his chair—"I'll go if I can make it, George—it's seldom I have a chance to raise my nose from an indictment, you know. I really must get away somewhere, if I live till summer, though—the strain of that office is terrific. I'm beginning to feel it—going to walk over to the hotel?"

"Yes," replied Bernap, "if you're going out and have the time, walk over with me."

"Sure thing—I'm in no hurry." And Robing led the way out of the grill and to the cloak room, where the two men secured their hats, coats and Robing's stick. At the cigar stand Robing procured a package of cigarettes and a card of paper matches.

As they emerged from the club into the unexpectedly soft night air, Bernap chaffed him about the cane.

"Another of your Eastern affectations, Henry?" said the man from Chicago lightly.

"Not exactly, George—weigh it." And Robing passed the ebony stick to his friend.

Robing balanced it in his hand. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed and returned it. "Why the bludgeon?"

"Well, there are a number of well-known gentlemen about town who have a feeling that if I had a lily lying on my breast the world would be a sweeter place for them to live in—so I carry this stick—it's most convenient."

They turned into Forty-Second Street and slowly moved eastward. Bernap again rallied Robing about his evening's engagement. "By the way," he reminded him; "you haven't told me who the lucky lady is—the one you are going to see—on business."

Robing did not immediately reply, then exploded bitterly, "I'm not going to tell you, George. When I see you and think of your contentment, your wife, your children, you happy future and contrast it with my barren, solitary existence—so different from what I had once planned and hoped—I could almost hate the woman I'm going to see to-night. She is responsible for it—she mangled my ideals and my life. There have been moments, old friend, when I could not think of her without seeing red—without wanting to strangle her. I haven't seen her in many years, and perhaps I shouldn't see her to-night—I don't know—" Again a pause, then: "Forgive me, George,

I didn't mean to bore you. My memories overcame me; that's all."

"Oh, forget it, Henry; I can understand." But Bernap felt uncomfortable and glanced quickly and curiously at Robing. He had suddenly recalled the Mabel Stenter days at Woolwich and their significance. "I wonder—" he mused; but did not, of course, put his thought into words.

At the Commodore entrance the two men parted with the firm handclasp of established friendship. Bernap entered the hotel; Robing hailed a taxi and directed the chauffeur to drive him to 59 West Eightieth Street.

"Very well, Mr. Robing," said the driver respectfully. Robing was accustomed to being thus recognized by strangers. Even in New York, his striking personality and growing reputation singled him out among men. It was a distinct tribute to him; although Robing would have scoffed at it.

Into the crowding traffic of Fifth Avenue the taxi drifted as a barge glides from a tributary stream out upon some great river. It flowed with the northward current, sometimes swiftly borne, then caught in a still eddy under the winking eyes of the tall lighthouses on the islands washed by that human flood. The smooth-working mechanism of control had always interested Robing. It was so silently effective. It seemed automatic—stripped of human agency. The nervous pedestrians dodging across the avenue through the traffic seemed to him like tiny skiffs trifling with a gigantic flotilla.

"The deduction," pondered Robing, "is not to interfere with the established order. If you do you are likely to be run down." His thoughts turned to his impending interview. "I got what was coming to me from life when I trifled ignorantly with that established disorder, the feminine mind. It was decreed that I was to be a fool—it probably was the best thing for me that could have happened, too—and what a jackass I was to become emotional when Bernap was with me to-night—he must think I wanted sympathy. Why can't people—especially myself—keep their mouths shut—George must think I'm crazy. I'll write him to-morrow—no, I won't."

The taxi drifted out of the main stream at the entrance to the park and rolled swiftly away from the myriad-windowed peaks that leap against the skyline of Fifty-Ninth Street. Here and there on the disheveled park lawns and beneath the trees along the glistening asphalt belated drifts of grimy snow were melting into miniature glacial streams. The sidewalks were dotted here and there by strolling couples.

IV.

As the car turned into Eightieth Street Robing gazed interestedly out of the open window to see what manner of domicile it was that sheltered his former love. The taxi drew up at the curb in front of a four-story house; Robing descended, paid his fare, received a deferential touch of the cap from the driver and was left alone on the sidewalk. He examined the house with a question and saw that it was one of the many old brownstone structures that have of late been remodeled into small apartments. It differed in no material way from hundreds of its brown brethren. About half of the windows were lighted. From one apartment's open casement a phonograph launched a metallic melody upon the street. From another there came laughter and a snatch of a song.

With a certain degree of repressed excitement Robing descended the four stone steps to the entrance which was now on the aforetime basement level. The white, grilled outside door stood ajar. Pushing it open Robing found himself in a small, well-lighted vestibule. Upon his right hand, set into the wall, were the polished brass mail-boxes and call buttons of the occupants. Beside them was the simple apparatus of the house telephone. Examining the cards Robing finally discovered one bearing in engraved script the name "Mrs. Sterling Whitney." It was obviously a man's card as the "s" had been added by a pen to the "Mr." The district attorney pressed the corresponding button and disengaged the telephone receiver. A feminine voice responded, and Robing announced himself to Mrs. Whitney. The lock of the inside door chattered; he thrust it forward and entered a narrow, bare hallway broken on the left

hand by the staircase—the passage to the right leading back presumably to the caretaker's quarters.

Robing started the ascent of the stairs. They were thickly carpeted and yielded no sound of his footsteps. He had forgotten to ascertain the exact location of Mrs. Whitney's apartment and, meeting a young woman at the top of the first flight, made bold to ask her if she would direct him. She looked at him curiously, insolently for a second, then said curtly, " Next floor, back —you can see her card on the door if you look," and then proceeded on her way.

Accordingly the prosecuting attorney mounted to the second floor. Pinned to a door at the right of the head of the stairway he found a card similar to the one in the vestibule below stairs. Almost simultaneously with his pressing the bell, as if the person inside had stood with her hand upon the latch awaiting his ring, the door swung inward silently and once more, this time after an interval of fifteen years, Robing stood in the presence of Mabel Stenter.

What he had been expecting was of course based on his memories of her and his knowledge of the abrading effects of time. And so it was with a burning and quickening shock to him that he envisaged the woman on the threshold. He was momentarily bewildered, keyed as he had been to a different note. It was as if he had been expecting to hear an inharmonious discord and then found himself listening to the strains of—let us say—Anitra's Dance. Yes, Mabel was like that, and as Robing without conscious decision stepped into the room, he felt that he must be on guard. The district attorney was far from being a coward; quite to the contrary his fearlessness was, in or out of the court room, a matter of record; but he passed into Mrs. Whitney's apartment with much the same feeling that fills a man entering a dark, mysterious alleyway.

Perhaps he would not have experienced this sensation had he been meeting her for the first time; but he instantly and instinctively knew that a reappraisal of Mabel Stenter was necessary. This was betrayed by a slight constraint on his part, which was reflected not indistinctly in her, as she held out her hand and drew him into the room. Beyond the first stilted greetings, words did not come easily to them. Mabel covered what might have been confusion, by closing the door behind them softly, taking his hat, stick and coat in friendly manner, apologizing for the appearance of the room, because as she explained, she was living alone and the service in the house was inadequate. Robing could not decide whether to be disquieted or at ease when he noticed that the door in closing had not locked automatically—as is usual in New York apartments; but he dismissed the question with an inward gesture as he looked about him. His quickened sense of caution, combined with his alert and well-trained mind, swept the room in a swift but all-recording glance.

In its dimensions, it was quite like many others of the " furnished, two-room, kitchenette and bath apartments " that have become so popular of late in the city. The oblong room, high of ceiling, was papered with gray cartridge paper and trimmed with white painted woodwork. A large window at the back, with curtains drawn, but partly open on this warm night to mitigate the heat supplied by a too-generous or careless janitor, was just at the left of the entrance and looked down, Robing conjectured, upon the usual desolate back yards of New York. To the right hand extended the room, at the end of which two doors were ajar. One at the left led to a dimly lighted bedroom; the other, unlighted, showed glimpses of the white tiling of a bathroom. There was visible no direct connection between bedroom and bath. Cheap prints hung here and there upon three walls. In the middle of the wall opposite the entrance was fixed a plain white marble fireplace and mantel with glazed tile hearth. Over it a large mirror in an ornate gilt frame. Mantel and mirror had obviously been retained when the old mid-Victorian house had been remodeled. The floors were of parquet in mixed woods, with here and there an inexpensive rug lying tawdry and dejected under foot.

The furnishings of the living room were of the inevitable auction-room variety—a

horror of mixed styles and periods—violently insulting to the eye. About in the middle of the room and directly in front of the fireplace stood a large, round, near-mahogany table. Upon its center was placed an electric lamp whose beams were glaringly projected by a spreading red glass shade. Scattered about upon the table were a few books, women's magazines, a hand-bag of beadwork, a gold pencil, a veil rolled up and loosely pinned, a letter or two, roughly opened, an emptied glass—odds and ends of a woman's daily life. Just at the left side of the table stood an immense, deep and low leather chair with broad arms facing the hearth diagonally, and on the other side of the table another chair was placed—this one of the imitation Windsor variety. Between the fireplace and the bedroom wall was located a light, cheap, deal table literally massed with dishes, glassware, opened bottles of olives and sandwich paste, table silver—a miscellany of the casual housekeeper's equipment. As his glance caught it Robing surmised that in all probability Mabel prepared her own breakfasts and at times a sketchy luncheon. This table was about a foot from the hearth and slightly removed from the wall. The Windsor chair was between it and the round center-table. Against the opposite wall was a low couch, covered with a cheap Afghan spread and a half dozen cushions, leather and denim, stencilled and embroidered. At its head reposed a small, enameled metal ice-box and on the ice-box, accompanied by a nickeled shaker rested a half-filled square gin bottle and some glasses. Three trunks, two of the wardrobe variety and one large theatrical trunk, were located haphazard about the windowed end of the room. They bore evidence of extensive wanderings in labels and bruises.

To Robing, however, their most remarkable feature was the condition of the contents. They all stood open. To the observing lawyer it seemed as though they had blown open, exploded, as the milkweed bursts its shell and launches its inclosed seed upon the air. Spilled, scattered upon chairs, drooping from the tops and interiors of the trunks, prone upon the floor were gowns and frocks, varicolored and white, silks and velvets, for evening and afternoon wear; piles of pink lingerie, uncut bolts of material, ribbons, lace; partly unwrapped packages of laundry; an assortment of shoes; a dozen pairs of silk stockings pendent from a chair back. Women's finery overflowed the room; was piled upon the couch and boxes. Disorder stalked triumphant. Confusion was supreme.

The center of the actual life of the room was in the pool of light cast by the garish lamp upon the round table, upon the hearth and the two chairs before it. All the riot about it served to hedge in that portion. It was isolated by the tangle of chaotic domesticity that formed its boundaries.

As Robing made his way to the hearth he recalled that in their college days Mabel Stenter had been known by her room-mate as careless and untidy; but he had not really sensed its degree. She had always been so immaculate in public appearance—fresh, dainty, crisp in garment and body. She must, he fancied, be much like a waterlily which rises, waxlike and fragrant, from a bed of reeking mud.

The woman who had at one time meant all the world to Robing, stood again appealingly before him—one hand resting on the table, the other entwined in the folds of a garment strange to his bachelor eyes. He had then, in the diminished glow of the lamp, a chance, of which he took deliberate advantage, to inventory and revalue the returned Delilah.

V.

ROBING'S first glance was drawn to the white fingers of the left hand as they rested nervously in the lamplight on the table's edge. One was encircled by the narrow band of a platinum wedding ring. Upon the forefinger of that hand rested a curiously set ruby. The hand was meticulously manicured. Her arm was pearl bare. Robing noticed that its slenderness remained —the white roundness had however attained a slightly greater fullness. Mabel's gown puzzled him, falling as it did in straight lines from shoulder to foot. It was of a rich, dark blue silk, embroidered in grotesque figures of flower and leaf woven with intricate gold—an adaptation of a

mandarin robe to the purpose of an Occidental woman's toilet. The throat and bosom were bare, alluringly so—the slim, bare feet clad in tiny Chinese sandals hid behind the low falling robe. It was a negligee well calculated to attract and impress him.

Upon Mabel's head her brown hair was piled in high, loose masses. It seemed to add to her height—and she was tall when he had known her. The dark shadows of her tresses were unshot with gray or silver; a heavy, shell comb thrust in at an angle held her hair precariously in position.

Robing's eyes found Mabel's face. There, if anywhere, would the ravages of time be visible. His glance at her on entering found complete confirmation. She was more beautiful than ever—with a richer, riper, more finished loveliness. The years had filled out rather than taken away. Mabel was one of that rare type of women which reaches in the summer of life a charm transcending even the fresh allure of its spring. Whatever of art had been exercised in preserving the bloom and tint, the smooth contours, the deep brilliancy of eye, it had been done with consummate skill. And yet to Henry Robing, looking at Mabel Stenter with the eyes of fifteen years ago, there was a haggard quality behind the blue lights of her eyes; a faint, hunted shadow below them. The once red lips were now rouged. Mabel was tense; but with what? Nervousness? Expectancy? Fear? Did she have a plan? If so, to what purpose "Careful!" said Robing to himself. "Careful!"

Then suddenly a revulsion swept over him, unaccountably. Inwardly he laughed. What a fool he had been for fifteen years! He knew he had never loved this woman—with flooding force it came to him that she was star-distant from his Mabel Stenter—the Mabel of his dreams. His experience had taught him to know artifice and his swiftly clearing brain exposed it here; showed with the clean-cut definition of a powerful search-light a hidden meaning behind the telephone call, the solicited meeting, the studied self preparation. What was her definite intent he could not yet tell; but that the feminine appeal, the call of the old intimacies were to be thrown into the game was pitifully plain. She thought he would be as simple and guileless as in the days when she had rolled his emotions between her fingers and flipped them away. Strange how a long absence stops the sense of another's growth! Well, he would let her find out.

It was banal, of course; but Robing felt that she expected a tribute quite in the old manner. Perhaps it would put her at her ease again. So: "How lovely you are, Mabel—more than I had hoped—more beautiful than my memory."

Mabel mentally leaped over several of her plotted phrases. Unaccountably the barriers to her goal seemed to have disappeared. She welcomed the relief—her tension slacked. It—whatever she had in mind—seemed easier, nearer. But with that relaxing the artificial stimulus, repressed up to that time, rose to its own. Her fingers gripped the table once, then lifted, and she swayed toward Robing. "Oh, Henry, do you think so—after the way I treated you—I was afraid you—" half acting, half earnest. She had steeled herself and the steel had proved unnecessary. The act she had rehearsed and set was useless. Her tongue stumbled—she confused her part. And in the reaction, she was flushed with relief—for which she felt grateful to Robing. She looked at him with new eyes—this old lover of hers, now grown to a high place, imposing, impressive in his evening garb. To her sensuous spirit came a rush of madness. It came upon her that it would, for its own sake, be sweet to lie in his arms again; feel his kisses upon her lips. The means pressingly became more mandatory than the end. At least, so she ardently thought.

But for Robing the situation held a grimly humorous application. He now felt so secure, so confident of himself that he wanted to see the comedy worked out. Let her act it through. He would play the part she had selected for him. He had said to himself, "Careful!" But why? There was nothing here to fear. And temporarily he forgot that he was the district attorney.

Mabel had swayed slightly toward him and then recovered herself. Postponement for the moment. She wanted to savor the sweet morsel upon her tongue before swal-

lowing it. " Sit down, Henry. Tell me all about yourself. Take the big chair—be comfortable."

Robing leisurely seated himself; took out his cigarette case and looked at Mabel for permission. She nodded and said, " Surely; don't be foolish—I'll take one, too." When the cigarettes were lighted she continued, " Tell me what you have been doing, Henry. It's a long time—you have become very famous." Her eyes were admiring his stalwart figure, his unevenly handsome face.

Henry flicked the ash from his cigarette and parried her question. " No; I've had nothing but work—didn't you have something you wanted to see me about?"

" Yes, I did; but it isn't important. It can wait—I'd rather it did—you have changed so, Henry—I'm almost afraid of you. You've grown handsomer even than you were." Her eyes caressed him openly. She stirred in her chair; coiled her supple figure. " You still think me good-looking? Have you ever thought about me—Harry?"

She managed the " Harry " with a simulated timorousness that was almost, but not quite, convincing.

Henry Robing was applauding her under his breath. " Good work! Go on!" he silently exhorted her and then aloud: " Many, many times, Mabel. I have never forgotten you—I never shall. What wonderful days those were." Robing could act—a small part—if the cues were given properly.

Mabel was sitting in the Windsor chair facing him in three-quarter profile. Her left arm lay upon the round table, her fingers trifling with the gold pencil abstractedly. For the moment Henry Robing filled her vision, her whole being. The black flag was again flying on her pirate craft!

She leaned forward and started to speak. " Oh, Harry, if only I hadn't been such a fool. Let me make—" But at that juncture the telephone bell in the bedroom shrilled stridently. " Excuse me a minute," said Mabel and rose from her chair. Once upon her feet she again swayed slightly as she moved away from him. Entering the bedroom she partially closed the door and Robing heard her say, " Oh, hello; how are you?" No name was used, however. It was evident that Mabel was wise. A silence ensued; then: " No, it's much too late. I can't. It can't be of that much importance—hold the line a moment." Mabel closed the door.

Alone, Robing looked about him with casual interest. He picked up the pencil that had rolled under his hand and abstractedly examined it—a pencil of the type so widely advertised, with the owner's initials engraved in the small panel in black type, " S. T. W.," evidently the property of Sterling Whitney. Robing wondered what had become of him; where he was. Mabel had said nothing about him; she was living alone—probably he was dead or divorced. He looked at the disordered room—evidence of the selfishness of the woman, a self-centering attention to her own person that excluded all other details. The scattered articles showed voluptuous indolence. Robing's opinion was that probably Mabel was not so attractive at eleven o'clock in the morning as at seven in the evening. There were inevitable suggestions of luxurious tastes and indulgences which the cheap apartment belied. That was it—Mabel had come upon hard days—she needed money—she wanted to borrow or beg from him! Very well, Robing decided to see how she would go about getting it.

His eyes fell upon the white ice-box, the cocktail shaker, the gin bottle. Ah; that explained the swaying figure, the haggard look in her eyes! His hostess must be holding herself with a tight rein not to have betrayed herself more openly.

The bedroom door opened and Mabel emerged with an apology on her lips. " My lawyer—at this time of night," she explained. " He wanted to see me, but I told him it was impossible—I could not allow him to interrupt us, Harry." She stood close to him, smiling down into his face. Her warm body touched his hand as it lay on the arm of the chair. Her fragrance—the bizarre perfume of old—stole to his nostrils. Robing affected unease, a temptation resisting pose; but Mabel still wanted a slight delay in her attack. She had captured him once by preparation and tumultuous assault. Better to follow that plan, even though the urgency of her senses made

her giddy—that and the gin she had drunk. That was it, she thought. If there was still rigidity toward her let a cocktail assist her in softening it. She must win—must have his arms about her.

"Harry, let's have a toast to the old days," she murmured, leaning close to his ear, allowing her fingers once to brush his hair. "You crack some ice and I'll get the oranges. There's some gin on the ice-box—you take a drink now, don't you?'

"Once in a while," agreed Robing rising. "One a day is about my limit, but to-day is different. Where is the ice pick?"

"In the ice box," replied Mabel. "Move the things on it over to the center-table."

Robing did so, lifted the refrigerator cover, and finding a bowl on the deal table near the fireplace, removed a section of ice to it and there, using the short ice-pick, cracked it into smaller pieces. The pick was one of the short, sharp-pointed, heavy-handled, nickeled variety. Robing was awkward with it and succeeded in pricking his finger. In order to get at his handkerchief he put the ice-pick down upon the extreme outer edge of the deal table.

Mabel mixed the concoction of orange juice, gin and ice in two glasses. For an instant they stood silent by the round table; then at a quick gesture from Mabel the man seated himself again in the low chair. She in turn, first with the appearance of hesitation, then with hot impatience, stepped sinuously around him and sank upon the broad chair arm.

"To the old days, Harry—may they come back!"

With a sardonic emphasis that was lost upon her, Robing echoed the sentiment. Mabel drained her glass. Harry took a slow sip of his and then placed the glass upon the table, just in time to feel a hand pass disordering through his hair; an arm encircled his neck, a voice breathe passionately in his ear: "This is why I wanted you here, Harry, dear. I want to come back to you." Mabel was leaning upon his shoulder, and when he could strain around to see her face he saw that it was white with an odd pallor; yet her heart was beating, beating against his arm through her thin garments, with thudding insistency.

"Come back to me!" he exclaimed with a semblance of astonishment. "You want to do that, Mabel? How can you—haven't you a husband?"

The woman's face was a white fire; her blue eyes, half closed, glowed into his; her lips looked black against the white skin; her head was thrown back. Then swiftly it came forward; her glass fell to the floor with a splintering crash as she slipped easily across his breast, her right hand holding tightly to his neck. "He's gone, Harry, dead, I think—I don't know or care now—please—please." Then abruptly the murmur of her whisper died. Her hand slipped from its hold and dropped inert. Her entire soft body relaxed and lay limp in his arms.

"Mabel! What's the matter?"

He pinched her arm twice. She did not wince. Freeing his right hand from her weight, Robing felt of her heart. It was faintly, slowly beating—a flutter of life. Whether it was merely a fainting spell or heart trouble he could not tell, but that he was anxiously concerned was sure.

"Wake up, Mabel, wake up!" he urged her. She murmured something unintelligible and stirred weakly. He shook her and the thick masses of hair broke and fell from the comb which clattered on the parquet. "Wake up, Mabel!"

Robing did not know what to do. It was a new situation for him—an alarming one. He thought she ought to lie down. If he could only get her into the bedroom or fetch some water. With that thought he struggled to rise, to lift her. The chair was low; her dead weight considerable. At his effort Mabel raised her arms and feebly, gropingly hung them about his neck. Finally he managed to get to his feet, staggered with his burden and then lost his balance. The woman had partly found her feet when he was upright, but only blindly; and as he faltered, her hold was lost and she fell stumbling away from him.

As she did so, her hand slid around his throat, scratching him with its sharp nails, and then catching inside his collar, ripped it loose and tore it away, together with a great part of his white shirt front in a rending pull.

Robing leaped to catch her as the deal

table was directly in her path; but he overlooked the Windsor chair. He tripped on it, sending the chair whirling across the polished floor into the corner. And the second of lost time was for its purpose equal to an epoch. Mabel eluded his grasp and fell heavily against the corner of the light table, shoving it back against the wall with such force as to overthrow all its fragile contents. Glassware and dishes smashed upon the floor; silverware shivered downward. The débris was scattered and littered over all the space about the table. For an infinitesimal second Mabel's body hung suspended across the table, her head entangled with the wreckage upon it; then she rolled over quietly and dropped suddenly into the broken clutter below it. All this happened in a horrifying moment—before Robing could get his forces under control. He heard her cry as she struck the table: "Oh, oh; he's killing me!" and then no more utterance save one great shriek as she touched the floor. There she lay still, dark hair streaming over white shoulder and still whiter face. She had fallen upon her left side, and to Robing she seemed as though asleep; so quiet, so relaxed were her twisted lines, her recumbent limbs, her supine body. Only her eyes were staring open and unseeing. Robing felt the touch of momentary paralysis. He seemed unable to move. Fear clutched at his heart. Then, recovering himself, he stooped to lift her, and his hand in passing beneath her breast encountered a moisture spreading rapidly. His hand came away red, his white cuff was scarlet stained. Then with a passion of haste he turned Mabel's body upon its back and with fevered fingers sought the cause. He found it in the disordered folds of the blood-stained robe—the round, heavy handle of the ice-pick embedded in the soft flesh of her left side, its point driven deep into her heart. With a hellish insistence upon the laws of gravity the little tool had rolled off the table under the impact of her weight, and had landed on the floor, point up, ready to launch its deadly shaft into her descending breast.

Robing knew that she was dead. There was no question. The full force of the fact stunned him as would a swinging club. He could not rise from his knees—he knelt at the dead girl's side with blank eyes, the sweat pouring from him. For the dazed moment he did not, could not, think. Unconsciously his fingers strayed again to the polished, malignant head of the venomous thing that had so blindly struck her—

He felt a hand fall on his shoulder, looked up reelingly and met the stony eyes of assistant district attorney Wollan, and a second man, a stranger, standing over him.

"Robing, why did you kill this woman?" asked Wollan.

VI.

THE Tombs prison is a place of shuddering. Its cold, gray stones surround a fit inclosure for the dance of the doomed—that slow shuffle of feet pacing back and forth between the solid masonry at the rear of a cell and the hard steel bars that form its front. The dancers are, as a rule, an unsmiling and morose company; but on the morning after Henry Robing had been discovered and taken in the very act of murder, his fingers actually clasping the weapon with which he had foully killed a defenseless woman, the prison woke with a grisly joy. In some cells the shuffle became a double shuffle of delight. Young Shotwell smiled and breathed more easily. "Mike the Bite" saw twenty years come off his sentence. "Omaha Lily" grinned a vindictive welcome to the man who up to that morning had seemed to be her particular Nemesis. A yell of sardonic glee went up as the news spread through the iron-laced corridors that the "Blood Hound" was now part and parcel of their ignominy—that the hunter had been caught in one of his own deadly nets.

Henry Robing sat in his cell and gazed at his mental reflection. It was a grotesque image that he studied. His unimpassioned brain reviewed and rehearsed the events of the preceding night with exact attention to its details. District Attorney Robing checked up the actions of Henry Robing, the suspected murderer, and applied to him mercilessly the analysis of procedure he was wont to pursue in ordinary cases, and it was not a pleasing path in which he found his feet were set. He had strayed, as it

were, into an unknown jungle, unsuspecting its poisonous, coiling plants, the hidden serpents and pitfalls, making no note of landmarks. And then of a sudden he was caught, lost. He might cry out, but who was there to heed his voice? He might lash about him in frantic despair, but of what avail was his puny strength against the tropic growth of circumstance in which he had become so inextricably entangled? His only hope of escape was to keep his head, conserve his abilities, search for the outlet that somewhere must exist. It was impossible, he said to himself, that an innocent man could be made to pay the penalty of the guilty.

With the touch of Wollan's hand on his shoulder he had instantly recognized his position, and beyond a bare denial to Wollan's question had made no further comment on the accident. With the first assistant he had consented to go to headquarters and thence to the Tombs. The stranger who had accompanied Wollan in his soft-footed entry upon the scene proved to be a resident of the apartment house, or at least he proclaimed himself as such. None of the other occupants had heard the disturbance, or if they did, had not heeded it. How Wollan had chanced to be at hand had not been explained to him. Robing had not asked him, and no information had been offered. Robing knew that Wollan lived somewhere on the upper West Side; but recalled vaguely that his first assistant had changed his residence recently. Like himself, Wollan was a single man; but unlike Robing, his disposition was a roving one and he shifted his quarters frequently. Nevertheless, Robing decided that it might be helpful to ascertain just why Sam Wollan happened to be so surprisingly at hand the night before.

Robing was not a popular man as social popularity goes. What impress he had made upon New York's citizenry had been accomplished by sheer driving force. People feared him, respected his ability, admired his strength, but did not like him. They gave him tributes, but never gifts. He lived alone; was given to solitude; preferred work to play. He had in the governmental life of the great city come to be looked upon much as the lord high executioner without any of the Gilbert and Sullivan humor of the office. His enemies were numerous—some of them powerful; and they were to be found in all levels of society, criminal, political, financial. Such a remorseless hewing to the line as had marked his career was bound to bring criticism and vengeful yells of rage. Old man Peters, purple-faced bellwether of his club's company of gossips, had expressed it: "That man Robing isn't human. He looks at me as if he were always saying to himself, 'Some day I'm going to get you into the prisoner's pen, and when I do, you're going up for life.' He makes me shiver." And Peters's flock had nodded solemn agreement.

Robing knew of this attitude, but did not care. What people thought of him did not affect him one whit, except perhaps to put a little more bitterness into his attacks upon the lawbreakers; to add a bit more of grimness to his thumbscrews.

He knew that in Wollan he had no friend. Sam Wollan was clever and ambitious—and, Robing suspected, unscrupulous where there was a certain margin of security. In his eyes, as Robing had met them in Mabel's apartment, there had lurked a triumphant glint beneath the formality of sorrow and regret at Robing's position. He had not pretended to believe Robing's denial of guilt; and for that, at least Robing was grateful—he knew and could calculate to a nicety the selfish glee with which Sam Wollan would contemplate the trial of his chief. It was Wollan's opportunity to have his way cleared to Robing's office. He knew that Wollan could, if he wished, have the attorney general appoint him to conduct the trial and thus have opportunity to show the public the talents he could take into the office of district attorney. The spectacular character of the case would silhouette Wollan with bright definition against the curtain of publicity. Or on the other hand, Wollan might elect to sit in the prompter's box.

That the case would be more than a nine-days' wonder was vividly apparent to Robing. His name flared and flickered in the newspapers he had secured that morning.

There had been ample time after his appearance at police headquarters at eleven o'clock to prepare stories that would rock the waking metropolis. And they did. Although the police officials were inclined to show courtesy to their eminent prisoner, and all information had been refused to reporters except the bare record on the police blotter, still there had been a leak somewhere and the newspaper accounts were fairly accurate stories of the affair in so far as the external details were concerned. Robing had said nothing beyond his plea of " not guilty " before the examining magistrate; therefore there was nothing to restrain the papers in their hunger for sensation. With striking unanimity the district attorney was characterized as a killer, while at the same time, for safety's sake, the event was kept moderately befogged until the issues should be definitely joined.

His usual reticence and stubborn disregard for public comment, marked Robing as he carefully went over the various accounts. He would not say a word, he decided. He had been remanded to the Tombs, there to await the action of the grand jury, and waiting the action of that body, in the Tombs he would sit silently and let the wolves of the press howl themselves hoarse. If the public was fool enough to believe, and let their opinions be formed by such hysterical accusations then let the public be fooled. He was not guilty; he was as innocent of murderous intent or action as any man on earth. He insisted to himself again that it was not in the justice of heaven to let the innocent suffer. The judgment of men often wavered, but in the end all human difficulties were made straight. He must not let panic seize him; he must proceed quietly but surely in the preparation of his defense. He must prove himself not guilty.

Robing knew that during that day the ferrets would be busy. Out into the open would be driven the hidden things. An obscure woman who had lived unnoticed in West Eightieth Street would suddenly become a subject of intense interest to millions of people.

Pictures of Mabel Stenter, the apartment house in which she had lived, her rooms would appear and reappear in the gray and lifeless halftones of the press. His photograph, that of Wollan and Duncan—the man who had accompanied him—would be scanned and studied by eager hundreds of thousands. His own dreary life story would, bit by bit, come to the light of day. Not much in it of dramatic interest between Woolwich University and the Criminal Courts Building, but by that very fact those two periods would be emphasized and highly colored. His long dead romance would assume redoubled interest and quadrupled significance against the background supplied by the drab interim and his ruthless career as district attorney.

Oh, yes, they would turn upon him! His influential enemies would show their teeth in mirthless laughter. The adjectives, " cruel," " brutal," " hateful," would hastily be applied to his past labors. The theory of murder for revenge would find almost unanimous support. He would be convicted by opinion before he came to trial—he, the lawyer who had said and believed that " evidence was evidence "; that there was " no such thing as ' circumstantial ' evidence "; that " a series of coincidences always proved a plot." Would Wollan make use of those articles of his creed? He would, indeed!

There would be editorial outcry against the easy-going ways of America in selecting its public officials. Tender-hearted fools would write long letters to the papers condemning him for his brutality and dragging many of his own cases to the front in proof of his surly ruthlessness toward the innocent. His own case would be paralleled with those of several culprits whom he knew were now sleeping in quicklime. There would be a roar from multitudinous throats that justice be meted to him as he had always insisted it should be meted to others. The prosecution could do no other than bow to the demand. There would be no favors shown to the ex-district attorney in the Court of General Sessions.

Coincidences? Why, the case against him would be built up exclusively of coincidences—the " series of coincidences " that he had always held up to scorn. Robing himself might have laughed at the ease with

which he could convict a prisoner with such evidence in his hand. The only thing that could be said about it was that it was too conclusive—it showed the perpetrator of the crime to be a simple-minded ass—too intent upon his vengeance to make provision for escape. But he had tried and convicted many such asses himself—without regrets.

The killing itself? What jury would believe his grotesque story? Had he not been caught in the very act—his fingers, red with her blood, still clutching the mortal weapon buried in his victim's breast? Could it have been an accident? That was almost a humorous suggestion under the circumstances—his tousled hair, the long, deep scratches upon his throat, his torn and mangled linen, his obvious panic as discovered by Wollan and Duncan. There was Mabel's dishevelment, the tumbled condition of her attire, her loosened hair, the bruises upon her arm and head, her cry, "He's killing me!" The room itself—a chaos of confusion, a chair upset, débris littering the floor. Robing had entered the house an hour previous to Wollan's entry to the room; that would be confirmed. He had intended to call there that evening. Miss Townsend and Bernap knew it—the telephone call at his office, the call slips at his club could, if handled adroitly, be made to appear wholly incriminating and show depth of plan. Why not? Robing had been at first reluctant to go and then had consented almost eagerly; he had sent Miss Townsend home before he finished his talk with Mabel. Why? What had he wanted to say that could not be heard by his secretary? Mabel had anxiously sought him at office and club. Who knew why?

These self-questionings brought to Robing's mind the ease with which a motive could be established. Had he not desperately loved this girl; been cast aside by her; sworn vengeance upon her; remained a recluse so far as women were concerned from that day forward? He had said to Bernap upon the very night she had died that he had often wanted to kill her. This was the first and only occasion when she had come within reach of his avenging arm since she had abandoned him fifteen years before. Into his hatred of her, it would be said, he had put the same inexorable determination with which he had helped the law kill others. All his ugly characteristics would be called to the aid of that theory.

His victim had received him graciously—that was evident. She had wanted to please him; was arrayed in the habiliments of allure; had offered him hospitality. All those details were recorded. She was dead now and could not testify; but might not those mute witnesses tell of her desire to make up to him for the suffering she had once caused—betoken a repentance and an intent to restore, if he would have them, and in so far as she could, the benefits of her affection which once he had so hungrily desired? And how had he requited her attempt to restitute?

Whatever Mabel Whitney's character may have been it had no direct bearing. Even if she had been notorious it would not release him from the toils of responsibility.

Blank, unscalable walls, whichever way he turned.

VII.

Henry Robing's own creed was threatening his life. He was enmeshed in a net with whose web he had tangled many another man to his undoing. This time it was his work to unravel the threads instead of weaving them together. For this task he would need help and advice, although he had, with his usual self-confidence, decided to direct his own defense.

He sent for Pliny Trevor, an able and brilliant lawyer, who had in the past three years appeared as counsel for the defense in several important cases against him. These cases Trevor had conducted in such a way as to impress Robing—and Robing's attitude toward other lawyer's had ever given the impression of ill-concealed contempt. Robing's motive in asking Trevor's advice instead of some closer friend's was that he wanted a more dispassionate review of the possibilities than he was likely to get otherwise. Besides, there were few of his acquaintances in whose ability he had much confidence. Trevor had beaten him twice, which was more than any other lawyer had accomplished, and by that record had

earned Robing's genuine respect. Trevor, he felt also, would give his best if associated in this big case because of its tremendous publicity and possible fame.

But he was not prepared for the blunt way in which Trevor expressed his interest when he arrived.

Trevor was a tall, saturnine man of about Robing's age. Black, penetrating eyes below jet-black hair and slightly pointed, heavy eyebrows gave him well-nigh a Mephistophelian aspect. His voice was a slow drawl which hinted a lurking strength and confidence. His rare smile revealed a gleam of strong, white teeth, beneath a small black mustache. In his dress he showed a planned carelessness. In manner, Trevor was brusque; in speech uncompromising. In many ways he and Robing held mutual resemblances. They were both strong men and respected each other's power.

Perhaps in thus picturing this case it will be permissible to report several of the conferences which took place between the two. The first one began with only perfunctory greetings.

Trevor glanced at the newspapers which Robing had been examining. "See you've been reading about yourself, Robing. What did you do it for?"

"I didn't stab that girl, Trevor; and if you were sane you'd know it. It was an accident—as I will tell you."

"Well, if it was an accident I'll say you concealed your innocence most skillfully. But first tell me: do you want me to defend you or just act like the rudder on a ship—a useful instrument, but entirely concealed by water?"

"Why, I asked you in, Trevor, to advise me and assist me in my defense. I know this case—none better, unfortunately—and intend to conduct it."

"Nix, old-timer; nothing doing. I'm a lawyer, you are a lawyer. Your life is at stake; my reputation will be. You're sitting so close to the hub you can't feel the wheel go round. They're not going to pussyfoot this case against you. Wollan or his man is going into court against you, hung all over with jingling bells. They are rehearsing the anvil chorus right now. You don't hear 'em. I do. If half what the papers say is true I'll have one hell of a time even in getting a disagreement or a compromise verdict for you—"

He held up a hand to stop Robing's protest and continued: "I know what you're going to say, old man; but what I'm telling you is the truth. I don't like to say it, and I'm going to listen to your story with all four ears, but before I hear it I want you to know that I won't act for you unless I can handle the case in my own way. I'm talking for your best interest. Just remember that for the present you are not the district attorney—you're only a distinguished suspect. You might as well get it now as later—if I can save you I want the credit."

Robing demurred, but Trevor was firm. Robing argued; Trevor was unmoved.

"Why, man, you know I'm not guilty," protested Robing.

"Perhaps I think so," drawled Trevor, "but I'll have to make twelve hammerheads and one unemotional judge believe it; and you'll remember that the defense is not the only side that has a hat to fling into the ring. If I take the risk I get the honor."

Robing was still reluctant to give up the control. "Listen to my side and then decide," said he. "You've got your bias from a newspaper story."

"Not one story—eight; six morning and two evening—this coming evening, which is not yet here; but its papers are with us. Also I've had a keen and alert ear to the ground to-day—but go ahead with the story, old man; we can bicker after you tell it. Just remember I want you to have the best of any bargain we make."

Trevor took a plug of tobacco, cut off a small portion and rolled it under his tongue. He pulled off his coat and folded up his shirt sleeves. He tipped back his chair; in some manner adjusted his long legs around it, put his head back against the wall of the consulting room and fixed his eyes upon the ceiling. "Proceed," said he.

With an immaculate attention to every slight detail, beginning with his first sight of Mabel Stenter at Woolwich University down to the moment when Wollan had found him kneeling beside the body of Mabel, Robing related his story of the

tragedy. He omitted nothing; exaggerated nothing; colored no incident; softened no event. It was a flat, gray reproduction of what had occurred.

Throughout the narrative Trevor did not stir and only twice did he interrupt.

Once he said: "Just a minute—that gold pencil. You say you examined it and that when you left the room it was no longer on the table. What were the initials?"

"S. T. W."

"H-m! Go on."

The second interruption was irrelevant. "What's your idea about Wollan? How did he happen to be cruising around in that house at the exact psychological moment?"

"Let's talk about that later, Trevor, when I finish this story of mine—I don't figure him out yet."

"You're right—pardon me—later." And Trevor again fixed his unwavering eye on the ceiling.

Upon the completion of Robing's bald and gruesome chronicle Trevor kept his eye for some time cocked aloft. Then he unfurled his feet and the front legs of his chair came down to the floor with a forceful bang.

"So that's that!" he ejaculated. "You're accustomed to looking facts in the face, Robing—if you were prosecuting this case you couldn't ask for a sweeter nut to crack—it's a paper-shell pecan. I don't believe Wollan is going to lose any sleep over it; but if I step into it I'm going to lose a lot. Man, dear, I want to be with you. I'm frank; I've nothing to lose in it—everything to gain. And therefore you've got to let me run it. Don't you see the absurdity of your handling it—you, the man who has irreconcilably maintained that a chain of circumstances always implies guilt? You can't do it. They would laugh you into the chair. Don't you realize that?"

Robing's nerves were a bit on edge. "I didn't ask you to come here, Trevor, to tell me I'm guilty. I wanted you to help me fight—"

"I know that, Robing." The lawyer was quick to understand and soothe Robing's easy irritation. "All I want to do is to convince you that you've got to fight and must let me manage the battle. You have reason to know that I'm a fairly quick-footed scrapper; and, believe me, the prosecution is going to suffer a few cuts and contusions before they are through with us—if you'll let me do the leading. How about it?"

Robing pondered for a moment, then sighed. "All right—go ahead. I'm in your hands." His perspective was distorted. He knew it.

"Fine!" said Trevor. "Now let's get down to cases. I've got a hunch you didn't kill this Mabel; but I'm telling you that you and I are about the only ones who have. We've got to do some speedy loping. Let's get busy and sift this stuff as a sort of warming-up gallop."

For two hours the two men picked up and examined each bit of evidence and classified it, item by item, piece by piece. Step by step that fatality was recreated and mentally rehearsed. At the conclusion they looked mutely at each other, and the unspoken agreement was that, as it then stood, their case was a flimsy structure. Trevor spoke first.

"I wanted to get it hot off the bat from you while your memory was fresh and the picture vivid. As it looks this morning there are a couple of soft spots we want to look into. Of course they may not amount to anything for us, but that will come out later. On the surface Wollan's presence in the apartment looks as though he had a murder alarm in his room and dressed like a fireman. He'll have a smooth explanation—but it will bear a little probing. And another thing—just to show you that you are too close to this thing. Remember the pencil that first was and then wasn't on the table? Maybe you overlooked the fact that "S. T. W." stands for Sterling T. Whitney, and it might stand for Samuel T. Wollan as well. Maybe he'll have a new one to-day, but at that he isn't going to throw away a solid gold pencil. I'll send McGuire, a little Irishman I know, underground for a while. He'll emerge with something in his teeth. He's good."

At the time Robing could suggest no supplements to the plan of operation, although to him it seemed to amount to little more than tentative thrusts into the dark. They

were not constructive plans, and as arguments they were nearly equivalent to saying, "You're another," to the man who says, "You're a liar." They did not arrive.

But the chance could not be neglected—nothing should be overlooked, so he assented readily to Trevor's suggestion. The significance of the gold pencil and its engraved initials had not occurred to him, although the coincidence would, he was sure, have struck him in a later and less distressful moment, and, he also knew, would have been turned to profitable account. Trevor had seized it instantly. He was pleased at his attorney's quick grasp of its possibilities. It augured well for him; and he was obliged to admit to himself the wisdom of allowing Trevor to take the lead.

And there was the possibility, he permitted himself to conjecture after Trevor had taken his departure, that they would have to depend upon a smoke screen to effect his escape. All the parts of the prosecution's case fitted as exactly as a jig-saw puzzle; nothing was missing. As joined together, it formed a perfect picture.

He started thinking about Sam Wollan again. Would Wollan conduct the case himself and thereby deprive the prosecution of his testimony as the principal witness, leaving Duncan's testimony as the only offset to Robing's, or would he have the case put into other hands—perhaps outside counsel? The prosecution's case would be infinitely strengthened if Wollan should go on the witness stand, but he would lose most of the prestige. If, however, he subordinated himself to the rôle of witness there would be smaller cause to suspect him of a personal interest in Robing's conviction.

He was inclined to think that Wollan would not head the prosecution, but for the time being nothing could be gained by speculating along that line. Time enough after McGuire had reported his findings.

Robing's mind turned back to a consideration of the motive that might be presented. He felt sure that if the prosecution offered revenge as the keynote Trevor would do wisely in attempting to make it appear absurd. It was inconceivable that a plotted crime could have been enacted with such a disregard for its reactions as had distinguished this gruesome affair. Premeditation would have denuded the deed of its intemperate stupidities—and Robing was not stupid.

Then Robing thought of Mabel's cry as her head crashed into the havoc of the table's contents: "Oh, he's killing me!" That, it seemed to him, would be the most difficult item in the entire tragedy to explain to a hard-headed jury. How could he convey to them convincingly that Mabel in her backward fall from his arms, unconscious of its innocent cause, had attributed to his brutality her smashing blow upon that senseless piece of cheap furniture? Doubtless several witnesses had heard the cry, and also her agonized shriek, so suddenly cut short as the vicious steel bit into her heart and silenced her voice forever. That outcry must, by some as yet unseen method, be explained.

For an instant it flashed through his mind that he might claim that Mabel had committed suicide; that in his struggle to prevent her from doing so he had received the injuries to his clothing and himself; but just as quickly he rejected it—that would not only be perjury, but a foolish lie. In claiming that she had stabbed herself he could see no reasonable support for the supposition. Mabel's death had been the result of an accident, and he would stand by it. Best to take his medicine with a clear conscience.

Seldom before, in consequence of his indifference to any of the hampering illogicalities of his profession, had Robing been brought to understand the pathos, the sordid and pitiful attributes of the accused. The force of it flooded him, and as the flood diminished he was kneeling once more beside the body of that beautiful woman. There came to him no hysteria over her swift passing.

She meant nothing to him now; it was as though a lost, sick child had come to his doorstep—to speak for a moment of lovely, forgotten things—then fallen and died. He was curious in a way quite separate from its bearing upon his case as to the report McGuire would turn in. He hoped, almost, that her record would be

clean. He had not wanted her; but he would like always to know that she had regretted and offered to make restitution.

Again, on the practical side. Lightning, he thought, could not have struck with more lethal speed. The entire time consumed from the moment she had slipped from his supporting arms until she was dead, had not been more than ten seconds. And in ten seconds more the swift-footed men were upon him. No time to collect physical or reasoning strength; no opportunity to do more than instinctively withdraw into his shell of reticence.

He wondered what he would have done if time had been permitted him to think and act without interruption; but a careful consideration of his probable actions yielded no promise that his position could have been improved. Better to have had Wollan intervene as he did than permit any act of bewildered carelessness further to complicate the tangle.

Ah, but it was bitter to contemplate this situation of his! One man against the world, with the mechanism of the law revolving inexorably to his destruction. His egoism—and there is always an egoism of ability—would not allow him to consider his position as hopeless; but he was forced to agree with Trevor that it was most desperate.

Their interviews were, after the first one, brief and succinct. A molding of theory and fact into a compacted whole—still malleable to future disclosures.

VIII.

A WEEK after the tragedy Trevor brought McGuire with him to see Robing. The Irishman had come to the surface—a mild-mannered little man of middle age, partially bald, dressed in shabby black, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. His pale-blue eyes gave no hint of the tenacity with which he was wont to fasten on a trail. A thin, singsong voice droned its short sentences monotonously.

In response to Trevor's "Tell us what you know, Mac," he began to speak.

"It's easy," said he; "buyin' subway tickets is harder. Mabel Whitney's been livin' in that house for six months. Her husband's a minin' engineer—been out in Arizona fer a year. They never agreed good. She liked the ponies, and they give her a run. They say she used to step out some, but the' ain't no big record of it here. Lived quiet—few visitors—had no women friends except the woman in the front apartment, a widow named Gregory. She used to see her once or twicet a week, and liked her.

"Sterling Whitney and Sam Wollan were acquaintances in Denver. When Mabel Whitney come to New York this last trip she let Sam know after she'd been here about three months. He used to drop in often to see her—took her out to dinners and such. Only about a month ago she let out to him that she used to know you, Mr. Robing. Sam third-degreed her, I guess, until she spilled the whole story. He saw a chance to upset your limas, and planted Sylvester Duncan as a roomer in the extension that snugs up close to Mrs. Whitney's apartment window. It has a window at right angles to hers.

"Duncan is a drug-store clerk, and he owes Wollan money. Sam slipped a ten case with a promise of more jack to Marie Jacobson, the superintendent's daughter, and told her to get a close-up of any visitors calling on Mrs. W. She's the snappy ruffle you met in the upper hall, Mr. Robing. She's stuck on Duncan.

"What I didn't get," McGuire interrupted himself, "is just how Wollan dragged Mabel Whitney up to the mark, or just what he planned for her to do. She's dead, you know"—and the earnest little man didn't even blush at that announcement to Robing—"so Wollan's the only one who knows.

"It might have been money, or it might be he played on her vanity till she couldn't resist takin' a flyer at you to see could she make a monkey out o' you. The' ain't anything on paper to tell; that's sure. Anyway, he knew at six o'clock that night that you was goin' up there, and the plant was ready. Duncan at the listenin' post—Marie on patrol. Sam was in Mrs. W's. apartment from about seven to eight. Met her outside on her way home from an early

dinner alone. You won't find any one who will admit seein' them come in or go out, and I can't prove it; but I know."

Again McGuire stopped his story to address Robing. "Do you remember about the curtain to that window, Mr. Robing? Was it all the way down? Think hard."

Robing did remember it well. "The curtain was drawn all the way, but the window was partly open. I recall that once or twice a draft of air outside slatted the curtain stick against the window sill and the curtain blew out. The window was raised about two and a half feet, I think."

"That's too bad," commented McGuire. "They probably wanted that curtain up, and either she forgot or turned sour on 'em after he left. It would have helped you if it had been up the way they wanted it—as the thing come out. They could have seen clear to the deal table.

"Well, they had a couple or three shots of gin while he was there—at least Mrs. W. did. He didn't; but she had a kinda likin' for the square face. Then he went away and come back after you was in. He was callin' on Mr. Duncan then. He'll say that—on his old pal. They was pals once, back in the home town swimmin' hole. Not since.

"Whatever he wanted to get on you, Mr. Robing, you give him somethin' better. You dealt him three aces to go with the one he had. He played 'em, too. That was his pencil—I got it here. Identify it?"

He handed a gold pencil to Robing, who took it, examined it, and nodded. "That's the one," said he.

McGuire permitted himself a half smile. "I'm a pretty good little second-story worker meself," he said, then added: "That's about all. You know the rest. They must 'a' had two ears glued to Duncan's window. They could hear a good deal, and when her glass broke they was set to go. With her fallin' and yellin' 'He's killin' me,' they was at her door and in just after it. Anyway, that checks up pretty close with the time, the place, and the girl; don't it? My joke"; and he parted his lips in a pale grin.

"Well," said Trevor, "it's a rotten joke, and you're a thick-skinned Mick; but I'll say you did a good job. What do you think, Robing?"

"Why, it's interesting," replied Robing, after a musing moment, "and it is certainly a quick piece of sleuthing; but where does it get us? It shows collusion of some kind for the purpose of involving me in trouble, but what good is that to us now? We can't prove anything, and if we attempted it they would probably turn it against us by claiming that I had discovered the plot and that the discovery had only fed the flames of my murderous intent.

"It might discredit Wollan, but how does it help me? I don't care a tinker's damn about that rat. I'm thinking about twelve good men and true and which way they're going to point their thumbs. Believe me; my interest is there."

Trevor rolled his tobacco under his tongue and ruminated while McGuire sat silent and unwinking. Then Trevor's oscillating chair came down.

"It gets us this much," he shot out. "We know Wollan won't try the case. He will probably ask for Frost as counsel. Frost is a skunk, of course, but he's as clever as the devil. I shall enjoy a battle with him. I've cracked him over the head once before, and I can do it again.

"So much for that," he went on. "We know who's against us, and we know why. We know that Wollan was trying to frame you, Robing, and that he had the nerve to run the wheel himself. It's possible that he overlooked something. We will find out about that. He's yellow. I haven't a doubt but that he was acting for somebody who had instructed him to get you. We'll learn about that, too.

"He didn't have sufficient personal motive himself—but, as you say, that's another story. He was careless about that pencil—that was a fool thing to do. Maybe he was foolish about something else. These bright boys move too fast sometimes."

Trevor stopped short, gazed straight ahead of him with glistening eyes gradually growing brighter for a long, silent interval, and then exclaimed:

"By cracky, Robing, I believe I've got it! Don't ask me now. Let me think it out.

Come on, Mac—let's go. Good-by, Henry; see you to-morrow."

Followed by the shabby little man, Trevor swung rapidly out of sight.

That afternoon Robing had evidence of the constancy of one friend at least. The small, blond Miss Townsend called to see him at the prison. Robing was both surprised and pleased to see her. He told her so.

"I wanted you to know, Mr. Robing," she said with her shy little smile, "that I don't believe what they are saying about you—not a single word. Isn't there something I can do to help you? I'll do anything—anything."

"Why, but that's good of you, Miss Townsend!" exclaimed Robing. "And I do appreciate it most deeply. I wish there were something, but there isn't a thing that can be done."

"I wanted to ask you about the notes—the pencil notes you made that day Mrs. Whitney called you?" asked the girl. "I went back to the office after you had left that night, and found the notes on the desk, so I put them in the top drawer. Next morning when I came in—I had read the papers, you know—I took them out, and still have them. Will they hurt you? Because if they will I'm going to burn them. I couldn't bring them here. I was afraid the police—"

She stopped quickly and looked away from Robing as a vivid blush flooded her face. The man gazed at her with new eyes. He had never seen this girl before. Here was loyalty and devotion that is not represented in the pay check.

"Oh, Miss Townsend, that won't be necessary. Those notes will not harm me—just pencil scratches, weren't they? If you are subpœnaed as a witness it will be done merely to testify that Mrs. Whitney called me by telephone. You remember, possibly, hearing me say that I was reluctant to see her. That in a way will be of aid to me, if you remember it."

"Yes, Mr. Robing, I do remember it; and I will be ready!" cried the eager girl. "I do so want you to get out of this trouble. It hurts me to think of your being here; it hurts."

Robing held out his two hands to her. "I thank you, Miss Townsend—I cannot tell you how much. Friends in adversity make the friends of prosperity look small indeed. I hadn't realized before—"

Robing in his turn broke off his sentence, and there was a light in his eyes that once more brought the suffusing blood to the girl's cheeks. As he tightly held her hands, she glanced up at him, and there was almost a pleading look in her tearful big blue eyes.

"I'll do anything—anything I can," she whispered, and was gone.

But Jessica Townsend did not take away with her the memory of her heart-warming visit. Even the ominous gray shadows in which he sat could not obliterate from Robing's mind the persisting sense of her shy loyalty, her crisp and fragrant presence, the demure loveliness of this maiden who, for three years, had sat at his side, and whom he had never seen until that moment—perhaps too late.

IX.

Stone walls inclose the body and oppress the spirit; loneliness and prevision of calamity sap the soul. Robing was a courageous man and a resourceful one; but here there was so little to lay hands upon—there were such heavy stones to lift in searching for the springs of truth. Robing looked forward with impatient eagerness to Trevor's visit the following day—speculated almost wildly in his mind as to what his attorney's sudden idea could have been.

More and more was Pliny Trevor growing in Robing's esteem. His casual manner, his brusqueness, the seemingly impersonal attitude he had assumed toward Robing's case concealed a coiled-spring brain and a professional ambition which nothing thwarted.

Their greetings approached warmth when they shook hands the next day. Trevor met Robing's questioning glance with a smile.

"How good a gambler are you, Henry?" he asked.

"Well," Robing replied, "I used to swing a nasty hand at draw, but I really preferred stud poker."

"Attaboy, Henry!" and Trevor grinned. "Now, listen, we're going to play stud with these birds; but they don't know it. I've thought it all out, and want your opinion about it. We know who are sitting into this game. We know they think they have an absolutely sure thing, and I don't blame them for it. Every time they think it over they jab each other in the ribs and break into loud guffaws. That's going to make 'em careless—it looks too easy. We'll catch 'em asleep—this way—"

For a quarter of an hour Trevor talked rapidly and intensely, while Robing listened with concentration. At the conclusion of his talk Trevor leaned back in his chair.

"What do you think of it, Henry? It may sound forlorn to you—and I'll admit it's a long chance myself—but I submit that it's the best way to utilize this frame-up of Wollan's and to catch 'em off their guard.

"They'll try to rush this case to trial—the grand jury considers it day after tomorrow, and will surely bring in a true bill against you; so we will help 'em along by asking for no postponements or favors; make 'em think we've lost heart and surrendered to superior forces. Be humble and meek, you know. Say nothing; do nothing. Act like goats until the last minute, and then slap 'em down dead. Hey? How does the idea strike you?"

Robing pondered long before speaking; then:

"What else have we? Nothing. We can, I think, prove that there was no premeditation; but after that, on the face of things, we run into an impasse. I hadn't thought about the significance of the incident you mention, but it's logical and it looks worth while. I'll play stud along with you. I believe you are right and can break up the game—unless the grand jury minutes throw some new light on the case."

"They won't—believe me," and Trevor's eyes gleamed triumphantly. "The case is good enough for them as it stands. And right here, Henry Robing, I want to hand it to you—you're a sportsman. Shake!"

And they shook hands to their luck in throwing dice with death.

As predicted by Trevor, the grand jury handed down its indictment, and an examination of the minutes disclosed no considerable or important divergence from the expected thing. Trevor and Robing could play their game of stud poker.

Maxwell Frost was appointed as special counsel for the prosecution and given direct charge of the case, and it was set for trial on Monday of the third week following. Trevor made no protests—was almost lamblike in his submissiveness to the prosecution's program; so much so that many people shook their heads and said that Robing had made a great mistake in retaining him.

The case was so hopeless, they said, that Trevor, realizing it, had lost his aggressiveness for once. There were rumors that Robing and Trevor disagreed as to the line of defense; some went so far as to say that Trevor had advised Robing, in the face of such damning evidence, to plead guilty to second degree murder and throw himself on the mercy of the court.

It was predicted by some of the wise ones that Trevor would withdraw from the case before it came to trial, and the betting was ten to one for a conviction, two to one for first degree murder.

The newspaper headlines flared and blared; and the rising tides of popular indignation washed against the walls of the Tombs with insolent insistence. To think that the defender of the people's peace should so far betray the trust of his office as to commit this cowardly crime! Through the days preceding the trial Trevor and Robing preserved their voiceless pose, their assumed rôle of participants in a forlorn hope, resigned to disaster.

At first it puzzled Wollan; then, with the passing days, his confidence increased as public opinion bellowed against Robing and nothing occurred to shake the perfect chain of evidence with which the prisoner was bound. At first Wollan had been nervous, but with continued immunity came a warm sense of security that rose to heights of bravado. Everything was going his way!

Trevor and Robing rehearsed and polished their plan as a gambler practices

throwing his cards, until they were perfect. They shared their plan with no one, locked it in their minds securely. McGuire had operated unseen and unheard—no suspicion had been caused by his work; even his securing of the gold pencil had not been discovered. As Trevor had said, McGuire was "good." A cheering note came to the Tombs from Jessica Townsend.

It was a great gamble; but it had to be.

X.

"YOUR honor, and gentlemen of the jury, in this case which is offered to you for consideration and judgment are presented elements that demand the most serious exercise of your abilities. A high official of this commonwealth has been indicted by the grand jury for murder in the first degree upon evidence submitted—a murder committed, as we will show you, deliberately and with due premeditation. The victim was a woman, beautiful and innocent of any harm or design to harm the person or integrity of the prisoner before you."

Maxwell Frost was opening for the prosecution in Part IV, before Judge Wilbur Forsythe, General Sessions. The judge was an austerely handsome man, whose white hair and serene dignity seemed to set him above the phantasmagoria of human passions which were to be spread out before him in seething sequence; a man with a slightly wearied air—somewhat scornful of this display of the frailties of man.

Frost was facing the jury. It was the usual jury—the residuum collected after the grinding and shifting of a hundred male citizens. It had been secured with difficulty. Prejudice against Robing had eliminated many by the question, "Have you formed an opinion in this case?" Others did not believe in capital punishment. But on the whole, as juries go, it satisfied Trevor and Robing.

The twelve men were of the ordinary, self-satisfied type, slightly conscious of their prominent position, somewhat uneasy under the weight of its importance. Most of the twelve had not confessed to prejudice because of their inherently bovine natures. They did not have an acute interest in anything outside their own narrow paths. As is usual, there were two or three jurors whose intelligence was superior to the others, and it was to these that the trial lawyers subtly directed their chief arguments.

Trevor and Frost were direct antitheses. The latter gave the impression of intense energy, as a small, nervous man will. His rather prominent dark eyes gleamed behind strong-lensed glasses; his bald head shone silkily; he wore a profusion of gold articles of personal adornment or use—two massive, ornate rings, a slender watch chain, a lavish stickpin. In dress he was natty to a degree; one sensed that Frost probably patronized a theatrical tailor. His movements were quick, his bearing dramatic. One trick he possessed—that of forcing the blood into his face as he lashed himself into an emotional crisis—had often been extremely effective with a raw jury. It gave him the empurpled mask of an avenging fury. He was a famous lawyer, and enjoyed his notoriety. No mean antagonist was he.

Near him sat Wollan, his eyes and hands busy with papers—never once glancing at the defendant or his counsel seated not far from him.

Robing had crossed the Bridge of Sighs to the court room, passing through a corridor lined with a curious and inimical throng. He had heard jeers, low-voiced comments on his crime, whispers about his guilty look—not one note of cheer or friendship. This condition continued in the densely crowded court room, a small sea of inquisitive faces, some hateful, a few neutral, none friendly in that sensation-hungry pack of people save two.

Robing caught sight of Jessica Townsend as he entered, her blue eyes turned to him in a wistful little smile. Wonderfully it cheered him. A moment later George Bernap nodded to him—a gesture of sympathy not devoid of a mournful quality. Bernap was there to testify concerning their last meeting—not willingly, Robing knew, but he felt nevertheless that Bernap might believe him guilty.

Adhering to their plan, Robing entered

the room and took his seat with dejected mien and hopeless manner. When Trevor took his place beside him, he too wore a dispirited air; scarcely spoke to his client. Their disheartened appearance caused a buzz of comment in the crowd, and a whisper passed between Wollan and Frost. Whatever the whispered remark was, it provoked a smile from Frost as he cast a mocking glance at the jury. Robing and Trevor had planned well. Quite obviously the prosecution felt that the trial would be a matter of mere routine. Their confidence was unshaken, suspicion slept. Max Frost proceeded with his preliminary address.

"We shall show you that, fifteen years ago, an attachment existed between the victim, Mrs. Whitney, and the defendant, Henry Robing. We shall show that this attachment was terminated by Mrs. Whitney, then Miss Stenter, for reasons best known to herself.

"We expect to show that during the intervening fifteen years hatred of his former sweetheart and a desire for revenge has persistently burned in this man's heart. We shall show you that the defendant has said that he had often wanted to kill her. We shall show that the defendant was seen entering Mrs. Whitney's door at ten minutes past nine of the night upon which she died; that he did not leave that room again until after she was dead; that their voices were heard in conversation; that at ten minutes before ten o'clock there were sounds of an altercation in which the voice of the defendant was heard to shout threateningly.

"We shall show you by unimpeachable evidence that there were sounds of a conflict within the room; that Mrs. Whitney was heard to cry out, 'He's killing me'; that there was a sound as of breaking dishes and overturning furniture, followed by a prolonged and agonized shriek. By the testimony of two witnesses we shall show that immediately following these evidences of a struggle the room was entered and the defendant was discovered kneeling by the side of the dead woman with his hand clasping the head of the ice pick by which she had met her death; that his clothes were torn, his throat bleeding, his cuffs stained with blood; that the room was in a condition of extreme disorder and turmoil, and that there was evidence that there had been heavy drinking.

"Upon that evidence, gentlemen of the jury, the State bases its case, and after its submission looks to you confidently for a verdict demanding the extreme penalty of the law."

Frost concluded and turned from the jury.

A simple, straightforward presentation of the case delivered in the matter-of-fact tone characteristic of Frost in his openings—a striking contrast to the pyrotechnics with which he would sum up.

The coroner's physician was called first, and testified that Mrs. Whitney had died from the effect of a blow of a pointed ice pick delivered with such force that it had penetrated her heart. The ice pick was received in evidence.

Frost conferred for a moment with Wollan and then summoned George Bernap to the witness stand. By skillful manipulation he drew from Bernap the entire story of the love affair between Robing and Mabel Stenter at Woolwich University. The details of that romantic adventure had been previously secured, so that Bernap was really only the brush with which the picture was spread upon the canvas. Great emphasis was laid upon the bitterness, the wild threats from Robing which had followed Mabel's elopement.

Later, after Miss Townsend's testimony, Bernap was recalled to the stand, and from the conscientious George was drawn the reluctant admission that just before Robing had left him that fatal evening he had said that he was going to call upon a woman whom he had often wanted to strangle, and about whom he could not think without seeing red.

All throughout the direct examination Trevor and the defendant sat unmoved, and at Frost's "You may take the witness," Trevor rose only to develop the fact that Robing had told Bernay that he might be making a mistake in seeing Mabel again.

Frost and Wollan smiled covertly at that. Why, Trevor was crazy to blunder into

such a trap! Robing had been afraid to trust himself, then, had he?

The doorman of the club where Robing lived testified as to the telephone messages for him; the memorandum slips left upon his chiffonier were offered as evidence.

Miss Townsend, hesitant in her admission, was obliged to testify as to the telephone call at the office, Robing's talk with Mrs. Whitney, and to his telling Miss Townsend in the midst of the talk that she might leave the room and go home. Again Trevor, on cross-examination, developed only Robing's hesitancy about calling on Mabel.

It was becoming quite apparent to Wollan and Frost that all Robing hoped for was to establish the absence of premeditation. He had become flaccid; could not fight and bluster now that he was the accused, not the accuser. Also, Trevor apparently betrayed a sullen resentment at Robing's faintheartedness.

Little Jessica Townsend left the stand disturbed and anxious. This man was so different from her former hero, District Attorney Robing; but her strong faith in him was not shaken, even though she could not understand.

Mrs. Gregory, the widow occupying the front apartment on Mrs. Whitney's floor, bore witness to Mabel's quiet behavior and uneventful life. This was corroborated by Jacobson, the superintendent, and his daughter. Marie Jacobson's testimony also established the time of Robing's arrival at 98-A West Eightieth Street that night. To all this testimony Trevor offered no objections—except in a perfunctory manner, or to glaring attempts by Frost to place utterly damnatory statements on the record. Trevor was listless, Robing was spineless.

After the day's adjournment discussion raged in and out of the courthouse and through the city. What had happened to Robing? What ailed Trevor? Where was the battering force of Robing? Whence had fled the lightning thrusts, the alert parries of Trevor? The morning papers printed only accounts of an ominous attack and a tepid defense. Even Judge Forsythe had betrayed signs of surprise at Pliny Trevor's attitude.

The prosecutors were exultant, the defense invisible and silent, the public dazed.

XI.

Upon the reopening of court the following morning Wollan, the first of the two most important witnesses, was called to the stand. He took the chair with assurance, almost insolence. Frost began his clever questioning, Wollan his carefully prepared answers.

Trevor was sitting behind Frost, directly in Wollan's line of vision. It was the first time during the trial that they had looked at each other face to face, and even now they avoided each other's eye. Trevor, with downcast face, was weakly fumbling some papers on the table before him.

Yes, Wollan knew Robing—as assistant district attorney he had been in daily touch with him for three years. He had seen him on the day in question—first at the Cosmos Club at about eight fifteen in the evening; later at 98-A West Eightieth Street; the first time he was at dinner with Mr. Bernap—he had spoken to him. The second time he saw him was in Mrs. Whitney's apartment; he was kneeling on the floor beside her body; yes, she was dead.

"Were you alone?" asked Frost.

"No," Wollan replied.

"Who was with you?"

"Sylvester Duncan."

"Is that the man?" Frost pointed to Duncan.

"Yes."

"Have you known him long?"

"Yes; practically all my life."

"Does he live in New York?"

"Yes, at 98-A West Eightieth Street."

"Is that where Mrs. Whitney lived?"

"Yes; he has a room on the same floor."

"Were you visiting him that night?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice anything out of the ordinary that night?"

"Yes."

"Then please tell his honor and the jury in as clear a way as possible just what happened to you that night—be as brief as you can."

Wollan hitched forward in his chair and began his story. He had dropped in to see his friend Duncan at about twenty minutes past nine; he had found him in, reading and smoking in his shirt sleeves. The night was unseasonably warm, and his window was up. From where he sat while talking with Duncan he could see a lighted window, which later proved to be in Mrs. Whitney's apartment.

The shades of her window were drawn, but he was sure the window was raised because the yellow shade waved once or twice in the draft. It was a quiet night, and frequently he heard indistinct voices in her apartment—a man's voice and a woman's. He had paid no attention to it, quite naturally, until he had suddenly heard the man's voice exclaim, " Back up there!" in a threatening tone.

He had given little heed to that—quarrels are too frequent in New York apartments to attract attention. Shortly after, however, he had heard a terrific crash and almost simultaneously the woman's voice cry, " Oh, oh; he's killing me!" At this he had leaped to his feet and, followed by Duncan, started for the door. Before he reached it, however, there was another crash, followed by a woman's scream. Once they were in the hall Duncan had said, " Be careful," and he had turned the knob of Mrs. Whitney's door noiselessly. To his surprise, it yielded, and the door opened.

He had entered cautiously, followed by Duncan. At first glance no one was visible; then, advancing slowly into the room, he observed that a table holding a lamp was obscuring a man kneeling on its farther side. The room was perfectly quiet, but the kneeling figure seemed oblivious to their presence. Approaching it, he had been struck by the startling fact that the man was his chief, Henry Robing, and that he was kneeling over the body of a woman with his hand upon a shining object which later proved to be the ice pick. There was every evidence in the room of a bitter struggle—in the dead woman's appearance, in Robing's, and in the wreckage of utensils and furniture.

Wollan detailed to the jury the condition in which he had found the two occupants and the apartment itself—the overturned chair, the ruined tableware, the partly empty gin bottle, the broken glass on the hearth.

The story was simply, lucidly told. It needed but a few more deftly added questions by Frost to make it a seemingly airtight and convincing document. Duncan was to follow with, presumably, corroboration and confirmation. It seemed hopeless for Robing.

He and Trevor had sat immobile of body and expression through the direct examination of Wollan. When the witness was turned over to Trevor for cross-examination the tall lawyer betrayed no real interest in his task. He rose rather languidly, and with no spirit took his stand before Wollan.

He seemed utterly disarmed and began his examination most amateurishly by going over the same track that had been pioneered by Frost; asking the same questions; opening no new vistas of possible escape for Robing. It was as though he were helping to nail up his own coffin. A decisive smile ran over the faces of the crowd.

" You entered the room, you say," drawled Trevor, and as he did so he drew the gold pencil from his waistcoat pocket, so unobtrusively, so apparently without consciousness of the act, that no one in the court room save the one man in the witness box saw any significance in it. " You entered the room. Now tell me, please, about its condition."

Trevor carelessly waved the pencil at Wollan.

The witness stared at him for a moment, turned a shade paler, hesitated, recovered himself, and proceeded with the description. He stumbled slightly on one or two details, but Trevor paid no attention. At the end the lawyer said, " Thank you—that's very good." He tapped his forehead with the pencil, turned it in his fingers as though considering his next question, and again thrust it at Wollan.

" Where did you find the bottle of gin?" he questioned.

Wollan was gazing at the pencil fixed-

ly. It seemed to have a hypnotic power over him.

"On the ice box—no, on the table," he said.

"Just so," was Trevor's only comment. He seemed suddenly to notice for the first time that he was holding a gold pencil. He examined it curiously, looked at the engraving upon it, and then smiled disarmingly at Wollan as with the pencil he slowly tapped the palm of his left hand.

"Now, Mr. Wollan," said he in the same indifferent tone, "when you saw Mrs. Whitney fall and cry, 'He's killing me,' why didn't you try to save her? She was appealing to you."

Frost leaped to his feet with reddened face; but before he could voice his objection Wollan, eyes still set on the pencil, blurted out:

"I didn't want Robing to see me."

Frost screamed in protest, while Trevor, turning to the jury, smiled broadly, blandly at them. The question and answer swept over the court room with dramatic violence. There were quick gaspings for breath, craning of necks, reporters slipping out to the telephone. The jurors twisted excitedly in their chairs and glared at Wollan, who sat, shaken and trembling, in his place.

Here was a new angle! This was the long awaited counter-attack! Frost raged and expostulated, but Judge Forsythe refused to allow his objections.

"You may proceed, Mr. Trevor," said he, and there was a new interest in his voice.

Then from the transformed and exultant Trevor there descended upon the benumbed Wollan a merciless thunderstorm of questions. It cut his soul to pieces; laid bare the secrets of his plan to discredit Robing in collusion with the now dead Mrs. Whitney—a plot into which he had forced her unwillingly by satisfying her desperate need of money.

Trevor's pitiless examination exposed the source of that money—a ring of criminal politicians who wanted Robing out of the way. He drew from the now cringing witness the true details of his movements on the night of the fatality; showed that his activities on that night had been exactly as stated during the direct examination—with the exception of only one important item: the precise time at which he and Duncan had entered Mrs. Whitney's apartment. An item imponderable in the endless flight of time, but, in this instance, heavy with significance. Ten seconds too soon for their purpose!

Trevor established by Wollan's testimony that he, followed by Duncan, had slipped silently through Mrs. Whitney's well-oiled door immediately after Robing's cry of "Wake up," which he had purposely testified as "Back up."

They had first peered through the crack of the door, had seen Robing with his back to them, struggling to his feet, and jumped through the doorway noiselessly to the shelter of two wardrobe trunks—about ten seconds before the finale.

Therefore, from two different angles, they had been unobserved witnesses to the tragic accident. To this Wollan bore reluctant testimony; also that he had been impelled by an evil inspiration to accuse Robing of the crime. The situation was too tempting to resist; his plans had been replaced by an incredibly greater opportunity. Robing, as McGuire had put it, had "dealt him three aces."

During this blasting inquisition Robing sat calm and imperturbable under the scrutiny of the crowd—the audience which, with the unexpected change in the wind of evidence, had as suddenly veered in his favor, with the inconstancy of a weather vane.

Vindicated? Yes. It had not needed the additional testimony of Duncan when given to cause Judge Forsythe in his charge to the jury to direct a verdict of acquittal for the defendant, or the jury to render that verdict without leaving the box. An uproar of popular sympathy and approval, a scurrying of criminal rats back to their holes, a reinstatement to office that promised greater things for Robing, followed in their quick course.

XII.

AGAIN Robing was seated at his desk, little Miss Townsend at his side. Robing

had just hung up the receiver after another call of congratulation.

"That was the attorney general," he said, turning to her with a smile. "You heard what I said? After this experience I shall have to revise my theories concerning coincidences. They do occur, Jessica, sometimes in fatal sequence."

"Indeed they do, Mr. Robing," and Jessica gazed at him earnestly; "but what I don't understand is how Mr. Trevor knew those men were in the room. Did he really know it?"

"No, he didn't," and Robing smiled grimly. "That was our gamble. Trevor reasoned this way: if I had been the only other person in the room Mrs. Whitney would have cried, 'You're killing me,' but that her cry of 'He's killing me' was evidence that she saw some one else behind me, and was in her blindness appealing for aid. I did not take my eyes from her until Wollan's hand fell on my shoulder. That was our hidden card," he explained. "We were betting that Wollan was in the room at least ten seconds before Mrs. Whitney fell to the floor.

"Then Trevor threw Wollan off his balance by producing the gold pencil when he was on the stand; excited his fears; almost hypnotized him into the confession that he was there. It was brilliant work by Trevor—good psychology."

The dainty, demure girl smiled.

"But I wish I had known—I might not have been so frightened," she said.

Robing smiled down upon her lowered head for a moment.

"I am not so subtle as Trevor," he said gently. "I have to win cases in my own way—but I have learned something about myself during this trial. May I tell you what it is, dear?"

Jessica lifted her blue eyes to his shyly, sweetly.

"Yes," said she.

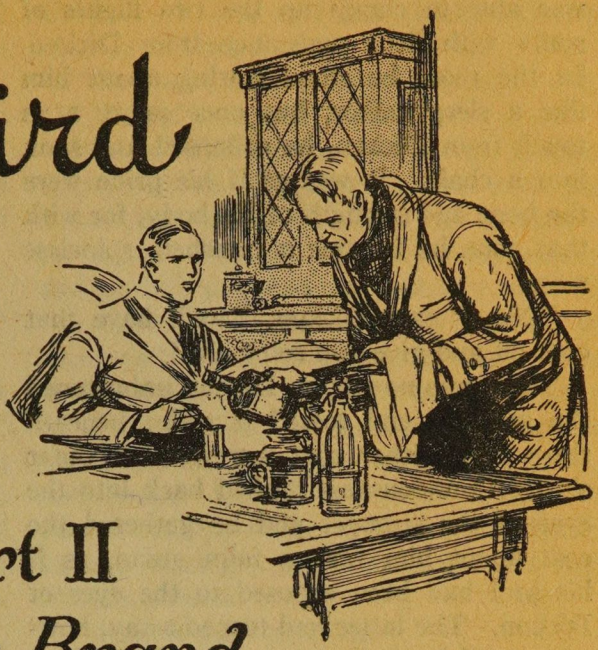
(The end.)

RENUNCIATION

'TIS June again, the month of the red, red roses;
Over the earth arches a warm blue sky,
Laughter and sunshine abound,
While mid the happy,
None is so happy, as I.
All, all alone I sit
I watch the young lovers
Pace arm in arm
Where the roses are blooming.
All, all alone, for I told you to leave me
Knowing 'twas best,
Best for you—though you loved me.
That's why I'm happy
Alone with the roses
Nothing can ever take from me,
That knowledge
You loved me.

Margaret G. Hays.

His Third Master



Part II

by Max Brand

Author of "The Garden of Eden," "Gun Gentlemen," "The Untamed," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

FOR seven years Dickon Greene has gone through the motions of living without progressing in any direction. On the evening of his thirtieth birthday a telephone call from an acquaintance, Harrison Gilmore, who is also assistant cashier in the bank in which Greene is a teller, takes him to a social club de luxe in lower Manhattan. He is presented to the proprietor, Silverman, whose patrons are unconsciously puppets in his scheme of self-amusement; in an alcove he meets John Vincent, cynical purveyor of information concerning those who frequent the club. Lydia, a woman of ice in the motley gathering of sensation-seekers, holds Greene's attention until the advent of Marie Guilbert, who, with her "angel," has just come from a night of popular success on Broadway. An unexpected element of fineness in the girl's character forces Greene to try to get her away from the tainted atmosphere of Silverman's; she accedes to his wishes. On the following morning he gives up his position in the bank; he has been merely existing—and wishes now to live, to change drab certainty to glamorous romance. Walking up the avenue, after leaving the bank, his attention is attracted by a middle-aged man of impressive features who appears to be a cultured European; in keeping with his new scheme of adventure-seeking, Greene follows him. It is apparent by the way the man eyes food displays in restaurants that he is hungry; once, too, he stops before a pawnshop—but turns away. Certainly a gentleman on his uppers, Greene thinks. Following an impulse Greene calls a cab and orders the starving man to join him.

CHAPTER VIII.

GREENE PLAYS THE SAMARITAN.

AS for Dickon, he feared at first that his man was in a state of utter collapse, for his head had fallen back on the rim of the cushion and his hands lay limp at his sides, palms up; but presently he saw that the face of the stranger was wrinkled and tight with pain. By his appearance it could not be a fast of very great duration; he suffered more from an anguish of humiliation. Only once on all the way out did he turn his eyes toward Dickon, a flickering glance, but Dickon was looking straight before him; whatever examination he made was from the corner of his eye.

They did not speak, and even after they reached Dickon's address and the driver had been paid the stranger had still not a word to say. To be sure, he seemed to be riveted to the pavement for an instant as he faced the house, standing stiffly to his full imposing height, but at the touch of Dickon's hand all the grenadier went out of him—his head sagged, and he entered the place with a heavy step. Plainly his spirit was more crushed than his body, for he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 3.

was able to clump up the two flights of stairs with little assistance from Dickon. In the room he stood staring about him like a sleep-walker, but once more, at a touch from Dickon, he collapsed and sank into a chair. It was as if his pride were the bone and strength of his body, for with that gone he became a bunched, spineless mass.

"Now," said Dickon, "we'll have that coat off and give you some air."

There was no stir, so Dickon unbuttoned the garment and tossed it wide; beneath there was neither coat nor vest nor outer shirt. Consciousness flashed back into the eyes of the stranger and he gathered the coat about him with a faint groan, as if his soul had been exposed to the eyes of Dickon. The latter had turned away, however, as if he saw nothing out of the ordinary.

"Now," he said, jerking open the window, "I'll be back in ten minutes. Make yourself easy. Here are some cigarettes—matches—ash tray. Excuse me for a moment!"

No answer to this; one clutching hand kept the overcoat in place, but the rest of his body drooped inert. Dickon shrugged the picture out of his mind as he closed the door and hurried down to the corner restaurant; pride was this poor fellow's empire and now he had abdicated his throne. His spirit was broken utterly, perhaps would never be restored, for Dickon recalled tales of blooded race horses with hearts so proud that a single defeat ruins them; they can never win again. He gave a rush order for a tray at the counter of the restaurant, and while he waited he went over the details of his mental picture. The man was in the neighborhood of fifty, probably a trifle over that age, and everything about him, from the unwrinkled, broad forehead to the white hands, scrupulously cared for, spoke an entire life of idleness. Probably he was one of those second sons of English families who drift about the world with remittances too slender to maintain their social duties at home, but sufficient to keep up appearances abroad. Suppose those remittances ended; it would be laying the ax to the root of the tree.

The tray came, covered with white napkins, steaming pleasantly, and Dickon returned. A vague trouble hurried him, and in the upper hall he found a reason for worry. It was his stranger, in the very act of stealing down the stairs. He started back like a guilty child, at sight of Dickon, and flushed purple.

"I can't stay, sir," he breathed, his back to the wall. "I—I can't stand it!"

"Nonsense," said Dickon. "Utter nonsense. This is hypersensitiveness, for listen to me. After to-day you need never see me again; you can brush this memory out of your mind. Now come back with me to the room."

He watched the tide of the last battle grow fierce and ebb away in the face of the other, and then the trouble flickered out like a snuffed candle, suddenly. Dickon imagined that it was the savory fried chicken that told the tale, but he perceived that the stare of the man was not fastened upon the tray, but upon the face of his Good Samaritan. It was not mere interest, but a deep, happy amazement, as if he looked through the eyes of Dickon and saw a treasure within. Plainly he was as incredulous as delighted, but whatever he saw, or thought he saw in the face of Dickon, his spineless agony of indecision ended. He stepped to the door, opened it, and then held out his hands for the tray.

"Now, that's better," smiled Dickon. "Step in!"

"I am quite able to carry the tray, sir."

"Not a bit of it!"

"Really, sir, if you please!"

He flushed with distress and Dickon, wondering, allowed him to take the tray; the stranger sighed with relief.

"After you, sir," he said at the door.

Something in that phrase, in the nod which was an inclination of the whole body, swept Dickon away to a vision of quiet, spacious rooms, and a formal servant bowing him through the entrance. It was impossible, for an indefinable reason, to protest. He passed through the door.

In the room the derelict deposited the tray on the table and swept the napkins away. Dickon discreetly turned his back and he heard hard, quick breathing behind

him, then: "I beg your pardon, sir, but if you will favor me with some soap and water—"

A starving man who had to wash before he could eat! It staggered Dickon so that he could not make a comment, but led the way to the bathroom. He pointed out the towels.

"Anything else you wish?"

"Quite everything is here, sir," answered the other. "Very sorry to trouble you."

"Not a bit," muttered Dickon, and went thoughtfully back. This persistent "sir" seemed interwoven in the speech of his stranger like a recurrent color in a pattern. He picked up a week-old newspaper and took a chair which was half turned from the table, for he knew that nothing troubles a hungry man more than observance. Then the door opened, clicked softly shut, and the other appeared with a pink spot of anticipation in either cheek. All trace of embarrassment was gone.

"One moment," called Dickon. "I nearly forgot." And he took a flask and a pair of glasses from a cabinet. "Help yourself—"

"William North is my name, sir."

"I am Dickon Greene."

He was about to put out his hand, but William North was bowing deeply, with no movement toward taking it.

"Shall I help you, Mr. Greene?"

"Why, yes, if you will."

Another bow, and then the bottle tilted and a thin amber stream flowed into the glass. Dickon sighed, for all liquor was rare in these days, and this was a choice old Scotch, almost the end of his stock.

"Will you have soda or water, sir?"

There was in this a touch, not of cringing, but of something submissive that troubled Dickon; the younger son of an English gentleman's family should not bow quite so low. The manner of William North was a sort of cross between English dignity and Latin grace.

"I'll take it neat," he said with a trace of curtness.

"Quite so." And William North poured his own glass with an accurate eye upon it. He stopped when his drink was fully a third short of the measure he had given his host; it was odd that Dickon should note so minute a detail.

"To your health," said Dickon.

"Thank you, Mr. Greene."

And with his glass at his lips Dickon discovered that William North had not raised his own drink. He was waiting—for what? Dickon swallowed the whisky and pushed the glass thoughtfully back on the table. Was the fellow too proud to drink with him? What did it mean? But there was surely no pride in the manner of William North as he now took up his glass, bowed like one asking permission, and drank. Only a few drops could have passed his lips when he lowered his hand; he was staring with such bright eyes that Dickon smiled.

"Rather good stuff, eh?"

"If I may venture a guess, sir, twenty years old?"

"Twenty-five."

"Ah!" sighed William North, and drained his glass slowly.

CHAPTER IX.

HE BECOMES A MASTER.

UNQUESTIONABLY all shame was vanished from William North and in its place there was the same look which he had cast upon Dickon in the hall, save that now there was less amazement and more probing interest. Even the food seemed to have little or no meaning to the famished man, and when Dickon took his place in the chair which he had turned away from the table he felt that the gaze of North held steadily upon him, trying to pierce to his character. All of which perturbed him so that the page of his newspaper became a swirl of meaningless print with disjointed words and phrases coming out at him from the tangle: " . . . Falls from the fourth story"; "hit of the season"; "beautiful Mme. De Kay"; "panic"; and in short Dickon began to feel like a schoolboy caught cheating by the teacher. He could make neither head nor tail of the shirtless vagabond—the paralysis of mortification in which he had first submitted to charity from a stranger, a shame

so profound that William North had even attempted to flee from help at the last moment—and then the sharp revolution in his attitude which had occurred in the hall. What had come over this imposing, penniless figure who began with such complete pride and ended in this abject acceptance of everything?

"I shall return this tray, sir, if you will tell me where it belongs."

And Dickon turned from his meditations and saw that the edibles had vanished; every plate was clean, each bowl empty. He looked admiringly upon William North, for it had been a numerous selection of dishes and each was a double order; three might have dined comfortably from that tray, and it seemed to Dickon that the face and form of his guest had filled out—there was even a tinge of pink far back on either cheek.

"At the Bijou Restaurant on the corner," he answered.

The other bowed, and commenced piling the dishes.

"But if you don't feel up to it," suggested Dickon, "I'll be glad to take the tray back."

There was something akin to horror in the face of North. He raised a white hand in protest.

"No, sir; by no means, sir; I am quite myself again—quite!"

As if to prove it he redoubled his speed sorting the dishes and his work was a bit of art. The heavy plates and saucers were piled together with hardly a sound, each fitting softly and swiftly into place; and then William North took the tray and went for the door. It was amazing to see him, for in some manner he managed to balance the tray on one hand, though his hat was caught neatly under that arm, which left one hand free to wave back the proffered assistance of Dickon and then open the door and close it gently behind him. In a moment Dickon perceived the method behind this eagerness to return the tray alone; it gave the poor fellow an opportunity to escape from his benefactor without the embarrassing necessity for thanks; as for ready cash, he could pawn the dishes and silver for a trifle. But just as Dickon was chuckling over this conclusion the door swung open and North entered once more.

"Feeling a bit more cheerful?" queried Dickon.

"Indeed, yes, thank you, sir."

He spoke in the most casual manner, and though Dickon was glad to be freed from any outburst of thanks he could not help a slight irritation. Perhaps, he thought, this fellow comes of such old family that he takes everything for granted. He decided to get rid of William North at once.

"Very well," he said. "Now for the future—"

He paused, and the other nodded, with such astounding assurance that Dickon flushed.

"Exactly, sir. I was about to speak of the future."

"Go ahead, then. Sit down."

William North started, and then glanced rather sharply at Dickon as though he were disappointed, hurt.

"I am quite able to stand, sir. Quite!"

He looked about him, not with the embarrassment of one about to ask a favor, but as if he sought for an opening clew.

"If I may be excused, sir—it is clear that you have been without a servant for some time."

He waved to the littered window-seat, to the disordered couch-cover, and then bent an apologetic smile upon Dickon. The gorge of the latter rose at this subtle mockery, but he remembered that he was the host in the nick of time and regarded William North with grave displeasure.

"As for a servant—" he began dryly.

The other raised both delicate hands in protest; they were oddly out of proportion with that bulky body; they were rather the hands of an idle youth of eighteen.

"I know what the servant problem is, Mr. Greene." His long face grew longer still and his eyes turned up. "I know what it is. Times are not what they were when I was a boy, and it is hard for a gentleman to secure the proper service—very hard! You can't put up with *any one*. Indeed, I quite sympathize with your attitude, sir—better no one than Tom, Dick, or Harry!"

As if overcome by this truth, he turned

abstractedly to the mantelpiece beside which he stood and with a few deft motions gathered magazines and books and odds and ends into place. In an instant order grew out of chaos at the touch of those pale, deft fingers.

"He is about to tell me," thought Dickon, "of the number of perfect servants in his father's house."

"But, sir," went on William North, "hard as it is to find proper service, it is even more difficult for a servant of the right sort to find—a gentleman!"

He made a little pause before the word, and when he uttered it he straightened to his full height, a mantle of dignity fell over him; he was like a Crusader naming Jerusalem. His voice changed subtly, grew solemn, hushed.

"In all my life I have found only two, sir: William Archibald Devening, and the late Peter Wentworth 3rd."

William North stopped and his head drooped sadly; it seemed to Dickon Greene that he had heard a confession of faith, and he had sudden vision of two men of the old school, clad in carefully tailored overcoats, like William North, and wrapped, like him, in black neck cloths; he saw long, drooping mustaches, misty eyes; he saw high-ceilinged rooms, all hushed with flower-patterned carpets; he saw the glimmer of tall glasses and heard the hiss of seltzer.

"I have served those two all my life," William North was saying simply. "All my life!"

It stirred Dickon Greene; he felt a great impulse to spring from his chair and press the hand of his guest, and he thought of the long, quiet companionship with these three names, Devening, Peter Wentworth 3rd, and William North, linked together. They had frolicked together in their youth, no doubt, and they had truly served each other through sorrow and the coming of age.

"All my life!" echoed North, sighing. "I beg your pardon, sir. I forgot myself!" He smiled sadly at Dickon. "But it is necessary that you know my past work. When I was fourteen I entered the household of the Devenings in the stables."

The full import of this sank gradually home in Dickon and his eyes widened; a thing which North perceived and flushed.

"Yes, sir, a modest beginning." His voice rose and there was a ring of metal in it. "But in five years, sir—yes, in five short years I was the valet of William Archibald Devening himself!"

His smile of triumph fairly shone upon Dickon.

"His valet!" gasped Dickon, hastily fitting all that he knew of the fellow together and seeing that the picture was complete, perfect. He relaxed in his chair and laughed weakly.

"It is, indeed, something to be doubted," explained the ex-valet of Devening stiffly, "but old Smythe, my predecessor, took to drink as he got on in years and the master was forced to pension him." He shook his head at the memory. "It was a sad day for poor Smythe. Also, sir, it forced Mr. Devening to look about him hastily for a new man. It was the matter of an accident to Mrs. Devening. The madame had some trouble with her hunter one morning and it was my good fortune to be of assistance. This brought me to the eye of the master. Ah, sir, I shall not forget how I stood before him that morning! He had the look of a conqueror; he pierced to my heart. 'North,' he said, 'you are young, but I believe you have stuff in you. I am going to train you as my valet.' Naturally I could not speak, but the master laid his hand kindly on my shoulder and gave me leave to go!"

William North smiled into that happy past and his hand stole halfway up toward his right shoulder, like an ancient knight remembering the accolade.

"I was thirty when my first master died," went on William North. "He would have kept me in the family by his own request, but though his eldest son was—ah—very well, sir—considered quite the thing in many places—Mr. William Devening knew that I could not get on with a master who was not a gentleman in the true sense. You understand me, sir? You will not take what I say of young Devening as a blow to his good repute?"

"Very well," nodded Dickon, and controlled a smile. He had heard of this same

"young" Devening—a man of over fifty now—much as one hears of the movement of a comet. The very pink of good society, that was the repute of Devening.

"Accordingly, the master was forced to provide for me outside his family. I remember how he lay there in his bed propped with pillows; I begged him to let the matter go—to give no thought to me; but he insisted in that way of his and we went over the list of the prospects. There were many in our acquaintance of faultless family, of wealth, of social standing, but as the first master once said: 'A gentleman, North, stands outside of money, position, blood; like a poet, like a seer, he is born by the grace of God!' At last we struck upon the man. Needless to say, it was Peter Wentworth 3rd. Neither of us knew him through any space of time, but it needs only a glance, only a single test as you know, sir, to prove a gentleman."

Here North fixed a brief, keen glance upon Dickon, and it seemed to Dickon Greene that his soul stood naked and shamed in his eyes.

"Peter Wentworth 3rd was pure gold. Money could not spoil him; neither could flattery or success with ladies. The first master had one failing—he would not be angry, Mr. Greene, if he heard me at this moment name it—he was a little strong of speech before breakfast; but Mr. Wentworth was perfect." He paused and looked into the past as though to summon up the picture and judge it again; then he nodded slowly. "In all my life, sir, I have never known one who could manage his liquor with the grace of Mr. Wentworth; not one! But there is an end to the happiest tale, sir. Peter Wentworth died and left me alone!"

He brushed his hand across his puckered forehead as though the blow still stunned him.

"He passed from among us, sir," he continued hoarsely, "suddenly—at night. He was struck down without warning and left me without a master."

He stopped, breathing hard, and it was a moment before he could go on.

"I felt it was the end. In my life I had had the good fortune to find two masters; I felt then that there could never be a third. Yet I stayed on, through force of habit, with the Wentworth household and served Mr. Vincent." He shook his head in strong distaste. "Mr. Vincent Wentworth," he said coldly, "has always cigars of the finest quality about, but he himself prefers unspeakable, five-cent smokes. Sir, upon honor I did my best with him. I tried suggestions. I tried hints. I even descended to lectures. But nothing can be done with a man of naturally bad taste. I gave up Mr. Vincent Wentworth. For the sake of his father I was sad to leave him; but a gentleman, sir, is born, not made, and education was wasted on Mr. Vincent.

"Once away from his household I drew a great breath of relief. I was alone in the world; I had little money and my misfortunes at cards rapidly took my small store from me. The last five thousand went at a single sitting." Here Dickon closed his teeth hard to keep back a gasp. "I saw, then, that the end had come. To become a valet in some riffraff household of the newly rich was unspeakable; I resigned myself to die as became the servant of William Devening and Peter Wentworth 3rd.

"And then—but that brings me to today. I had given up the last hope. My money, my few belongings were gone. But then the impossible happened."

He stood as stiff as a grenadier; a sort of holy light illumined those bland, supercilious eyes; his heavy lips were trembling.

"I need not speak; you understand. When I faced you in the hall, sir, a few moments since, I saw that the miracle had happened and that a great power had taken me by the hand and led me to the service of one born a gentleman, sir—my third master!"

CHAPTER X.

HE IS LED BY THE HAND.

HE said it with a gesture of both hands, palms up, with an infinite dignity and grace offering himself; and though Dickon felt words of denial, explanation, forming in his throat, he could not

speak them. He wanted to repay this history with another which had to do with his own life, beginning with a penniless youth, passing on to a grim struggle that gave him a college education, and ending with the seven wasted years at the bank; but he saw at once that such a tale of poverty would have no meaning in the eyes of one who believed that gentlemen were born, not made; a valet who lost five thousand at a sitting! Moreover, in spite of his embarrassment he felt a lifting sense of happiness and seemed to breathe a purer atmosphere with every money care banished from life. Through the closed doors phantoms drifted and walked and talked in the room—William Archibald Devening and Peter Wentworth 3rd admitting him to a close companionship in which the base and bond was William North; with them came the picture of the girl he had passed in the park, the dark, alert eyes, and all the exquisite freshness of that face. For the first time he sensed in her the cause of all the changes of this day, the discontent with the past, the wild hope for the future, the impulses which had made him leave the bank and pick up the stranger; she and the coming of spring were guilty. Perhaps it was the picture of the girl that made him smile kindly upon William North. He drew out his wallet and tossed it to the valet.

"Sir?"

"Count it."

A bow from William North, who then opened the case and counted the bills.

"Five hundred and twenty-three dollars, sir."

"And that is your answer, North. Every cent I have in the world is in your hand."

William North nodded gravely.

"In that case you had best let me keep it, sir."

"Eh?"

"I can probably make it last longer, Mr. Greene."

"H-m!" said Dickon.

"We can manage on very little until you make some more, sir."

"How shall I make it?"

"Why, one would suggest another mortgage on the estate, Mr. Greene."

"H-m!" said Dickon.

"Or a few jewels pawned often help one through a pinch."

"North," said Dickon, "I see that your financial genius is positively—Fifth Avenue. Now let me tell you the sum of the truth. I have no estate; my family is dead; my jewels are my cuff links; and finally, as a maker of money I am a mummy, a wooden image. In my hands dollars turn into cents and cents into thin air."

"So," breathed William North.

"You see, it is hopeless."

"Yes," nodded the valet. "A gentleman has usually these gifts. Mr. Devening inherited several millions and left nothing but debts. These qualities are born. I have acquired a certain thriftlessness, but it is not the real thing."

"So that ends it, unfortunately."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

Dickon stared. Was it possible that the poor fellow still persisted in his dream of serving the third master?

"Nothing," he said, hunting for some conclusive argument.

"We start with one great advantage," suggested North. "Our shoulders and collars are about of a size. Mr. Devening was too short and Mr. Wentworth was too thin for me; but your clothes will do me nicely."

"Yes," said Dickon dryly, "that's a great help."

"And the five hundred will probably do, until I make a financial arrangement, sir."

"Financial arrangement?"

"I thought of speculation—say, with half of this."

"No, no, North! Keep away from the Street. I've been on it."

"Some startling things have been done there, sir, with management."

"But I positively ban the Street, North."

"That ends it, sir. Then you might try your luck at cards, Mr. Greene."

"I haven't any."

"Or I could do it."

"What did you say about losing five thousand in a sitting?"

"That was my own money. I could not possibly lose yours, sir."

"H-m!" said Dickon. "I see that you have a fine sense for finance, North. But I'm afraid I must ban the gambling."

"That leaves only women, I fear, sir."

"What's that?"

"I agree with you, sir. A bachelor's life is to be preferred. Avoids much friction. But in a pinch one may marry."

"An heiress, eh?"

"H-m!"

The valet said hastily: "Some of them are not bad, Mr. Greene. Some of them will do very well, indeed. They usually require a tidy bit of schooling; but I have seen them turned out quite presentable; I have seen amazing things done with them!"

"Really?"

"And the financial arrangement is usually quite smooth. Social position must be paid for, and the newly rich will go to the bottom of the purse to buy. Disagreeable business, but the best families are sometimes forced to contract such an alliance."

"North, you must try to understand that I have no family inheritance, even of distinguished name; and socially I am absolutely a total loss. My place in society is represented by a cipher. Can you comprehend that?"

"Sir," said William North coldly, "pray do not underestimate me. I am aware that one does not mingle promiscuously."

Dickon threw himself back in his chair with a gesture of surrender.

"Go on, North. Tell me what I must do."

"I appreciate your position, sir. I deeply sympathize. Do not think for a moment that I shall send you about to the first millionaire who opens his door."

"No?"

"Upon my honor, sir, I shall not."

"Thank you, North," murmured Dickon. He was astonished by his ability to keep his face.

"I shall only have you appear at the places of a chosen few—say, the Bantrys', the Douglas Lords', the Baldwin-Dexters'. Such people as these."

"Very good," gasped Dickon. He called to mind the last picture he had seen in the paper of Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter, that terrible and charming queen of the social world. "Very simple, North, but how the devil am I to get inside their doors? I tell you, my friend, that I not only have never met a single one of these people, but I have not even a speaking acquaintance with the least member of their circles."

William North sighed.

"I hope, sir, that you are willing to make some sacrifices?" Then, as Dickon failed of speech, he went on: "I perfectly understand that you dread rubbing shoulders with so many in a short time; but it will be necessary in some measure in order to establish a worth while position. Those who are ready to buy such a thing, of course, are hardly able to appreciate the qualities with which one is born. They demand the show of power, sir."

"And how am I to get that power, North?"

"How, sir? Why, by showing yourself, of course."

"In short," said Dickon in résumé, "I look over the selected places, pick out the ones I wish to appear in, and then present myself—"

He choked.

"You consent, sir?" cried the valet eagerly.

"Why not?" said Dickon. "Find a bidder for me, North, and you can auction me off—social standing and all!"

"Naturally the thought makes you bitter," said North.

"Not at all."

"If you could look at it in the light of a lark, sir?"

"By all means—as a joke, in fact."

"Then I shall begin?"

"At once."

"Very good, sir. The first thing must be proper quarters. Let me see—five hundred dollars—that will limit us to some place in Greenwich Village—" He raised a hand to check a protest from Dickon. "Not desirable, sir, of course. But one may live for a short time there. The very best people will often go down to the Village for a time and rough it a bit among those who may be found there. Distressing—yes! But it will not be for long, sir, I assure you. Also, it will enable you to make a simple return for hospitalities which you receive—a studio tea once a month would do nicely, you know."

"Perfect."

"Then I shall go down this afternoon to look for quarters. Something roomy, but not too large; something furnished, but not too furnished."

"Good."

"And now this matter of clothes?" said William North.

As he had prophesied, the clothes of the third master fitted him to a hair—shirt, coat, collar were donned by the valet. He surveyed himself for a full five minutes in the glass and then nodded his approval.

"But the money," said Dickon when his valet stood at the door. "You have it all, you know."

"Very true."

He took out the wallet. "How much will you need, sir?"

"Eh?"

"I'll have to keep you a bit short, Mr. Greene."

He held ten dollars to the third master. "It is really all we can afford to let you have, sir." And William North bowed himself through the door.

As for Dickon, he stood stupefied with the bill in his hand. A man whom he had never seen before that day was walking off in an outfit of his clothes with five hundred dollars of his money besides. He laid a hand on the knob of the door to throw it open and rush in pursuit; then he checked himself and fell to his chair with a groan.

"If he's crooked," said Dickon aloud, "I'm the greatest fool in New York. If he's straight, Manhattan, look out for Dickon Greene!"

CHAPTER XI.

HE WAITS.

IT spoke much for the self-control of Dickon that he was able to push William North out of his mind during the rest of the afternoon. He sat with his back to the clock until seven that evening; then dined leisurely at a neighboring restaurant, read the late baseball and racing returns while he sipped his coffee, and was not back in his room until nearly nine. William North was not there. And at half past nine he was still away, and at ten there was still no sign of him. It did not excite Dickon, it merely depressed him, for he was so accustomed to disappointments that he knew exactly how to receive mental shocks of all kinds; and as for suspense, when a man has waited in expectation of advancement for seven years it is a great thing indeed which can make his heart flutter. In fact, Dickon was able to lean back in his chair and smile at the affair. If it were a hoax, it was such an admirably acted one that he was very lucky to get off with a five-hundred-dollar loss; and besides, if the money were really lost, it would be pleasant, in a way, to start with a blank, clean slate, carrying over nothing out of his past.

At half past ten, however, the room became irksome, and he left it for a walk through the park, going across Amsterdam, that avenue of shops and dingy-fronted apartment houses, to Morningside Drive. There he paused, for the hill dropped sharply away before him in the precipitous block of Morningside Park, and beyond it stretched the long level of the eastern city, a pavement of solid roofs. It must be warm down there, a humid warmth, for a faint mist obscured the street lamps and made them spots of red and a light glow of lavender reached up to the sky. A glance at that lower city had a stifling effect, like a breath of smoke; but here on the height a breeze stirred, giving life, and the trees of the park reached above the fence, narrow poplars with edgings of green and the broad skeletons of elm trees. It seemed to Dickon that he saw the two main castes of humanity in that picture, those who are born to drudge obscured by mist, and those who breathe clear air on the heights, and on the whole it was an accident of birth or luck that made the difference.

He wandered down the Drive past the great, awkward outlines of St. John the Divine and passed into a jangle of traffic below the hill; one moment the Elevated clattered and screamed and roared above him, the next he was in Central Park. He did not send out his mind to hunt for impressions, but let it remain passively awake, hearing and seeing and feeling, so that there was a dreamy quality to the scene. It

seemed to Dickon that he still perceived the same distinctions in men. The voices of the pedestrians were harsh, their laughter brief and nasal as though they panted out their mirth, but sometimes when an automobile purred by with lazy power a word drifted back to him, spoken clearly by people at ease and as the machine hummed away it left a trail of quiet content in the mind of Dickon. Of course he was walking, but he knew with a certain foreknowledge that he belonged to the upper caste.

He alone among the pedestrians sauntered; the rest hurried with their faces inclined to the ground as though they were walking against the wind. Every one talked loudly, even of the most intimate subjects, confident that none in the river of humanity about them would care to remember or would ever be able to note the face of him who spoke; snatches of conversation rushed to him from in front and behind, growing loud against his ear and dying away to nothing as soon as the speaker stepped past: "You're sure knocking their eyes out tonight." "Save that, Charlie, and tell it to your wife when you get home." "How could I guess it? How could anybody guess it? It dropped to ninety and I waited; it went to eighty-nine and I waited; it dropped to eighty-eight and I couldn't keep back. I bought—soaked everything in—and, my God! In half an hour it hit eighty and was falling like a bullet. We're done for!" "I says to him: 'It ain't that you're fresh, Harry,' I says, 'but you're just plain stupid.'" "I'll tell you this: I'd rather eat on Third Avenue for a quarter than look one of your suppers in the face. And I'm through, get me? I've stood it three years, and now I'm through!"

Whatever he might be, he was not part of this; and Dickon turned aside from the main drift of the people and reached the reservoir. It was inky-black, motionless as a pool of molten glass, and the lights which circled it shot long streaks of brilliant white out from the sides, crisscrossing in broad bands in the center of the lake. There were only two other people near the place—a girl in filmy white and a man in black on the farther side, and no sound of their walking reached Dickon. They were like two ghosts. He felt ghostly himself, and strolled for a long time up and down the concrete without a picture in his mind, simply enjoying the hush and coolness.

By the time he started back he had dismissed William North from his thoughts, accepted the loss of his five hundred dollars, and fixed unshakably as rock the determination never to return to the old life; for it was less than life—it was a brute existence from which he had been awakened by the voice of John Vincent, by the lights of Silverman's, by the cold eyes of Lydia and the beauty of Marie Guilbert. He was coolly amused when he remembered the Dickon Greene who had come down to the great city from college full of grim purposefulness, full of fierce honesty, his hands tensed, ready to battle cleanly and hard for the victory. That was not the way to success.

He had not really changed in character during the past two days, but he saw the world in a new light, like some natural diplomat who leaves his farm to take a portfolio, like some gifted chemist who abandons business to enter a laboratory. He climbed Morningside Drive again at peace with the world, the calm, dangerous peace of a man who is sure of himself, and if he had no envy for those who whirred past him in high-powered automobiles, neither did he have any pity for the lower, humid city at his right, shrouded in that hot lavender mist. He was humming when he climbed the stairs to his apartment, but when he came to his door his humming stopped abruptly, for there was a huddled shadow bunched against the wall, and from it came a soft, measured snoring. He leaned far over; it was William North, sound asleep, his big head canted to one side and his brows gathered in a tremendous frown.

"North!" called Dickon, and tapped the man on the shoulder.

"The red wins!" groaned North, opening his eyes, and then started to his feet, staggering when the weight came on his cramped legs.

"I should have given you a key," said Dickon, "but why didn't you go to a hotel?"

William North paused in his efforts to

wink the sleep out of his eyes and shake his clothes into place and stared at the third master.

"Why, sir, who would have got you to bed?"

It made Dickon blink; it rushed his imagination back to a helpless infancy. Who would have put him to bed?

"I could have managed that," he answered, turning his back to open the door and thereby providentially saving his face.

William North cast the suggestion into outer oblivion and chaos. "Not to be thought of, sir. Not to be thought of!" He pressed open the door as soon as Dickon turned the latch, and again when they passed down the hall to Dickon's room the old valet was mysteriously first to reach the knob and open the door. He even entered ahead of the third master, which surprised Dickon until the lights were switched on. No good valet, he perceived, could allow his employer to fumble about in the dark.

He slipped out of his coat, and before his arms were clear of it, William North had glided across the room with astonishing speed and was there to receive the burden and take the master's hat. He hung these up in the closet and was back again arranging the study lamp near the one comfortable chair.

"You care to read, sir, before you sleep?" he suggested.

And still there was no volunteered information about his search for their new living quarters.

"I think not. North, you'd better turn in; and now that I think of it, there isn't a place here where you can sleep. Go down Broadway till you find the hotel on the—"

An outstretched hand of William North stopped him.

"I'll do very well here, sir."

"But, man, there's nothing but a single bed!"

"No matter, for an old campaigner like me. An overcoat to wrap up in and—er—the corner of a rug to lie on—quite good enough." He looked resolutely at the floor, unable to repress a shudder. "Besides," he concluded, "sleeping on the floor straightens the back, and I'm inclined to grow round-shouldered as the years go on."

"H-m!" said Dickon. "Very well. Lie down, then. You're staggering with fatigue."

"Retire before you, sir?" breathed North, straightening from his search of the closet with Dickon's pyjamas, dressing gown, and slippers in his arms. "It is true that I am not young, sir," he said coldly, "but I am not altogether effete!"

Further objection or advice became impossible; Dickon was crushed.

"Well," he said, unlacing his shoes, "you found nothing for us to live in? No good quarters?"

"Quite the contrary, sir. We are already housed, and admirably for that style of thing." He laid out the nightclothes of Dickon in convenient reach and placed the slippers beside his feet. "Do you wish a tub drawn, sir?"

"Not to-night. One bath a day does me, North, unless I'm taking exercise, and I use a shower in the morning, or a cold plunge."

William North touched his heart with a gesture of pain.

"A cold plunge!" he gasped faintly. "I shall remember, sir."

"But the new rooms for us, North!" cried Dickon, unable to contain his impatience. "Tell me about them."

It caused William North, on his way across the room, to turn sharply around and look at the third master for a moment before he replied.

"I think you will approve of my judgment, sir. We shall go down to them after breakfast."

"Of course, of course," muttered Dickon, and bent low over his shoe, pretending to struggle with a refractory lace, but really anxious to hide his flush. He felt that he had indeed changed his condition of life if he were no longer allowed to ask questions about his own living quarters and he saw clearly that he was to be both master and slave to William North.

When he was undressed and in his other room, he found the windows opened, the covers turned back, the sheets smoothed to perfection, which his landlady could never have achieved.

"Now," he said briskly, "we'll rip the

top off that bed. Comes to my mind that there are two mattresses on it—both a bit thin, you know—and you shall have one of them on the floor." He laid his grip on the covers, but a white, immaculate hand shot out and pressed the covering back in place.

"Sir," cried William North, panting in haste, "I shall not be able to close an eye if I know you are sleeping on the springs, or nearly so. Upon my honor, it's a habit with me to spend one night a week on the boards. Keeps me young—ha!—quite so, sir! Absolute habit."

Dickon cast one glance at that flushed, anxious face and surrendered without condition; a moment later he slipped into the bed and North raised his hand to the light.

"Nothing you wish, sir?"

"Not a thing."

"A glass and pitcher on the table beside you? Or your cigarettes?"

"I don't smoke before breakfast. Nothing, North."

"Then, a very good night to you, sir."

"Good night, North. Better quarters to-morrow."

The light snapped out; the door closed softly behind the valet. A little later Dickon roused from a doze to chuckle softly, for he heard a faint groan from the next room and knew that William North had lain down for the night in pursuit of his laconic regimen.

CHAPTER XII.

HE ENTERS A NEW WORLD.

DICKON dreamed busily until morning, but he awoke without a cloud in his mind, for his dreams had been of an old age, the Grand Monarch's court, with Dickon a lord among lords in white laces and red-heeled shoes, golden buckles and satin coats. A glance brought service, a nod dismissed, a gesture shook his entire household from groom to secretary in those delightful visions of Dickon Greene. When he wakened the first thing he saw was the crack in the ceiling above his bed; the first thing he heard was the long-range gossip of two women, from window to window, and then the drone of a street car coming to a stop on the corner. This was sufficient to snuff out the last brightness of Dickon's night, but presently there was a tap at his door, very discreetly soft.

"Come!" he called.

The door was pushed a little ajar, but neither hand nor face appeared.

"Good morning, sir. The tub this morning? The—er—cold plunge?"

"The cold tub, North. Good morning."

He fancied that he heard the chatter of the valet's teeth before the door closed again; and then there was the crisp rushing of water in the bathroom. It rose to the volume of a running stream when North entered the room once more, closed the windows, examined the radiator in vain for signs of heat on that chilly spring morning, and then stood to one side, smiling. There was something professional in that smile, Dickon decided, like the guaranteed pleasantness of a trained nurse who must strike the proper mean between good nature which is unsympathetic and gloom which is depressing. He could sense the scowl behind this smile of the valet's very much as one feels rain in the wind of a bright day; William North was busy laying out Dickon's linen. He already seemed perfectly familiar with every article of Dickon's apparel.

"North," he said, raising himself suddenly on one elbow.

The other looked up; there was a frown on his forehead, a grin on his lips.

"Before breakfast, North, I'm apt to be devilishly grumpy, snappy, glum, and in general, vicious."

"Yes, sir."

"And cheery people in particular irritate me."

There was a long sigh from the valet—a sigh which came from the roots of his heart. A very genuine smile flashed across his face, which then lengthened with saturnine gloom.

"Very good, sir."

And Dickon felt that if William North had respected him before he had now a sort of reverence for the third master. There was no need of another hint. Not a word came from the valet throughout the bath,

throughout the dressing. He stood about covertly stretching himself to get the laggard sleep out of his muscles and rubbing his back and hips where his bones had worked sorely close to the floor during the night; but whether they spoke or were silent there was established a new *entente cordiale* between master and servant which all the cheery chatter in the world could not create.

William North breakfasted while Dickon finished his bath and his dressing, and when Dickon came back from the restaurant he found a truck backed against the curb and two stalwarts loading it with strangely familiar furniture.

"No need going up, sir," said William North from the interior of the truck. "They've brought down everything. Steady! Steady! Confound it, where are your hands?" This to the truckmen who had slipped with the little cabinet which contained Dickon's supply of liquor, and a jingle of glassware came from the interior. "Everything is in safely," continued William North. "Not a scratch or a mar, sir. I've seen to that."

He climbed down over the tailboard and dropped lightly to his feet, dusting off his hands.

"But," protested Dickon, "suppose this place you've selected doesn't appeal to us both? Gad, North, why rush about the matter?"

William North was not even shaken.

"I've looked into it thoroughly, paid the deposit, and stayed down last night having it washed up," he stated. "Still a number of things which must be done to it to-day, but it will be possible, sir. Quite nothing for you to think about. Taxi!" He brought a passing cab to the curb, and opened the door.

"If you'll step in, sir," he said, "we'll run down at once."

It was much like fighting against a force which presses upon one from all sides at once; there was a certain absolutism about William North which, Dickon felt, not only made argument difficult, but almost rendered it stupid. They dropped downtown in the taxicab through the residence districts, through the theater and shopping circles, past the wholesale regions of mighty loft buildings, and then swung into the peace and brightness of lower Fifth Avenue. Only a breath of this before they struck Washington Square, with its solemn row of brick houses to the north and a bit of everything to the south, and the big green buses careening to and fro; and from the square they shot west into that dark region of narrow, crooked streets, fantastic old houses with colorful fronts and a rare apartment house here and there shouldering its way above the mob.

In the very center of Greenwich Village they stopped before a big house built as a perfect square, without any pretensions toward ornament, but giving, as square houses are apt to do, an impression of spacious and solid comfort within. Yet the entrance hall was a distinct blow to Dickon, without sign of floor covering, a great stairway winding up to the left, an ugly, rusted gas jet near the door, and all the woodwork and the plaster of the walls covered with gloomy yellow paint, gray with age, chipped, pencil-marked. He could not help a glance aside at William North, but the latter paid not the slightest attention, and led the way through a door on the second floor.

The step across the threshold was a step into a new world for Dickon Greene. He pushed his shoulders back and drew a deep breath.

"And this is ours?" he muttered.

"Yes, sir."

"But the furnishings, North?"

"They go with the place."

"Good gad, at what price?"

"Extraordinarily moderate, sir. You are subleasing it from young Harry Raleigh, sir. He was called away to England."

Dickon, shaking his head, counted the windows in bewilderment. There were six of them, three on two sides, and each window thrice as large as the ordinary; the ceiling swept high above him, and the floor space was so large that the room naturally divided into nooks and corners.

"Mr. Raleigh left the place in the hands of his butler, to rent or keep vacant as he saw fit, and his butler is an old acquaintance of mine. I explained that we were dropping down here simply for the experience and that you are not prepared to go in heavily

for this sort of thing, and of course it was easily arranged. Maine was glad to let it go for a song; he knows that the things will be taken care of, and it gets the place off his mind. He will mail me the lease—" He broke off to push a chair into a convenient light beside a window. " You will find this the most comfortable seat, sir."

And Dickon sank slowly into it and once more assured himself that it was reality and not a continuation of those dreams of the last night. William North swelled into an imposing figure, a sort of wizard.

" The pictures," went on North, " of course will not do. That landscape is not bad and the dancing girl is a genuine Wienard that would have delighted Mr. Peter Wentworth. He was partial to Wienard."

Dickon dared not look at William North; he stared at the oil painting instead.

" A bit too elegant," he ventured.

" Yes, sir. Lacks repose. Repose was the thing Mr. Devening almost went in for in his paintings—and had perfect taste. But I'll have these things down before night. The janitor promises me a man to get them away and store them to-day, if he can borrow one of the men Mr. Plummer is using. Jackson Gidding Plummer, sir, the sculptor."

" Ah, yes," murmured Dickon, sweeping his memory and finding nothing.

" He is giving a tea this afternoon. Just back from Europe, and he is furnishing up his apartment, which is quite a wreck, the janitor tells me. He has three men in to try to get his place ready for this afternoon and perhaps we can borrow one of them. By the way, it would not be bad to have you attend that tea, sir."

" But I don't know the man, North. The tea is ruled out."

" Your pardon, sir. It is not ruled out. I may find a way."

Dickon sighed and said nothing. He was enjoying the lines of that chair, surely planned by an artist for himself alone among all men.

" Considering that we have little time to waste," went on North, sitting down at a respectful distance, " it might be well for us to get to work at once."

" Work? Ah, yes."

The manner of William North was full of business.

" To begin with, what can you do, sir?"

" Devilish little, North. I have a pretty good head for figures, it's said. That's about all."

William North had placed upon his nose large, black-rimmed glasses which endowed him with the ominous solemnity of a judge, and now he peered over these rims at Dickon like a magistrate who suspects a witness of levity.

" Of course," he said gravely, " I mean social accomplishments."

Dickon searched his mind.

" Absolutely none, I'm sorry to say."

But William North smiled. " That," he said, " is impossible. We will see what you can do."

CHAPTER XIII.

HE ANSWERS MANY QUESTIONS.

THE valet produced a pencil and a pocket pad of paper.

" Cards?" he suggested.

" I detest all games."

" Including tennis?"

" Yes."

" Golf?"

" Yes."

" Boating?"

" Yes. Everything except football, North, which I'm too old to play."

" However, you dance, sir."

" Pretty well."

" Perhaps you sing? Or play the piano?"

" I am only a listener in music."

" The ability to listen," stated William North, " is the greatest social accomplishment in the world." And he made a notation.

" But in the matter of outdoor exercise, sir?"

" I like to walk."

The valet shook his head. " Nothing else?"

" Something I haven't been able to afford, but I've squeezed in quite a bit of it with friends. Riding, North." He straightened as he said it.

"Ah," murmured the valet. "Horses!"

"Horses!" repeated Dickon Greene, and there was a ring in his voice, a glitter in his eyes which used to come there while he hung on his toes waiting for the signal of the quarterback. "Sometimes I think I'd sell my soul to have them—not just mounts, but horses with blood. Ride? Yes, I think I can ride with most men. I had an early training—rode the range for two seasons in the West when I was a youngster and I learned to stick with anything on four feet as long as its hide sticks. Then I came East and I met blooded fellows that make you tingle to look at them. One look at a horse's head, North, and I'll tell you what's in his soul! By the Lord, I almost think you can tell how high a horse can jump by looking in his eyes—and how he will land on the other side."

William North sat with suffused face and beaming eyes. He kept nodding like a father encouraging a favorite child.

"I shall differ on only one point, sir. Instead of a look at the face of a horse let me see the side of his head to measure the distance from the eye to the angle of the jaw."

"A very good point, North, but you must have noticed that a wide forehead gives usually a short head with small volume and small ears as well as a great distance from the eye to the angle of the jaw; no, let me stand straight ahead and watch the horse walk toward me, whatever your professional judges may say. You'll see the soul of a horse that way."

The valet opened his mouth to argue, but apparently thought better of it and contented himself with a notation.

"You can listen," he said, gravely summing up the points, "you can ride; you can dance. Men have gone far with less than that. Henry Loring started with an introduction and three thousand a year. Can you imagine a more meager start than that, sir? For ten years he was lost in the shuffle and then an accident saved him. This was a long time since, and the styles were rather sacky that year, and Loring, being a very absent-minded sort, got into a three-year-old coat. He was a slender fellow, sir, and the tight fit of that coat made him positively waspish, so that at the dinner that night every one looked at him—for the first time he was noticed. But as I said, he was extremely absent-minded and he paid not the slightest attention to the smiles. The result was that people began to say: 'Henry Loring is an authority in styles.' And that was how he became known. Two years later he married several millions. And all that, sir, because he put on a coat three years out of the fashion!"

William North sat shaking his head and smiling in gentle wonder, and Dickon perceived that the valet was so serious that it would be cruel to laugh; moreover, he began to understand what North meant by forcing one's social standing up. A slip of the tongue might topple the highest; a trick of the hand might lift him up again.

"The next thing," continued Dickon's social preceptor, "is to find the correct goal."

"Girl, you mean?" suggested Dickon dryly.

"Fortune is more to the point, sir."

"Does it occur to you, North, that some people consider fortune-hunting disgraceful?"

"There are, unquestionably, some who dislike mercenary adventures of all sorts; and to be sure, sir, we ourselves only bow to a necessity. But to begin with the list."

He brought out a pocketful of newspaper clippings and notes.

"Very rusty on this sort of thing—the younger set and all that, you know, sir—so I went through my things and selected a few of the more promising."

There was a vague notion in Dickon's mind to protest against another step forward in this business, but before the impulse took shape in words or deeds he remembered his walk through the park, and the chattering herd of pedestrians, and the smooth-powered cars that hummed past him through the night. His scruples fled, and never returned again; and yet he sat there staring at William North and inwardly chuckling at the modern form of a *Mephistopheles*. The valet was scanning the notes rapidly.

He muttered two or three names which

Dickon could not hear and then spoke one aloud: " Ruth Anson."

He sat back in his chair to consider the possibility.

" Yes," nodded North. " She might do. Unless you rule out the girl's looks."

He brought a picture to Dickon, a tolerably clear print in spite of the soft, rough paper, and Dickon looked into a frank, good-natured face, handsome in a way, and with two irresistibly humorous eyes.

" Pleasant enough," said Dickon.

William North nodded judicially and returned to his chair.

" I think," said he, " that the girl may do. Lively, but teachable; pleasant, but not gushing; natural, but not clumsy. In a word, she may do very well indeed. Best of all, there would be no difficulty about the financial arrangement. Her father is extraordinarily eager to put the best foot forward in that way. He's not a self-made man like the majority of these newly rich, sir. They are a hard type; apt to pooh-pooh thoughts of social preference, but Mr. Anson inherited his money quite without expectation, and he is now concentrating his efforts to spend the money to the best advantage. His exact fortune—let me see—between two and three millions—very handsome, sir! The settlement should be unexceptionable."

" Then that's settled," nodded Dickon. " We've established the girl—goal, I mean."

" Your pardon, sir. Not quite settled as yet. Let us consider the family, for unfortunately the family is, in a way, apt to form a relation through the marriage."

" That's a small worry, it seems to me," said Dickon. " For three millions a man can put up with many inconveniences. No?"

The eyes of William North grew moist.

" I see how difficult you find the whole affair, sir," he said, " and you're determined to sacrifice yourself completely. But, sir, I had rather see you established in a household of not more than three servants than let you find unhappiness. Upon my honor, sir, poverty is preferable to an unfortunate alliance!"

" For my part," said Dickon, restraining his smile, " I think it might be entirely possible to live with only three or four servants. But go on with the family of the Ansons."

" The father," said North, " is the chief factor. An eager, humble man astonished by the good fortune he has found. He will not be objectionable. To pass on to the mother. She has spent all her married life up to the past few months in worry and the habit is fixed upon her. She is apt to sit with her hands folded in her lap and her eyes blank, very much in the manner of one who has recently heard of the death of one dear to her. Distressingly absent-minded, and the joints of her fingers are swollen with work. Unquestionably she is an obstacle, but not, I think, an unsurmountable one."

" Any brothers or sisters?" asked Dickon Greene.

The valet started, and his face fell.

" You have touched the tender point, sir. Yes, there is a brother. Unfortunately, there is a brother!" He paused and shook his head.

" As bad as all that?"

" Worse, sir. Worse than words can indicate!" He leaned closer and whispered: " Sir, he has a penchant for religion!"

" Terrible!" murmured Dickon.

" Indeed, sir, terrible! His leaning is toward—the Salvation Army! You smile? But I do not exaggerate. You might even pass him on the street—in uniform—singing!"

The last words William North was only able to utter after a pause for breath.

" No, we must put Miss Anson out of our minds. I could manage the father easily, the mother with some patience, but the brother would—overwhelm me, sir!"

He shuddered at the thought and hastily consulted his notes again.

" An orphan," muttered William North, " surely there is one orphan in this entire list. Betty Witter—no, she has an elder sister who affects the new art and mannish clothes. Mary Swann— Heavens, she is a twin!"

He allowed the mass of clippings and notes to flutter from his hand to the floor, and looked sadly at Dickon.

" If it were only you, sir," he said, " it might be managed, but relatives are very hard on me, sir. They require continual

adjusting. An orphan; an orphan!" he murmured gloomily to himself.

"Or an only child, North."

"By Heavens, sir," cried William North, "I have it!"

"What?"

"Sir, I congratulate you. You are as good as married this moment."

"To whom?"

"To Cynthia Rainey, sir. Where have my wits been not to think of her before?"

CHAPTER XIV.

HE IS GIVEN A GOAL.

THE face of the valet beamed with benignant happiness, and he leaned back in his chair with that solid self-satisfaction that comes from having done a good deed.

"But," protested Dickon, "this is a shock. I am hardly finished reconciling myself to Ruth Anson's rather large mouth when you tear me away and fling me into the arms of a strange family. Let me see the picture of Miss Rainey, North."

"I have no picture," said North, "except in my mind, but in this case there is no need for a photograph. She absolutely satisfies me."

Dickon looked sharply at the other, but William North had turned his smile ceilingward and continued: "I was prepared for a strenuous time, sir, giving lessons, building up households, but Miss Rainey will be tractable. Hints are all she needs toward the proper thing. Sir, I feel sure that after a few years you will have a genuine affection for her."

"Ah!" gasped Dickon.

"A thing which is not necessary, of course, but sometimes desirable."

"But," said Dickon, relaxing in his chair with a feeling that the will of the valet was sweeping him along toward a destination unknown, but equally unavoidable—"but North, aren't you going to describe the bride before the marriage?"

"Very lovely, sir, blonde, exquisite; fine gray-green eyes, wide and direct; a voice with the modulation of instinctive culture; and, above all, she knows how to get up from a chair and sit down in a chair—which is, so far as I know, the most vital and crucial test of a woman's manner. Their voices may be trained by singing masters; a dancing teacher can give suppleness and ease to their walk and their carriage; but it requires, sir, something in the soul before a girl can sit down in a chair properly and stand up without drawing uncomfortable glances. The first time I saw her I remarked her to Mr. Ned Waltham, a butler friend of mine, and he agreed with me that she would do."

The portrait of this paragon grew vivid before the fancy of Dickon Greene; also a picture of Mr. Ned Waltham.

"And the financial end?" he asked.

"Not definitely known," said North.

"I knew there would be a flaw," nodded Dickon. "Can't hope for perfection, eh? However, if you can reconcile yourself to a household of three or four servants—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," broke in North, looking at Dickon in wonder, "but this is *the* Miss Rainey."

"Oh, yes," said Dickon, perfectly at loss.

"Whose father," went on North, "made the fortune in irrigation in the West. The amount is indefinite, but the least estimate is fifteen millions. And some say—"

What some said did not reach the mind of Dickon, for the thought of fifteen millions swept him away into a glory of swirling color. Fifteen millions! A merchant prince, a giant with a thousand hands of power; a palace on the avenue; a villa in the country; a sea-going yacht; hordes of servants.

"And do you seriously think that I, North, can step into the lists and carry away this lovely girl, this only child with fifteen millions plus as her dowry? Do you think that I can carry her away? Granted that she wishes social prestige; granted that by some miracle I should be placed in a position to give her advantages which she does not now possess, how in the name of the dear God will I be able to sweep her off in the face of the competition, with every man of good family in the country aiming at her?"

William North looked at him with pitying interest, and his eyes wandered like one

who seeks for words of one syllable with which to explain a small problem to a child.

"Why," went on Dickon, gathering warmth of tone, "she could take her choice among twenty European titles!"

"Of course," nodded North, "that is the obvious possibility; but her mother objects."

"Ah, her mother is against the idea? Disgusted by her daughter's passion for social prestige, eh?"

"Not at all, sir! But, very properly, she is strongly American in her taste, and though she could undoubtedly step into the market, so to speak, and buy almost any title she cast her eyes upon, Mrs. Rainey is fixed as adamant. She is determined that her daughter shall succeed socially, and the society she has in mind is the American aristocracy."

"Even simpler," said Dickon. "Every young man with old blood in the whole country must be breaking his neck to get her hand."

But the valet shook his head.

"You must understand, sir," he said, "that she has not arrived."

"Ah!" muttered Dickon.

"She is not known. Granted that it requires only one step to lift her from the mob of the people and put her among the elect, that first step is a cliff which cannot be climbed—one must be lifted to the top. If the Baldwin-Dexters, or the John Wilders, or Mrs. Littleton opened their doors to her—any one of the three or any of their set—Miss Rainey would be made, of course. But those doors when knocked at only open to people like "—he hunted for the word—"yourself."

Dickon had long passed the stage of self-consciousness; he merely settled his heavy shoulders against the back of the chair and fastened upon the valet his alert eyes. From all signs and tokens William North judged society and social talents as an impresario judges an operatic voice—with unerring taste—and it was not wonderful that Dickon passed the point of secret amusement and began to accept himself with unconscious seriousness. He had dreamed so much, he had seen himself so often in imaginary rôles of importance, that he was quite willing to believe in some mysterious quality which distinguished him from other men.

Indeed, the key to Dickon's nature was his subtle egotism, with not the slightest trace of egotism; that is to say, he had not the egotist's vainglory, his aggressive self-confidence—Dickon merely saw the world through a lense of self. Perhaps a streak of good fortune, happiness, might destroy this selfishness—in the broadest sense of the word—but having lived through thirty odd years of uneventfulness he had fallen into the habit of placing himself in imaginary narratives rising to meet great situations, very much as a child will do. He had spent most of his solitary leisure predicating pleasant qualities in himself, but nothing astonished him more than to meet approbation from another. Accordingly, the almost reverent attitude of the valet at first baffled him, then amused him; but since that attitude persisted it finally brought Dickon sharply to a surmise; perhaps those qualities which he had dreamed in himself might be more than fictions and possibly that hero stuff existed. When North suddenly pointed his example with "yourself" it shocked Dickon into a tingling pleasure and he said soberly to himself: "The man is right; there is something of exceptional power in me. Give me an extraordinary situation and I shall meet it." He was pushed back to the old football days. Here he was, crouching, ready for the charge against the line of those determined faces, and here was William North, the quarterback, snapping out the signals, telling him at which point he should launch all the power of his lurching attack. Up to this point his social adventures were sufficiently misty; now, warm with self-confidence, he suddenly began to say to himself: "I shall have these things—the right to live pleasantly—the right to meet beautiful women—the right to talk with intelligent men." And he felt an inexhaustible mine of resource, invention, adaptability.

"First of all," said Dickon, "we must find out just where Cynthia Rainey is on the social ladder."

"I can answer that, sir. She is not even on it."

"But she is maneuvering for her opening."

"Her mother is doing that; a shrewd woman, sir, but what is force in society without—" He finished his comment with an airy gesture and a smile. "I shall find out exactly what they are doing."

He withdrew to the telephone, and Dickon followed him with half-admiring, half-contemptuous eyes just as he used to glance after his quarterback in the old days; for the quarterback could only point out the place where the opening in the line should be made, and once the signal was called it was left to Dickon to smash his way through, to shake off the hands of the tacklers from his legs, driving like pistons, to break into the clear, and then race down the scattered field, swerving adroitly past the halfbacks, hurdling the last defense, to lie finally behind the goal with the ball hugged against his jersey. After all, this was the same game with the mind in play instead of the body; that array of the socially prominent, they were the opposing team determined to keep him away, but he would smash through, open them up with a trick, and rush on irresistibly until he reached the goal. A goal of fifteen million!

William North had his number; he was saying: "Is this Mr. Bundy? Mr. North speaking— Thank you, Bundy; as a matter of fact, I haven't forgotten you, but I've let everything go to pot since my misfortune. Very kind of you, Bundy, but I need nothing; I am placed again— Indeed, more fortunately than ever before— With Dickon Greene— You never have? You must brush up your memory, Bundy. By the way, you didn't expect to stay so long with the Raineys, eh? I thought it was a makeshift position— Of course; of course! You would be indispensable to them. Still climbing socially, are they? Ah!" At this point there was a long pause, only broken by a soft chuckle from William North now and then. "You must call on me soon, Bundy. To be sure. Good-by."

The rather supercilious air of North melted as he turned to Dickon. As usual, he made no effort to volunteer his information.

"What did your friend Bundy say?" asked Dickon.

"I beg your pardon, sir! Not my friend, surely; an acquaintance merely. Bundy is an adroit fellow, however."

"But his news, North?"

"Yes, sir. The Raineys have at last made some headway. They are invited to Mrs. Littleton's ball at the Hotel Clermont to-night."

"Mrs. Littleton!" echoed Dickon. "Why, isn't she one of the social queens?"

"A remarkable woman, sir," nodded William North. "But of course, every one goes to her annual ball, high and low, rich and poor, one might say. Mrs. Rainey arranged the invitation with the secretary.

"Obviously the thing to do, sir, is to get in touch with the secretary and go to the ball to-night at the Clermont. Mrs. Littleton's secretary is—"

But Dickon raised his hand for silence.

"That," said the third master, "is mechanical, and therefore wrong. Nothing usual, North; we must work at the head, not at the feet. Now, this tea which J. Gidding Plummer gives this afternoon; do you imagine Mrs. Littleton will be there?"

"She will be asked, sir, no doubt; but with a ball to-night she will hardly be at a tea this afternoon."

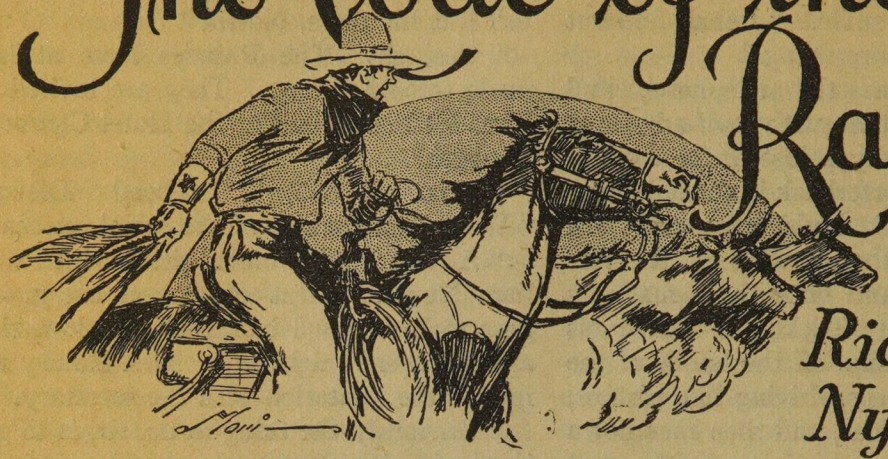
"At least, we must take the chance. The problem, North, is to secure an invitation to Plummer's tea."

"That had already occurred to me as a possibility," muttered William North, "but it is not so easy." He frowned at the floor. "I could guarantee to manage Mrs. Littleton's secretary, but Mr. Plummer is more difficult. You know how artists are, sir? They draw the most rigid lines when they are successful—royalty and millions on the one side, patrons and purchasers, you know; on the other hand, they admit only the aristocracy of brains." He added hastily: "Artistic ability, sir."

But once more Dickon raised his hand for silence; he shifted comfortably in his chair, and while he pondered his eye ran over the twisting line of the dragon motif in the rug and his foot played softly up and down against its depths.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Code of the Ranch



by Richard Nygren

WE had just poked the last steer aboard the cattle train and were riding back to town. It had been a long drive through a shadeless sandy country, and any one who has ever trailed a herd of cattle under a blistering midsummer sun in Texas has a fair idea of what Hades might be. Fifteen hundred steers kicking up a cloud of dust that sifts through your closely knotted neckerchief and into your squinted eyes is hell a plenty.

But having completed a job, cowboys soon forget the hardships of a drive. We were to have the usual holiday in town which follows a shipment of beef, so we were gay. There would be poker for some, dancing for others and whisky for all. We sang ballads and joked as we rode along.

The Kid only took no part in the singing and raillery. He was in a sullen mood and rode alone. But then the Kid was somehow different anyway. He was really a boy—only about eighteen—but he looked man enough, standing six feet two without his boots, and he was man all right in his ways. I reckon it was his blue eyes and his yellow hair — yellow and curly like a girl's—that got him the name of Kid, as much as his youth. But none of the old ones understood the shipping game any better than the Kid, and that's why Brant always took him along. The Kid had come to count on it.

But this time at the last minute Brant changed his mind for some reason or other, and took Butte instead. We all guessed that was why the Kid was acting so standoffish. He was just plumb disappointed, and we knew pretty well why. But we didn't say anything—just winked at each other behind his back. Finally Bill Brandon couldn't hold in any longer and broke lose with a song:

"I have a girl in Omaha,
Oh, me; oh, my; ha, ha!"

Every one laughed and took up the next verse; all but the Kid. He set his jaw firm, and there was a look in his eye as he turned in his saddle that *ought* to have made us shut up.

But Calhern broke out with an oath. "There ain't any girl living," he declared, "worth the trouble to worry over; *none*. They're all the same, ready to help spend your money, and when it's gone they are gone. And when you're not around, they are telling some other *hombre* how much they think of him. When Brandon and I was in Omaha last month and were in putting on the feed-bag, that there little cashier dame was tellin—"

The Kid whirled his horse across the road and pulled up in front of Cal, his hand on his holster.

"Cut that!" he said. His face was

white with rage, and his eyes flashed the way they did when he was mad clean through.

"Why, I'm only telling what Bill and I saw and heard," Cal went on.

"You *cut it,* do you hear?" roared the Kid.

Cal gave a lazy sort of laugh. "You'll live to be an old man, Kid," he said, "if you curb that damn temper of yours. If you don't, why it 'll get you some day."

"I reckon you'll let a fellow live his life in his own way, won't you?" retorted the Kid. And turning his horse, he rode on ahead again.

We drew in behind and took a long breath, and for a short time no one spoke. But nothing can keep down the spirits of punchers bent on pleasure in town, and we thought no more of the incident.

But the Kid didn't forget, and I suppose he was still on edge when we pulled up before the Puncher's Rest saloon, known to every cowboy within a hundred miles of Amirillo. Jim Dorgan was the proprietor. He was an ex-ranger with a record of fifteen years' service, and the reputation of being able to draw a gun so fast no eye could follow the movement of his hand. His long experience with all sorts of men was mighty useful to him in the saloon business.

He was fearless and square and big-hearted; and he was cool and collected at all times. Where men blow in three or four months' wages in one night drinking and gambling, there is bound to be an occasional row. And at such times Jim Dorgan showed his force and personality. More than once he had walked empty-handed in between two of his patrons on the verge of unlimbering their artillery. It would have been suicide for most men to attempt it, but so far Dorgan had always come out with a whole skin, and had been able to convince the men bent on murder, that they hadn't sufficient cause to warrant any one getting hurt. There hadn't been a killing in the "Rest" since Jim took it over.

Dorgan's greatest joy in life was his only son, Bud. He had promised Bud's mother — who died when the child was born—that he would give up his dangerous occupation of man-hunting and look after the little fellow. And he had kept his word. There was nothing too good for Bud. Dorgan gratified his every wish. He had every kind of pet, but his favorite was an English bulldog named Bull, as ugly looking as young Bud was handsome. He was always good-natured with Bud and loved him with a dog's devotion, but he had one bad habit which riled the cowboys. He would rush out unexpectedly as they rode by, and jumping up would snap at their horses. To-day he had played himself out and was lying asleep on the porch that ran the full length of the Rest. As we drew near we let loose a few ear splitting yells and whoops to announce our coming.

The noise woke the pup suddenly, and with a rush and an angry growl he made a leap for the Kid's pony, Calico. Before Calico could dodge he had locked his jaws on her nose. With a snort of terror Calico reared, almost going over backward. The Kid grabbed his saddle-horn to keep from sliding off. But it was no easy matter to unhorse the Kid. He rose in his stirrups and swung the loaded end of his quirt across the pup's nose to break his hold. The dog dropped to the ground whimpering with pain. As soon as Calico found herself free from the jaws of the dog she bolted, taking the Kid several hundred feet before he was able to control her. She was bleeding freely from the gash Bull's teeth had made in her nose, and the Kid was clean loco with anger.

As he came riding back, he was seeing red. Coming on top of his other irritation and disappointment it was more than his fiery temper could stand. As he rode up he drew his gun from his holster and took deliberate aim at Bull, who was still in the road trying to rub a badly swollen nose. The Kid hesitated, lowered his gun and holstered it with a jerk. In his rage, shooting was too quick and easy a way to settle with Bull. With a deft yank of his hand he pulled his rope lose from where it hung at the side of his saddle. Without further motion than the opening of the loop he sent it whirling around the dog and drew it taut. Turning Calico, he dug his spurs into her sides and tore madly down the road with the dog at the end of the rope.

It was all over so quickly we didn't even see what part of the dog was roped, and just stood gazing down the road at the cloud of dust being kicked up by the horse.

It was young Bud who brought us back. He had been playing with the ticket agent's son and had looked up in time to see the Kid rope his dog and tear down the road. Now he came running and crying for his dad. Right into the saloon he ran, and into Dorgan's arms. Between heartbroken sobs he told what had happened. It made us all feel bad. We had gone in and were standing silent at one end of the bar while Dorgan patted Bud's head and tried to comfort him. Putting him down he straightened up slowly, and though I had seen Jim Dorgan bury his wife, and had seen his strong face pale and haggard, I had never seen him look as he looked then.

In a voice that sounded hollow and far away he turned to Carrigan.

"Why did he do it, Bill?" he asked.

Bill Carrigan and Dorgan were friends of long standing, and Dorgan knew Bill would tell him straight. And Bill did. He gave Dorgan all the details. Dorgan stood looking at him all the time he was talking, his hands gripping the bar so hard his knuckles stood out white. Bud was crumpled up on the floor behind the bar crying. Hearing the hoof beats of a galloping horse Dorgan turned and looked out of the window. His face hardened. He saw it was the Kid returning.

Just then little Bud cried: "Oh, dad, I don't want to live now that Bull is dead."

Something snapped in Dorgan's head. Gone was all his old coolness and reserve. He swore viciously and grabbed his gun from underneath the bar and started on a run around the counter. We tried to block his way, all talking at once. Carrigan grabbed his arm pleading with him to think of Bud and his promise to the child's mother. But Dorgan was not to be stopped. He rushed by, and through the doors.

It was just at the time the Kid had pulled up and was coiling his rope. The loud voices inside attracted his attention, and as he heard his name spoken, he stiffened in his saddle. So when Dorgan burst through the swinging doors the Kid had his gun out and leveled at him.

"Drop your gun, Dorgan, or I'll bore a hole in you," he grated between his teeth.

Quick as Dorgan was, it would have been impossible for him to have brought his weapon to bear on the Kid before the latter could have made good his threat.

Dorgan's face was purple as he dropped his gun. Turning on the Kid he asked: "Where is that dog, damn you?"

"Down the road a piece, I reckon," answered the Kid.

Dorgan looked in that direction as though he half expected to see the pup. Then speaking slowly he said: "If he don't come back, I'd make myself scarce if I was you."

"He ain't coming back," said the Kid, "leastwise not on his own power, and I ain't going to make myself scarce."

"Oh, you're not, hey?" snapped Dorgan. "Well, maybe I'll see you when—"

"When I'm not looking," interrupted the Kid. Now, in the cow-country we don't shoot in the back, and we don't shoot when a man's unarmed. It's part of our code."

Dorgan's face looked as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Why, you loco, yuh don't mean—" he began. Then seeing the changeless expression on the Kid's face, he said: "I heard yuh. I hope yuh heard *me*." And turning on his heel he walked inside.

The Kid finished coiling up his rope and then rode over to Barton's livery stable to attend to Calico.

Calhern was right. The Kid's fiery temper had caught him. He had spoken out of his turn when he interrupted Dorgan. What Dorgan would have said, most likely, if the Kid had waited him out, would have been: "I'll *see* you when you feel like drawing your gun again," thereby making it optional with the Kid. And, safe to say, when the Kid had cooled off a bit, knowing Dorgan as he did, there wouldn't have been a chance of his ever feeling the least bit inlined to shoot it out.

But now there could be but one ending. At their first meeting, regardless of when or where, they would start pumping lead at one another. The Kid had offered the

greatest insult to Dorgan that one man can give to another in the cowland. He would have to back up his rash statement or pull his freight out of the country.

As a general thing such incidents are all in the day's work in the West. One man never interferes with another man's game.

But we felt different about the Kid. We liked the boy a lot. He had told us his father had died before he could remember, and his mother when he was twelve years old. He said an old aunt had tried to bring him up, but he had run away at fourteen, and had been on his own ever since.

He had come into our country about a year before from the Panhandle, and had hired out with the Old Man, who had been right skeptical at first about taking him on owing to his youth. But the Kid said he had punched cows in six different States and had a look at Mexico, so the Old Man gave him a try. The Kid had come up to the mark on all occasions, and proved that he was older in experience than in years.

He broke his own string of horses, could rope as well as the rest, and taking him all told he was an A No. 1 hand. In town he was a likable companion at all times, ready to bet his pile on the turn of a card, or drink you down. He could consume as much whisky as any hardened old-timer and walk away.

He had been in several scrapes, and always it was his fiery temper that had got him into them, and likewise brought him safely through. But this was different. The quickest hand and the coolest head would decide this issue. The odds were all in Dorgan's favor.

We could see the Kid through the open door of the stable across the road, washing out the gash in Calico's nose, and as we strolled past on our way to the Widow Lang's eating house, we could hear him swearing. He cursed Brant roundly for leaving him behind in the morning; he cursed the dog, and he cursed Dorgan, and most of all he cursed his own temper and lack of control.

Once inside the Widow Lang's and getting some warm food in us, we started to come back to normal. All but Calhern. He talked little and ate less. It was plain to see he was sorely troubled, and Blinker made it worse by saying: "You sure called the turn on the Kid this morning, Cal."

Brandon gave him a kick under the table and Carrigan passed him some more pie, but Blinker went on.

"Yuh *said,* Cal—"

But Cal interrupted with an oath. "I wish I hadn't," he cut in, and picking up his hat from the floor, he got up and walked out.

"Blinker, you're a box head, if ever there was one," commented Shorty disgustedly. "You think Cal is gloryin' over callin' the turn on the Kid, do yuh? Age up, young 'un, age up."

Blinker, not being able to reply to this, had the good sense for once to keep still.

We finished our meal and went over to the Spike Horn to wash it down. But try as we did, we could not forget the thing. We knew unless something was done, sooner or later the Kid would meet up with Dorgan, and the outcome of such a meeting could result in but one way. The Kid would go under.

It was the Duke who proposed a plan. He was a newcomer in the territory. We knew little about him outside of the fact that he spoke with a strong English accent. It was rumored that he was of the English nobility. He was very green when he first hired out with the Lazy H, but the Old Man had been short of hands, so he put him wrangling.

The Duke had taken a liking to the Kid from the first, and the Kid had given him a lot of points. Under his teaching the Duke had learned quickly, and now he was on the pay roll as a rider. Speaking to Carrigan he asked:

"Why can't we go down to the Rest, Bill, and in a casual way, so as not to let Dorgan know what we are up to, discuss the events that led up to the Kid's running mad?"

"I don't guess it would do any good, Duke," said Bill. "It ain't the killing of the dog so much now that Jim's thinking about. I reckon he would 'ave passed that up in time. It's that remark of the Kid's that carries all the weight. And Dorgan certainly ain't goin' to run after the Kid

and demand an apology from him. No sir, not Dorgan! Not if I know him! Yuh might speak to the Kid, seein' as how he likes you a lot, and suggest that he ask Dorgan's pardon."

The Duke was green, but not so green as that.

"Oh, you know the Kid would never stand for that, Bill," he said.

"There yuh are," replied Bill. "And no more will Dorgan, and rightly. If there's goin' to be any backin' down in this affair, it's got to be done by the Kid, and he *won't*. Why, he'd go clean off his fool head if you'd dare mention it to him. You got to keep a tight line on yourself at all times in this country, Duke. Back where you come from I reckon it is some different. When you have words with a gent there, I reckon you just cease bein' friendly. Out here when you cease bein' friendly, it's usually somethin' big that caused it. No, I'm afraid we can't help the Kid. He is tol'able young in the ways of the country. So far as I can see, knowin' both of 'em, there ain't any power can prevent their meetin' and settlin' it in their own way."

The Duke was silent for a long time. He knew, as we all did, that old Bill had summed it up correctly.

Finally he came out with: "I am for making a try at it; we can't do any harm. Who is with me?"

"I'm for it," said Calhern. "I feel I'm partly to blame for what's happened."

Brandon and the rest all signified their willingness to do what they could, but Bill looked doubtful.

"It's not that I don't respect your views, Carrigan," said the Duke, turning to Bill in his polite way. "I do, and I thank you for them. But I am just green enough to try this stunt. It might make Dorgan ease up a bit on the Kid."

"Sure," rejoined Bill, "I understand. You can't make it harder. I'll see you later," he added, walking off.

We strolled back into Dorgan's, and placed ourselves at the end of the bar where Dorgan could overhear our talk.

The players were back in their seats, and except for the fact that Dorgan looked rather sober as he served drinks to a couple of Cross Bar punchers at the lower end of the bar, everything was as usual. A stranger coming in would not have guessed that sudden death had hovered over the place a little while back.

We started to discuss among ourselves the events that led up to the Kid's losing his head.

"Why in hell didn't Brant take him along?" asked Shorty.

"Don't know," answered Slim. "Something queer about it. He always did before."

"He might have let him know," said the Duke, "so he wouldn't have made his plans to go. And you, Cal, why in the devil did you have to open up on him about that girl? You knew he was sore clean through as it was."

"Yeh, that was a bad break on my part," admitted Cal. "I should have known better. I reckon he's only a kid after all," he went on, but talking loud enough now for Dorgan to hear. "Only a kid, and should be *treated* as such. Good hearted boy as ever lived; bad temper is about his only fault. Why, I bet right now he's off in some corner cryin' his eyes out for what he done and said."

"Loves old Calico better 'an his life," said Slim. "Just went mad when he saw her bleed."

All the time we were talking, Dorgan acted as though he wasn't getting a word of our drift. Then: "Boys," he said, turning so sudden we were all taken aback, "you ain't making but damn little impression on yourselves, and *none* on me. If you all feel so bad about the Kid and his tender years, why don't you all chip in and send him back where he come from? You, Cal, you talk about his being a kid and that he should be treated as such; I guess you all wouldn't want *him* to know you had been in here makin' a plea for him on that account, would yuh?"

No one answered. We were through. Carrigan was right. We had failed in what we had attempted.

We looked around for the Kid, but didn't see him. As we rode back to the ranch we talked mighty little. We all felt we had lost something.

On arriving at the bunkhouse we found the Kid asleep.

"Cal," said the Duke softly, "I hoped we wouldn't find him here. I hoped he would have beat it."

"Huh!" muttered Cal. "I reckon you don't know him very well after all. *He'll stick.*"

Next morning the Kid greeted us all in his cheery way, and nodded to Cal with a smile.

Carrigan was acting as foreman of the Lazy H in the absence of Brant, so he sent the Kid to look the drift fence over at the lower end of the ranch. He said he was sure the Kid wanted to be alone and think things over, and being old at the game, he knew fence riding gave a fellow lots of chance to think.

The Kid rode all day looking for breaks, and when he came back to the ranch some of the young look seemed to have gone out of his face.

That night the old man, as all the boys called McPherson, sent for the Kid to come up to the ranch house. He was there a long time, and whatever it was the old man said to him made him very quiet when he returned.

Two days later McPherson paid a visit to the Rest. He had known Dorgan when he was on the ranger force. Jim greeted him cordially as the old man entered.

"Mac, wherever have you been grazing for the past weeks?" he asked.

"Right busy, Jim, right busy. Shipping and buying beeves has kept me jumping around. And you, Jim, are as well as ever?"

"Tol'able, Mac, tol'able," replied Dorgan, pushing a bottle of private stock in front of him. They poured out a couple of drinks and pledged each other's health.

Taking a look around the place and not seeing any one, Mac came right to the point.

"What's all this I've been hearing, Jim?" he asked.

"So you've come to speak about that, too? Well, I swear, Mac, is this country gettin' so you can't settle your own disputes without every friend you've got horning in?"

"I'm not trying to interfere, Jim," said the old man softly. "I was only thinkin' if you knew more about the Kid, you'd feel some different. But if you'd rather not, I'll go."

Dorgan placed a detaining hand on the old man's arm and said, "What is it, Mac?"

Mac told him more about the Kid than he could have told himself, as it seems Mac had known the boy's father.

"Why, Jim," he pleaded, "the Kid ain't to blame. He inherited that terrible temper. You know what his father was."

"Who was he?" asked Jim.

Seeing a couple of punchers coming in, Mac whispered a name to Jim that made him start.

"I never met him," he said, "and just as well satisfied I didn't. Is it true, Mac," he asked, "that he kept right on walking forward, facing the guns—walking forward with two bullets in the center of his forehead, until he dropped dead?"

"As true as you're standin' there behind that bar, Jim," said the old man. "Think of having that kind of blood in you! The Kid's got his temper, and," he added, with a flash in his eyes, "his grit, too!"

"Have you talked to the Kid about this affair between him and me?" asked Jim.

"I have," said Mac.

"What did he have to say?" asked Jim.

"Couldn't get him to budge. Said he was able to take care of his own affairs, and if I disapproved, why, I could give him his time."

"He did, hey? Well, I don't see where that leaves anything for me to say. I surely am able to take care of *myself!*"

The place having filled up, they said no more. Then the old man took his leave.

A few days after that a letter came to the ranch addressed to the Kid, and postmarked from Omaha.

We heard afterward that the cashier girl had overheard a couple of Triangle cowboys discussing the Kid and Dorgan affair, and before they left she knew mighty well that the Kid's life was in danger.

From what happened later, I reckon, woman like, she must have begged the Kid to beat it and come on to Omaha.

Anyway, that letter upset the Kid more than facing any gun fire would have done.

The Widow Lang said she saw him reading it over and over, out back of the kitchen, and that the tears kept coming in his eyes, and finally he kissed it, and folded it up very carefully and put it in his shirt. And she said as he swung himself into the saddle she heard him say to Calico, in a voice all broken up, "We've got to stick, old girl! We can't go to her, bless her generous heart!"

That night a light burned late in the bunkhouse, and the Kid wrote letters and tore them up, until long after every one but Calhern—who was secretly watching him—was asleep.

Finally he got one that seemed to satisfy him, and blowing out the light, lay down. Whether or not he slept any that night, Cal said he didn't know.

The next morning the Kid rode to town and mailed his letter himself, not wanting to trust it to any one else, I reckon.

After that he would visit town as regular as ever before, but never failed to look his gun over before he started, and then put it in between his belt and waistcoat. It was against the law of Amirillo to carry a gun openly unless you were in a drive, or on other business which required a weapon.

We all had hoped the Kid would leave his gun at home when he went into town, for Dorgan would never shoot an unarmed man. But he went heeled at all times. He wouldn't hedge. On one or two occasions he rode in with us, but on getting there he would trail off alone, not caring to have us along should he meet up with Dorgan. He also knew we would not visit the Rest as long as he was in our company. He chose to play it alone.

Out on the ranch he went about his work right cheerfully, never casting a gloom on the rest of the outfit. But deep down in his heart he knew he had no chance, and that any day might be his last.

But there came a day when luck favored him. Stepping out of the side door of the Spike Horn saloon, there across the street he saw Dorgan. The Kid's right hand flew to his waistcoat. Dorgan had just come out of the restaurant where he took his meals, and was bending over talking to Bud. The Kid's hand tightened on his gun. Here was his chance. When Dorgan straightened up the Kid would be ready for him, and if Dorgan reached for his gun, the odds would be on the Kid's side. His face was hard and his eyes were cold.

"But you'll be back soon, dad, won't you?" asked Bud, pulling his father's ear playfully.

The Kid's eyes dropped for a second on Bud.

"No, I'll be *damned* if I do it before the child," he muttered. "I'll wait and risk my chances on another time!"

He backed through the door into the Spike Horn again.

Inside he found the Duke and Shorty tanking up. Seeing him the Duke called out, "I say, Kid, come over here and help me spend some of this money I shook the boys down for last night."

Feeling in need of a drink, the Kid joined them. He had drunk little since the eventful day. So having had his drink he threw a gold eagle on the bar and told the bartender to fill them up again. Then taking out his heavy gold watch, he glanced at it and said, "I must be goin' now. I'll see yuh again."

The Duke grabbed his arm and said, "Just one more, Kid. It's been such a long time since we've drunk together."

I reckon the Kid was lonesome and starved for companionship. He consented. Shorty called for the dice box and they rolled for drinks. They stayed there all afternoon. Then the Duke suggested that they make the rounds. From one saloon to another they went, until they couldn't recognize a gin mill from a drug store.

Then it happened!

The Kid stumbled through the doors of the Rest, followed by the Duke and Shorty. Catching the heel of his boot on the threshold, he all but fell. Straightening up he stood there rubbing his eyes. Coming out of the dark, the glare of the bright light blinked him. As his eyes cleared, and he noted the deadly silence of the place, it slowly dawned on him where he was.

The card tables were being deserted and men were shifting themselves around to

get out of the line of fire, but no one uttered a word.

He had not as yet looked toward the bar where Dorgan was standing with a forty-five resting before him. Turning his head to face Dorgan, the Kid waited. It was so quiet you could hear the tick of the clock.

It seemed a long time before the Kid's right hand started to move slowly to where his gun was in his waistcoat.

Then Dorgan spoke. "Leave your gun where it is, Kid," he said. "I reckon we're all even now if you're agreeable." And picking up his own gun he placed it under the bar.

The Kid did not move. He did not understand. Seeing the puzzled look on his face, Dorgan said: "The Widow Lang told me when I was in for supper to-night, about seeing you this noon over at the Horn, and what you did. What are you goin' to drink?" he asked. "All of you," he added, with a wave of his hand.

The Kid stepped up and took his drink in silence, as did all of us.

We had seen one of the gamest acts we had ever witnessed in a country where game acts are plentiful!

Nodding his head to all of us, the Kid walked out. The Duke followed. Coming out on the porch he grabbed the Kid's hand, and near cried for joy.

Looking up at the sky, the Kid said, "Duke, I never knew the stars were so beautiful!"

Then a thought struck him. "Duke," he said, "do you feel like a ride to-night? You think your old bag o' bones is good for fifty miles between now and sun up?"

"Yes, twice fifty," answered the Duke. "Where are you headed for?"

"I want to go over to Davison's. The last time I was over there his old collie had a litter of new-born pups. They ought to be old enough to be on their own feed by now."

"Oh," said the Duke, "I get you."

Mounting their horses they rode away at a gallop. Coming to a grade they let the horses walk. It was the Duke who broke the silence.

"Kid," he said, "what I can't understand is why you went for your gun when you knew you had no chance of getting it. And why were you so painfully slow?"

The Kid smiled. "You're right, Duke, I didn't have a chance, and if I had been as fast as greased lightin' I still would have been somewhat late. But it was Dorgan's right that I should go after my gun, and give him his chance to settle his score with me and still be inside of the law. It is one of the codes of this country, Duke. But it was *my* right," he concluded, "to take my own time about getting my gun, so why should I have hurried my own funeral?"

Arriving at the ranch the Kid got Davison out of bed. Cursing and grumbling, he came out with a lantern and wanted to know what they meant by waking a man at that time of night.

The Kid made his business known, and selected the best of the sleepy-eyed pups. He paid for it and apologized to Davison for having disturbed his slumber.

Then mounting they rode away, with the pup held close in the Kid's free arm.

They reached town before daylight, and pulling up in front of the Widow Lang's, where Dorgan and Bud roomed, the Kid dismounted. He scrawled on a bit of paper, "From the Kid to Bud," and fastened it to the pup's collar. Tying the dog to a post of the veranda, he returned to the Duke.

"I would have done this before, Duke," he said, "only I was afraid Dorgan might think I was trying to buy him off."

They arrived at the Lazy H just as the boys were rolling out for breakfast.

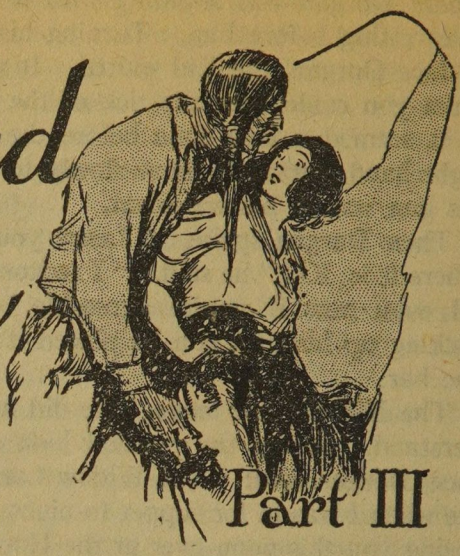
"Oh, Kid," called Calhern, coming toward him with a yellow envelope in his hand, "here's something come over the wire for you last night."

Taking it from his hand, the Kid opened and read it. Seeing his face light up, Cal said, "When Brandon and I was in there last, she was sayin' to a fresh young drummer, 'There's only one man I'd give up this job for, and it ain't you, you monkey-faced pill peddler!'"

Putting out his hand, the Kid said, "Thank you, Cal, I'm obliged to you."

Cal gripped his hand, and smiling, said, "Let us know when it's to be, Kid, and we'll all be on deck."

The Unconquered Savage



by Richard Barry

Part III

Author of "Petroleum Prince," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK PANTHER.

NOR was it Surefoot who presently leaped over the bank high beyond the stream and stood above the three whites. This new figure carried a rifle, and wore a gray feather in his hair. At first glance, except for the color of the feather, he might have been the Cree chief—alert, cool, tall, and silent.

Harvey Wood, from his bed of pain, glanced into the bronzed face and recognized it. "The Panther!" he said, almost gladly.

Ray looked at Philippa with curious dismay. He had never heard of the Panther, and did not understand, until later, how she could take his advent so tranquilly. Instinctively Ray recoiled before this new creature of the wilds, dressed more according to the white man's way than any of the other Indians he had seen, and yet the young aviator felt immediately that here was a man more nearly a savage at heart than any of Surefoot's band.

Wood, meanwhile, was introducing the newcomer, if a grunt and a wave of the hand without the use of names or ceremonial politeness, could be called an introduction. Ray acknowledged it with a grave inclination of the head, while Philippa stepped back, as if she suddenly had realized the significance of this dramatic appearance.

The girl's eyes passed over the newcomer's figure slowly. The grace and ease of his posture well indicated the fierce beauty of the wild animal whose name had been chosen to signify him. Finally her gaze rested on his brown, clean shaven face, surmounted by raven-black straight hair.

It seemed to her that this was the handsomest and the cruelest face she had ever seen. High cheek bones, aquiline nose, delicate nostrils; piercing, passionate, jet-black eyes, narrow set; ears small and low hung like those of a terrier; a mouth slit like a jagged scar, uptilted at one end, down swirled at the other; a bony chin protruding ever so slightly to give a suggestion of unassailable craft and determination. And all lit by intelligence of a very high order, but without the least suggestion of scruple. It was the head and face of a super animal, one endowed with all the instinct and tenacity of a beast, and yet animated with the superiority of a human.

Without realizing what she was doing Philippa drew close to the side of Ray and slipped an arm within his. The Panther was looking at her with fierce burning eyes

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that brought her a certain curious thrill for the first time in her life.

She was wearing the breeches and puttees of the mountain girl, and since she had been in the wilderness with men she had felt as though she were one of them. In fact, never before in her life as now had there come to her a consciousness of sex.

One burning glance went through her like a corroding acid. She felt that the boyish clothes which covered her slender limbs had been stripped from her, and that her white youthful body lay bare before that gaze.

Quivering, she pressed close to the side of Ray. He had never caused her such a feeling. The frankly admiring, even ardent glances of Surefoot had not so disturbed her as had one look from this human catamount.

Obeying an instinct that she hardly understood, she dragged the lapels of her coat across her breast.

Confused blushes mantled her cheeks. She trembled as she pressed the arm of the aviator who responded to her unspoken appeal by standing staunchly straight and flashing back a questioning glance at the dusky newcomer.

Ray turned to Harvey Wood with an insistent query: "Who is the Panther?" He uttered this, looking squarely in the face of the alert, provoking stranger.

"A friend!" came from the slitted lips of the Indian.

"Our best friend," hastily added Wood, as he winced with pain. Involuntarily he moaned and this gave Philippa a welcome opportunity to avoid the glances of the redman. She eased the posture of the injured man, and asked Ray to assist her. When they had made him again comfortable by means of piling some leafy boughs at his back he continued his explanation to Ray.

"The Panther," he said, "is a good Indian. He is a Cree, but he is the friend of the white man, and especially of Philippa's uncle. In fact, Dan Whipple employs him by the month. Is it not so, old scout?"

"True," assented the Indian.

"And he is paying you now?" Ray demanded.

"Yes."

Philippa cut in, not quite daring to put all of her question in words, but plainly startled with a suspicious thought. "Then how—" she demanded.

"How did I come to attack your party? Is that it, miss?" The savage was blandness itself. There was an insinuating plausibility about the fellow which confused the inexperienced Ray.

"Of course," Philippa answered hotly, "For it was you who attacked us and who killed our guides, wasn't it?"

"And why not?" the Indian coolly replied.

"You dare admit it?"

"Certainly. My duty would have been unfulfilled otherwise."

"Duty?" She was plainly taken aback.

"My duty to your uncle. I am, it is true, in his pay. I have been hired to protect him and his party, and the most precious member of that party, miss, is your very charming self."

The shock of hearing language so well measured, of listening to an accent plainly not without its culture, counteracted the bewilderment at this strange revelation. Philippa clung to Ray's arm with a tenacity of which she was unaware.

"But I don't—I don't understand," she stammered.

"I will explain." He bowed low, and then went on, in modulated tones which plainly cost him an effort at self-control. "As you perhaps, did not know, it is dangerous to come into the Cree country. There is an Indian here, an upstart, a no-good, one known as Surefoot, who claims that no white man shall enter this land. There is no boundary line. There are no fences. There is no way for any one to know where Surefoot claims the Cree country begins.

"But I—I, the Panther—I know what he claims. I know the unknown Cree boundary line, and I know that when a white man crosses that his life is not safe. Your uncle also knows it. Therefore am I paid, and paid well to insure his safety and yours."

Again he bowed low. "I trust you understand now, miss."

Slowly she shook her head. "Less than before," she murmured.

"But, Miss Horton," Wood interfered,

" can't you see that the Panther was on the lookout from the hills and saw us in charge of some of Surefoot's men? Of course he didn't know as how we'd all been taken by Surefoot, and then been let off and sent back that way, under escort, as it were. Did you, old scout?"

The Panther shook his head gravely.

" So he naturally came in on a rescue party. Huh?"

The Panther nodded.

" But why did you kill our guides?" Philippa insisted.

The Panther shrugged his shoulders. The question was too palpably feminine to merit an answer.

Angered, she stamped her foot and exclaimed: " But they were good Indians. I shall report you to my uncle. You had no right. No right, I say!"

The Panther bowed again, with a slow smile. " Report me, by all means, miss. And, remember that it was a white man who said, ' the only good Indian is a dead Indian.' "

He turned away, leaped up the bank and held his hand aloft, apparently in a signal. Presently there appeared half a dozen of his followers. He brought them down to the creek bed where lay the injured prospector and instructed them to move him up to the trail. That done he told Ray and Philippa to follow.

She protested. " Where? Where are you going?"

" Where do you want to go?" the Indian countered.

" To Ogden."

" Very well. To Ogden, then." He started off, and called back over his shoulder, " Ogden a long way. First, I make you comfortable—in my camp."

" I want to go straight to Ogden," Philippa insisted.

" Sure."

With no further word and no further delay the Indians began their march, four of them carrying Wood on an improvised stretcher. Philippa walked along glumly, carefully keeping close to Ray.

She felt a constriction in her chest and she breathed with difficulty. The effect this Indian had on her was quite different from that she had experienced with Surefoot. For the football star she had only a feeling of patronizing superiority; but against this member of the Cree tribe it seemed as if every drop of blood in her body cried loud in warning.

Philippa came of Southern blood. Her maternal grandfather had been a slave-owning Alabaman, and to her a colored person was an inferior. But never in her life had she known cause to fear one.

She communicated her fear to Ray. He tried to soothe her. " I think it is all right," he said. " This fellow is undoubtedly in the pay of your uncle. Did you never hear him speak of the Panther?"

"Oh, yes! He often talked about how safe he felt because he got his guides from the head of all the Crees who dealt with white men, and when Mr. Wood says this is the man of course I believe him. It is not that. It's just—just—"

She broke off abruptly, unable to put into words the nameless something which affrighted her. At home when she had insisted that she be allowed to come on this prospecting expedition with her uncle she had been consumed with boundless enthusiasm because she wanted to experience the dangers of the wild. She had looked forward to meeting bears and snakes, and wild cats—yes, and Indians. But she had never really believed that the Indians meant any actual danger. Weren't they a phase of the old West, the West before Custer, the West that had disappeared with the railroad and the new century? The mere fact that she had seen Indians on the football field at old Cornell had been enough to wipe out of her mind any expectation that they would be a serious danger on her expedition.

A few worthless wandering beggars selling trinkets at the railroad station, or leading slattern lives in the confines of a reservation, uncouth, ignorant, worthless, with no cause for alarm, and, now that the government was taking care of them, no cause for pity—thus she pictured the present-day redman.

Surefoot had shaken her ideas with his culture and simple manliness, though her aversion for him remained. Now this Panther, this prowling savage of the wilderness,

equipped apparently with all the hereditary craft of his savage ancestors and yet the equal of a shifty white man, suddenly opened her eyes to the Indian of the present. She thoroughly realized that she was facing a danger she had not foreseen. Yet she tried to drive it from her mind.

The trail wound pleasantly through a level mesa where the injured Wood found the deft Indians fully equal to the task of carrying him without a jolt. The stretcher swung from their shoulders with an ease that could hardly have been imparted to it by the best metal springs.

Philippa did not leave Ray's side for an instant, and often her hand reached out for his. He responded with an ardent clasp, and thus, hand in hand, like school children, they continued their way under the shadow of the towering Rockies, while ahead the Panther led them.

Once Philippa whispered to Ray that it would be well if they slipped away into the brush and abandoned Wood to what was evidently, for him, a safe conduct. For answer Ray turned her sharply about. A hundred yards behind two of the Panther's men were coming slowly, their eyes keenly fixed on them.

"He's guarding us from something," said the aviator. "Maybe it's from your folly. You mustn't be afraid. Now, buck up and be a man." And he pressed her hand.

Just at dusk they rounded a shoulder of rock and then swiftly descended a declivity which led them unexpectedly into a clearing in which was pitched a dozen or more tepees. At one side was a corral made of saplings enclosing a number of horses.

The Panther led the way directly to the central tepee, one of unusual size. He lifted the flap and stepped aside. "Make yourself at home, miss," he said to Philippa.

"But you said you would take us to Ogden," she protested.

"In the morning," he softly replied. "For to-night—make yourself comfortable in my camp."

Slowly, wonderingly, but keeping at Ray's side, she started to enter.

The Indian laid a hand on the aviator. "This way," said he. "The tent next door is for the gentlemen."

As Ray paused Philippa came swiftly to him. "No," she insisted. "Do not leave me. I am afraid."

The dark, scowling face of the bronzed guide intervened. "Afraid of what, miss?" he demanded.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ATTACK BY NIGHT.

"AFRAID—just—just afraid!"

Yet she returned his gaze staunchly. His eyes fell first, and she added, weakly, "I don't like to be alone. Come with me, Ray."

She passed inside the tepee. Ray followed. They found a structure rather large, fully twice as large as the usual Indian shelter. Across the folds of the rear were drawn a series of brilliant Navaho blankets and in the center was an immense divan, over which was thrown numberless skins, of bear, of buffalo, of cougar and the silky white beauty of the wild mountain sheep.

Ray exclaimed with delight at the sight of this wild sheepskin, and the two examined it with care. Ray explained that this hardy denizen of the Rocky Mountains was seldom trapped, and that the laws now forbade shooting one, and that therefore the skins were very rare. The fur possesses the luxurious softness of the polar bear, but is curly about the neck and shoulders.

This large white skin lay in the center of the divan, and was flanked by two brown pelts. "Grizzlies," said Ray.

Philippa cast herself at length on the divan, and, for the moment, felt reassured. Two oil lamps suspended from a ridge pole cast a pleasant glow over them as she slowly inspected the tepee.

"Look, Ray," said she. "See those rugs—those pretty Navahos. Pull them down. Bring them here."

He obeyed and three hand-woven red and yellow woolen blankets were promptly beside her.

"Now, there is a rope in the corner. Bring it here."

"This reata?" He pulled forth a finely braided long line.

"Is that what you call it? Good. It's

strong." She tested it by stretching it firmly between her hands. "Now tie one end there—on the ridge pole."

When he had obeyed she directed the tying of the other across the entrance to the tepee and then helped him suspend the blankets over the reata. The result was the forming of a little anteroom to the tepee, closing out the entrance.

"There, Ray," said she, "is your bedroom. That is where you sleep to-night."

"Thanks," said he. "You make me feel like the captain of the queen's bodyguard."

"And so you are!" she laughed. "Come. Let us go and look after Mr. Wood."

They found the crippled white man in a neighboring tepee, whose edge was not a yard from that assigned to Philippa. However, it was of only half the size of the large tepee, and it had no luxurious divan. In the corner was a pallet of boughs covered by a single tattered old buffalo robe. On this Wood was reclining.

"Look!" he cried as Ray and Philippa came in to him, and as he exhibited a bottle to them. "The Panther is a regular fellow. See the label."

They examined it under the glow from the kerosene lamp. It was French brandy. Wood assured them the label was not a misnomer. Already he had consumed over half the bottle and was in a hilarious state.

"Great ol' Panther!" he murmured. "Did you see the way he spotted them renegade Surefoot fellers? Sniped them off the hills like they was rabbits in a gallery. Ha! Ha! A piece of luck fallin' in with him—th' greatest little feller in Montana!"

Philippa persuaded Wood that he had had enough and sequestered the bottle. Presently two Indians entered bearing huge platters of smoking food.

"Supper!" one of them grunted.

The three whites fell to with enormous appetites. There was venison steak, corn steamed in the husk, a bowl apiece of black coffee. These were followed by a heaping wicker basket of butternuts, and another basket piled high with red-faced pippins. For more than an hour they reveled in the food. The exercise, the excitement, the long abstinence, and the cheerful mountain air had whetted their appetites to a fine edge.

"You are not afraid now, are you?" Ray pressed Philippa's hand.

"No, not now," she admitted, and added quickly: "But the captain of the queen's bodyguard occupies the anteroom to-night just the same." She laughed guiltily.

Ray saluted. "At your orders, your majesty!"

Now the Panther appeared. Assured that all was well he announced that they would start at dawn. They thanked him and said they would be ready. He explained, casually it seemed, that he had expected Ray to occupy the tepee with Wood and pointed to a second pallet which occupied the far side of the inclosed space.

Ray explained the arrangements that had been made in the larger tepee and said he would sleep there if the chief did not mind.

"And why should I mind?" the Panther blandly queried.

"I didn't suppose you would, but I wanted to be polite about it," Ray replied.

"The camp is yours. Do with it as you please. And now—good night!"

Half an hour later Wood was alone and had drained the remainder of the brandy bottle, sinking into a soggy slumber in which he forgot the jerky pain of the broken limb which two of the Indians had set for him before supper.

Philippa and Ray remained up for a little while longer. Before retiring they inspected the camp. They found that fourteen tepees in all stretched along the little clearing and that in the corral were over twenty horses. This seemed a surprisingly large number as they had not seen more than a dozen Indians.

"This must be the headquarters camp," Ray concluded.

No one molested them. As they passed through the street they saw dark forms seated in the entrance to the tepees. They wandered out to the woods that began at the foot of the mesa. As they came to the first tree a silent form approached them and stood in their path. As they advanced the figure raised its arm to bar the way.

The night was so dark they could not see distinctly, so Ray struck a match and peered into the Indian's face. He motioned mutely back toward the tepees and shook

his head as they tried to tell him they were out only for a walk. Rather than press the issue they turned back.

They had started out gayly, revivified by the abundant and appetizing food, but when they came back they were silent.

"I feel like a prisoner," said Philippa.

"You shouldn't feel that way," Ray tried to reassure her. "It is right for them to keep a guard. We might have strayed off into the woods and lost our way."

"I don't like it—just the same."

It was barely nine thirty as they said good night at the entrance to the large teepee, but dawn was earlier than four at that time of year in that altitude, so they had little more than six hours for sleep. Already the camp was in deep silence.

In a moment Philippa extinguished her lights, and hers were the last. Ray tried to sleep, but for some reason his lids would not stay closed.

All through the day he had made light of Philippa's alarm. He had not wanted her to be encouraged in the belief that there was anything to fear. He realized that she was not only young, but as he put to himself, "only a girl." That in itself was enough to make her uneasy, and was not he an unwilling part of the deception that had been practiced on her in not telling her the full reason for that separation? Aside from that he reasoned that she had no good cause for her almost hysterical state of nerves, especially as she had revealed them the first moment of the meeting with the Panther.

But *was* her state of nerves without justification? He had seen the fierce appraising look of the Indian and he did not like it. Of course a man would be foolish to draw any definite conclusions merely from a look.

Besides, it was a bit queer that the Panther and his followers should have accounted for *all* of Surefoot's men. And nothing had been said of the Panther's losses. Had he come through the contest unscathed? If so, it argued a superior ambush and therefore a superior craft.

Finally was Harvey Wood dead positive about this Panther fellow? *Was* he all right?

Nonsense. Wood surely had as much at stake as Ray or Philippa. And Wood knew the wilderness and Indians. Surely they would continue on the morrow and all would be well. They would arrive safely in Ogden as the Panther had promised.

How far was Ogden? It couldn't be very far, as he had already walked several days in its general direction, and he had originally planned on making it the first day of his flight East from the coast.

So ran Ray's thoughts, but he did not think to estimate the difference in running time between an airplane flying like the crow from point to point and a man walking up mountains, through valleys, across rivers, along mesas, and forced to detour by every slight nonconformity of the country. He realized there was a great difference, but just how great that difference really was he could not estimate.

He thought of Harvey Wood. The rather stodgy nature of the prospector had not appealed to him. "Lumpy" is how Ray described the other to himself. Yet there was no reason to doubt his loyalty to Black Dan Whipple. Besides, weren't they all in the same boat now?

More than an hour elapsed as these thoughts and queries occupied the brain that should have been sleeping. At last the little imp of query tugging at his mental structure forced him to roll over and lift the flap of the teepee and look out into the night.

There being no moon it was very dark, although the stars were out and the night was clear. The outer air refreshed him. He seemed to have no fatigue now. By stretching out an arm he could touch the teepee in which Wood was sleeping. An irresistible impulse impelled him thither.

Slowly and with the utmost caution he propelled himself clear of the teepee, edging on the ground, stomach down, like a wriggling snake. As his feet left his own shelter his head entered the adjoining one.

A moment later he stood upright inside Wood's teepee. He could not remember the location of the pallet and he began groping his way toward it in the pitch blackness. It seemed that he spent an interminable time in this fruitless search.

At last his hands came in contact with

an obstruction and he was about to lean over and whisper in the sleeping man's ear when he was frozen into a posture of suddenly arrested movement.

There rang out in the clear night, seemingly as by signal and almost simultaneously, a dozen shots—*rat-at-tat-tat-tat-plumk-bung-burr-tat-tat.* Like that. He thought that a bullet passed through the side of the teepee and that another entered his clothing.

At the first shot Roy instinctively fell and hugged the ground. Then he began crawling back as he had come. Only something told him to vary his course a trifle and not to go out or come in by the accepted doorways.

In a moment he was in Philippa's teepee. She had been wakened from a sound sleep and had presence of mind enough not to cry out. To his cautious "S-sh!" she answered softly, "Here!"

Promptly he reached her side and his arm went reassuringly about her. "It's another attack," he whispered. "Don't waste a second. Follow me!"

Stealthily he found a way through the rear of the teepee. Luckily the removal of the blankets earlier in the evening had left the way open. Once they were in the clear Ray whispered to Philippa to bend close to the rear of the line of teepees and avoid the fronts. He showed her how to keep her body in the shadow so that even the faint reflection of the starlight would not make them distinct.

The extraordinary feature of the attack, if attack it was—lay in the fact that it was already apparently over. There was no more firing. Indeed, there had been but one volley—a blazing round, and no more.

Events were moving so rapidly that neither had a chance to note this curious fact at the moment.

"Remember the guard," Philippa whispered.

"I know," Ray responded. "I'm going the other way."

"Where?"

"To the corral. Keep close to me."

In a very brief space they had passed the line of teepees and the indistinct line of the sapling fence could be distinguished not far off.

"Can you ride well?" Ray asked as they reached the fence.

"Of course," Philippa replied, as they cleared it.

At that moment a shriek of baffled rage rent the air. It was the unmistakable voice of the Panther, but he was talking, or very likely cursing, in his native tongue.

For an instant they looked back. Lights darted from the large teepee. Again that cry rent the air, and instantly there glided forth in many directions the crawling, low-running forms of the Panther's men.

Meanwhile, by virtue of extraordinary luck, Ray had located two bridled horses. Neither of them was saddled. As all the other horses were lying down, and these were the only ones standing, he concluded that only they were bridled.

His heart sank. "Can you go it bareback?" he asked.

"Anything," Philippa gasped. "Anything to get out of this."

"Then up you go!" He lifted her astride the nearest of the mounts. The pony swirled and leaped as the slim form landed upon his sleek back. With one stark bound, forepaws uplifted high, he cleared the fence, and like a streak, was off.

A few seconds later Ray followed. He had a sense of gratification as he realized that he had picked for Philippa the fleeter of the horses.

Was it, perhaps, the Panther's own special mount?

A shot rang out, and it seemed that a bolt of lightning had seared Ray's brain. The heavens had opened and devoured him. The next instant he was in oblivion.

Then his limp body sank on the pony's neck, clung there a moment, as if in caressing tenderness, and slid softly down, like a sack of meal dropped gently from the end of a cart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHASE.

THE pony bore Philippa on swiftly into the night. At first she thought she would slip from his back at each plunge, for she had never before ridden

without a saddle, but soon she found she could grip the slim, muscular sides splendidly with her knees. It was not long before she wondered why people ever used saddles. This velvet tension, this slippered ease, this undulant glide in which she became a very part of her galloping mount, coincided with her spirit. She laughed aloud in glee.

She was riding—alone—bareback—in the dark shadow of the dim starlit Rockies—pursued by Indians! The stark novelty, the glamorous thrill of the adventure, held her for a time.

And then the uncertainties of her position began to assail her. What had become of Ray? He had started with her. As he helped her to mount and sent her on her way he had whispered that he would accompany her, but not to wait, not to look around for him.

Yet there was no sign, no sound to indicate he had tried to come. She pulled on the bridle of her loping pony. He slowed at her command, and even as he slowed the patter of rapid hoofs sounded through the mesquite in her rear.

A great lump came into her throat, a lump of apprehension. Was this Ray? Or was it, perchance, the Panther or his men? Now for the first time she seriously asked herself why she had so precipitately fled. Was not the Panther her accredited guide? Might not those shots have been fired by his followers in an honest attempt to ward off an attack on the camp which sheltered her? And, if so, had she not only endangered herself?

She had about decided to give the Panther the benefit of the doubt, and to turn about to meet him squarely, if indeed it was he who raced on behind her, when the mount on her heels slid alongside her own pony, and the two came to a halt at once, as if answering the appeal of her bridle-like Siamese twins.

The velvety muzzle of the second pony slid along the flank of her mount and rested contentedly against her thigh. In the starlight she could now see clearly that he was riderless! Yet his bridle hung loose across his mane.

She remembered that Ray had pointed out to her as they scaled the fence of the corral that only two of the horses had bridles. Therefore, this must be the one he had mounted. And he was not here. Where could he be?

She remained quietly thinking it over for a long time. Was it not, perhaps, the wiser part to turn and ride back toward the camp? What could she do alone, a mere girl, in this vast wilderness, without knowledge of which way to proceed, without food or drink, without even a compass?

That thought concerning a compass caused her to dismount and to tie the two ponies to a near-by tree. She would wait for the dawn, for that, at least, would indicate the general direction of the east. She knew that Ogden lay to the southeast, and she had no desire to waste her efforts in traveling in a circle.

As she waited she received a further comfort in fingering the little silver-handled pistol that lay concealed in her belt. It was only a tiny thing, it was true—a twenty-two caliber, Uncle Dan had said—but it was a firearm and she had learned to shoot with it. Its presence gave her courage.

The night seemed interminable, but at length a soft silver illumined the horizon and then suddenly this was shot with cerise, then with lilac, then with crimson and gold.

With the dawn she congratulated herself that she had waited. For she had been headed straight north. She mounted the pony she had been riding, and leading the other by the bridle, started toward the east and the south.

The light had answered her question. Only in the dark had she considered the advisability of going back. Cheered by the sun she thought of but one route—that most direct to civilization. She did not care to learn what had become of Harvey Wood. And she felt that Ray would take care of himself and would not want her to do else than as she was doing.

With twelve to fourteen hours of daylight ahead of her and two good horses she must surely reach safety! And that day!

Now that she could see the character of the country through which she was riding she marveled that she had come so far without an accident. Apparently she had

abruptly left the shelter of the valley and its timber some distance back, for she was among bowlders and sparsely grown, mesquite-covered ground that appeared to have no direction. The mountains towered above on three sides. Only toward the south-southeast were they distantly open. In this direction she laid her course, but giving the ponies their heads.

She urged them into a gentle lope, and was gratified to see how instinctively they skirted the bowlders and flitted like shadows through the patches of mesquite. As the sun rose her spirits rose, too, and a little song trembled on her lips.

She would not admit that there was any danger, and yet her heart was beating wildly. There in that vast, wild country with not a soul in sight, the day bright and clear, the ozone filling her lungs, why should she feel such apprehension?

It was the middle of the forenoon when she approached a big shoulder of rock that jutted out into a slight vale. She gave this a wide berth, naturally, as the going near it was rough, but just as she rounded it a call came from behind it—a call like the cry of the jay. She had seen no birds since the day before, and this call was so clear that she turned half in her seat to survey the barren rock whence it came.

The ponies answered instantly. Both stopped dead still, turned and whinnied. She pulled their noses to the southeast and urged them on. The one she was riding obeyed, but protestingly. The other gave a quick jerk and tore the bridle from her grasp. Then it kicked up its heels and in a wild gallop lit out for the mysterious bowlder.

Her own steed tried to turn and follow, but she reined him in tightly and urged him on. As he proceeded reluctantly she looked back. Out from the protection of the rock rode a solitary Indian. Presently the led horse loped to within reach of his arm and he gathered in the flying bridle.

She had lost her second mount, and for a moment she hesitated while the pony, feeling her indecision, slowed to a canter. Why should she run? There was nothing as yet hostile in this approaching figure. It wore the customary shirt and breeches of all the guides she had yet seen. And, even if she did run, and if he were hostile, he could easily overtake her. But could he? Was not her pony as fleet as his? Only a trial of speed would determine that.

While she weighed these pros and cons she turned back for another good look. The Indian had covered some distance in the meantime and now she saw him clearly.

There could be no mistake. It was the Panther!

If she had had any doubt of continuing her escape one glance at him settled her mind. There was a sinister air of determination in his attitude. He was riding her down. There could be no doubt about that.

Besides, more terrifying than anything else, she received, or thought she received, a repetition of that glance which had unnerved her the day before on their first meeting.

She dug her heels desperately into the sleek sides of her pony, gathered the reins firmly into her hands, leaned over his neck and whispered tensely into his ear, as if she had no doubt he could hear, "Save me! Save me! I know you can do it! Save me!"

The pony responded as if he had heard and understood every word. He leaped on with wondrous strides, his tiny hoofs barely clipping the shale and sand and tufty brush as he fairly flew along. She looked back, and with a sigh of relief noted that she was gaining.

At the same time she could not fail to realize that the Panther was near enough to bring her down with a shot if he so wished. This thought did not deter her. She knew that it was difficult to fire effectively from a running horse, especially at an object also in erratic motion, and she pinned her hope on the chance of widening the distance between them.

A few minutes elapsed and she felt that she was steadily gaining. Ahead a mile or so she saw a cliff that seemed wooded. Behind that she might find a stream, or a ravine in which she might hide.

Then, just as she was breathing a little more freely, again the call of the jay sounded clearly across the dry air. Her pony

pricked up his ears and halted as if stricken, his forepaws stuck stubbornly in the ground, while Philippa was almost thrown over his neck.

Sick with fear she barely retained her seat and turned about to face the onrushing Indian. She saw the sardonic smile on his lean countenance. It maddened her, and without thinking, she whipped the revolver from her belt and discharged it at him—once, twice, three times.

She looked to see him fall, but instead he came on more fiercely, and a wild shriek of triumph rose from his lips. If she had any doubt of his intention before it was settled now. Frantically, almost hysterically, she leaned over her pony and again pleaded as she dug her heels into his sides, "Save me! Save me!"

And again the pony responded gallantly. Again a furtive glance to the rear indicated that she was at least on even terms with her pursuer, but as she looked ahead a more sickening fear than any other overwhelmed her.

In some inexplicable way her pony had turned about, and was headed at right angles to the trail she had just covered. She pulled at his head to guide him back, and he half responded. Then she became confused and pulled and sawed at his bridle. He moved drunkenly from one side to the other. In despair she gave him his head. Now he was going directly in the opposite direction.

Fear had laid hold of her, and then terror. For a moment it may have been that she swooned, though her legs still held her firmly on the pony's back. As she came to a fuller consciousness she heard the call of the jay again. Again felt the pony swerve and stop.

Thus the tense figure of the savage swept upon her. All that she could remember was that her uncle had told her the little revolver held six shots, and that she had used only three. She had kept the others for just this emergency.

With a supreme effort and a marvelous coolness, considering her condition of overwrought nerves, she turned the muzzle toward those tigerish eyes and pulled the trigger—and again—and again!

Still he looked at her, and the sardonic smile never flickered. With a cry of disgust she hurled the revolver to the ground and again rained blows from her slender heels into the responsive flanks of the pony.

Only a few yards separated them, but her horse dashed off, with the Indian hard in pursuit.

Now, for the last time, the piercing cry of the jay rent the air and the little ears of the pony lay straight back as he swerved and stopped.

At the same moment the pursuing pony flung alongside. Without pausing the Indian leaned over and with a powerful arm swept her from her seat.

An instant later they were galloping back toward the mysterious bowlder, Philippa struggling in the ironlike clasp of the Panther, who held her tight against his breast, while the two horses she had ridden cantered meekly behind.

She aimed a blow at his lean chin with her small fist. He dodged amiably, but his arm tightened until she gasped with pain. "You are killing me!" she sobbed.

He slightly relaxed his grip, but made no other reply. In a moment, however, he rearranged his burden so that her arms were pinioned. Her body law in front of him across his pony's shoulders, while he held her close against his side, her face against his shirt front, with as little regard for her comfort or her feelings as if she had been an animal.

Thus they rode for a time that seemed to her eternity. She could hardly breathe.

She could not think clearly, for rage consumed her. There seemed a sort of relief in at last being actually close to his body in this way, for now she actually knew what she had to face. The fear and apprehension had been supplanted by terror, and now the terror gave way to rage.

She was passionately, blindly angry at this creature who had dared touch her, and yet her feelings seemed of as little interest to him as had been her bullets.

Revulsion consumed her. The idea of suicide had not yet come to her forcibly, for she was in superb bodily health, but it already seemed that death was far preferable to the touch of this man's body.

His horse had wheeled as he seized her, but she did not know in what direction they were going. Her face hidden, she lost all sense of direction. She began hoping, longing, desperately praying for an accident.

Yet what accident could occur to one so sure as this Indian who clung to his horse as if a part of it? She could feel him swaying easily in the saddle with the unsteady jerk of the galloping hoofs which every now and then struck fire from the rocks, but even the most sudden jerks did not in the least effect the viselike grip of his arm as it gripped her.

Once, as he changed her position a trifle, she got a glimpse of his other hand. It fell straight to his side, limp, unused. The bridle hung slackly over the pony's neck. He was guiding with his knees.

For a moment her mind dwelt on Ray. Had he been killed? Or was he being held a captive? She chose to accept the latter solution. It offered some hope.

For hours thus—then—

Late that afternoon the call of the jay sounded once more. The horses came to an instant stop, and this time the Indian swung lightly to the ground, thrusting her free and on her feet as he did so.

For a long time she had been planning what she would do at this moment, and had been resting in preparation for it. The instant she felt the firm earth beneath her feet she started to run as with lightning speed.

She got probably three paces before his hand seized her by the shirt collar. She was lifted from the ground as unceremoniously as if she had been a bad baby, suddenly seized by an angry parent. And, without a word, she was carried, struggling, kicking, screaming, into a log cabin that nestled under the side of a hill.

There he threw her, without a word, without a sound, onto a huge pile of skins that lay in the center of the room. She recoiled from him, fairly frothing at the mouth, and barely noted that chief among the skins was that of the cougar, sometimes known as the "mountain panther."

A gleam of aroused passion lit his dark face as he stood above her. With his right hand he reached up to his left shoulder and ripped off the sleeve of his shirt.

Relief suffused her as she saw the blood oozing from a wound in his shoulder. Never before in her life had the sight of blood had any effect but nausea on her; now her heart bounded with delight.

"You shoot well—for a girl!" he said, as he pointed to a basin and a pail of water lying on a bench on the other side of the room. Her eyes slowly followed his direction, and the sense of relief became almost suffocating.

"You want me—to—to bind it—up for you?" she stammered.

"What else—you little vixen?"

She was tempted to laugh in his face. For a brief second, feeling that he was wounded, her eyes darted about the room in search of exits, but as promptly came the reflection that if she could not escape him in the open she could hardly expect to do so here, for his wound had been the same then as now.

Then, without her knowing what it was that took hold of her, without her realizing that the curious camaraderie of the wilderness which binds friends and enemies in misfortune, had descended on her, even in what she felt was her deadly peril, a peril of worse than death, she slowly advanced toward the cleansing water.

As she brought it back and began to wash and bind his wound, her brain became again quite clear. She told herself she would be as gentle as possible with him and see if there was not some softer appeal she could make.

CHAPTER XIV.

RAY'S SEARCH.

WHEN the stroke which seemed like a thunderbolt blotted Ray Custer from consciousness just as he had mounted the second bridled pony in the Cree corral, he fell almost under the horse's hoofs and landed in the protecting arms of a patch of elderberry bushes, which eased him gently to the ground. There he lay for some time, dead to the world.

The time was long enough for the swirl

of events in the Cree encampment to divest it of every one of its human occupants. With the early dawn of the next day there were only two teepees left, the large one and its next neighbor.

The bullet that put Ray temporarily out of commission was like the blow of the expert pugilist. It was a clean knockout, but not fatal, not even permanently harmful. The bullet had passed along his cheekbone, grinding over the aural nerves and grazing the occiput. Except for a few hours of unconsciousness, which he sorely needed, and an abrasion of the skin, he came back to himself with the rise of the next sun with only a curious light feeling in the head to indicate that he had not slept sweetly and soundly in his own bed.

He scrambled inquiringly out of the elderberry bush and looked about for a few moments before he remembered what had happened. Then it all came back to him; his desire to consult Harvey Wood in the dead of night, his prowling entrance to the neighboring teepee, his inability to locate Harvey immediately, the sudden volley of shots, the instant flight to Philippa, the flight with her, the flying entrance to the corral, the good fortune of finding the two bridled horses, his rapid mount, her swift get-away, his hot pursuit, and—the final blow. Yet, that was not a dream, not a nightmare. It had actually happened. If any proof were needed the dried blood on his cheek and temple supplied it.

But there was more complete proof, and he promptly discovered it as he went back toward the teepees. He proceeded with a reasonable amount of caution, remembering the impulse which had sent him scurrying away the night before, but when he reached the corral he found it empty of ponies, and he shortly realized that an atmosphere of abandonment lay over everything.

There was indeed nothing to fear, at least nothing apparent at first glance. It was then that he discovered that only two of the teepees were left. For a moment he surveyed them at a distance, not yet quite sure that it was wise to approach. Would he discover there friend or foe?

Finally he went forward. The smaller teepee was the first in his path. He entered this gingerly by the rear, poking his head inquiringly under the edge like a sneaking boy entering a circus.

The interior was dark. He stepped boldly within. As he did so a sick dread consumed him, and, as the place was dark, he boldly stepped to the entrance and threw open the flap, thus letting in the broad daylight.

The sun fell on the upturned gaping mouth and protruding eyeballs of Harvey Wood, whose body, cold and twisted as in a last convulsion, confronted him from the edge of the pallet. It lay half on the boughs and half on the ground as if the wounded man had expired in a last agony of trying to reach out for succor.

A close examination revealed that he had been shot through the body and through the head. Either seemed sufficient to account for his finish. But as Ray turned the body over he gasped with horror.

Wood had been stabbed in the back as well. The long handle of a hunting knife stuck forth from between his shoulder blades.

A cold sweat suffused Ray!

At the very moment this double outrage was being perpetrated he had been within a few feet of the killers. What miracle had saved *him?*

He was to have a plausible answer a few minutes later when he examined the big teepee and the improvised anteroom in which he had lain for the brief hours before he had grown restless and had gone adventuring on the quest which at last he perceived had spared his life.

In this little anteroom there lay the modest pallet he had placed there. Through this he found at least four bullet holes. Just above the side of the teepee was punctured with four holes, also.

Searching closer he found imbedded in the pallet a long handled hunting knife. Evidently these redskins played both ends toward the middle. They took no chances when they went out to frame up a little plot. If he had lain on that pallet no chance on earth could have spared him from the fate of Harvey Wood.

Swiftly, and with a quickly mounting fear, for the significance of it all was too apparent, he passed inside to the divan where Philippa had lain. Rapidly he searched it to discover evidence of bullets or of knives.

There were none whatever. The plan plainly had been to spare her while her white companions were silenced forever. And to what purpose? Could there be other than one?

At last it was unmistakable to the mind of Ray that Philippa's fears which had seemed to him vague were more than justified.

Now what should he do?

It seemed the height of folly to think that he could follow the trail of the horses and be of any service. To make sure he went again to the corral and looked about for sign of a mount. The bars were down. There was not a living thing in sight.

If he desired to follow Philippa it would have to be on foot. Inspired with the urgent necessity of knowing more of her fate, he started off valiantly, picking up the marks of the pony beyond the spot where he had fallen.

However, he did not proceed far on this road before he realized its uselessness. The horses would go at least three miles to his one. What could pursuit in that manner avail him?

Before he stopped he was thrown into a real panic when he discovered that the trail carried three instead of two ponies' hoofprints. If there had been more he would have felt easier. The fact that there were only three strangely disturbed him.

Proceeding back to the corral he tried to make out from the hoofmarks leading from it something of the story of the Indians' flight. He found that all of the horses, except three, had gone in a direction opposite to the one he had sent Philippa.

Evidently the major portion of the Indians were off in a direction that would not bother Philippa. He tried to console himself with the reflection that it might have been a stray horse which followed her, but his heart was heavy as lead, nevertheless.

In all of his study of the situation Ray found his mind insistently returning to Surefoot. To his own surprise he kept thinking of the hereditary Cree chief as of a haven of refuge. Despite himself he wanted now, above all things, to see Surefoot.

This, indeed, seemed strange when he recalled the inexplicable behavior of that gentleman. Was not Black Dan Whipple even now a captive, a hostage under Surefoot? And was he not to meet a nameless fate within two weeks unless the proper word should be taken to Washington?

Already two days of the two weeks had elapsed, and the man who was intrusted to take the word lay slain—murdered by men whom he had trusted. What, then, would become of Black Dan?

He concluded that the best way to insure this was to retrace his steps of the day before. If he went on he might be days in reaching a white outpost. The country was entirely new to him, and he might be hundred of miles from help.

On the other hand, he knew it was not more than a score of miles back to the point where he had left Black Dan and the mighty Teddy Jones. In that direction, then, he directed his steps.

Before the sun was high in the heavens he was running!

At noon he stopped for a moment to bathe his feet in a stream and to gather some wild blackberries, with which to supplement the chocolate and cheese he found in his pockets. He wondered if Philippa had anything to eat, and could not remember that she carried anything.

He recalled that trim, boyish figure with its jaunty twirl to the felt hat, and the breeches pockets in which she delighted to stretch her hands. But—alas—he also remembered all too well that she had often submitted to his joking when he asked to see her pocket knife and her keys and her eatables by pulling her pockets wrong side out to exhibit them empty.

Pockets sagging down might be all right for a man, she said, but the lumpy patches should never interfere with her "lines." No. Philippa would have nothing to eat.

He was glad to remember that she car-

ried that little revolver, the tiny pearl-handled thing. Yes. She must have that. She always carried it. Only, as Black Dan had said, it would be a trifling little thing to sting a man with, and a beast would only laugh at it.

Such thoughts consumed Ray as he raced back along the trail.

The air was cool and bracing, and he said to himself that he must be covering between five and six miles an hour when a *ping* sounded from the woods above him and a shot spat into the earth at his feet.

There was a peculiarity about this shot that reminded him of the shots he had seen Surefoot make the first day he had seen him in the wild, the day he had landed from the airplane. It seemed not so much one of deadly intent as of warning.

He obeyed that shot by standing instantly perfectly still.

Nothing further happened. After a lengthy interval he realized what it meant. He had come to the boundary line, and one of Surefoot's scouts had spotted him from a lookout in the hills. If he turned back all was well; if he persisted forward it was at his own peril.

He decides that he must persist forward. He did so with arms held aloft and baring in one a white handkerchief. A few rods farther on two Indians suddenly popped from behind bowlders and confronted him, with leveled revolvers.

To them he confided his desire. He must see Surefoot. Silently they indicated a place between them and marched on.

Just before sundown they brought him to a camp he had not yet seen. It was a permanent thing of mud and bark huts, whose doors were decorated with red and yellow blankets. A few Indians looked curiously at him as he was brought in.

A few guttural words were exchanged and he was informed that Surefoot was not at home, but might be in before night. Meanwhile he was to wait in the central hut, whence he was promptly thrust.

As he stepped inside he confronted Black Dan Whipple.

Rapidly he told his story to the bearded prospector, who listened with surly, suspicious glances.

"You mean to say the Panther murdered Harvey in cold blood?"

"He or one of his men."

"And vamosed with Philippa?"

"It is as I tell you."

Black Dan's thick lip curled in derision. "You mean to say that a clever varmint like the Panther started on a game like that, one he's sure to get caught on, and overlooked a bet of a pesky little tenderfoot like you and got a hard-boiled old-timer like Harvey Wood?"

"It certainly looks that way."

"There's somethin' crooked about it."

"Of course. The Panther's a dog and a traitor and—though I pray to God I am mistaken in that—a beast."

"I mean there's somethin' crooked about your story."

Ray blanched as he saw the mean, suspicious scowl in the prospector's countenance. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you're concealin' somethin'. I mean I've been on to your game from the first."

"Why—why—" Ray stammered, dumfounded. "I have no game."

"No game!" thundered Black Dan. "Haven't I seen it from the first. You want to get that girl off for yourself, you cursed little lyin' sneak!"

With this it seemed to Ray that something snapped in his head the same as it had the night before when the bullet clipped him on the chin. At any rate he knew not what he was doing, for he threw himself with a cry of rage on the huge Whipple, and so intense and unexpected was his impact that for an instant he bore the stronger and larger man to earth.

But only for an instant. Promptly Dan was up. He seized the slender aviator by the neck and in a moment more might easily have choked him to death if he had not been stopped by a rude hand which seized him from behind.

"Enough!" spoke a determined voice behind the determined hand.

Dan dropped his adversary and turned to look into the glowing eyes of Surefoot. The Cree chieftain pushed aside the prospector and assisted Ray to his feet.

"Thanks, Teddy," said Custer, as he

rubbed his throat where the rough fingers had almost shut off his breath. "You're the gladdest thing I have ever seen in my life. Come. There is not a second to lose."

"Where?" insisted the matter-of-fact Indian.

"Come with me and I'll tell you, but if there's a decent drop of blood in you don't waste a minute."

Slowly Surefoot followed, backing from the room, as he gave a command in his native tongue to a follower, who promptly closed in on Black Dan and forced him into the cabin.

CHAPTER XV.

AT BAY.

PHILIPPA approached the task of cleansing and binding the Panther's wound impersonally. That is, she told herself it was impersonally. Had she not received first-aid instruction at the dormitory in Ithaca? Was she not prepared for just such an emergency as this? By some queer quirk of feminine logic she convinced herself for the moment that all would yet be well, and, despite the fact that she had fled headlong from this dark figure, despite the fact that she herself had fired the bullet which had wounded him, and had fired with intent to kill, she went about her new duties with *sang froid*. Perhaps, after all, the dread nameless thing before thought of which her innermost spirit quailed, would not transpire.

She bathed the shoulder which was already caked with blood, and the red drops welled forth afresh. One of her bullets had gone through the fleshy part of the upper arm—not a serious wound provided infection did not set in.

She asked if he had a disinfectant. He went to a corner cupboard and got a bottle which he handed her.

"That's a bad use for good whisky," said he.

Her only reply was to take the bottle and prepare to pour some of its contents on the arm in the region of the wound.

"Better drink it yourself," he insisted.

She did not trust herself to make spoken reply, but merely shook her head as she persisted in her task. He did not flinch as the alcohol poured into the open wound, and she marveled at his steadiness of nerve. She soaked a rag with the fluid and laid it over the lacerated flesh. Then she bound it up carefully and neatly.

"Thanks, pretty lady!" he said as she took the basin and the bottle to the rear of the room. Still she made no spoken reply. She was studying the room. There was a single door and two tiny windows, high above the reach of her hands; evidently not an easy place to get out of.

That huge divan in the center with its panther skin and its bear rugs and its buffalo hides gracefully filling in the spaces on the near-by floor frightened her more than all else. It seemed so out of place with its suggestion of inappropriate luxury. What could an Indian be thinking of when he kept a couch so different from the accepted customs of the wild country? As she contemplated it there seemed again no escape from the inevitable conclusion of her presence there.

Yet she must be brave. She must try to face him out. She must still find a way to postpone the final act. A minute only intervened, but a dozen schemes flashed through her brain in that brief space of time.

She washed her own hands and took as much time as she possibly could in the operation. Finally she turned to face him.

He was waiting in the center of the room, leaning gracefully against a rustic chair, surveying her with a slight lift on the slit of his mouth. Again that glance—that fearful glance! The passionate desire in it left her sick and faint. She stumbled and almost fell.

In an instant he was at her side and his right arm swept about her with an intense sense of possession.

"You may kiss me!" he murmured between set teeth.

The touch of his arm, the close union of his warm, strong body burned her as with a fever. She made a furious movement to reach his wounded arm with the intent of tearing off the bandages she had placed there only the moment before, but it was futile.

She writhed in his grasp, but he crushed her against his breast as easily as if he had two arms free, and the sudden access of possessive passion seemed to render her senses more keen. Some instinctive knowledge of the revelation he was about to make came over her, for she must have given some sign of coquetry, perhaps quite unconscious.

Whatever the cause he halted at that decisive moment, and again demanded, " Kiss me!"

A gleam of hope swept into her eyes as she answered his burning glance directly. " Not yet! Not yet!" she breathed softly.

It was the right word, the very thought to halt him for still another moment in this dreadful pursuit. He relaxed the tension of his hold. Then, apparently, the reaction was too violent for even his strong will to withstand without some relief, and he hurled her from him, spinning, in the center of the divan. She sank into the nest of skins with a soft thump, unhurt.

" Well, mind you, don't keep me waiting too long" he savagely replied and went to the cupboard for the bottle, and drained a long drink.

Now, she realized that he had bruised her. For a moment she thought that he might have broken some of her bones. She felt herself all over carefully. Satisfied that she was not maimed she suddenly gave way to a flood of feeling and buried her head and sobbed.

In a moment again she felt his strong hand on her shoulder, and she was pulled sharply to her feet to confront the blazing eyes. The odor of whisky on his breath affrighted her, and at the same time it awakened a new desperation. Before she had thought it worthless to use words on him. Was he not merely an Indian, a savage, incapable of responding to the ideas which formed her thoughts? But now she instantly came to conclusion that he was in some subtle way more nearly her equal. And this barely awakened sense of equality had a very curious effect. It caused her to turn on him with her deepest scorn.

" You dog!" she cried, with blazing eyes. " You contemptible villain! You sneaking devil!"

She paused, breathless, searching for words with which to sear his consciousness. Without realizing whence her tongue had seized it she remembered an old phrase she had often heard used by her grandfather, the son of the old slave holder. To her youthful, feminine mind it had always seemed the extremity of cursing. So now she hurled it at the Indian.

" You black hound!" she cried.

Instantly the scowl passed from his face. A slight, crooked smile appeared on his thin lips. His answer was peculiar. With his right hand he seized his shirt where he had first torn it to release the wounded shoulder and tore it open now from left to right, laying bare the broad expanse of flesh below his collar.

" Look!" he said, and pointed to his chest, which he flexed, as might an athlete, and extended for her inspection.

An instinctive sense of modesty caused her to shut her eyes for the instant, but an even stronger sense of curiosity caused her again to open them immediately, for she felt that only by opening them could she prevent an immediately unwelcome advance.

" See!" His forefinger traversed his chest slowly. " I am white!"

As if hypnotized she gazed. He seized her hand and lay it upon his breast. " Whiter than you!" he exclaimed, as if in triumph.

Indeed, this seemed to be true, for her hand was considerably browned by exposure, while his protected neck and throat appeared as white as hers. She stared incredulously, muttering: " Aren't you an Indian, then?"

" Huh!" he chortled, as he drew back a pace. " I've got just enough dribble of the Cree blood to give me all they've got, but as you can see for yourself I'm as white as you are!"

She blanched a sickly chalk color and knew not what happened. She must have swooned, for the next she knew he was leaning over her, bathing her neck and face in cold water.

" There, pretty child," he said, as she came to consciousness. " Too much excitement—eh?"

For an instant she was blind with fear, but then she became reassured as she noted

that he sat quietly on a chair near by. She glanced at the window. The sun was still an hour from setting; it had been practically thus when she last looked. No. She could not have been unconscious more than a few minutes.

The Panther seemed more quiet than before. The fire did not burn so fiercely in his eyes. Was it that he wanted to convince her that he was master of himself still? Or was he waiting only because of his hurt shoulder which she observed he was gently nursing in his well hand?

"Little one," he spoke directly, with an attempt at tenderness. "You are about the neatest thing that has ever come into my life. That's why I've told you what very few know—that I am really white. And I want to be white with you."

She leaned forward breathlessly. Had she misjudged him all along? But such an idea was of course ridiculous in view of all that happened. She did not venture to reply.

"Ain't that what you'd like to have me—white?" he insisted.

"Why—why—yes." Her eyes dropped.

He seized her hand, which she withdrew as if it had been scorched.

"But don't test my patience too damned far." He rose abruptly. "Remember, I am master here."

She, also, rose, consumed again with the sick fear. It seemed now that her nerves were breaking. Why did he toy with her thus, like a cat with a mouse? For an instant she almost wished it were over with. She could not endure the strain any longer.

Perhaps this was what he had planned on, the thing he had anticipated, for as a psychologist he was not without merit, and he evidently had had experience with women before. He came very close to her now, not venturing to touch her this time.

"Why, dang it, little one," he asserted brusquely, "I'd marry you if—"

She swung on him with vehemence, opened her mouth to speak, and then was unable to utter a sound.

He did not wait to hear what she might have to say before he added, with an oath, "But why trifle with that sort of nonsense? I'm not the marryin' kind."

He stood back for a few minutes after this frank statement, as if it were a specimen of his scruple to let her weigh it and properly appraise him and his meaning. She closed her eyes and gave herself over to prayer. She prayed for a calm mind to meet what was still to come; she prayed to be shown a way to postpone the evil moment; she prayed for the coming of Ray; and then, beyond her prayer, in a way she could not explain, her thoughts ran to Surefoot. And was this not strange—that she should think in friendly terms of the acknowledged Indian when this renegade of a half-breed menaced her?

He became impatient, and touched her on the shoulder. She looked up into the brutally frank eyes. She noted the scar in his left chin; the straight, willful mouth.

"I reckon it makes a difference with you now you know I'm white—eh, girlie?" He laughed softly.

Very slowly she shook her head.

"Why, my people are the same as yours; my feelings are the same as yours. See! I speak your language."

Still she said nothing.

"Can't you l-like me—a little?"

Swiftly she answered this. "Oh, yes, I like you a little, and I could like you very much," she hastened to add.

He breathed deeply and came close to her. "That's the way to talk, little one." And he put an arm about her.

She took the arm away "I could like you very much if you took me outside, gave me back my horse, and showed me the way to ride safely out of this wilderness."

Again the soft laugh. "Maybe I'll do that very little thing for you—to-morrow—or next day," he replied.

"No. Now! Now!" she demanded.

"Not until I've had what is coming to me." He seized her and this time did not pause to ask for kisses; he gave them, instead. He rained them on her hair, her forehead, her cheeks, her mouth, despite her frantic efforts to evade him.

Then, suddenly she slipped through his arm and wilted into a little pathetic heap at his feet. She clasped her arms about his knees and began to implore him to spare her. She begged as she had not thought

it was possible to beg. She humbled her spirit in a very humility of supplication. Somehow the knowledge that he had white blood, coupled with his own declaration of at least a rudimentary honorable desire, fired her with a wild hope She poured forth her appeal with despairing vehemence.

In a brief moment he became impatient and lifted her roughly to her feet. He tilted her chin up in his hand and looked fiercely into her eyes.

"Listen, little one," he commanded. "I don't like rough stuff. That's not my style. I want you to come to me of your own free will. Do you hear?"

He paused for an answer. Her eyes were vacant. They did not see him, but stared instead, into the beyond. He shook her roughly.

Then he passed to the door, leaving her alone for the moment; threw it wide open and leaned out. Evidently satisfied with what he saw he called to her. She did not hear, or, if she did hear, did not respond. He was obliged to go for her. He seized her by the wrist and dragged her to the door. He pointed out.

She looked. Half a dozen Indians, half-breeds in his hire, squatted silently on the ground a few paces away. Beyond them were tethered their horses. It seemed they were waiting there patiently, inexorably for something that should be paid to them. They had earned their bit, and they were satisfied that eventually they would have what was coming to them.

Philippa shrank away, aghast.

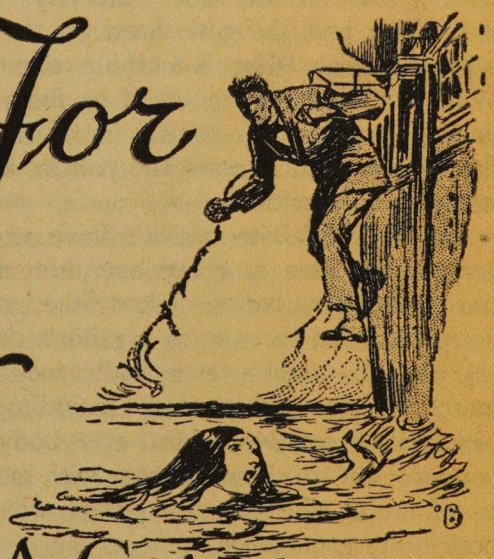
The Panther closed the door. He faced her, with the evil glint lighting his fierce eyes.

"You shall have your voluntary choice, little one," said he nonchalantly, as he turned to leave her alone. "I'll give you two hours to think it over. You can have me, or—" and he waved his well arm toward the sitting, stolid, sordid half-breeds, "or —my men. It's up to you!"

Abruptly he left her alone, went out and locked the door. She sank into a heap on the divan, wailing bitterly.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

A Run For His Love



by George M. A. Cain

AS I came out of the dining saloon after supper that first night out of New York, Jerry Grace, our second mate, was attending to the job the old man and I had swiftly wished on him—that of keeping the ladies aboard happy.

I chuckled as I went on up to the wheel-house. Jerry is so everlastingly out of the ordinary type of ladies' man; he's such a huge six-foot-three and two hundred pounds of solid, joyous high-class seaman, I can't get used yet to his facility at enter-

taining the girls. There's no denying that he likes them. And they—well, he certainly kept them happy.

Of course he'd been raised that way. His two years with us were for practice on big ships. He'd won his master's ticket with his father's yacht, before Grace, Sr., smashed up on Wall Street and blew his brains out. Jerry chose the sea then professionally because he liked it better than anything on *terra firma*.

He was wont to come to me with his troubles. I suppose he couldn't help a snobbish respect for the university degree I got before I found my throat wouldn't keep anywhere but on salt water. Still I was surprised with the nature of the difficulty he brought me an hour later that evening.

I'd never known the girls to bother him before. There was only one he liked any better than he liked them all. He could forget their charms in less than no time after we'd seen them safely landed. The one girl was the old man's daughter.

Of course it's against the rules and all that, but the captain just has to have her aboard most of the time. He pays for a stateroom, and she gets down on the passenger list as Miss Something else than Waite. I have my doubts if he fools anybody higher up. He owns a lot of stock in the company and knows the politics of the maritime authorities.

But Helen Waite needn't have worried Jerry. She was as crazy over him as all the passenger ladies. And she shares Jerry's love of the sea, as a sailor's daughter should. And — everybody took that match about for granted, including the principals themselves. And everybody was happy about it. It was a case with most of us of seeing the two youngsters we liked best liking each other.

Anyhow, she hadn't caught us this time. And he'd been singing happy in his room just before we sailed with a fat letter from her, explaining what had delayed her return East from some California aunt's she'd been visiting. He came in from the séance with the load of traveling schoolma'ams taking our trip down the South American coast for a change from Europe—came into my room with a worry on his chest and in his face—

"Say, Mr. Kirk, you know that story of mine about the missionary wives from Holland, don't you?" he demanded.

"Rather—for Heaven's sake don't—" I answered.

"Well — is there anything wrong with that yarn? I mean something a lady might object to? Lord! They always seemed to think it was funny before. All the others did to-night."

"I never tell it to ladies, Mr. Grace," I answered with a touch of severity in my tone. We're very careful, he and I, about our misters on shipboard. I am the first officer. Ashore he calls me "Pop."

"You—you don't?" he gasped.

Obviously Jerry had failed to make a hit with somebody.

The following afternoon, when I was on the bridge, I was a little surprised to see him in a tête-à-tête on the hurricane deck right aft the chart room, with one of the school teachers. Jerry wasn't given to solitaires with girls, excepting Helen Waite, of course.

It looked to me as if neither of them was specially happy. Jerry wore a worried look again. The girl—she was rather handsome in a *grande dame* sort of fashion — acted bored.

"What are you laughing at, sir?" asked the quartermaster at the wheel. He was a jolly chap who never wanted to miss a joke. I was wondering if—hoping that—this was the girl who had failed to respond to Jerry's mirth last night, and he was apologizing for the respectability of his stories.

"What's the joke?" the man at the wheel asked again.

"I'm not sure that there is any yet," I told him; but another look at Jerry, just for once so obviously all at sea with a girl, seemed to me a good bit like a joke.

It was a whole lot like plenty of jokes. It didn't take many days in back-firing all over the ship. That night the orchestra was ready, and the usual dancing started in the saloon. Ever since Jerry had been aboard, the Barbara Frietchie dances had been growing famous. It wasn't unusual to hear a passenger remark that a friend had

suggested that boat because it had such fine dancing.

Jerry always turned a dance into what I think it ought to be, if it's going to be at all—a romp. He simply wouldn't stand for wall-flowers. Two voyages back, I had seen him drag a lady evangelist to the floor, trying to apologize to everybody at once by saying out loud:

"I've always preached against dancing—but, of course you're young enough to be my own son!"

But drag this Miss Webster? I'd found out her name now. What Jerry did was to get about twice around the floor with a fat Jane of forty who seemed to belong to their party and to be extra good friends with Miss Webster. She was winded with a fox-trot just started—which was exactly what that young scoundrel wanted of her. She fairly toppled onto the seat next Miss Webster. And Jerry sat down beside her.

Of course I couldn't be in there all the evening. But I didn't see him anywhere else the whole time. He was carrying on the most solemn flirtation with fat-and-forty you could imagine between a widowed minister and the wife of his late main deacon. And it was painfully, agonizingly evident that he was talking *to* the stout dame and *at* the fair one on the other side of her.

I hadn't attempted to trip a toe over a floor in the year and a half he'd been aboard. The old man had quit going near the dances. A young engineer who had been fairly lively socially, had got a higher berth on another ship of the line. The chief steward and the doctor were about in my class—they could do it if they had to, and they would do it as if they had to.

Well, the dance quit at ten after ten. Everybody went to bed, except the men who played cards in the smoking saloon. I got a feeling that this voyage wasn't going to be a success in the passenger department.

Of course South American steamers are most interested in freight; but a good passenger business is worth having. And the Blue W Line was out to build up all it could. Quite a lot of confirmed travelers, who didn't find Europe attractive since the war, had come our way; and the commerce we had picked up during the war had more men than usual traveling down that way. Europe hadn't so nearly got it all stolen back again then.

For a year and a half the Barbara Frietchie had been the banner ship in this respect. The Blue W Line was leading everything else in getting it; and the Barbara Frietchie was leading the Blue W's. Just the last voyage I'd overheard a woman remarking that she had already booked her passage back with the purser; and telling her friend how she'd had so much better time on the ship than she'd ever had on the European liners.

It was not like that now. We weren't down to Key West before I overheard something I was meant to overhear:

"I wish I hadn't paid clear through. I'd get off and go back to some quiet farmhouse in Jersey for a lively time. I'd like to know who started that thing about the good times on this tub. How much longer—"

But, of course Jerry was hired to navigate the ship as needed, and not to entertain the passengers. And of course a man has a right to choose his own wife. Only—I'd set my heart on seeing him marry Helen some day; and I knew she'd set *her* heart on it.

And there wasn't a thing against this Miss Webster, of course. She wasn't an ordinary school-teacher. She gave the kind of lectures they call travelogues, to women's clubs and select girls' schools and such places. She was after first-hand material now, and making notes most of the time.

But—it hurt me trying to imagine Jerry, of all the he-men God ever made, in the rôle of wife—I mean, husband, of course—to the kind of woman who is a successful public speaker. And it hurt me worse yet to see him tagging around after her friends instead of coming right at her like a man.

But Jerry seemed hell-bent to attain the distinction of a lady-lecturer's husband. He wised up, while we were in Havana, to the line of talk that she really wanted. He paid me a visit as soon as we had cleared the harbor and got things in running shape after it.

"Say, pop," he began, forgetting ship

etiquette in his wild eagerness, "have you any dope about Curaçao? That darned cyclopedia in the library—oh, that isn't close-up, inside stuff. I want to know about the psychology of the natives. What are they like, really? What's the Dutch influence done to the place? All I know about it is seeing mixed niggers taking off cargo and putting it on, and a bunch of stories about the American gobs the times they have been down here."

I told him I'd never got deeply into mixed nigger psychology, and the Dutch influence had got to me but once at a banquet ashore principally washed down with Holland gin. I knew half a dozen shipping agents.

He couldn't make much of that; but at Curaçao he fairly loaded up with volumes from which he could get side lights on Caracas. Considering that we made that run in fourteen hours, he did pretty well. I found Miss Webster actually listening to what Jerry had to say. She was putting some of it down.

And he had collated enough about Trinidad a day and a half before we got there, to make of himself a walking historical-physical-ethnical geography on the place. And what he didn't know about British Guiana when we hit Georgetown simply isn't in books. Paramaribo, Cayenne—it was incredible that those steaming, waterlogged towns could have possessed all the facts he knew about them. But his masterpiece was Pará. He'd had a week to dig it all up, and he'd managed to buy about everything ever written on the Amazon River system. He was prepared to reel off the distinctions in the way the different naked tribes of the upper rivers wore their mud paint. His brain must have swum with a complete aquarium of piscatorial knowledge.

He came in occasionally, and told me thrilling things about the different breeds of white ants a couple of thousand miles up and likely to stay there. He was practicing on me to make sure he had his lesson down fine. Or it would be some deep disquisition on the healthfulness of some fish as food in its peculiar season; or the religion of a tribe with only three hundred words to its whole vocabulary. I got so tired of it, I lost interest in whom or what he married. If he was going to stay that way, he would best choose a deaf-mute who wouldn't ever have to stop him to get a word in edgewise.

But he didn't stay that way exactly. Down in Bahia, Miss Webster admitted she was glad she had met him; but mighty sorry she had come all this way instead of hiring a stenographer to take down all he knew right in New York. Then, instead of staying to listen on, she buried herself in her notes, trying to fish out a few of the more important things for the limited time of a series of lectures.

The next I saw him in my quarters, he didn't try to pump me full of information about the prize coon town of all America. It wasn't because he hadn't read up on Bahia; it was to give me vague hints of the latest sad development in what ailed him.

"Mr. Kirk," he announced with the cheerfulness wherewith I'd have expected him to announce his purpose of immediate suicide, "I'm going to give up the sea. This is my last voyage as a seaman."

"Well?" I said indifferently. My disappointment in him had got so keen it was making me forget that he really had some good points.

"After all," he mourned on, "a man's mind is the big thing about him. He should use it for all it's worth. Of course, in your case, your health wouldn't let you do the kind of thing you're mentally equipped for. But I have no such excuse."

"If you're meaning to insinuate," I spoke up belligerently, "that it doesn't take brains to run a first-class steamship—"

"Oh, bull!" he interrupted with a snarl of impatience—it looked to me as if much study was getting him nervous. He had rings under his eyes. "You know what I mean. You wouldn't class the captain of the best ship afloat with any sort of a man of letters, for instance."

"I should say not," I exclaimed, "not where the captain could hear me."

"Oh, you're not talking sense," he fairly cried. "You know you wouldn't have done this if it hadn't been for your throat."

"Thank God for my throat!" I ejaculated. "I'd probably have taught Greek to

high school boys! And I'd have missed—that!" I pointed out of the porthole. There wasn't a thing in sight but green water and blue sky. But, if I'm not a born seaman, I've been made one these many years; and I was talking to a born seaman if ever there was one. He understood.

I wished I hadn't said it. The tears stood in his fine blue eyes. For the first time I realized that, whatever it was about Miss Webster, it had got him where he was ready to make a sacrifice of the thing he loved next best in life for her. I didn't need to be told that she had suggested he was too well informed, too intellectual, to waste his talents on the sea.

Pitying a big husky like Jerry Grace is sickish stuff; but I was so sorry for him and so disgusted with him that, in my effort to comfort him, I think I broke all previous records in saying the wrong thing.

"Ellis told you who's aboard the Sâo Roque?" I asked. The big steam yacht of the coffee planter had overtaken us during the forenoon, barely showing a shimmer of smoke to the west. We had got her name by wireless, and the news. Senhor Cassem was bringing Helen Waite down to join us at Rio. He could afford to; we had saved him and the Sâo Roque in the big blow of the year before.

"The old man told me," Jerry answered listlessly. His voice was husky. But I thought he had forgotten Helen so completely, her coming held no interest for him.

I was mistaken. Helen was part of the life he'd lived and loved and was going to give up for Miss Webster. And the thought of her was an added straw to the misery the sacrifice was costing him. He dropped onto my seat and fairly groaned:

"Oh, God! I wish we'd get such a hell of a storm it would damn near sink the damn ship!" His swearing was the obvious man's substitute for regular weeps. "I wish it would show her whether this is the place for brains and muscles and all a real man can ever have in him. If she could just see the old man in a bad sea, maybe—maybe—she'd—"

Maybe she would have; but we didn't get any storm. And then, to crown everything, Miss Webster suddenly decided she wouldn't go on down to Buenos Aires at all. She'd collected enough material for a barrel of lectures. She'd get off at Rio, spend three days there, and catch the Betsy Ross back.

Of course, after he'd practically blubbered out his confidence to me, Jerry continued to keep me posted on the sad details. The girl had made her sudden decision two days out from Rio de Janeiro. He couldn't lose sight of her that way. He came in, looking like a broken heart.

"Pop," he all but wailed, "she won't have me. She thinks too much of her work ever to give it up for marriage anyhow. Oh—she said she was sorry—I'd helped her with so much information. She hoped she hadn't done anything to help me make such a mistake.

"God knows she hasn't. But—hanged if I understand why. She's the first girl I ever met I couldn't make like me at all. I—I—" He broke off. Then he quashed up the little hope I was raising that now he'd forget her as fast as he could.

"Damned if I'll quit yet. Faint heart never won fair lady." But he didn't look what you could call hopeful about it. He certainly took it hard. Of course he kept pretty well out of her way until we were riding at quarter speed right into one of the most beautiful bays of the world.

I saw a little motor boat shoot out from shore a mile away. In a moment I noticed that the skipper, with nothing to do but wait while the pilot ran things, had a glass on the launch. There was nothing for me to do for another half hour. I started for the bridge, just to get a little share of the old man's joy in seeing his daughter again. I was wondering how much he had noticed of Jerry's recent actions, whether he would have anything to say about them.

And here came Jerry from somewhere. He had his eye fixed on a certain lifeboat—the one to starboard at the extreme after end of the forward deck house. He almost ran into me.

"Pop," he paused to mutter, "I've tried everything else. I've missed the one bet that—that she needed."

There was a wild determination about his whisper. He looked almost desperate.

"What's that?" I asked him.

"Caveman stuff!" he flung over his shoulder, as he hurried off down the hurricane deck toward that midship lifeboat. Of course the wheelhouse was only three steps higher. The old man was on top of that—alone.

"She's coming!" he yelled down to me and to Jerry. I don't think Jerry even heard it. He went right on.

"Come up here, you can see her—by George! She waved to me. She hasn't a glass; but I reckon she knows I'm looking."

The old man didn't take his eyes from his telescope to see whether we came or not. Half way up the ladder, I got a nervous feeling about Jerry—a notion that he was looking a bit too wild. I peered aft, over the ladder's rail.

All the passengers were below that deck, but one. I had already guessed Miss Webster was there, on top, taking in all the beauties of the scene—and notes on them. She was in a corner. Jerry was headed for that corner, and tiptoeing to keep her from a chance to dodge him until he was right up to her.

I decided I'd better get after him. He had plumb forgotten he was an officer on that ship, and she a passenger, and the deuce of a mess he could make with any rough stuff. I would have called to him, but I hoped to keep the skipper from noticing.

But I guess Jerry's nerve half failed him at the last moment. Anyhow, he stopped dead when she looked up. He didn't rush right in and grab her. I paused, too, ducking behind a ventilator. If it was going to be a tame little last effort at a proposal, I didn't want to mix in.

Jerry took another hitch on his courage. As nearly as one could judge from the back of his head, he must have been looking her in the eye as if he intended to hypnotize her. I was only ten feet away, and I heard the way he got off—

"Susan Webster, I love you. You don't know what that means—you don't know what love means—you don't know me. I'm going to teach you. I don't believe you ever let a man kiss you in your life. I'm going to kiss you without letting. I'm—"

With that he started toward her, slowly, certainly, and, to her eyes, as I could see them from my hiding-place, simply dreadfully. It was that look on her face which kept me just a second too long about butting into the scene. She was more scared than Jerry could possibly warrant.

He might possibly carry out his threat to kiss her. More likely, he would get a tight hold on her and let her realize how helpless she was in his big paws and—well, it struck me right then that, if the girl had it in her to love any one, Jerry wasn't so far wrong in his last thought as to the method of teaching her. Whatever heart nature had given her was cased up in a regular armor-plate of conceit. And about two minutes in Jerry's husky arms might crush that armor all up and have her realizing what nice big arms they were, and that even a kiss which was meant as a betrothal needn't be the saddest thing in the world.

I guess I was wrong about it. But something in her look gave me the notion she was taking her lesson before it was given—that she had a flicker of longing to see what his love was going to be like. That notion held me in check for another pair of seconds. When she started to duck under the rope where the rail opened for the lifeboat, I thought she meant, "Catch me first," even if her lips did seem to frame the words:

"You are a brute, after all."

Anyhow, she didn't yell for help. I believe now she was scared out of her voice.

The next second I yelled. She was backing away from him. She was backing to the sheer edge of the deck. She backed right off it flinging out her arms in a wild effort to catch her balance, and sailing into space.

I had previously remarked that the approaching motorboat was a fast hydroplane, which Senhor Cassem had probably purchased in the States and brought down for a tender. I think my yell, intended to warn Miss Webster, crossed the words of the captain in the eighty feet of deck between him and us—

"Lower the accommodation ladder for them, Mr.—" He would have given the order to Jerry. It was right then he made the discovery that we were not on the bridge behind him. And he saw the rest and heard

my yell at the same time. It was he who uttered the first shout—

"Man overboard!" By that time there was. Jerry had vaulted head-first over the rail before the girl could have hit the water below. I got to it in time to see the splash behind her. How many times she had turned over in falling, I don't know. She had chanced to strike the surface exactly head-first or foot-first, and she went deep. Jerry, perceiving that the second between her start down and his meant several feet between their positions in the water, bent his hands and body to throw himself toward the spot where she had sunk.

That made his dive too shallow. From away up there, I saw him pass clear over her. I don't think he could see her. She was wearing a dark suit. He began swimming about under water. He was going deeper as the ship carried me to an angle where I couldn't see him any more.

Of course the captain had telegraphed the order to stop the engines. The two had gone down so far aft that he dared not have them reversed. The propellers might hit both of them on the head.

I threw a lifebelt overboard. It seemed quite needless. If ever a man were capable of taking care of two or three drowning women of Miss Webster's size, Jerry Grace could do it. Three other lifebelts hit the water as mine did. I came as nearly jumping down the ladder to the lower deck amidship as I have ever done, and raced through the after-deckhouse. I reached a cross passage, dashed to its open end and peered down.

Neither of the two was in sight. I felt suddenly sick. Suppose there were sharks! Suppose—

I quit supposing and went overboard to find out. It was a foolish thing for me to do. I am only a fairish swimmer. I would but complicate things for a rescue like that. It was doubly foolish because I neglected to consider how near the propeller was untill I banged the tip of a blade with my head. Don't tell me stars can't shine under water. I saw a million. It was all I did see.

When I got to the surface I was just fit to keep myself there until some one should come along and pull me out—if he came quick. The crack on the skull had all but knocked me unconscious. I had forgotten all about what I had come for. And, when the bow of the motorboat shot around the stern in a wide circle, to miss the propeller blades I had forgotten before, I saw it only as my hope of prolonged life. I didn't realize that I was clinging to another propeller blade until it was jarred almost from my grasp.

Right beside me, Jerry Grace's head leaped out of the water. He stared a second at me, spouted spray like a whale, and went down again. Somebody stuck a boathook at me, as the motorboat swept in close. I grabbed the hook and clung to it. That was all I did for Jerry Grace or Miss Susan Webster. Senhor Cassem and a dusky native dragged me onto the launch.

"Here she is—take her," I heard a voice in the water under the launch's rail. "Don't stop for me. I think she's hurt. Rush her ashore to a hospital. I'll get up the ladder." Jerry never had any faith in our ship's doctor.

I managed to raise my head to see him swimming off. Senhor Cassem was examining the girl's limp form. Helen Waite was helping him.

"Not hurt—drowned." Her voice was soothing in its expert efficiency. "We can save her."

They got her face down. Helen began the regular pump-handle movements of the arms to empty the lungs and start breathing. The stern of the ship drifted past us.

"She's coming to already," I heard Helen say. And she turned around and looked over the water.

I looked where she did. Jerry had got a hand on the bottom rung of the ladder. It had meant a swim of four or five hundred feet to make it. He tried to pull himself up. To my astonishment, he dropped back. He made another try.

"Good Heaven!" Helen screamed. "His arm's broken!"

I recalled the bump I had felt as I clung to the propeller. Jerry had hit it, too. He had been in a hurry to reach the surface and had struck it harder than I did. And now—he didn't come up after the second failure to make the ladder.

Helen was over the side of the launch while she spoke. In four seconds there were three more men in the water, from the side of the ship. One of the boats was swinging out on its davits. But Helen beat them all to the spot where Jerry had last shown. I don't pretend that she was another Annette Kellerman; but I'd have to see Annette swim in real water, without the aid of a movie operator speeding the reel, and with a heavy linen skirt and a coat on, before I'd admit that she could have led the skipper's daughter to the point just after the ladder of the Barbara Frietchie.

But that was the trouble—the point. Jerry had made hard work of finding Miss Webster, though he started not twenty-five feet from her splash. Helen Waite had four hundred feet to cover. She dived—came up—dived again.

The realization came to me that none on earth could tell just where Jerry had gone down. Nothing is more nearly impossible than locating a spot in water amid objects like the ship and the launch, drifting on their own momentum. We had lost Jerry. Down the girl went, and down again. The men were diving, too—two others after the first three. But the girl stayed under longest and stayed up for the shortest breathing spells of them all.

Afraid to start the engine, we pushed the launch in nearer with oars. The ship's boat got in with us. Helen was giving out. Her face came up white to the surface; she coughed great gulps of salt water. Her father's faith in her prowess as a swimmer could stand it no longer. He ordered her to stop. Then he took the long header, clear from the bridge, to stop her.

Two of the first three men over had given up and were clinging to the gunwale of the boat. Helen lay still on her back, breathing weakly and fast, raising her head now and then just enough to note the approach of her father, swimming heavily from where he had come to the surface. She waited until he was almost upon her.

With a quick flip of her lithe but almost exhausted body she was face down again and driving herself straight for the bottom of the bay. The old man sank from view, too; but he carried the too buoyant flesh of his years. He could not stay down. He came up, blue with near apoplexy; he soon went white with anxiety.

We watched—those of us still on the launch, the men in the water. We peered down into the murky green. The two latest and freshest of the divers went down and came up, blowing and blown.

A little ripple of bubbles rose to the surface, a few yards from where we were all looking.

Quick as a flash one of the men who had come down with the boat plunged at the bubbles. He was my jolly boatswain. He came up—his face drawn, coughing, adding tears to the sea water streaming down his cheeks.

"I—I can't get down far enough," he gasped.

"Look! What's that?"

I turned with a start. It was Miss Webster who had spoken. We had all forgotten her. She pointed a water-shriveled finger.

We paddled, rowed, swam—

It was Helen's head—the back of it. The ship's boat reached it first. Of course she was quite unconscious. A sailor's arms got hold of her, lifted.

"God!" he gasped at her weight. Then—

"She's got him—his body!" said somebody. And she had.

Yes, of course we all survived the thing. Helen was not a great deal longer in coming around than the other woman had been. And she was sitting up and urging everybody to work a little longer before we got Jerry to show signs of life. The ship's doctor set his arm for him, whether he liked it or not.

He was the only one who was not about by the following day. Helen and I were about him most of it. I realized what a grip the lad had got on me.

Helen left the room for something. Jerry looked up at me. He looked worried. If he hadn't just got over being so near dead I should have figured he ought to be worried.

"Gosh! Pop, what kind of a mess am I in, anyhow?" he finally asked me. "Here I've scared one nice girl who would

not love me so I barely saved her from death. Another nice girl who might have loved me has saved me from death. Of course she saw what I did to Miss Webster. That settles me with her. She's trying to nurse me a bit now, because she's the sort that would do that for anybody, just as she nearly drowned herself to fish me up. I—I guess I'd better have stuck to her right through."

"But—have you found out how Miss Webster feels about it?"

"I haven't," I snapped at him. "Here's a note she sent in while you were having that last nap. Maybe that will tell you. Shall I open it for you?"

He took it eagerly—confound him! Holding it up with his one good hand, he read it once. Then he read it again. His hand shook.

"Read it," he croaked at me suddenly.

I hesitated an instant, then took it. I read:

MR. JERE. GRACE, SECOND MATE, THE BARBARA FRIETCHIE.

DEAR SIR:

After due consideration of the unfortunate publicity which might accrue to me, as well as the fact that you saved me, at considerable pains and injury to yourself, from the death to which you so nearly drove me, I have decided to refrain from prosecuting you. Of course I am assuming that you will not be quite foolish enough to attempt to claim any reward which may be customary in cases where the circumstances are different.

I am further moved to leniency by the fear that I made possible your mistake as to our relative positions by my mistaken interest in your welfare. I realize, and hope you will come to see, that my mistake consisted in confusing a retentive memory with real intellectuality. I trust you will continue your usefulness in the sphere for which nature made you. No one capable of really higher things would imagine that every woman must inevitably fall victim to the charms of a uniform of good fit on a sturdy figure.

No answer to this will be necessary. I hope and believe you will be satisfied to consider the incident closed. And, thanking you for your past courteous help in my work, however unfortunately based in mistaken assumption, also wishing you future happiness in your own sphere with a woman of your own class, I remain,

Very sincerely,

SUSAN WEBSTER.

"What do you think of it, pop?" Jerry asked me finally.

"I think it's a pity you didn't get her. As quintessent damfools, she, with her lofty notion of herself, and you falling for it, are certainly in a class all by yourselves."

And suddenly I perceived that Jerry was laughing. It was the nearest approach to the old lighthearted, happy sailor's laugh I'd heard from him in a month.

"Oh, the injustice of it!" he finally cried. "Why, man—as a damfool I beat her a million miles. And for lofty notions—why, I was so sure I was the loveliest thing on earth that I could not be happy until I'd proven it by giving up everything for the one woman who was sane enough not to act as if she wanted me. But tell me this, man—tell me this! Where am I going to find anybody in my class to marry?"

"Are you sure that's what ailed you?" I insisted.

"Oh, I'll say I am," he groaned. "I'll say so. But—the question! Where will I find another—"

"Sh-h!" I warned. "She's liable to come in any minute. Of course she didn't see what started Miss Webster off as a high diver, and there is a month of your history she doesn't know. And if you never tell her, I won't. She thinks you made a heroic rescue. And, in her poor ignorance, she shares that fool notion of yours that you're the loveliest thing on earth."

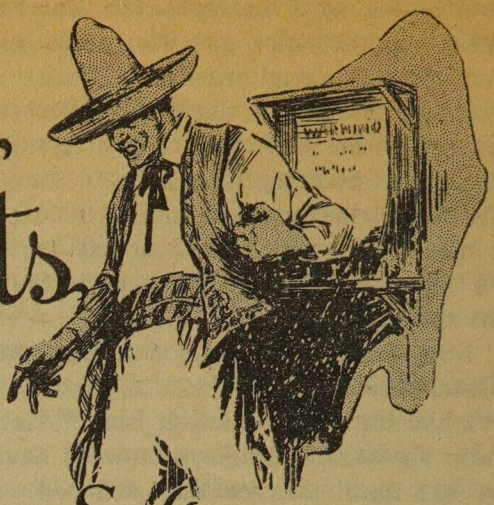
And she came; and I went. After a while I came back.

"Say, pop," *Jerry* whispered, "I'm all wised up now. I'm not the loveliest thing—I'm the luckiest darned lunatic in the world."

"GHOST LIGHTS"

by Hamilton Thompson, a strange tale of the sea, will be our Novelette next week.

Brass Commandments



Part IV

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

"FLASH IT!"

IN the silvery moon radiance the faces of the men in the group that had followed Campan out were clearly outlined. All were silent, tense, expectant. Campan had talked much, had boasted, had threatened. But at this minute he was exhibiting a hardihood and courage that none had dared to show since the warning had been posted. And in the crowd that surrounded Campan were many who might in justice have been identified as the "one other" mentioned by Lannon. There was a certain awe in the eyes of these guilty ones, a wondering admiration of Campan.

Campan had heard of the posted warning before entering town. One among the men who watched him now had carried word to him. And, knowing Lannon's reputation, Campan had come; had entered town in violation of the warning; had come armed.

Campan laughed loudly, raised his right hand to sweep the cartridges from the little shelf below the bulletin board. There the hand stopped, still raised, poised, the fingers spread. From a point in the street, penetrating the tense silence, came a voice, sharp, cold, full of a strange menace:

"Campan!"

As though they were puppets moved by the power of a master hand the men in the crowd faced the street. Confronting them, his legs asprawl, the upper part of his body leaning forward a little, was Lannon. While the men and Campan had been giving their entire attention to the bulletin board, Lannon had left his position at the side of the building. As he now stood the crowd was in front of him; the front of the post office forming a background which outlined them clearly.

Concertedly, staring at Lannon, the men around Campan began to move away from him. As they moved they raised their hands, thus mutely advertising the peaceableness of their intentions. Strange it was how swiftly they opened a clear space around Campan.

Campan had not changed position. He still stood, facing the bulletin board, his right hand raised. There had been no mistaking the voice which had uttered his name. Campan knew Lannon stood behind him.

"Campan, I reckon you've read that notice or you wouldn't be wanting to tear it down. You're heeled; you know what I told you that night at Benson's. I'm going to deliver one of my commandments! Turn around!"

Slowly Campan turned, his right hand still raised. He moved jerkily, as though forcing his reluctant muscles to function;

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 20.

after turning he stood with the right hand still raised, staring at the sinister figure in front of him.

"You're getting your chance, Campan. Let that hand down—slowly, keeping it away from your gun!"

Campan's hand slowly descended. It paused imperceptibly as it reached the butt of the weapon at his hip, and Lannon's arms moved upward a little, in significant preparation. But Campan's hand continued downward until his hand swung at his side below the butt of the gun.

There was a silence while one might have drawn a full breath. Then Lannon spoke shortly:

"*Flash it!*"

Campan's hand leaped upward; his gun seemed to spring to meet his eager fingers. Incredibly swift was the movement, amazingly sure Campan's grasp on the handle of the gun. Yet while the muzzle was still in the holster a lancelike streak of fire darted from Lannon's left hip and ended at Campan's right wrist, while a second lance flame, seeming simultaneous with the other, leaped from Lannon's right hip and appeared to touch Campan's head. Campan reeled, spun around and fell in a heap against the wall of the building, almost under the bulletin board. His gun had dropped from his hand; it now lay in the dust of the street, glittering brightly in the moonlight.

Campan was not unconscious. While Lannon and the crowd watched him he twisted around, sat up, lifted his left hand to his left cheek and held it there, groaning, cursing. His right hand hung limply at his side.

Lannon's two guns were still in his hands. He stood as when he had faced Campan, his legs slightly asprawl, his body bent forward a little, from the hips.

"I'm looking for the one other I mentioned in that notice," he said. "If he's in this crowd I'm inviting him to go for his gun!"

The mysterious personage Lannon had called upon did not appear; none of the raised hands moved downward. Lannon's smile was cold and mirthless.

"Well, modesty will keep that other guy's skin whole, I reckon. Meanwhile, some of you had better lead Campan to the doctor; he's creased rather deep, and I don't want him to bleed to death."

For an instant he stood. No man moved or spoke. Then he sheathed his guns and walked down the street toward the hotel, not even looking back toward the awed group in front of the post office.

A few minutes later Lannon was leading Polestar out of the stable behind the hotel. Between two buildings, after he had mounted, he saw some men leading Campan down the street, and he smiled as Campan's curses reached his ears. He rode Polestar eastward over the plains, following a faint trail that he knew well. Half an hour later he was dismounting at the gate of Benson's corral.

Benson was glad to see him.

"You old son-of-a-gun!" he exclaimed as he stepped out on the gallery and scrutinized Lannon in the light that streamed out of the open door. "You've sure got this country stirred up with that notice you stuck up on the post office. There's a heap of guys goin' straight in this basin who used to think it was a joke to rustle cattle! Lannon, your law is the best law that's struck these parts in five years!"

"Benson, this basin will stand a lot of cleaning up."

"Sure; you talk straight there. An' the only law that will put the fear of Gawd in the hearts of them damned rustlers is the sort of law you stood on end on that shelf on the bulletin board! Lannon, there's talk among the honest owners of organizin' a bunch of regulators to get behind you! You've sure took right a-hold!"

"I'll be glad to have help, Benson, but I'm leaving that decision to the honest men in the basin. Have you seen Ellen Bosworth?"

"She rode in about dusk, Lannon. Mother Benson put her to bed. She was trembly an' scared. She didn't have much to say, but me an' mother sort of suspicioned somethin' had happened to her. You don't reckon to know what it was?"

"I haven't talked to Ellen lately," evaded Lannon. "I was riding the west trail yesterday and saw her ahead of me. When

I got to that flat ridge just outside of town I met Gloria Stowe. Gloria said Ellen had ridden over here."

"She's lost her hat, I reckon," said Benson. "She wasn't wearin' any."

"I found her hat, Benson; that's what brought me here. Picked it up on the trail. In my slicker. I reckon I'll stay here overnight and give it to her in the morning."

"Sure; we'll be mighty glad to have you, Lannon. You just wait a minute till I get on my boots an' I'll help you put your horse away."

Lannon was aware of Benson's suspicious glances while they stood for an instant on the gallery, talking; and later when they went into the house Benson's eyes seemed to be probing for information. Before going to bed Benson smiled knowingly at his guest.

"Mighty interestin' gal, Lannon. Well, I don't reckon I blame you for wantin' to hang around an' give her the hat yourself."

Shortly after dawn the next morning Lannon was coming out of the stable after feeding and watering Polestar and Silver, when he saw Ellen Bosworth, hatless, standing near the little stream of water that spanned the corral. She saw him as he looked toward her, and came toward him, smiling.

"Benson told me you were here," she said. "He said you had found my hat, that you had seen me riding ahead of you, and that you met Gloria Stowe."

"Benson is accurate as well as prompt, Miss Bosworth. I did all of the things he said I did. I have your hat in my slicker. Except that it may be crumpled a little it seems to be in good shape."

"I suppose you — you talked with Gloria?" she asked with a sharp glance at him.

"As a matter of fact, I rode to town with her." He smiled at her, seeing her agitation. "She told me about your adventure with Clearwater. If you don't mind telling me I should like to hear what happened."

She told him.

"I'm glad you haven't told anybody but Gloria Stowe," he said when she finished. "You see, Clearwater carried the joke too far. In fact, he overacted."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, her face flushing.

"Clearwater is not a rustler, Miss Bosworth. He is merely pretending to be with Campan. I met him on the trail yesterday after you got away from him, and he told me that he had possibly scared you more than he intended. But he had been afraid that if he seemed half-hearted about it you'd have a suspicion that he was only pretending to be afraid you would escape."

"Lannon, he tried to kill me! He shot at me!"

"I know it. I was right behind you."

"Why, he might have hit me! I might have fallen from my horse. I was so scared it is a wonder I didn't! Lannon, that doesn't sound like the truth to me!"

"Possibly not," said Lannon calmly. "As I say, Clearwater overacted. But he had to make it strong. For if he hadn't been convincing, and you had mentioned it to somebody, Campan would make short work of him."

"But people will know now that Clearwater is a rustler, for I shall tell them he is. Won't that be just as dangerous for him?"

"I think not, Miss Bosworth; for you must not talk about what happened. I have told Gloria Stowe not to talk, and this morning I am going to ride over to tell your father about the incident and to suggest that he add his advice to mine."

She seemed relieved. "Well, I'm glad you are going; I'll be delighted to have company. I don't mind telling you that, pretending or not, Clearwater seemed to me to be very much in earnest."

After breakfast they rode west at a slow lope. They crossed the big level that encircled Benson's ranch, followed a sinuous and broken trail through some hills, and finally reached the ridge on which Ellen had been riding the day before when she had met Gloria Stowe.

"Then Clearwater didn't follow me very far after I got out of that basin just this side of the big mesa?" asked Ellen.

"That's as far as he followed you. I caught him there."

Twice as they rode she glanced covertly at him before she asked a question that had been disturbing her:

"Do you find Gloria Stowe interesting?"

"Yes, Miss Bosworth."

"As a type or as an individual?" There was light banter in her voice, though a strange impatience agitated her. She had found Gloria interesting in that the girl represented the crudeness and the elemental sturdiness of the West; she could not understand how a man who had spent five years in the society of Eastern women could be attracted by a girl like Gloria. She was surprised and disappointed and slightly indignant when his face now turned red.

"As both, I think, Miss Bosworth," answered Lannon.

She laughed, but only to conceal her disappointment. She felt vaguely uneasy and resentful. The feeling was indescribably subtle; she had never felt it before, but it was curiously like a sensation that had once oppressed her when as a girl a boy friend had selected her chum instead of herself as the recipient of some slight favor. The feeling wasn't injured vanity; it wasn't consciousness of neglect. It was jealousy!

Strange that she should admit it. She had never been jealous of any woman; and among her Eastern friends had been some worthy and capable strategist in the warfare for manly attention. She had laughed at them for thinking she was interested in the men they had selected as their victims.

Could she now admit that she was jealous of this Western girl? Was the feeling jealousy, after all? She glanced at Lannon and was conscious of a queer breathlessness. Lannon was desirable! He was worth any girl's serious consideration. And she had felt the lure of him from the first. That was what had made her conceive the idea of adventuring with him. She had meant merely to play with him; now she found herself resenting his admission that he was interested in another girl. Gloria Stowe was to be her rival!

"She is interesting, I suppose," Ellen conceded. "As an untutored child of the desert she is diverting. As a type, that is. As an individual she is rather impossible, don't you think?"

"Raw gold, Miss Bosworth," he said with a quick glance at her.

"In dire need of polishing," she laughed. "Our prospector is enthusiastic! He has washed the dross away, to discover the jewel hidden beneath!"

He smiled. "I think the jewel is quite unconscious of the enthusiasm of the prospector," he replied, thinking of the lash of Gloria's quirt and still feeling the sting of it on his cheek. "Or she at least considers his enthusiasm misdirected." He knew Gloria had misinterpreted his advances.

"Rejected!" declared Ellen. "And now the poor prospector must seek other jewels in the rough!"

Somehow, to Lannon, this conversation seemed a sacrilege. There was the vivid contrast of two entirely different personalities before him: Gloria earnest, determinedly guarding her graces, considering the relations between man and woman to be a serious understanding, not to be lightly talked of, trying in the face of discouragement to defend her chastity and to force men to acknowledge it; Ellen Bosworth, volatile, capricious, with a blasé attitude toward life and with the contempt of the sophisticated for its meaning.

"Don't waste your sympathy on the poor prospector, Miss Bosworth," he returned. "If he was rejected he deserved to be."

After that Ellen said no more about Gloria. She rode in silence for several miles, her forehead thoughtfully wrinkled as she studied the stern profile of the man who rode beside her. And long before they reached the Lazy J ranch-house she had become convinced that never had she seen a man who had impressed her as Lannon impressed her. She began to feel a strange awe of him, and into her heart crept a respect that she had never felt for any man. She divined that for him life was a serious business, that he thought in terms of iron and force, while her own mental channel had run pleasantly, following the gossamer thread of ease.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAVIS IS AVENGED.

ON his way back to the Bosque Grand, after seeing Ellen home and having a short talk with Bosworth, who expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied

to let Lannon lead the attack against the rustlers, Lannon stopped at the Star to see Clearwater. He rode to the front of the house, and found Clearwater sitting in a chair gloomily staring into space.

When Lannon rode up Clearwater's eyes brightened. He arose, greeted the other, and walked to the end of the gallery to glance back toward the corrals.

"All of the boys are ridin' the lower timber this mornin'," he said. "Bolton's here, though. Seems he's always got an excuse to hang around. Bolton's with Campan to a finish. He's all bad. All the other men are square; but Bolton's been tryin' to spoil 'em."

"I reckon I'd be firing Bolton."

"Lannon, I don't dare to fire him. At times when I've hinted about it Campan's always looked at me sort of threatenin' as though if I fired Bolton he'd take it as somethin' personal." His face reddened, his eyes blazed vindictively. "Why in hell didn't you kill the skunk instead of wingin' him an' bustin' his face up that way?" he demanded.

"So you've heard of that, Clearwater. Who brought word?"

"A Cross-in-a-box man who rode by here this mornin'. He said you made a monkey of Campan; that you give him his chance, an' didn't draw till he went for his gun. Lordy! Lannon, if I could throw a gun that way I'd have cleaned up on this gang long ago. But I'm slow; they've all got me faded, an' I reckon they know it. I've got to set quiet an' take what's comin' to me. I don't dast to whimper."

"You met Barkwell?"

"In Salt Cañon—like you told me. Him an' the other boys was waitin' for you. They didn't find the cache nor no more hooftracks. I didn't tell 'em where to find the cache, because you didn't say anything about it. An' findin' the cache right now wouldn't do a heap of good. There's no cattle there, an' mebbe only one or two of the gang."

"Where does Campan hang out when he isn't at the cache?"

"Sometimes at Pardo, as I told you yesterday. But most of the time he just disappears an' no one knows where he is. I reckon he's got a place where he holes up till he wants to show himself. He'll be gone a while, an' then he'll show up, not sayin' where he's been."

Clearwater again glanced covertly toward the corral and the stable, then whispered to Lannon excitedly, eagerly:

"Lannon, mebbe you don't know it, but you've throwed a scare into the guys which have been mixed up in this stealin'. Devake an' Tulerosa an' Lally an' Bannack was here last night, grumblin' an' cussin'. They're sore as hell outside. But they can't fool me; they're scared, too. There is three or four of the gang that's already pulled their freight out of the valley, sayin' they didn't want no truck with you. Some of them was here the other day, when Ellen Bosworth was hidin' in the house.

"There's more boys—fellers from the ranches around the valley—which was in the gang for the hell of it an' for the little extra money they got out of it.

"They wasn't bad, you understand; they just thought it was a hell of a big joke to steal from the Eastern owners. Well, them kind of boys broke off with Campan right after you put up that notice. Campan has threatened 'em, but they laff at him an' tell him that Lannon 'll get him if he don't drag it.

"There ain't no joke in stealin' when there's a chance of 'em runnin' into you. They ain't takin' no chances. Right now Campan's gang is pretty slim. There's about three or four scum from around Pardo still stickin', an' Devake an' Lally an' Bannack an' Tulerosa an' Bolton. You get Campan an' Devake an' Lally an' Tulerosa, an' the rest of the gang will come around an' eat out of your hand."

He again glanced at the stable and the corral. "Bolton's comin' now," he said nervously. "I reckon he's seen you an' is comin' a snoopin'! Lannon, you'd better go. If anything turns up I'll let you know."

But Lannon did not go immediately. He lingered until Bolton came around the corner of the house, greeted him cordially, took note of his appearance. Realizing that as one of Campan's men Bolton would be suspicious of his visit to Clearwater, he

spoke shortly to the latter for Bolton's benefit.

" Clearwater, I was in town last night. Early this morning I rode over to Benson's. Ellen Bosworth was there. She was excited over something and afraid to ride home alone. She wouldn't tell me what it was that she was afraid of, but I suspect some one had bothered her on the ride to town. She told me she had stopped there. Do you know anything about it?"

Lannon saw Bolton's eyes quicken as he looked at Clearwater. Clearwater reddened, though he did not look at Bolton.

" Ellen was all right when she left here, Lannon," said Clearwater.

" Her imagination was bothering her, I reckon," suggested Lannon lightly. " Anyway, I took her home." He looked at Bolton. The latter was smiling with slight cynicism or disinterest, and his lips were curving crookedly at the corners.

Lannon tried to solve the mystery of Bolton's smile as he rode off. Ellen had told him of Bolton's part in the affair, and he knew that Bolton must be wondering why Ellen had not talked. But even if Lannon's words had left Bolton suspicious, the man could have no knowledge of the secret understanding between Clearwater and himself.

It was late afternoon when Lannon rode to the Bosque Grand corral gates and dismounted. He went to the ranch-house and discovered that the Bozzam City doctor had left only an hour before, after deciding that Ed Lane would " pull through."

Yates, Barkwell and Perrin were in the room with Lane, and they followed Lannon out upon the gallery after he had looked at the wounded man.

" Barkwell," said Lannon, " Clearwater told me you discovered nothing more in Salt Cañon. I sent Clearwater to meet you because I had business in town last night."

" The doctor was sayin'," returned Barkwell, grinning and exchanging glances with Yates and Perrin. " Accordin' to the doc's story, your business wasn't none secret. The doc set Throne's nose, which was bruk bad, an' patched up Campan's mug an' busted wrist. Gentlemen, I reckon that was business enough for one night."

" I didn't think Throne would get mixed up with the rustlers," said Yates. " He's a big mouth, but I never thought he had nerve enough to throw in on anything risky."

Lannon's face reddened a little; Yates noticed it and stared at him.

" The doc says he heard Throne was runnin' down some woman," said Perrin. " Glory Stowe, most likely. Thet thar gal is squar', an' yet thar's coyotes in the valley which keep botherin' her, thinkin' thet she's like their own damned thoughts. Boss, ef you busted Throne's ugly mug for talkin' about Glory Stowe I want to shake hands with you."

Lannon silently reached out a hand to Perrin, while Yates turned his head to hide a smile.

" Thet gal thinks a hell of a lot of you, boss!" went on Perrin, unaware of Lannon's red face or of Yates's frown. " Thet night Campan shot you I found her ouside of Benson's cryin' like blazes. She was a heap sorry she'd acted the way she did, I reckon, an'— But it seems like I told you thet once before, didn't I?"

' Perrin, you did," replied Lannon. " And if you want to keep the rest of the men of Bozzam City from having their faces busted, you can sort of hint to them not to talk about Gloria Stowe."

He gripped Perrin's hand tightly, then dropped it and turned to Yates.

" Tom," he said, " I've got information about the location of Campan's cache. If there's enough men here we'll ride over and take a look at it."

" There's about a dozen of the boys hanging around," returned Yates. " They are all yearning to get a chance to get square with the guys that put Chavis out and drilled Lane like they did."

He leaped off the gallery and ran toward the bunk-house.

" Perrin, you'd better stay here and take care of Lane," suggested Lannon.

" Boss, I reckon you're right. Keepin' Ed alive is more important than killin' one of them damned rustlers!"

He stood on the porch and watched Lannon, Barkwell, Yates and the other men ride away.

Riding ahead with Yates, Lannon confided to the other what had happened at the Star with Ellen Bosworth as the chief actor. When Lannon related how he had seen Clearwater shooting at the girl Yates gave him a glance of sharp incredulity. Yates's verbal comment was reserved for the end of Lannon's recital, and then it was a mere "Shucks!"

They were riding through Bear Flat before Yates spoke again.

"Well," he said then, "come to think of it, there was always something wrong with Lem. He's always been so damned soft that a man could stick a finger through him! So that's what, eh? Lem's been a backslider, an' now he's aiming to be good again. He sure must have lost his head complete, to go to shooting at a woman!"

They rode the cañons in silence, alertly scrutinizing every intersecting gorge, peering into clefts, scanning the shelves and ledges. But they made rapid progress, so that just before dusk they reached the point where the floor of the cañon began to take an upward trend.

When they approached close to a sharp recess in the cañon wall, where two huge bowlders of red granite stood out boldly, contrasting with the green-black lava of the floor, Lannon signaled the other men to halt, while he rode forward alone.

A tangle of wild brush stretched between the two red bowlders, the ground sloping upward to melt into the cañon walls at a considerable distance above Lannon's head. As Lannon rode along the edge of the brush he began to think Clearwater had lied to him, because it seemed there was no break in the brush, no opening such as Clearwater had mentioned. He reached the red bowlder on his right as he rode up the cañon, and was smiling skeptically as he rounded it, expecting to end his quest against the rugged walls.

His skepticism vanished when, after rounding the bowlder, he found himself riding into a cleft in the wall of the cañon; a passageway about a dozen feet wide which ran straight northward, behind the wild brush, and seemingly under it. He rode on cautiously for perhaps fifty feet; then the passageway, which had taken on the appearance of a natural tunnel, led him eastward. He halted Polestar and sat amazed, staring straight ahead.

Before him, basking in the quiet light, was a cañon of mighty proportions. Its smooth, sandy floor was dotted with wild growth such as mesquite, yucca, ocatilla, cactus, with occasional clumps of manzanita and aspen. The cañon ran east and west, at right angles to the main cañon, and a narrow stream of water trickled down a cleft in the north wall, to follow its base eastward, down the sloping floor.

The cañon was perhaps half a mile long. A dark, towering granite wall marked its easterly end. The south wall, like the north, was longer than the eastern wall, so that they resembled the sides of an oblong box, with the floor as a bottom and the west wall, behind Lannon, as the fourth side.

The massive tunnel through which Lannon had entered was insignificant in comparison with the gigantic size of the place; and to pursue the metaphor of the box, it was as though the tunnel were a rat hole penetrating the base of the western side.

The cañon was several hundred yards wide. A few gaunt, gnarled trees grew out of the sandy floor. Down toward the farther end were bushes, grass. The grass was a pale, brilliant green in the dying light that seemed stronger here than in the main cañon. A few hundred yards from where Lannon sat on Polestar were two cabins, apparently unoccupied, for no smoke came out of them, and Lannon could see no horses in the cañon.

Lannon rode back the way he had come, motioned to Yates and the others, who followed him through the tunnel and sat for some minutes staring in amazement. Still following Lannon, they rode slowly forward, coming to a halt near the two cabins. Yates, Lannon and Barkwell dismounted and entered the cabins. They were unoccupied, but bore evidence of recent use.

They were rectangular in shape, resembling light sheds. They were constructed of saguaro ribs, tied horizontally to upright logs that formed the corners, the saguaro ribs bound together with sunflower

stalks and slender branches of mesquite, and the whole plastered inside and out with adobe mud. There were no doors, but crude porches had been constructed of mesquite poles, the upper end forked to carry the roof, which, like the roof of the cabin, was covered with wide, coarse saccaton grass plastered with mud.

Inside were bedding, cooking utensils and various odds and ends—bunks, benches, a stove, a wooden pail, a rough table, dishes. Lannon, Yates and Barkwell emerged, climbed upon their horses.

"I reckon we'd better take a look around," suggested Yates.

The riders scattered, their horses darting here and there.

Lannon and Yates halted their mounts a few feet from the cabins and watched the progress of the riders as the latter searched the cañon. A hundred yards or so from where Lannon and Yates stood the sandy level took a downward sweep, descending to some low, brush-crowned hills. A dry arroyo gashed a level that reached out from the southern wall of the cañon, a fringe of manzanita and aspen tracing its sinuous course. A rider rode into it, vanished. Another rider topped a ridge about a quarter of a mile from Lannon and Yates. He sat motionless on his horse for some time, peering into some gnarled brush ahead of him eastward, toward the cañon end. North of the man on the ridge were other riders, working their way eastward.

"It looks as though Campan's men have pulled their freight out of here," remarked Yates. "But maybe not. I reckon that man on the ridge sees something."

As though Yates's words were a signal, the rider on the ridge shouted and waved a hand. Instantly three or four of the other men moved toward him. One rider had almost reached the man on the ridge when the latter yelled and plunged out of the saddle. A puff of white smoke floated upward out of the brush beyond the ridge; the vicious report of a rifle reached the ears of Lannon and Yates.

Lannon raced Polestar toward the ridge, Yates following closely. Other riders had reached the spot sooner; several of the men were firing into the brush.

The rider Lannon and Yates had seen plunging out of the saddle at the first shot was sitting below the crest of the ridge rubbing his left arm and grinning hugely.

"Creased me, I reckon," he said to Lannon. "I saw him drawin' a bead on me. If I hadn't flopped when I did I reckon I wouldn't be none active about now."

He seemed to bear no resentment toward the man who had shot him; it was as if the hazarding of one's life was all a part of the game, and the game a highly humorous one.

"There's two of 'em," he told Lannon. "I've seen 'em before, with Campan an' his gang. They're Pardo men." A screech interrupted him, rising above the shooting. "I reckon I made a mistake, gentlemen," said the rider gravely; "there'll only be one now!"

Barkwell's voice rose with a word of command. The shooting stopped. Riding to the crest of the ridge, Lannon and Yates saw a man standing in the brush at a little distance. His hands were above his head.

"Keep a comin'!" ordered Barkwell.

The man came forward, toward the ridge, breasting the brush, keeping his hands high. He reached the edge of the tangle and stood, sullen, dirty, unkempt, staring with truculent eyes at his captors.

At a word from Barkwell, who received a significant nod from Yates, a Bosque Grand man slipped out of his saddle and took the outlaw's gun from its holster. He ran a hand over the man in search of other weapons, finding a knife in one of the outlaw's boot legs; the rifle had been left in the brush. Another Bosque Grand man, searching the brush, called out that there was another rifle in the brush. He pitched it out and it landed at Barkwell's feet. More Bosque Grand riders were now in the brush; the voice of one rose:

"Here's his pard, boys; he's deader than hell!"

In an arroyo back of the brush were found two horses, saddled, bridled. They had evidently been hidden there when Lannon had appeared at the mouth of the tunnel. They were led forth and a rider took charge of them.

The captive had watched sullenly. There

was something sinister and threatening in the manner and actions of the Bosque Grand men. The captive sensed it, and a pale, sneering smile distorted his face.

"Wa-al, I reckon you guys won't git none the best of it," he said. "It was me an' Bill thet drilled two of yore men night before last. Chavis an' Lane, their names was."

No one told the man that Lane would live; the faces of the men in the group around the outlaw were notably without expression except for certain grim lines around their lips.

The outlaw laughed. "Ah, hell, don't look so down in the mouth!" he jeered. "You act like a bunch of damned hypocrites! Git a-goin' an' git it over with!"

Barkwell made a sign to a rider who sat on a horse near by. A rope swished out, the noose dropping over the outlaw's head. It was jerked tight around his neck. Without further talk the man was led to one of the gnarled trees near the center of the cañon bottom. There he was forced to mount one of the horses that had been found in the arroyo. He was mockingly defiant and cursed his captors.

"I sure hate to waste a rope on this hombre," declared the rider whose rope encircled the outlaw's neck.

"You'll get his an' his pardner's in exchange," said another rider with grim humor. "You sure hadn't ought to kick on that."

The loose end of the rope was thrown over a branch of the tree, and the outlaw was drawn upward until he was standing on his horse. He cursed as the rope cut into his neck.

"There ain't no need to go to actin' like that," reproved a rider. "You're gettin' all the best of it. You didn't give Chavis any time to do any cussin'."

"If it 'll do you any good to know it, Ed Lane is goin' to stay a whole lot alive," said another man.

"Hell, you guys give me a pain!" sneered the outlaw. "Git goin'!"

"Mr. Man," said Yates, "I reckon we're not hanging you to get even with you. If we were thinking of getting even I reckon we'd have to work some Apache notions on you. We're white men, and we can't do those things. But you've got to go, and you're too sneaking mean to be worth while monkeying with. Somebody's got to attend to coyotes like you. We're considering ourselves as the law, and I'm repeating some words which were spoken by a preacher of Sacramento in a case like this. Here they are: 'A people can be justified in recalling delegated power and resuming its exercise.' Meaning that if people can't get action by the courts they've got a right to do their own acting. I reckon that's all."

Yates and Lannon rode away, to halt their horses near the cabins. The other riders lingered at the tree with the outlaw for some minutes, and then they came on and halted near Yates and Lannon.

"Those shacks are pretty dry," remarked Yates. He looked at Lannon, and the latter nodded. Yates slipped off his horse, went inside the nearest cabin. Presently a thin skein of smoke floated out of the doorway and spiraled upward. Yates emerged from the cabin and entered the other. Smoke emerged from the door of that structure. Yates followed it, stood for an instant looking back into the interior as though to make certain he had done his work well, and then mounted his horse. For a time the riders sat silent on their horses, watching the cabins, and then in response to a low word from Lannon they began to move slowly toward the cañon entrance.

At the mouth of the tunnel they again halted. Looking backward they saw the suspended figure of the outlaw slowly swinging back and forth. The first cabin was bathed in flames that licked straight upward in seeming glee; the second cabin was ballooning with gray-black smoke shot with crimson streaks.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WIPE 'EM OUT!"

WORD of what had been done in the box cañon spread, through some mysterious agency, to the farthest reaches of the basin. No one knew who was responsible for the rumor, but it became known that certain of the men who had

been seen with Campan would be seen with him no more. No names were linked with the rumor, and therefore speculation did much to keep rumor alive; yet there remained evidence that justice and retribution were abroad in the land. The location of the cache became known to every one, and though none had been found who seemed to know anything about it, there still persisted tales of the burned cabins and a ghastly thing swinging to the whim of the breezes in the box cañon.

Additional interest was in the eyes of men and women who passed the post office. Lannon's commandments were still there, the paper faded to the color of straw by age, the brass of the cartridges dulled by the elements.

Throne had taken himself and his belongings out of Bozzam City. It was whispered that after the doctor had patched up his nose he had said things about Lannon in public which, sooner or later, would reach Lannon's ears. Throne, convinced that he had been indiscreet, had decided he would be better off elsewhere.

Gloria Stowe's father had returned to town; indeed, he had been in town on the day Gloria had met Ellen Bosworth on the trail, though Gloria had not mentioned the fact to Lannon. Gloria, it seemed, was taking advantage of her father's presence to escape the tedium and responsibility of running the hotel. She rode much, and had visited the Lazy J several times. She and Ellen Bosworth had been seen riding together in various parts of the basin.

Town was quiet; a cleaner, purer atmosphere seemed to hover over it. Chaste and repentant, it went about its business, devoting less time to hilarity, and keeping its vices invisible. Fewer cowboys patronized the saloons; faces that had once been distinguished by a bold recklessness had become thoughtful, serious.

Though Lannon had not visited Bozzam City since the night he had met Campan in front of the post office he had not lacked news of the activities of the town's inhabitants. Perrin, keen to keep a finger on the public pulse, rode over often, his eyes and ears alert. Usually he kept his tongue quiet until he returned to the Bosque Grand.

"Bozzam City is wearin' a church-door mug right now," he told his "boss." "Thar ain't no discountin' the fact thet ef Bozzam is told things in a tone of voice thet town will set up an' take notice. In one way or another every galoot in town has heard about what happened in the box cañon. A lot of guys is wonderin' how they'd look ef they was swingin' from thet tree down thar, like thet Pardo man. Seems like town is sort of ca'm, while wonderin' whar the next section of hell will be raised. Thar's lots of folks thinkin' they'll be in on the next section, an' they're layin' low, takin' no chances. Them commandments are a-settin' thar, lookin' like eyes which is watchin' folks. It's mighty queer what a feelin' they give a man!

"Campan, Devake, Tulerosa, an' Slim Lally ain't bothered town since Campan got his face clawed up. But word of Campan has drifted in. A Pig-pen man seen him, was talkin' to him. Campan's got over his wounds, but his face looks like somebody had stepped on it an' pushed it in so's it 'd never come back in place. But that Pig-pen man says his wrist has healed perfect an' thet he's practisin' every day with his gun, tryin' to get his draw to match yours. He's wild an' ragin'. Swears he'll kill you for what you done to him!"

Of all the news brought by Perrin, the most interesting to Lannon was that Gloria Stowe had been seen riding with Ellen Bosworth. He had no means of knowing what Gloria thought of Ellen, but he still remembered how Ellen's voice had sounded when she had asked him if he did not think Gloria "impossible." Ellen had deprecated Gloria to him, and yet Ellen went riding with the girl. He wondered if Ellen's outward graces did not mask certain unadmirable traits. But women had always been mysteries to him, and they still were, for that matter. But he thought he understood Gloria better than any he had met.

He was giving Queen Mab a run down the sage-covered slope early one afternoon about six weeks after his visit to Bozzam City when he saw a dust cloud moving toward him along a distant rise. Queen Mab wanted to run, and Lannon let her out after he struck the broad level at the foot of the

sage slope, heading her directly toward the approaching dust cloud which he knew contained a rider.

Lannon had thought the rider would turn out to be a Bosque Grand man, but when he came close he was surprised to find the rider was Clearwater. The man had been riding hard, for his horse was flecked with foam and was breathing heavily. Clearwater was pale and excited and nervous.

"Lannon, there's hell to pay again!" he declared as he pulled his horse up. "I ain't got no time to stop, for one of them damned skunks is mebbe trailin' me. I don't trust Bolton; he was watchin' me when I left. I've got to light out of here pretty quick. I'll head to town an' make 'em think I was goin' there on purpose. But I reckon if Bolton's trailin' me he'll suspect what I've come for!"

"Clearwater, there is no one trailing you. Turn around and look back, man. You can see the country for twenty miles!"

"Lannon, I can't afford to take any chances!" declared Clearwater. "Since Tulerosa an' Lally found that Pardo man swingin' in the box cañon them guys has been ridin' sign on me. I've been scared of my life, I tell you!"

Clearwater's nerves were at a terrible tension. His hand shook as he brushed the sweat out of his eyes; his huge body squirmed, twisted.

"Clearwater, brace up! What's bothering you?"

"Lannon, Campan's gang is goin' to raid your cattle again. They're figurin' to strike on that south range, at Little Elk crossin'. They've been waitin' until your cattle got down that far. They're goin' to run 'em across the creek through that gorge that runs in there, an' then on down through Elk Basin to the hills. From there they're goin' to strike for the desert an' drive 'em over to Pardo!

"Tulerosa, Devake, Slim Lally, an' Bannack framed this deal up last night, over to my place. I've got to go with 'em; I can't get out of it, though I'm goin' to take a chance if I get killed for it! Them four won't be alone. They've got some new guys from Pardo—mebbe a dozen, though they didn't name 'em. After they get the cattle in the desert they're goin' to turn 'em over to the Pardo men!

"Campan ain't in it. Mebbe he ain't got entirely over the shootin'. But there will be plenty without him. Lannon, take enough of your boys to Little Elk. Clean 'em up. Wipe 'em out! Little Elk, Lannon! That's straight goods! I've sure got to get out of here!"

He yanked his tired horse around, headed him toward Bozzam City and went clattering away, swaying oddly from side to side and beating the hips of the beast with a heavy hand.

Lannon watched Clearwater for a time. Then he rode Queen Mab hard for a quarter of an hour. Later, with the mare in a steady gallop, he reached the crest of the slope above Bear Flat. He saw several of the Bosque Grand men riding the floor of the big level, and he made out Yates and Barkwell. Probably a thousand cattle were scattered around the flat.

Yates saw Lannon coming and rode to meet him. Barkwell, talking with two other cowboys, did not ride forward at once, and he came up while Lannon and Yates were talking.

"The boys are all within reach," Yates told Lannon after the latter had apprised him of Clearwater's visit. "I'll have them over on Little Elk pronto, choosing their ground. There's going to be a moon tonight and we'll sure make the fur fly!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BETRAYAL.

LANNON spent the rest of the afternoon on Queen Mab. He and Barkwell rode around the rim of the basin in an eccentric fashion. Seemingly they were searching for strays, and any one watching them must have been convinced that they had no ulterior object. They weaved in and out of the timber that fringed the rim of the basin; they crashed through the brush of arroyos; they looked into coverts, searched the deep draws in the hills and peered into the gorges.

True, they found several strays and head-

ed them down the slope into the basin, but the real reason for their activities was to conceal the movements of the Bosque Grand men who, while Lannon and Barkwell rode the rim, were working their way into various advantageous positions in the basin. Any prying eyes in the high country roundabout would have concentrated their attention upon Lannon and Barkwell, for the presence of those two would have kept a possible spy at a considerable distance from the basin's rim.

But Lannon and Barkwell saw no spy, and when late in the afternoon, just as dusk began to settle, they saw Yates wave a hand at them from below, they rode down, joined him and followed him northward, up the farther slope to the plains.

Yates was grimly smiling.

"I reckon we're all fixed nice and pretty," he said. "Any rustlers that think they're going to run off any stock to-night are going to be a heap surprised. There's twenty men down there now, all hid. They've got plenty of chuck so's they won't have to light no fires. They've got orders against smoking. They won't like that, but they'll obey orders. Every man's set so's he'll be able to draw a bead on the mouth of the gorge, where the rustlers will have to go out. I reckon they'll come in that way, too. Gentlemen, there's going to be a hell of a mix-up in the mouth of that gorge when the boys begin to throw lead!"

Lannon, Yates, and Barkwell went back to the Bosque Grand. From the rim of the basin just before they rode homeward, Yates pointed to a dark gash in the floor of the basin, over near the southern slope in a section densely wooded, the trees seeming to overhang the spot Yates indicated.

"The horses are boxed in that arroyo," said Yates. "They can't be seen from the rim anywheres around."

After dark, and just before moonrise, Lannon, Yates, and Barkwell returned to the rim of the basin. Lannon and Barkwell had changed horses; Yates had gone back to the ranch-house for his rifle, which he had forgotten. The three descended the slope, rode across the basin and joined several Bosque Grand men who were concealed in a thicket that grew close to the wall of the gorge through which the rustlers would probably come. The men had expected Lannon and the others, and had been watching for them.

The three horses were led into a depression at the edge of the thicket and staked out there. Then, in the dense darkness and conversing in whispers, the men waited.

In an hour a silver flood of moonlight bathed the farther rim of the basin. The radiance descended the slope, and as the moon rose still higher the luminous silver flood began to creep over the floor of the basin toward the concealed Bosque Grand men. In another hour the basin was flooded with light. The herd had massed near the center, where the ground was smooth and the grass long. Some steers were still grazing; the others were down.

Lannon sat apart from the other men. He could not get his thoughts off Clearwater. It was strange how the man had acted, how he had let his fear of Campan rule him. Clearwater's terror, now that Lannon considered it, seemed to have been rather too visible, as though he had betrayed it for effect. While watching Clearwater and listening to him, Lannon had not been entirely convinced by Clearwater's manner; it had seemed to him that Clearwater had not been sincere. He had reflected, then, that perhaps Clearwater's size had something to do with the strange effect of the man's manner upon him, for a big man's emotions always seem grotesque; a fat man's tragedy always verges upon comedy and his earnestness must be violent to be effective, and even then it strikes the observer as absurd. The world's sympathies are for the weak and the impotent; it considers that a huge man is big enough to bear his own troubles in silence.

That explanation had sufficed Lannon while he had been talking with Clearwater. It had lasted until now. But Lannon had a presentiment that Clearwater had lied to him. He did not mention his feelings to Yates, who was nearest to him; he sat there revolving the incident of Clearwater's visit and trying to justify the man's manner. But the conviction that Clearwater had fooled him still persisted.

He was reluctant to mention his sus-

picions to Yates, because he had no grounds for them except his presentiment, and he knew it would seem strange to Yates that he had delayed mentioning them until now. Probably Yates would not say anything, but he would be certain to think it strange that Lannon had not acted upon his presentiment before the elaborate preparations for the discomfiture of the rustlers had been completed. Yates and the others would consider him inconsistent, capricious. So he sat silent for another hour, tortured by the indecision that had gripped him. Some strange force was assailing his sanity; he had a grotesque thought that a subtle power was trying to draw him out of the basin; upon him grew the conviction that he should not be here at all, that he was wanted elsewhere; that Destiny was beckoning to him through one of his senses, striving to tell him something that his intelligence could not grasp. The feeling grew so strong that he could no longer resist it. He got up and sought Yates's side.

"Yates," he said, keeping his voice casual, "this waiting don't agree with me. I'm going to move around a little. There's a gully running west toward Bear Flat. I'm going to ride through it and take a look around. It seems to me Campan's men ought to be here now, if they're coming."

"I reckon they'll choose their own time, Lannon. You're restless, eh? You want action. Well, I reckon a ride won't hurt you any; and if you ride through that gully it's likely you won't run into the rustlers—they'll be coming through the gorge, if they follow Clearwater's talk."

"How many men did you leave in Bear Flat?" asked Lannon.

"One. Ned Brail. You don't think they'll strike there, Lannon?"

"I've been thinking about it, Yates. I reckon I'll ride over there."

"Maybe I'd better send a man or two along, Lannon?" suggested Yates. "But, shucks, I reckon there's no use. Clearwater had them figured right or he wouldn't have rode over."

Lannon felt guilty as he rode Polestar into the entrance of the gully at a distance of probably a mile from where the Bosque Grand men were waiting at the mouth of the gorge. He was yielding to an impulse which his better judgment had rejected as absurd; he was answering a grotesque whim which, because he had continued to entertain it, had evolved into a resistless urge. He knew that when he reached Bear Flat and found everything to be all right he would realize how absurd had been the whim that had driven him, and yet he could not turn back until he had satisfied himself that things in Bear Flat were as they should be. It was strange that his thoughts should dwell upon Bear Flat; that his presentiment should point to a definite locality. He thought it was because he had been thinking strongly and continuously of the place.

There was a narrow trail through the gully, worn by the cattle that passed through it during the season. But the gully ran only about a mile westward, where it flattened, widened, and merged into a plain. The plain was rimmed by a wood at its southern limits. Northward were some low hills. Beyond was an upland, then a mesa. Straight ahead the ground sloped downward, the rim of the flat curving northward into a line of huge buttes.

After a ride of perhaps two miles, Lannon found himself in another gully. A sharp turn after he had ridden another half mile brought him to the brow of a mesa overlooking Bear Flat. The moonlight streamed down into the flat, disclosing the herd. There seemed to be nothing wrong. He was probably a mile from the edge of the herd, and the cattle appeared to be massed, as though sleeping. He sat motionless in the saddle, peering downward, searching the edge of the herd for sight of a rider, which would be Brail. No rider was in sight.

Lannon rode the rim of the mesa until he reached a trail which the cattle used when entering the flat. Not until he was more than half way down did he notice that the cattle were acting strangely, and then he urged Polestar. Polestar was running when he struck the level, and Lannon was leaning forward in the saddle, his eyes blazing.

The rustlers had been there! The cattle were milling, moving in the general direc-

tion of the eastern end of the flat. As Polestar flashed past a bunch of steers which were lying down and did not rise as the gray horse passed, Lannon circled them, rode back, brought Polestar to a halt, and stared down at them. Dead, every one! Shot! Some had their throats cut. There were possibly twenty in the bunch. More were lying near by. Lannon rode among them, a terrible rage gripping him. He slipped out of the saddle, threw the reins and bent over a cow whose calf was bleating beside her. She was lying on her side, her tongue lolling out, her eyes staring. Lannon drove the calf off and felt of the cow's body. It was still warm. He stood erect and scanned the flat. There was no sign of any horsemen, not even of Brail. Lannon leaped into the saddle again, jumped Polestar over some other dead cows and raced around the flat, searching for Brail. The main herd had milled eastward until stopped by the sheer buttes that rimmed the flat in that direction. There it had halted. Lannon could hear the bellowing of steers, the dismal bleating of calves seeking lost mothers. Dust from the milling movement floated over the flat like a pall.

Dead cattle were everywhere. They lay in ones, in twos, in groups. They littered the floor of the flat in appalling numbers. It had been a colossal slaughter, a bloody carnival, a hideous butchery by fiends! Lannon's brain reeled as he sat in the saddle. He got Polestar going again and sent him among the prone cattle, searching for Brail. He found Brail's horse. It, too, had been killed. The saddle was still on its back. Near by was Brail's rifle, empty. At a little distance from the horse Lannon found Brail. He was lying on his side, his head resting on his right arm, which was extended, the hand bent slightly, suggesting the complete lassitude of deep sleep.

Brail was asleep, forever. A bullet hole in the forehead was ghastly evidence of the finality that had overtaken him.

Lannon rose from Brail and stood erect for an instant. He understood Clearwater now! He knew why he had been skeptical of the man's sincerity. And also, he knew that the strange feeling that had come over him in the basin while sitting near Yates had not been a premonition at all; it had been merely his intelligence urging him to act upon his distrust of Clearwater. Clearwater had betrayed him! Clearwater had delivered him into the hands of his enemies!

CHAPTER XX.

CLEARWATER IS VINDICATED.

LANNON again climbed on Polestar. He sat in the saddle for a little space, gazing eastward, toward the basin where Yates and the other men waited for the rustlers who would not appear. He knew that after a while Yates, becoming uneasy over his long absence, would send men to search for him; and as he had mentioned Bear Flat to Yates, the latter would instruct the men to hunt for him there. Then the men would discover what had happened. They would ride back to Yates and Yates would go on the trail of the rustlers.

Lannon meant to find Clearwater. He would certainly kill the man. This latest outrage would precipitate a war which would not end until Campan, Devake, Lally, Bannack, Tulerosa, Clearwater, and all others of their kind had met the fate that they so mercilessly dealt others. The butchery in the flat was significant of the attitude of the rustlers toward him; it was an expression of their defiance of the warning he had posted in Bozzam City; it was a flouting of his edict against rustling the Bosque Grand stock, a ghastly and hideous way of daring him to do his worst. Of all the emotions that seethed in his veins as he sent Polestar scampering across the basin toward the western rim, regret that he had withheld his hand from Campan was the most poignant. He had made the foolish promise to defer killing Campan because he had thought Gloria Stowe had interfered that night at Benson's because she loved the man. He knew different now, had known since Perrin had told him about how he had found Gloria crying that night. But despite that knowledge, he had kept the promise he had made to

Campan in her presence. And because he had kept the promise he had been responsible for the death of Chavis, the wounding of Ed Lane, and now the killing of Brail. There was little doubt in his mind that if he had killed Campan that night in front of the post office in Bozzam City the other outlaws would have left the basin, never to return. Because he had not killed Campan they were showing their contempt of him by butchering his cattle instead of stealing them.

He sent Polestar against the western slope of the basin; halted for an instant at the crest to let the animal breathe after the long climb; and then headed him over the plains, westward.

In an hour after leaving the rim of the basin he was riding westward in an arroyo north of the edge of the mesa which he had circled on the day he had seen Clearwater shooting at Ellen Bosworth. When he thought of the man's actions after he had knocked him from his horse that day he was bitterly self-contemptuous.

"Fooled me clean!" he muttered, aloud.

He had reverted to the idioms of the past. He found that his thoughts were running as they had in that time. Ever since his return he had held himself in, not permitting the old passions to claim him, even under the great provocations that had urged him. But he now saw the futility of all that. A man's nature didn't change overnight. A man must respond to the influence of heredity, of habit, of custom. There was no use of trying to make one's self over; no use of trying to affect a refinement that one did not feel, that kept clashing with the elemental, and what was worse, which was continually proving that refinement is only a delusion which vanishes when the passions dominate. There was no use in arguing that refinement reached its highest state of perfection through the ability to control the passions, because just as soon as the need arose passion would break down all barriers.

He rode now in a spirit of grim exultation, in an exuberance of cold joy that made him, as in the old days, contemptuous of all his enemies and sneeringly derisive of their power to harm him. The old recklessness was upon him, the love of the old life again dwelt in his heart. He affectionately slapped the black handles of the guns at his thighs, assuring himself that the next time he used them they would speak in the convincing voice of the past. There would be no more false sentiment in his heart toward his enemies. As for that, if a man deserved to die he might as well be killed quickly. If he deserved other punishment why kill him at all?

Campan and his men deserved death. The first time that he met any or all of them they would get what they deserved. Thus he cast all his five years of Eastern training behind him and became again the terrible figure he had been in the old days —an apostle of the law of the gun.

When he reached the far side of the basin rim he rode Polestar into a timber grove near the edge and gazed down upon the Star buildings. He saw a light in a window, stabbing the moonlit level surrounding the house. He rode out of the timber into a gully and went down a slope to another wood—the same that Ellen Bosworth had entered on her way to the Star. He rode slowly, letting Polestar find the trail, for the wood was so dense that the moonlight did not penetrate. When his body no longer showed a tendency to slip forward in the saddle he knew Polestar had reached a level; and presently he saw a fence in a patch of moonlight beyond the edge of the timber. He followed the fence until he reached the stable. Riding into the shadow cast by the building he dismounted, threw Polestar's reins, and stood for an instant, listening, and peering into other shadows near by. He saw no one. He moved to a corner of the stable, from where he could see some of the other Star buildings. There were no lights in any of them, no signs that any of the Star men were about. Leaving the stable he crossed an open space and reached the shadow of the bunk house. There he again paused to gaze about him. There were a number of horses in the corral, but his interest centered upon three that stood outside the corral fence. They were saddled, bridled.

Lannon moved toward the ranch house. No light came through any of the rear win-

dows, though he saw a luminous streak through one window, which evidently came from a lamp in one of the front rooms of the house. He made his way along the rear wall until he reached the window through which shone the luminous streak. He saw that the light came through an open doorway in the front of the house. Through the doorway he could see a man's legs. The legs were stuck out, the feet were booted, spurred. A bracket lamp on a wall of the room shone brightly, revealing a faded carpet, a chair, unoccupied; a center table, a picture on the front wall.

Lannon moved stealthily around the side of the house, away from the three horses at the corral fence. The room in which he had seen the legs was on the north side of the house; Lannon saw the light from the lamp coming through a window on that side. It was the light he had seen from the rim of the basin.

A bush of wild roses screened the window. The moon, streaming its silvery light down into the basin from a southeasterly direction, did not touch the spot where Lannon stood looking through the open window into the room.

Five men were inside—Clearwater, Tulerosa, Lally, Bannack, and Bolton. Tulerosa was sitting in a chair that was tilted back against the south wall of the room. Near him, straddling a chair, facing its back, his arms crossed and his body leaning forward until his chin rested on his crossed arms, was Bannack. Lally was standing near the wall close to the door through which Lannon had seen the light when he had looked into the rear window. Within touch of Lally, seated in a chair, was Bolton. Bolton was leaning back, his arms folded, his legs extended in front of him, crossed.

Clearwater was standing. His back was toward Lannon. Though Lannon could not see Clearwater's face, he knew the man was violently agitated. His huge body seemed to be quivering. His hands were clasped behind him and they were continually in movement. He would grip the right hand with the left, and then the left with the right. Then he would open both hands and spread the fingers wide, as though he meditated clutching at something in front of him, but was beset with a mighty indecision. His huge shoulders were jerking with a spasmodic motion; he kept moving his feet and swaying his body from side to side.

The other men betrayed no agitation whatever. In fact, they seemed amused at Clearwater's agitation. Bannack, with his chin resting on his arms, was facing Clearwater. His eyes were aglitter with some subtle emotion; there was a strange menace in the set smile on his lips. Tulerosa, seated beside Bannack, was watching Clearwater intently, malice plain in his cold eyes. Lally, standing near the wall close to Bolton, was idly caressing his chin and watching Clearwater with strange steadiness; while Bolton, seated in a chair, kept a speculative gaze upon the big man.

There had been no sound in the room when Lannon had arrived at the window. He gathered that he had reached the window during a pause in a conversation. It seemed to him that a question had been put to Clearwater and that the other men were waiting for him to answer.

Clearwater's agitation resulted, it seemed, from his inability to answer or from a desire to equivocate. He stood, swaying his body, clasping and reclasping his hands. He was desperately harried.

"Well, Clearwater, I reckon you got a mouth!"

This was Bannack. His voice was a cold snarl.

"Boys," said Clearwater thickly; "it ain't so! Whoever says he saw me talkin' to Lannon that day is a miserable liar!"

"Not talkin', Clearwater; though you was seen doin' thet on the day you chased Ellen Bosworth through the basin. I reckon a man can talk to another man, all right, an' mebbe thar wouldn't be no harm in it. But it's a different thing when you go to runnin' errands for him."

"Bannack; it ain't so. Tell me about any errand I run for Lannon?"

"Clearwater, you ain't a hell of a success as a liar," said Bannack coldly. "Right now yore face is givin' you away. It's known thet the day you chased Ellen Bosworth you met Lannon an' talked to

him. Right after thet Lannon rode to Bozzam City, while you rode over to Salt Cañon an' delivered some sort of a message to Barkwell!"

"It ain't so!" declared Clearwater. "I was headin' toward the cache an' I run into Barkwell an' the Bosque Grand boys. I didn't say ten words to Barkwell—just enough to make him think I was ridin' down that way to look for strays."

"Uhuh," grunted Bannack. "An' the next day Lannon an' his bunch of coyotes find the cache an' drill Bill an' swing Mex Edwards. Haw, haw, haw, Clearwater! Look at yore face now!"

"Boys, I swear—"

"If you didn't tell Lannon about the cache, how did he find it?" asked Tulerosa slowly. "It's been there a hell of a while an' nobody ever found it before."

"Damn it, boys; how do I know?" returned Clearwater. Even to Lannon, who was now beginning to understand that Clearwater had not played the traitor to him after all, the man's voice was unconvincing.

"Shucks, Lem," drawled Lally; "you ain't been puttin' nothin' over on us. We've had some one ridin' sign on you for a considerable spell. We're able to tell you what you've been doin' right along. For instance, you was talkin' to Lannon no later than this mornin'."

Clearwater's body seemed to leap. His hands dropped to his sides. His manner, his expression, must have revealed his guilt to the men, for they exchanged significant glances and all smiled. They seemed hugely amused, but there was something sinister in their mirth, a menace that they tried to suppress. Lannon got the impression that they were playing with Clearwater; that they were baiting him, deliberately delaying, enjoying the man's terror.

"I reckon you ain't denyin' that, Clearwater?" said Lally.

"Boys, I stopped at the Bosque Grand on my way to Bozzam City. I didn't speak three words to Lannon."

"What made you ride thet way if you didn't want to say more than three words to Lannon?" asked Bannack. "What was them three words, Lem?"

Clearwater evidently had become so terrorized by the threatening presence of the men that he could not lie plausibly. He said lamely, his voice a mere hoarse whisper:

"I reckon I've clean forgot."

"You've forgot!" laughed Tulerosa. They all seemed to be amused beyond reason by Clearwater's answer. It seemed they were not laughing at Clearwater's answer at all, but at something the answer suggested to them. Illumination came to Lannon when Bannack ceased laughing and spoke to Clearwater.

"Lem," he said, "you're the damnedest bungler this side of hell! You can't even tell a lie straight. You want me to tell you why you rode over to see Lannon today? You wanted to tell him thet we was goin' to raid his cattle at Little Elk to-night. Thet's why you rode over thar, you damned coyote!"

"Bannack, I didn't do no such a thing. I tell you—"

"Shet up, Clearwater!"

The words snapped out of Bannack's mouth. Clearwater shivered under their impact as though he had been struck violently in the face. This time the men did not laugh at him, but sat or stood, motionless in their places, gazing at him with steady hostility. It was as though Bannack's words were a signal for the men to drop their masks of affected jocularity and become serious. They were now watching Clearwater as a hungry wolf pack watches its prey, waiting for the signal to attack. Lannon saw Clearwater's legs tremble. It was evident he felt the hopelessness of the situation.

"Clearwater, we knowed you was workin' with Lannon," went on Bannack. "We made thet thar talk about Little Elk for a purpose. Thet purpose was to fool you an' Lannon. It fooled you, because you rode right over an' told Lannon about it. Thet's proved, because this afternoon Bolton saw a lot of Bosque Grand men hidin' themselves in Little Elk basin. It fooled Lannon, for Lannon wouldn't have took his boys down in Little Elk to wait for us if he hadn't believed yore talk. Clearwater, you was figgerin' to get us wiped out by

Lannon's outfit! You've been a traitor right along!"

Clearwater did not answer; but he began to move backward.

"Clearwater! Stand still!"

Bannack was speaking again. He got slowly out of his chair, his glittering eyes fixed upon Clearwater's with a terrible steadiness. He seemed oblivious to every one else in the room; there was a singleness of purpose in his eyes, in his manner. He pushed the chair out of his way, so that it slid along the floor, overturned and crashed against the floor near the wall. He took several steps toward Clearwater and then began to back slowly away from him as though measuring distance. He meant to kill Clearwater.

Lannon knew the signs. He ran around to the front of the house, stepped lightly upon the gallery, and moved steadily forward until he stood just outside the open door, a little to one side so that he could not be seen by the men in the room.

Bannack was talking again, and while listening to him Lannon swiftly withdrew from the black handled gun at his right hip the two cartridges he had still in reserve for Campan. He dropped them into a pocket and reloaded the weapon from his cartridge belt.

His grim preparations completed, he listened to Bannack.

"You an' Lannon have been playin' a slick game," said Bannack. "But I reckon you ain't as slick as you thought you was. Lannon busts Throne for sayin' a word about thet thar female, Glory Stowe. Lannon's been buzzin' around thar, tryin' to horn in. Well, Glory is Devake's girl. He's been runnin' her for more'n a year. We're out to make Lannon squirm, an' we'll do it. We drilled about two hundred head of Lannon's stock to-night in Bear Flat, an' we drilled a guy named Brail for good measure. We'll get Lannon before we're through! I'm tellin' you this so's you'll know what's goin' on before you get to whar I'm goin' to send you! Haw, haw, haw!" he laughed. "Thet touches you, don't it, Lem? Well, Lannon will be touched to-morrow. Thar'll be mournin' in his camp when he finds out to-morrow thet Devake has took Glory Stowe to the desert cache! Devake's takin' her to-night! He's got old Stowe away so's there won't be any hitch. He's goin' to Bozzam City before mornin' an' he's goin' to—Hah!"

Bannack's exclamation caught in his throat, came out a shriek of fear and amazement. Lannon was standing in the doorway. His body was in a crouch, a wanton light was in his eyes and the two black-butted guns were in his hands, ready for action.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

EAST OF SUEZ

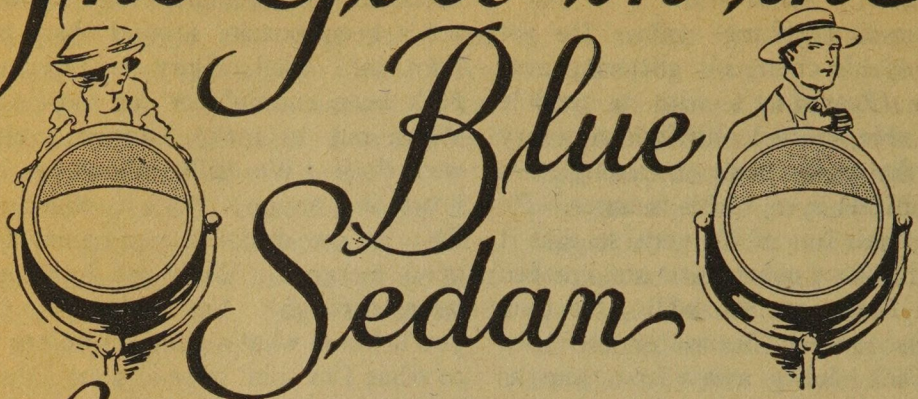
EAST of Suez, in sunrise lands away,
Where caravans swing with the sudden day,
My thoughts estray.

Out where the clamor drifts from gay bazaars,
With sandalwood for sale, bright silver bars,
And turquoise stars.

Insistent calls of temple bells that ride,
With haunting echoes on the twilight tide—
There I'd abide.

Thomas J. Murray.

The Girl in the Blue Sedan



by Appleton Wayne

IT was the last of May, and Commonwealth Avenue was a shining black expanse, its long green islands dividing two opposite-flowing streams of traffic. Phil Clinton cast an envious glance at the endless line of cars. It wouldn't be long now before he would be home, driving his own car again, but with weather like this the few weeks till after the end of exams seemed like years. He smiled thoughtfully, a smile which drew his smooth features into fresh, boyish lines.

Phil's was a pleasing face—with a smile, or without one; the mouth was practical, but the eyes were quixotic. They gave the lie to his long line of Puritan ancestors. Suddenly he paused. It was probably the car which had attracted his attention—a big blue sedan, with a Rhode Island license, drawn up at the curb just ahead. All shining and new, it was enough to attract any one's second glance. As he came up abreast, though, it was not the Mercer's long, low lines which continued to hold him. It was its occupant, a girl of about nineteen or twenty.

Phil slowed down his pace. The girl was extremely pretty, with her auburn hair and slightly tanned complexion—doubly so, Phil thought, for she seemed to be in trouble. There was a little pucker in her forehead, and her eyes were searching anxiously up and down the street. For a second she pressed her white teeth into her lower lip. Once she moved several levers on the dash, then shook her head, and sat back, tense.

Phil hesitated, watching. As her roving gaze met his he colored slightly and began to move away. He had had a momentary impulse to go up to her and see whether he could be of any service, but he had dismissed it. One didn't do those things in Boston.

He moved on slowly. Still, he didn't live in Boston. Out where he came from it would seem only natural.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the hoarse squawk of a klaxon behind him. As he turned about he saw the girl in the sedan move her face suddenly as if to avoid his glance. He wondered whether she had touched the horn by accident, or whether—

He retraced his steps to the car, smiling. "I beg your pardon," he said; "but I wondered—" He paused awkwardly.

The girl flushed slightly.

"Oh, dear!" She forced a smile. "I was hoping you wouldn't turn around. I changed my mind after it was too late."

Phil fingered the bright band on his straw hat for a second.

"Then you don't want me?"

The girl laughed nervously.

"Well, now that you're here," she said, "I guess it doesn't make much difference. I was just wondering if you could drive a car. I saw you walking along there, and thought maybe you could help me." She paused for a second. "Jack left me here to wait for him over an hour ago—said he was coming back in ten minutes, and he hasn't come back yet. I've been afraid to leave the car, and I can't drive it myself."

Phil slid into the front seat beside her. "Sure," he said, with a laugh, "I'll help you. I can drive—see?" He pulled out his bill-fold with a little flourish, and showed her his driver's license under the little isinglass window.

She smiled.

"We were on our way up to Maine, you know, and— No," she cut in as Phil put his foot on the starter, "I'm afraid you'll have to use the crank. Jack says the starter's stripped, or something."

Phil scooped the crank up from the floor of the car and hurried round in front. After several turns the engine began to throb.

"Well, where to?" he asked as he sank back into the plush upholstery again.

The girl looked at him archly for a moment, her blue eyes laughing.

"To the Copley, James," she said with mock dignity, then added: "I'm so worried about Jack; I can't imagine what would keep him this long. I think I ought to get back where I can telephone."

As they threaded their way in and out through the late afternoon traffic on Boylston Street, Phil stole several sly glances at his companion.

She was pretty—unusually so. Her quiet, blue-serge suit and black straw lent her a certain dignity and poise. Phil sighed inwardly; it was always this way with the girls he really wanted to see again. He usually met them once, and then they dropped out of his life.

"You say you're going up into Maine?" he hazarded suddenly, just as he brought the car to a stop before the pillared entrance to the Copley. "I've been thinking of spending a week or so up there myself, and I just wondered where you were going to be." As a matter of fact, he had been thinking of it—for at least fifteen minutes.

"Near Farmington—any one can tell you where we are— Never mind getting out; just drive around the corner and park." With that she climbed out of the car and moved off in the direction of the hotel door, where she called back: "You've no idea how grateful I am to you."

Phil watched the revolving glass engulf her, then gently slipped the car in gear, and drove round the corner, where he parked it. For a second he looked back at the hotel, then he laughed at his own discomfiture and walked slowly off up Boylston Street, whistling softly to himself. It was really funny—here he didn't even know her name.

After about ten minutes he came to a stop in front of a little curio shop. There, in the window, was just the sort of a bronze desk set he had been looking for. It was Japanese with twining serpents. The girl of the auburn hair and laughing blue eyes momentarily faded from his mind as he stepped inside to buy it.

"No, I'll take it with me," he said to the clerk as he slipped it under his arm. He reached for his bill-fold. As his hand went into his pocket Phil suddenly felt weak. It was not there. He hurriedly searched through his other pockets to no better results. It had evidently dropped out in the car; that was all there was to it. With a hurried explanation to the clerk, Phil went out onto the street again, into the shopping rush.

As he hastened back to Copley Square he couldn't help smiling at himself—half in annoyance at his own stupidity, half in the knowledge that this would perhaps provide a pretext for finding out the girl's name. Upon reaching the Copley he went straight to the desk.

"By the way," he began, "is there a girl stopping here with auburn hair and blue eyes—she wears a blue serge suit, I believe, and—"

He paused suddenly, struck by the ridiculousness of the situation.

The clerk shook his head gravely.

"You don't know her name," he added thoughtfully after several seconds.

Phil bit his lip.

"No, I'm afraid I don't," he replied.

He frowned in annoyance. He had been a fool not to ask her. There was nearly seventy-five dollars in that bill-fold.

He swept the tiled lobby with his glance, then walked on out past the fountain, through the mirrored hallway to the door. Once out in the fresh air he lit a cigarette. There was still one chance. He hurried over to where he had parked the car. That, at least, had not moved.

Opening the door, he made a careful search of the driver's seat, but found nothing. He drummed nervously with his fingers for a few seconds, then climbed up into the car and sat down. The girl had evidently picked it up, and he would wait there until her return. He lit another cigarette and settled back comfortably.

Phil's placid, smoke-ring dreams were rudely interrupted by the click of one of the doors several seconds later. There was a young man wearing the uniform of the Boston police standing on the running board with his head inside the car.

"What you doing here?" he asked rather aggressively.

Phil smiled. "Nothing," he answered; "that is—I'm just waiting."

"Your car?"

Phil shook his head.

"Whose is it?" the officer persisted.

Phil bit his lip. "Well, to be perfectly frank with you, I don't know. That is—I don't know her name, but I know what she looks like. You see—" He paused, confused.

The officer had climbed in beside Phil. "I think you'd better drive on up to the Back Bay station," he said curtly. "As it happens, this is a stolen car."

"A stolen car! What the—" Phil gasped in amazement.

The officer smiled knowingly. "Don't try to pull that stuff," he said. Then after a moment or two he added: "I can't figure out why you kept sitting there, though—don't you think we ever look for these cars?"

For the moment Phil said nothing. A stolen car! His bill-fold gone! It was all amazingly simple. Come to think of it, he remembered reading that very morning about a well-dressed woman coming along in a car, giving a man a lift, and then setting him down blissfully ignorant of the loss of his diamond stickpin and wallet. The girl's frank, open eyes and pretty hair had certainly taken him in all right.

He smiled sheepishly. He had always thought that he could spot a woman of that sort—by her dress, her speech, or some little subtlety—but this girl had proved too smooth for him. Here he had been planning a little side trip into Maine before he went home! He shook his head. It was still hard to reconcile his first impression of her with the truth.

Phil brought the car to a stop before the brownstone front of the Back Bay station. For a second the barred windows gave him a little chill, but he laughed it away.

Once inside, the officer turned him over to a fat desk sergeant with massive gold chevrons on his sleeves. The sergeant was an older man, with a jolly Irish face, but he spoke without trace of a brogue.

"Here's the man that got that Rhode Island car," the officer reported. "Found him sitting in it, smoking a cigarette, right in front of the Copley-Plazar."

The sergeant's red face tightened into a frown.

"Looks pretty young," he commented. Then to Phil he added: "Well, what you got to say for yourself?"

Phil was silent for a second. "Well," he began softly, "it 'll probably sound like a pretty wild fairy story to you, but I'll swear I'm telling the truth." With that, he started to tell the affair from the beginning—the sounding of the klaxon, the girl's story about waiting for her brother, his driving her to the Copley, and subsequent missing of his bill-fold.

"I had it when I got in the car," he went on, "because I took it out to show her my driver's license. When I missed the thing I naturally thought it had fallen out then, so I came right back, and when I couldn't find her in the Copley I went out to the car to wait for her. That's what I was doing when I was arrested."

The sergeant said nothing for several moments. "You say you're at Harvard?" he finally asked, looking at Phil searchingly.

Phil nodded.

The sergeant went on: "I suppose you have some cards or something of the sort on you that 'll prove it?"

Phil smiled nervously. "All my cards were in my bill-fold," he answered simply. Then he added, as if by way of an afterthought: "You might call up University Hall out at Cambridge, though, and see what they have to say about me."

The officer took down the receiver of a phone at his elbow. After a short conversation he turned to Phil again. "Well, that seems all right," he said. "You know, I'm sort of inclined to believe you, Mr. Clinton."

Phil smiled gratefully.

He was silent for a few seconds more, as if wrapped in deep thought. Then he took down the receiver again and called the Copley-Plaza.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully at length, "it does sound like a wild tale, but everything seems to check up. That woman must be the same one who pulled those jobs yesterday. You'd recognize her if you ever saw her again, would you?"

Phil laughed. "I'll say I would," he said.

"Well," the sergeant said, coming down from behind the high desk and taking Phil's hand, "I think we'll let you go now, though we may need you for a witness later."

Phil smiled. Fishing into his pocket, he drew out two cigars, which he extended to the officer. "Have a smoke, sergeant?" he asked.

The sergeant grinned. "Not now," he said, "but I'll be off duty in an hour."

With that Phil turned to leave. Just as he started, though, he suddenly noticed a familiar form in a blue serge suit and black straw hat coming up the stairs, very much out of breath.

She approached the sergeant, and was already talking before Phil could say a word. Her blue eyes were flashing, and her hair seemed to have taken on an almost reddish tint.

"My car," she began excitedly, "was taken from right in front of the Copley-Plaza. I came up here as fast as I could, and found it standing out in front." She paused for breath a second, then went on again. "I know who took it, too—a young man who offered to help me out on Commonwealth Avenue this afternoon. I left it with him to park, and he went off with it after I— Why, there he is now!" she exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of Phil, who had edged his way forward. She addressed the rest of her sentence to him. "You thief," she went on, "I thought there was something funny about the way you came up to me this afternoon." Her eyes snapped.

By this time the sergeant was rapping for order. "Lookee here, miss," he began, "do you think you can get away with that?"

The girl's blue eyes flashed. "Get away —get away with what?" she demanded indignantly.

The sergeant looked at her intently for several seconds, a peculiar glint in his eyes. "Never mind that stuff," he said deliberately. "We're on to you. Come on; you might as well confess; we know that's a stolen car, and we know what you've been doing with it."

Up to this point Phil had watched the proceedings in silence. Now he came up to the girl. "Come on," he said gently; "they know all about it; tell them how you picked me up and then took my bill-fold."

"Picked you up—took your bill-fold!" The girl looked wild-eyed from Phil to the sergeant. Then she drew herself together. "I really don't know what you're talking about," she added quietly, "but I'm willing to listen."

Phil watched her with admiration. This girl was an actress, too. No wonder she'd put it over on him so easily. She might almost do it again. She had overplayed her hand, though, when she had tried to come right into the station to get her stolen car back again. She doubtless knew her own game well enough, but there were a few refinements in the art of stealing cars that she wasn't acquainted with. For instance, it was unpardonably stupid for her to leave the Rhode Island plates on the machine.

By this time the girl had taken a chair.

She was trying to keep calm, but Phil could see that her lower lip was trembling. After a few seconds a tear pushed its way over her auburn lashes and began to trickle down her cheek. In spite of himself, Phil felt moved. Somehow, she didn't impress him as that kind of a girl. He felt in his pockets again to make sure his bill-fold was really gone, then shook his head. They were as empty as ever.

Finally, when the silence had become unbearable, the girl began to speak again. "I haven't his old bill-fold," she persisted; "you can search me—"

The sergeant's face was still hard. "We've heard that before, too," he said, though not quite so harshly. Then he looked from the girl to Phil and back again, his face tightening into a grim smile. "I think you'd both better wait around till the owner of the car comes," he declared at length. "He said he'd be around at six thirty to see if anything 'd happened. One of you is guilty, and I'll be damned if I'm sure which one it is."

With that he settled back in his chair and began to draw circles on his blotter.

Phil stole a glance at the girl. Her eyes were red but dry now. She returned his glance with a reproachfully defiant look, then turned her head away from him, preferring to gaze into the soft twilight outside.

Phil sighed inwardly. Queer how he should have been looking forward to meeting her again.

At a little after six a young man of about twenty-seven came up the steps into the paneled room. With his suit of gray sport tweeds, his sandy mustache, and his homespun cap, he created the impression of true New England refined nonchalance. His blue eyes were smiling.

"See you found the car, all right," he said, coming up to the desk. "I noticed it out in front when I came in."

The sergeant smiled.

"Yes, and here's the lady that took it," he replied, motioning toward the girl.

The newcomer halted suddenly as he turned.

"Why, Betty!" he exclaimed. "What under the sun are you doing here?"

The tears were sliding down the girl's cheeks once more as she crossed over and suffered herself to be taken into the young man's arms. He kissed her soothingly, then turned to the sergeant.

"There's surely some mistake here, officer," he said. "She's my sister. I left her sitting in the car up on Commonwealth Avenue this afternoon. I was going to be right back, but the business took longer than I expected. When I finally did come out to tell her that it was going to take me the rest of the afternoon, I found the car gone. Betty can't drive, so I naturally supposed she had left the machine to wait some place else, and that it had been stolen." Then to the girl he added: "How on earth did you ever get away with it, Betty?"

His sister was smiling weakly now.

"I asked this fellow to drive me to the Copley," she confessed, indicating Phil. "I was so tired of waiting, and then I was beginning to get worried about you, too. Later when I went out to see where he had parked the car I couldn't find it, so I came right up here, thinking he had stolen it. And when I got here they wouldn't let me go," she added, looking from Phil to the sergeant. "They said—well—"

Phil blushed slightly.

The officer was tickling his scalp with his forefinger.

"Well," he announced after a few minutes, "I think I'm satisfied that everything is all right—that is, except your wallet," he added, turning to Phil.

The latter cut in spontaneously: "Good Lord, you don't suppose I still think—" he began. "I must have dropped the wallet some place—perhaps it's still in the car." To the girl he added: "I'm awfully sorry to have caused you all this trouble."

The girl flushed a pretty carmine. "No sorrier than I am for what I've said to you," she put in. Then, changing the subject, she added: "I want you to meet my brother, Mr. Langdon."

Langdon smiled. "Pleased to meet you. Er—suppose we all have dinner together at the Copley, where we can talk it over." He held Phil's hand tightly for a second.

Phil smiled in acquiescence.

With that they turned to leave. Halfway down the steps, though, the sergeant's voice called them back.

"Hey!" he cried out. "Oh, Mr. Clinton, I have something here for you."

As Phil came up to the desk the sergeant handed him a black leather bill-fold. "Just turned in," he explained. "Traffic officer picked it up out of the gutter on Commonwealth Avenue." His jolly eyes were twinkling.

Phil gave a sigh of relief—not that he still cherished any doubts about the girl, but because he felt more comfortable to know just how he had lost the thing. "Look," he said, holding it up to the Langdons. "Guess it must have slipped out of my inside pocket when I bent over to crank the car."

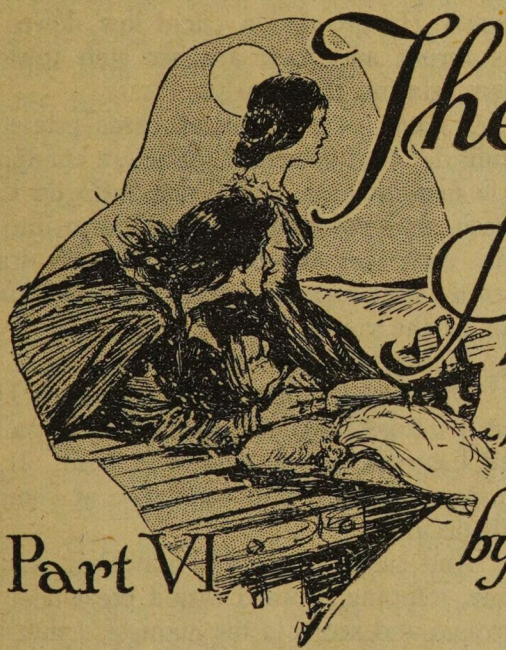
As they walked on down the steps Phil turned to Betty once more. "I've just been wondering," he said thoughtfully, "why it was I couldn't find you at the Copley. I described you to the clerk, and he said that no such person was stopping there."

"Which was the truth—then," the girl laughed. "You see, it was Jack who knew all about our reservations, so I decided to wait in the ladies' room till he came. Then I began to worry about the car, and went out to see—"

"I'm glad you did," Phil said as he helped her into the sedan. "You see, otherwise I might not have known whom to ask for in Farmington." He turned to look her in the face.

There was a mounting tide of color as she answered.

"And I might not have been expecting company," she rejoined archly.



The Further Adventures of Zorro*

Part VI

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FRAY FELIPE USES HIS WIT.

BARBADOS, who had been drinking heavily of the rich, stolen wine since the culmination of the fight with the *caballeros* and the crew of the trading schooner, had reached the stage where he was surly, mean, dangerous. The sensational escape of Señor Zorro had been as oil poured upon flames with the pirate chief. He roared and cursed like a fiend after Captain Ramón had ridden away in pursuit, cuffed some of his men out of the way, and then stood with his fists planted against his hips, his feet wide apart, a black look in his face, his tiny eyes glittering ominously as he glanced toward the adobe building

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wherein the *caballero* prisoners were quartered.

Sanchez and the others who knew Barbados best had been busy keeping out of his way and so escaping trouble, but now Barbados bellowed loudly for his lieutenant, and Sanchez was forced to disclose himself. He approached his chief warily, ready to turn and run if Barbados was in a belligerent mood; but he saw at a glance that what wrath Barbados was enjoying was not directed toward his second in command.

"Sanchez! Fiend of the fiends!" he shouted. "By my naked blade, it is in my mind that we are growing weary because of the lack of sport."

"Then we must have sport," Sanchez said. "If you've anything to suggest—"

"We have prisoners," Barbados remarked, licking his thick lips, "and it is possible that a little torture would not be amiss. Say, roasting at the stake for one of those high-born *caballeros* whose blood is gentle."

"Ha!" Sanchez grunted. "It is an excellent idea—if we draw out the man's agony."

"The drawing out of his agony can be accomplished without a great deal of trouble," Barbados declared. "We'll make him squirm and squeal."

"But there is an ambush to be prepared for the soldiers," Sanchez suggested.

"There will be ample time for that at a later hour," replied the pirate chief. "It will take some time for those troopers to gallop out here from San Diego de Alcala. We can fight better if we have more wine to drink and some sort of sport to watch before giving battle."

"And which of the *caballeros* shall be roasted?" Sanchez wanted to know. "All of them are valuable men from the standpoint of ransom."

"Ha! One can be spared," said Barbados. "Not a man in that adobe but has very rich relatives. What sum we lose from the one we roast we can fasten on the others. We'll force them to gamble and decide the victim themselves. That is a happy thought. Come with me and fetch half a dozen trusted men along."

Barbados, having arrived at a decision, started straight for the adobe building as Sanchez shouted to some of the men nearest. The pirate chief unfastened the outer door and entered with the others at his heels. Then he unlocked the inner door and threw it open.

The *caballeros* were sprawled around the room, talking to one another in low tones, and they turned and looked at Barbados as he stood before them, much as men might have looked at an intruder. Scorn was in every face, and the pirate chief was quick to notice it.

"So you raised a din and attracted our attention, and thus aided this Señor Zorro to escape!" Barbados accused. "It is in my mind that there must be some punishment for that."

The *caballeros* turned from him again and began talking to one another once more as though Barbados had not addressed them. He growled a curse low down in his throat and took another step toward them, glaring ferociously.

"I have here a pack of cards properly shuffled," Barbados said, his glare changing to a fiendish grin. "I'll put them on this bench, and you prisoners will form into a line, walk past the bench, and each draw a card. The man who draws the first deuce will be the victim."

"Victim of what?" one asked.

"Of torture!" Barbados roared. "The stake! Roasting! My men demand sport, and I am the one to give it to them. It is an even thing for you—the gods of chance will decide."

"And suppose, *señor*," said Don Audre Ruiz, stepping forward with a great deal of sarcasm and scorn in his manner, "that we do not care to play your game?"

"Ha! The solution of the difficulty is easy if you do not," Barbados assured him. "In such case, since you seem to be the leader here, we'll torture you and thereafter two others picked out at random."

"Death is close behind you, pirate, if you do this thing!" Don Audre warned.

"But you will not be here to see it if you are roasted first," the pirate chief reminded him. "Line up, prisoners! Do *caballeros* shake with fear at such a time?"

Don Audre Ruiz took another step forward and sneered in the face of Barbados. "*Caballeros* are not aware of the existence of such a thing as fear!" he declared. "If there is no other way, put down your pack of cards. But if you have courage and the spirit of fair play, let me fight it out with any two of your crew of fiends—a dagger against long blades."

"Do I resemble a fool?" Barbados requested to know. "Have I but half a mind? Run a needless chance when we have you powerless already? Ha! A *caballero* might do such a fool thing, but I am not a *caballero*."

"A blind man could see that," Don Audre retorted.

"Ha! More of your insults and I'll roast the lot of you! Line up! Here are the cards."

Barbados put the greasy pack down on the end of the bench and stood back, folding his great arms across his chest. Don Audre Ruiz glanced around at his comrades, and they began forming the line. Sergeant Gonzales, feeling a bit out of place, dropped back to the end. And then the line moved forward, and the first man turned a card and saw that it was a ten, and passed on.

One by one they advanced to the bench, picked up a card, showed it to Barbados, and moved forward again, playing with death, but with inscrutable faces.

"Ha!" the pirate chief cried. "Fortunate *caballeros,* eh? But one of you must draw a deuce soon. And then my men will have rare sport. We'll see whether a *caballero* of gentle blood will squeal and squirm when the hot flames lick at him. We'll let the women torment him first, and the children! Well— Ha!"

Barbados suddenly bent forward, an evil smile upon his face. Don Audre had reached the bench and had turned over his card—the deuce of spades!

Don Audre drew in his breath sharply, but his face gave never a sign of emotion. The others crowded forward.

"Ha!" Barbados shrieked. "It is well done and appropriate! You are their leader, *señor,* and possibly will set them an example how to die. For you we will make the fire hotter and the torment longer. We'll see how long you can live."

"He'll flinch quick enough!" Sanchez cried, grinning.

Don Audre Ruiz tossed the card away and dusted his hands as though the bit of pasteboard had soiled them. Then he raised his head proudly and looked Barbados straight in the eyes.

"How soon?" Don Audre Ruiz asked.

"How soon, *caballero?* Now, at once, and immediately! My men crave sport!" Barbados cried. "And while they listen to your shrieks and pleas for mercy they can drink some rich wine we took from Reina de Los Angeles."

"Are you human man enough to let me have speech with Fray Felipe before I die?" Don Audre asked.

"Want to pray with him, do you?" Barbados sneered. "I'll have him at the stake for you. You can pray through the smoke."

There was a sudden jostling in the crowd, and Sergeant Gonzales shouldered his way to the front.

"Foul pirate!" said he. "Murderer and fiend, let me make a deal!"

"What is this?" Barbados asked.

"I am a bigger man than the *caballero* here, and fatter men roast better. Also, I wear the uniform of the Governor, and you hate such uniforms. I'm twice the coward that Don Ruiz is. I'd squirm and squeal twice as much. Ha! Would it not be better sport to roast me at the stake?"

"You want to die for him?" Barbados asked.

"I offer myself in his place, since your fiends must be amused. I did not get a chance to draw a card, or surely I'd have drawn a deuce."

Don Audre put his hand on the sergeant's arm.

"This is useless, my friend," he said.

"Not so!" Sergeant Gonzales declared. "You are a fine man of parts, Don Audre Ruiz, and really amount to something in the world. And I am but a big pig. There are many better men who can fill my place."

"Whatever your birth and station, you are now, in my estimation, a *caballero* and a brave man," Don Audre said.

Barbados roared his laughter.

"A hero!" he sneered. "I cannot let you take the *caballero's* place, fool soldier, but, since you wish to be roasted, your wish is granted. We'll roast you later, when we have need of more sport. These other *caballeros* will be ransomed, but there is nobody in the world who would ransom you for as much as a bottle of thin wine."

"That is true, fiend of hell!" Sergeant Gonzales said.

"But it is not true!" Don Audre Ruiz cried, his face lighting. He whirled to confront the other *caballeros*. "Friends, promise me this last request—have your people make up a purse and ransom this soldier," he said. "He has been the friend of Don Diego Vega for years. We used to smile at that peculiar friendship, but now I can understand. The sergeant, also, is a man of parts, and Don Diego realized it while we were blind. A last handshake, and then—"

They surged toward him, and Barbados and his men stepped back to the door and waited. There was an evil grin on the face of the pirate chief again. The gods of chance were working in his favor, he felt, when they had delivered this *caballero* into his hands for his evil purposes.

"Come, *señor!*" he ordered. "It is not gentlemanly to keep my men waiting long for their fun."

Don Audre Ruiz shook the hands of his friends for the last time and turned away. They led him out and closed and barred the door again. They conducted him through the front room and into the open, first binding his hands behind his back.

"If you are a human being, let me see Fray Felipe," Don Audre said.

"I'll have him beside the stake," Barbados promised. "He can mumble over you all he likes."

Some of the pirates were shouting the news of what was to occur. Men came running from every direction, shouting and laughing and waving bottles, determined to see how a *caballero* could die. Women and children hurried from their huts.

The stake was ready, for it often had been used before, both for prisoners and pirates. It was a favorite method Barbados had of punishing traitors and those he deemed guilty of breaking some of the many laws he laid down. It stood near the sea, a long metal bar upright in the soil, the débris of many fires scattered around it and half buried in the shifting sand.

Already some of the men were hurrying toward the stake with fuel. The women and children were shrieking insults at the condemned man. But Don Audre Ruiz held his head proudly, and his lips were curled in scorn. Only the unusual pallor in his face told that there was a tumult of emotions within his breast.

They lashed him to the stake and made his body fast there with ropes and leather thongs. One chain they wrapped around him to hold him fast after the ropes had been burned away. Women spat at him, children hurled at him small stones and scoops of sand. The pirates danced around him like savages, waving wine bottles and brandishing their cutlasses.

"So you think that you will not squirm and squeal, eh?" Barbados taunted. "In a very few minutes we'll learn the truth concerning that."

"You promised me the *fray*," Don Audre Ruiz replied. "But I did not think that a pirate could keep his given word."

"Ha! I'll show you that I can play at having gentle blood!" Barbados laughed. "Matter of honor, eh? The *fray!* Fetch me the old *fray*, some of you!"

The dancing and drinking was continued, and more fuel was heaped around the stake and its victim. A few feet distant stood a man with a flaming torch. Barbados, his arms folded across his chest, stood waiting to give the word. And after a time old Fray Felipe thrust his way among them and reached the side of the pirate chief.

"What is this that you would do?" he demanded.

"We intend to broil this *caballero* until he is done properly," Barbados replied. "Being a pious soul, he has need of a priest before he dies. So we have sent for you."

Fray Felipe knew that there was small chance for an argument here. Ordinarily Barbados was exceedingly superstitious where a man of the church was concerned,

but now wine had given him a false courage. If Fray Felipe saved Don Audre Ruiz now it would not be through an appeal to the heart of Barbados.

And so Fray Felipe did a peculiar thing—a thing that startled them all, and Don Audre most of all. He threw back his gray head and laughed.

Barbados blinked his eyes rapidly, and Sanchez swore softly beneath his breath. Had the *fray* gone insane suddenly? Were his wits wandering? It was a horrible thing to see an old *fray* laugh like that.

"So it is as I suspected," Fray Felipe declared. "I had thought for a moment, Barbados, that you were a pirate leader in truth, a general with brains. But you play the boy."

"How is this?" Barbados cried.

"Traitors play with you, and you walk into traps. You and your fiends spend time at such cruel sports as this while your enemies are preparing to annihilate you—"

"*Fray,* what is your meaning?"

"Are you blind?" Fray Felipe asked. "Are you an utter and simple fool? You have put your confidence and trust in this Captain Ramón. And at this moment he is riding back from San Diego de Alcála at the head of the troopers, perhaps."

"Ha! I know it, *fray.* He is leading the soldiers into an ambush!"

"So you are such an easy dupe!" Fray Felipe said. "I know his plans, and so does the little *señorita.* You will form your ambush at the head of the cañon. And he will lead the troopers around it, attack you in the rear, cut you off from your camp, and annihilate you. By doing that he'll save his face and gain favor with decent men and women and with the Governor. He'll claim that he saved the *señorita,* and ask her in marriage, get her for a bride without cutting himself off forever from honest men. A man who can be traitor to one cause, Señor Pirate, can be traitor to another."

"Lies!" Barbados thundered.

"They are not lies!" Fray Felipe declared. "And you are playing here when you should be preparing for the battle. Easy victims you'll be for the troopers!"

Barbados seemed to hesitate. There was a quality in the *fray's* words and bearing that indicated truth. Then there came a woman's screech, and Inez thrust herself forward.

"The old *fray* speaks the truth!" she declared. "I overheard the *commandante* talking to the *señorita.* He told her that he was tricking you."

"By my naked blade!" Barbados swore.

"He is doubly a traitor!" the woman screeched. "I would not trust him. Make ready to fight the soldiers. Do not be caught in a trap. The man at the stake can wait. It will not hurt him to be bound there and meditate for a time."

Barbados suddenly seemed convinced. He began shouting his commands, and Sanchez echoed them as usual.

Men also ran to get horses and weapons.

"Catch me in a trap, eh?" Barbados cried. "I can arrange a trap myself, and not in the cañon!"

He rushed away, shrieking more orders. Don Audre Ruiz, fastened to the stake, was forgotten for the moment. Fray Felipe approached him.

"It was the only way, *caballero,*" the gentle *fray* said. "It would have been far better to have let the traitor wipe out these rogues entirely, but I had to save your life. And the soldiers will triumph when they come. Right is on their side and fights with them. Also Señor Zorro is at liberty!"

"Loose me, *fray!*"

"I cannot, *señor.* There is one chain that is too strong for me. But they have forgotten you now. I'll search for some tool with which I can remove the chain. The ropes and the leather thongs will be easy."

Fray Felipe bowed his head and shuffled away. Don Audre Ruiz remained lashed to the stake.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNEXPECTED HELP.

LEFT behind helpless in the guard room of the *presidio,* Señor Zorro fought to control his emotions, telling himself that he could think out no proper line of action while his brain was in sad tumult.

His case seemed hopeless. He was unable to make an escape, and Captain Ramón was leading the troopers against the pirates. Señor Zorro began wondering whether his good fortune had deserted him entirely. The *señorita* was in grave peril, and also his friends the *caballeros,* and he could do nothing.

But there was a certain outside influence at work regarding which Señor Zorro knew nothing, an influence caused by his just acts when, as Zorro, he had ridden up and down El Camino Real righting the wrongs inflicted on *frailes* and natives.

The native fisherman had guided him to the vicinity of the pirates' camp before dawn, and then had disappeared. Señor Zorro did not wonder at that, since it was commendable in the native to save his own skin.

The fisherman, however, had continued across the hills to San Diego de Alcála to pay a visit to relatives and friends. There he waited impatiently, anticipating news of a fight at the pirates' camp. And, because he admired uniforms, though they inspired fear in him as well as admiration, he drifted near the *presidio.*

He was in time to behold the arrival of Captain Ramón, and later of Señor Zorro. After a time, he saw Señor Zorro's attempt at escape, and watched the troopers gallop away. And then, by loitering near the *presidio,* he ascertained something of the truth—that Señor Zorro was being held a prisoner in the maniac's shirt and would be dealt with at some future time.

The native wandered around the huts of the village, doing more genuine thinking than ever before in his life. He remembered how Señor Zorro, a long time before, had saved his father. He was a neophyte native, and he remembered, also, how Señor Zorro had fought for the *frailes* when they were being persecuted.

The native fisherman did not have to think long on the subject before arriving at a conclusion. Having done so, he went to the hut of a cousin and begged a bottle of palm wine, potent stuff that could make a man mad.

He took a good drink of the palm wine and slipped away, carrying the bottle. He had a short, sharp knife that he used for the cleaning of fish, and he took this out and inspected it, and then hid it beneath his ragged shirt and in an armpit, fastening it there cleverly with a bit of rag.

Having made these preparations, the native fisherman drank more of the wine and gathered false courage. He spilled some of the liquor on his sorry clothes, so that its well-known odor mingled with that of fish. And then he approached the *presidio* again.

One of the two troopers remaining was sitting before the main door, and the other, supposedly, was in the corridor outside the guard room, where his duty called him. The native fisherman went close to the man before the door and regarded him evilly. He held up the bottle and guzzzled more of the palm wine. The trooper looked up and saw him.

"Dog of a savage!" he cried. "Know you not that it is against the laws and the wishes of his excellency for natives to drink the stuff?"

The native blinked his eyes at him. "May the devil take the laws," said he, boldly, "and his excellency also!"

"What words are these?" the soldier cried, getting to his feet.

"Every man who wears a uniform is a rascal and a thief!"

"This to me? A dog of a native speaks so to one of the soldiers of the Governor?"

"If the Governor was here," said the native, "I'd throw this drink in his face! And if you trouble me more, I'll throw it in yours!"

"Ha! In that case—"

"For you dare not put me in the guard room!" the native declared. "I have too many friends."

The trooper exploded and rushed forward. "Low-born dog!" he shrieked. He caught the native and cuffed him, and instead of taking the blows calmly, the native fought back. It was too much!

"Into the guard room you go!" the soldier shouted. "And when the *commandante* returns he probably will order you whipped. And I'll wield the lash! Give me that bottle!"

The trooper took the bottle and sat it down carefully, having noticed that it was

half full, then hustled the native inside and along the corridor to the door of the guard room. The other soldier looked up questioningly.

"This dog has been drinking palm wine and making remarks about his excellency!" the first soldier said. "Throw him into the guard house. He is fit company for Señor Zorro!"

The door was opened, the native was hurled inside, and the door was closed and barred again. The two soldiers peered through the small aperture in it. They saw the native pick himself up and look around as though dazed.

"Ha!" one of the troopers cried. "He will wonder what it is all about before morning. That palm wine is dangerous stuff."

"And I took half a bottle of it from the dog before we put him in," the other whispered.

"Let us watch a moment before we sample it."

The native glanced toward the corner where Señor Zorro, in the maniac's shirt, was propped up on a bench. He lurched toward him, bent forward, and peered into his face.

"A white man!" he gasped. "In the guard room the same as me!"

He threw out his chest and strutted around the room, as though a great honor had come to him. The soldiers at the door laughed. The native turned and blinked his eyes at them, mouthed some meaningless phrases, and appeared to be dazed again. Twice he shrieked like a soul in torment. He beat his fists against the wall of the guard room.

"*Si!* That wine is strong stuff!" one of the soldiers said.

Still they remained watching. But the native, it seemed, was exhausted. He slipped down to the floor, crawled over against the wall, and let his head topple to one side. Twice he nodded, and then he began to snore. The troopers closed the little door of the aperture. The fun was over.

Though he had recognized the native, Señor Zorro had spoken no word. He was not certain whether the man was under the influence of palm wine or shamming. He listened and heard the two soldiers walk down the corridor, then turned his head and glanced at the native again. The native had opened one of his eyes and was watching the door.

"They are drinking your wine," Zorro hissed.

"*Si, señor!* One moment!"

The native slipped slowly and carefully along the wall until he was within a few feet of Señor Zorro.

"I thought it out, *señor*," he said. "I know those maniac's shirts, for once they bound me and put me in one. And I have a sharp knife—"

"Careful!" Señor Zorro warned. "If you succeed in this I will make you rich for life!"

"I am not doing it for riches, but because you have been kind to my people and to the *frailes*," the native said. "I must do my work swiftly."

He had the knife out now, and began working at the tough leather of the shirt. The thong that drew the shirt about the neck was fastened with a metal clasp, a sort of lock, and so the tough leather had to be cut. The native sawed through it, and loosened the thong.

He stopped to slip noiselessly across to the door and crouch and listen there. He hurried back and began peeling the leather sack off Señor Zorro. He worked frantically, guessing what would be in store for him if he happened to be caught.

"If I escape, then must you do so," Señor Zorro said. "And keep away from San Diego de Alcála for many moons to come."

"I understand, *señor*. And, if I do not escape, remember, please, that I did what a poor man could."

"I'll help you, and I can."

"A good horse belonging to one of these soldiers is just in front of the *presidio, señor*."

"Good!"

"And some daggers are in leather boots near the front door, on the wall."

"Again, good!" Señor Zorro said.

The native slashed the last of the bonds, and Zorro stood and moved his limbs to re-

store circulation. Then he motioned the native toward the door.

"Stand on that side," Zorro directed. "And shriek as though you were being killed."

The native shrieked. Señor Zorro himself felt shivers run up and down his spine at those blood-curdling shrieks. The two soldiers listened, and then hurried back toward the guard room. They opened the little aperture in the door. They saw neither of their prisoners, but they did see the empty maniac's shirt in one corner of the room.

And then they did what Señor Zorro had judged they would do—unlock and open the door and rush inside. Zorro hurled himself upon the first and floored him, rolled aside just in time to escape the rush of the second, delivered a blow that laid this second on the floor unconscious, got the dagger from the soldier's belt, and whirled to take the rush of the first, now upon his feet again.

"Fly!" he ordered the native. But the fisherman stood just outside the door, waiting to see the outcome.

Señor Zorro had no quarrel with the soldiery, and he did not want to wound a trooper. But it was demanded of him that he make an escape as quicly as possible, and make certain that he could not be followed for some minutes.

And so he rushed his man with the dagger, and the other gave ground and put himself on guard. But suddenly Señor Zorro whirled and rushed backward instead of attacking, darted through the door, slammed it shut, and shot home the bar. Inside were the two soldiers.

"*Señores, adios!*" Zorro said at the aperture. "I regret that you cannot accompany me and see the fighting."

"For this—" one of the imprisoned troopers began.

"Have you ever seen this one?" Señor Zorro asked. And he slammed shut the door of the aperture, laughed loudly, saw that the native fisherman was free, and ran like the wind down the corridor and through the front door and into the sunshine.

A moment later he was in the saddle and galloping like a madman in the wake of Captain Ramón and the troopers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PLIGHT OF RUIZ.

CAPTAIN RAMÓN, riding with the lieutenant at the head of the soldiery, considered his plans.

The captain had told Barbados how to arrange an ambush at the head of the cañon, and he expected to lead the troopers around the ambush and to the rear, cutting the pirates off from their camp, and either exterminating them at once in the cañon or driving them up into the open, where the troopers could ride them down one by one.

Captain Ramón knew, of course and naturally, that the pirates would be watching the advance. But, just at the mouth of the cañon, Captain Ramón could lead the soldiers swiftly to one side and reach the rear before the pirates could understand the maneuver and hasten back to protect themselves.

He had not the slightest doubt regarding the outcome. The troopers were about equal in numbers to the pirates, and while the latter would fight desperately, knowing that capture meant the hangman's rope for them, the troopers were seasoned men who had been through several native uprisings and knew how to handle themselves in battle.

The soldiers had a few pistols, but they were not to be depended on so much as blades and a hand-to-hand conflict. The pirates had a few firearms also, but they lacked ammunition. It would be swords against cutclasses for the greater part, Captain Ramón knew, and the advantage would be with the troopers' swords.

As to his own part, Ramón realized well that Barbados would recognize his treachery at once. And so there would be no protection for him from the pirates after Barbados had passed the word to get him, and Ramón would have to fight with the soldiers as a loyal officer. But he did not doubt the outcome of the combat, and so felt secure.

They rode swiftly and in perfect military

formation along the dusty highway, and presently turned off and galloped across rolling country toward the sea. Now they proceeded with caution, flankers out, but they did not slacken speed. It was mid-afternoon, and they wanted to do their work before nightfall.

They approached the mouth of the cañon, and Captain Ramón shaded his eyes and peered ahead, but could see nothing human. The pirates were under cover, he supposed, waiting for the troopers to ride down into the narrow cañon and so into a trap from which they could not escape. Ramón spoke his plans to the lieutenant again, and the junior officer nodded that he understood the arrangements perfectly.

They came to the cañon's end, but swerved suddenly toward the right and galloped along the rim and up a gentle slope, the last before reaching the sea. Captain Ramón expected to hear roars of rage from the cañon, but he did not. He almost chuckled. Barbados evidently supposed that the *commandante* was playing some trick, he took it for granted.

They reached the crest of the slope and pulled up among the trees and looked down upon the pirate camp. A few women and children were running about, but they could see no men.

"Down the slope, then turn and gallop back toward the cañon," Captain Ramón instructed. "Thus we take them in the rear and have the rogues at our mercy!"

"How do you know that they are in the cañon?" the lieutenant asked with quick suspicion.

"Did I not hear this Señor Zorro make his plans?" Captain Ramón demanded with some show of anger. "Am I not your superior officer? They are now in the cañon, expecting us to gallop into the trap they have planned."

"Then they saw us approach," the lieutenant declared.

"*Sí!* And they are wondering what is happening, no doubt. It is possible that they have seen me at the head of the troopers and have noticed that Señor Zorro is not present. But they have not had time to get back to their camp. Their trap has been turned against them. Forward!"

Down the slope swept the troopers, and women and children screeched and ran into the huts and buildings. In a big circle the soldiers from San Diego de Alcála swerved and started back toward the cañon's mouth to hem in their foes.

And, in that instant, the *commandante* found that things were not as he had expected, and that he had been fooled. Reports of firearms came to his ears, bullets whistled among the troopers, and some of them fell from their saddles. And from the huts and buildings of the pirate camp poured the motley crew of Barbados, screeching their battle-cries, eager to wipe out the soldiery that would have tricked and slain them.

Captain Ramón cursed and began shouting commands. The troopers fired their pistols, drew their blades, and prepared for bloody and more intimate work. From behind the largest adobe building dashed a number of mounted pirates, Barbados and Sanchez riding at their head.

"At them!" the *commandante* shrieked wildly. "Forward! No mercy!"

The lieutenant, who was by far the better field officer, was endeavoring to make himself heard above the din. The pirates and the soldiers clashed, fought like maniacs, the troopers at the outset having much the better of it. But Barbados and his mounted pirates joined the battle and fought like fiends, because they saw visions of the hangman's noose if they failed to achieve a victory complete.

Captain Ramón had one close look at the face of Barbados, and heard the pirate chief shriek "Traitor!" at him. Thereafter he managed to keep well in the rear of the fighting, under pretense of handling the men. His blade was the only one not red.

Ramón had no intention of liberating the *caballeros* until the fight was over, for he wanted to claim full credit for rescuing them. He wanted another talk with the Señorita Lolita, too, before her friends approached her. She had not given him the promise that he had expected, and the necessity for it was over, since Zorro was free of the pirate camp. But Ramón hoped to get the promise yet, and have an immediate marriage, saying that he was the one

man who could give testimony that would save Señor Zorro if he was tried for conspiracy against the Governor.

The battle waged around him. Barbados and his pirate crew were endeavoring to keep between the troopers and the adobe building wherein the *caballeros* were held prisoners. The *caballeros* were crowding at the little windows, watching the fight. Don Audre Ruiz was still bound to the stake, for Fray Felipe had been unable to reach him before the fighting began, and now the aged *fray* was busy with the wounded men.

The *señorita* was under the close guard of a single pirate appointed to the task by Barbados. She was in one of the buildings, and Captain Ramón did not know where to find her. Convinced of the *commandante's* treachery, Barbados had no thought of letting him get possession of the *señorita*. She could be held for ransom, the pirate chief decided.

Back and forth across the open space, up and down the sandy beach the fight progressed. Here groups of men were battling like fiends, here one pursued a lone enemy. The women and children were keeping to the huts.

"Fire the place!" Captain Ramón was ordering. "Burn them out!"

Some of the troopers were quick to do his bidding. A pistol flash was enough. The poor huts began burning fiercely, the dry palm fronds with which they were manufactured flaming instantly.

Ramón began to worry some. The battle seemed an even thing. Both sides had lost many men, and the two forces now were about even. It came to his mind that, unless the soldiers triumphed very soon, he would have to release the *caballeros* and let them join in the fray.

Back toward the slope the pirates drove the remaining troopers. And there the battle waged at some distance from the burning huts of the pirate camp. The women tried to quench the flames, but could not. The wind from the sea carried flaming pieces of palm frond and fired more huts.

Don Audre Ruiz had tugged at his bonds until almost exhausted, but had been unable to get free. Once the battle surged near him, and then away again. Clouds of smoke from the burning huts rolled over him, surged around him. Great chunks of flaming material floated past him on the still breeze.

Don Audre wondered whether the pirates were to be victorious, whether, in the end, they would roast him at the stake, as they had started to do. He choked in the dense smoke; his eyes smarted and then pained; he tried to see how the fight was going, but could only get a glimpse now and then.

And then he saw something that caused a thrill of horror to pass through him. One of the burning brands had fallen at the edge of the pile of fuel about the stake. It smoldered, burst into flames again. The fuel caught, and the flames spread.

Don Audre Ruiz, helpless against the stake, watched the flames creep nearer, the fire spread and become more raging. Once more he struggled hopelessly against the chain and ropes that held him fast. What irony was this that he should burn without human hands firing the fuel?

Already he could feel the heat of the flames. Slowly they were eating their way toward him through the heaps of fuel the pirates had dropped. Soon they would touch him, smoke and fire would engulf him, and later men would find naught but his charred remains.

CHAPTER XXX.

FRAY FELIPE GETS HIS GOBLET.

SEÑOR ZORRO thanked his saints that the horse he had seized in front of the *presidio* at San Diego de Alcála was a noble animal of endurance and speed.

He kicked at the mount's flanks and rode like the wind in the wake of the troopers. He knew that he was gaining on them, but they had such an advantage of time that he realized he could not reach the pirate camp before Ramón and his soldiers.

As his horse negotiated the last slope before reaching the sea, Señor Zorro could hear, coming from a distance, the din of battle. He stopped his mount in the fringe of trees and looked down upon the scene.

The soldiers and pirates were fighting

hotly at some distance from the buildings. The huts were ablaze. Women and children were trying to escape into the brush. These things Señor Zorro saw at a glance, and also that the fight was an even one, with the advantage to neither force.

He ascertained that the *caballeros* were still prisoners. Only a moment he hesitated, and then he kicked at the horse's flanks again and raced the animal down the slope. The fight was to one side of him, and so he encountered neither soldier nor pirate. He had a glimpse of Ramón in the distance, and believed that Ramón saw him in turn. He rode wildly among the blazing huts, and so came to the adobe building where the prisoners were housed.

Señor Zorro sprang from his horse and dashed into the building. With a metal bar, he broke the lock of the inner door and shrieked to the *caballeros* that they were free.

"Follow me to your weapons!" he shouted. "Fight with the troopers against the pirates! Catch me this renegade and traitor of a Ramón! Remember, Ramón is mine!"

They answered him with glad shouts and rushed at his heels out of the building and toward the hut where the captured weapons had been placed, and before which there were no guards now. The roof of the hut already was blazing.

Señor Zorro kicked open the door, dashed inside, and began tossing out swords. The *caballeros* rushed forward, shouting as they claimed their weapons. Zorro dashed outside again, his own beloved blade in his hand. Already the *caballeros* were running toward the fight.

"Zorro, by the saints!" It was the bellowing voice of Sergeant Gonzales that hailed him. "What is this talk of my captain being a traitor?"

"He is!" Zorro cried. "He was in league with the pirates, and then turned against them. He is a double traitor! Forward, sergeant! Use your blade well! Ruiz! Where is Ruiz?"

"The devils took him out to roast him at the stake," the sergeant replied. "That was long before the fighting began."

"To roast him—" Señor Zorro gasped.

"Let me at a pirate!" the sergeant bellowed, dashing away. "There are scores to settle!"

Señor Zorro, his heart sinking within him, peered around through the smoke. And then hope flamed within him again, for in the distance he saw Dan Audre Ruiz, the flames leaping around him. Señor Zorro ran swiftly through the billows of smoke toward the stake.

Don Audre's clothing already was being scorched. He had turned his head away from the smoke and the heat, fighting to the last to keep from drawing deadly flame down into his lungs, and his eyes were closed.

He did not see the swift approach of Señor Zorro, did not guess that rescue was at hand until he heard Zorro's voice.

"Audre!" he cried. "Audre! Speak to me! If the fiends have slain you—"

Don Audre Ruiz opened his eyes and smiled, and Señor Zorro smiled in reply. Then he kicked away the burning fuel and leaped toward his friend.

"You are just in time," Don Audre said. "I had given up hope, Diego, my friend."

"A moment, and I'll have you free!"

He tore away the ropes and leather thongs, and worked frantically at the heavy chain, which was hot to his touch. He was alert and on guard as he worked, but the fight did not approach him. The *caballeros* had joined it, he saw, and the pirates were being cut down, and some taken prisoner.

And finally the heavy chain fell away, and Señor Zorro helped Don Audre a short distance from the stake and thrust a sword into his hand.

"Remember, Ramón belongs to me!" Zorro said. "Let us take him alive!"

Afoot, they dashed across the open space toward the edge of the fight. But they looked in vain for the *commandante*. He was not in his saddle, nor was he dead or wounded and on the ground.

"Find him!" Zorro cried. "He will be trying to get the *señorita* away!"

They ran toward the adobe buildings to commence their frantic search. They watched the slope, and the beach in either direction, half expecting to see the *com-*

mandante carrying Señorita Lolita away on his horse.

"Find him! We must find him!" Zorro screeched. "With me, Audre, my friend! She may be in one of the burning huts—"

And so they rushed through the smoke, calling, searching, fear in their hearts.

Sergeant Gonzales was looking for his captain also. The sergeant told himself that he was in a quandary. His commander and his friend, it appeared, were fighting each other, and the sergeant could not be loyal to both.

He bellowed a challenge and engaged a pirate in combat, took his man, and rushed on. He dodged a charging trooper who almost ran him down, darted around one of the blazing huts, and came upon a scene.

Fray Felipe, attending the wounded, had risen from the ground beside one to find a pirate rushing toward him in flight. The man stumbled and fell headlong, and from the sash he wore about his middle there fell something that flashed and glittered in the sun. Fray Felipe gave a cry and rushed forward. He had seen his beloved sacred goblet!

There was no escape for the pirate. When he regained his feet he found the old *fray* standing before him.

"Beast and fiend!" Fray Felipe said. "Give it me!"

"Ha! Would I not be a fool to do so?" the pirate challenged. "One side, *fray!* One side—or you die!"

The other raised his cutlass to strike. But Fray Felipe could not be driven back by such means while the sacred goblet was in the possession of the other.

"Give it me!" he commanded.

"One side—"

Fray Felipe took a quick step forward and jerked the goblet from the other's hand. The pirate cursed and darted forward again. Fray Felipe caught the descending arm.

Back and forth they struggled, and the *fray* dropped the goblet to the ground again. He was a strong man for his age, but the pirate was young and strong also. He forced Fray Felipe back against the wall of the burning hut, throttled him, raised the cutlass again.

"I warned you, *fray!*" the pirate hissed.

And then he hissed again, a hiss of pain and fright. Through his body a blade had been plunged. He dropped the cutlass, threw wide his arms, shrieked once more, and fell with face toward the ground. And Sergeant Gonzales merely glanced down at him, then picked up the goblet, wiped it against his tunic, and bowed before Fray Felipe.

"Allow me," the sergeant said. "It is a fortunate thing that I was near, *fray!*"

"I thank thee, son!"

"Son?" Gonzales cried. "You call an old sinner like me by such a name?"

"Perhaps you hold more worth than you yourself think," the old *fray* replied.

Sergeant Gonzales could not endure such talk. He grew redder in the face, blew out his cheeks, gulped and cleared his throat.

"I am a rough soldier!" Sergeant Gonzales declared. "And I belong in the battle, which is almost at an end."

"Go, son, and my blessings go with thee!"

Gonzales bowed his head an instant. Then, as though ashamed of himself, be bellowed at nothing at all and charged away through the smoke.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"MEAL MUSH AND GOAT'S MILK!"

THE appearance of Señor Zorro at the scene of battle when he was supposed to be behind bars in the *presidio* at San Diego de Alcála terrified Captain Ramón. He had a sudden feeling that the fates were against him—that his treachery was to be punished. And he found that his plans were ruined again.

He had no faith in a personal encounter with Señor Zorro. Something seemed to tell him that such would result fatally for himself. And he had small faith in proving Zorro a traitor after the fight, and a great fear that Zorro and some of the captured pirates would, on the other hand, prove him to be one.

Captain Ramón felt desperate. He had an idea that the *señorita* was under pirate guard in one of the buildings. He would make away with the guard and get her,

he decided—ride with her away from the camp and scene of battle.

He could say, afterward, that he had believed the pirates were to be victorious, and that he wanted to rescue the *señorita* while yet there was time. Possibly he could make them believe that he had departed before he saw the *caballeros* released and the tide of battle turned.

He had no definite plans after that. Perhaps, he thought, he could keep the *señorita* a prisoner of his own in some out of the way place, and force her to consent to wed him. Any wandering *fray* could perform the ceremony. Or, all else failing, he could turn criminal, play highwayman, force the *señorita* to do his bidding. In an emergency, a knife thrust in the heart, a secret grave, and Captain Ramón could wander back among men, saying he had seen nothing of her, possibly claiming that a blow on the head during the battle had robbed him of his wits, and that he did not know where he had been or what had happened.

Captain Ramón had a fertile brain when it came to plotting. He watched for his chance, and escaped through the clouds of smoke, urging his horse to its utmost. He galloped around behind the buildings, so that the smoke screened his movements. Behind an adobe building he dismounted, and then crept along the wall toward the front. He crouched beside a window, lifted himself slowly, and peered inside.

There sat the *señorita,* her hands to her face, and lounging near the door was one of the pirates on guard.

The *commandante* drew his blade and crept nearer the door. He waited for a lull in the din of battle and then shouted loudly.

"At you!" he cried. "Die, soldier!"

The subterfuge had immediate results. The pirate opened the door, stepped out a couple of feet, and peered into the smoke. Captain Ramón guessed that the fellow thought the battle was drawing near.

A quick thrust, and the pirate was down, coughing out the blood of his life. Captain Ramón dashed into the building, sheathing his red blade.

The *señorita* sprang to her feet.

"Quick, *señorita!* There is scant time!" he cried. "The pirates are having the best of it—"

"I am safer with them than with you!" she said with scorn.

He reached out and grasped her cruelly by the wrist.

"There is to be no more nonsense!" he exclaimed. "I am master here! You do as I say, *señorita!* Come with me!"

"Beast!" she cried.

"Hard words will not stop me now. Am I to be balked by a bit of womankind?"

He jerked her forward, put an arm around her, half lifted her from the floor, and carried her out of the building and through the billowing smoke. Around the corner he hurried, to his horse. Still holding her by the wrist, he vaulted into the saddle, then pulled her up before him.

"Help!" she cried. "Diego! Zorro!"

"Ha! Call to the fiend, but this time he does not come!" Captain Ramón exclaimed.

But Señor Zorro had heard her shriek. And the smoke lifted, and he and Don Audre Ruiz saw the *commandante* on the horse, the *señorita* held before him. Captain Ramón saw them, too, and kicked frantically at the animal's ribs. The frightened horse plunged away through the smoke.

Señor Zorro was more maniac than sane man as he dashed forward to follow. The fight swerved toward him. He sprang up and grasped a soldier, pulled him out of the saddle, sprang into the saddle himself, and gave chase.

Out of the clouds of smoke he rode, to see the *commandante* and his prisoner a short distance to the left. In the smoke Captain Ramón had lost his bearings for a moment.

Señor Zorro shrieked a challenge, whirled his horse, and took after his foe. Ramón found that he could not get up the slope without meeting Zorro and having a clash with him—the thing he most wanted to avoid. Desperate, he whirled his horse and charged back into the smoke again, thinking to outwit his pursuer.

Suddenly he found himself in the thick of the fighting. Again he whirled his

horse. The frightened steed refused to answer rein or pressure of knees, refused to spring forward at the cruel touch of spurs. The smoke swirled away on a breath of breeze. And Captain Ramón found himself inside a ring of *caballeros*, two of whom were holding his horse, another reaching to help the *señorita* down, others reaching up to seize him.

Señor Zorro came to a stop within a few feet of him, and dismounted swiftly, a grim look in his face.

"Down, renegade!" Zorro commanded.

Captain Ramón, in the face of such an emergency, could appear calm, though he was not. He sneered, lifted his brows as though in wonder, and slowly got from the saddle. Once he looked straight at Zorro, and then around the circle.

The fighting was at an end. What pirates had not been slain were captives. Barbados, himself a captive, stood to one side under guard. The lieutenant and his troopers were coming forward.

Ramón called to the officer. "Here is your Señor Zorro!" he shouted. "In some strange manner he has escaped the *presidio*. Seize him and see that he does not escape again!"

The lieutenant gave a quick command, and some of the troopers dismounted and started forward. But they found before them a line of determined *caballeros* with ready swords.

Don Audre Ruiz bowed before the lieutenant and spoke. "*Señor,*" he said, "I dislike exceedingly to interfere with a man in the proper performance of his duty. But I must ask you and your men to stand back for a time. There is a little matter between Señor Zorro and Captain Ramón that must be settled."

"I am in command here, under Captain Ramón," the lieutenant said. "This Señor Zorro is an escaped prisoner."

"Nevertheless, you must remain quiet until the affair is at an end," Don Audre said. "The *caballeros* are equal in number to your troopers now. If you care to fight it out—"

"Do you realize that you are taking up arms against the Governor?" the lieutenant demanded.

"As to that, we are not alarmed," Don Audre replied. "This Ramón is a renegade and a traitor!"

"Ha! That he is!" cried Barbados. "He joined hands with us, planned for us to raid Reina de Los Angeles and steal the girl. Then he turns against us, plans to trap us! Traitor and dog, he is!"

"And I say so, too," Don Audre declared. "Here are a number of gentlemen whose honors and names are unquestioned, *señor*. If there is a mistake made here this afternoon we will be responsible for it and take the consequences."

The lieutenant looked puzzled. Certainly he did not want to arouse the hostility of those of gentle blood by setting his troopers on the *caballeros;* and he doubted the outcome of the fight if he did that.

"Arrest the fellow!" Ramón thundered. "Are you to be held back by these meddlers?"

An open palm cracked against his cheek as he finished speaking. Señor Zorro stood before him, blade held ready. Don Audre Ruiz took the *señorita* by her arm and led her away.

"Ramón, double traitor and plotter against peace!" Señor Zorro addressed him. "Abductor of women! Foul in word and action and thought! On guard, *señor!*"

Captain Ramón felt like a trapped animal. He saw his sergeant in the ring.

"Gonzales!" he shrieked. "Seize that man! I command it!"

"I do not take commands from traitors!" the sergeant replied.

"I'll have you punished—"

"'Tis you will receive the punishment, when you gather courage enough to lift your blade," Gonzales replied.

Don Audre Ruiz had turned the *señorita* over to Fray Felipe. The old *fray* knew better than to make an attempt to prevent the duel. He belonged to the times, and he understood such things.

"On guard, *señor!*" Zorro warned again. "I do not like to pollute my blade with your blood, yet must it be done! On guard, renegade! Must I cut down a man who will not defend himself?"

Señor Zorro advanced a step. Captain Ramón, his face white, started to raise his

sword. He did not believe, could not force himself to believe, that he would be a victor. Yet he could do his best!

The blades touched. And in the next instant Señor Zorro had sprung backward, and a chorus of cries had come from those in the ring.

For Barbados, not watched as carefully as he should have been watched, had taken vengeance himself. He thrust one of his guards aside, snatched a dagger from the belt of another. His arm went up, came forward, the dagger whistled through the air. And it lodged in Captain Ramón's back, the point in his heart.

"That for a traitor!" Barbados cried. "Since I must be hanged, let me settle accounts first! Señor Zorro, you are a man! I, who have fought you, say it! Your blade is too true, *señor,* to be buried in a foul carcass such as that!"

The moonlight came again, touching the sea with glory and showing the trading schooner running up the coast before the breeze. Those of the crew who had been left aboard handled her well, and the *caballeros* gave aid.

Away from the scene of carnage the little ship rushed, the water hissing at her bows. Fray Felipe was polishing his beloved goblet. Don Audre Ruiz and his *caballeros* were dressing their hurts in the cabin. Big Sergeant Gonzales was wandering on the deck.

The sergeant stopped near the rail, leaned against it, looked over the sparkling sea toward the dark line that indicated the land.

Voices came to him, the voices of Zorro and the little *señorita.*

"The sword of Zorro! Let us hope that it has a long rest," the *señorita* said.

"A long rest!" Señor Zorro echoed. "As soon as we are at Reina de Los Angeles we'll be wed by Fray Felipe."

"*Sí!*" she said softly.

"Then years of happiness and peace."

"*Sí!*"

"Yet, I am not sorry for what has happened," said Señor Zorro. "It has brought us closer together. Peril knits hearts, *señorita.*"

"Once—when I thought that you were dead—"

Sergeant Gonzales observed a suspicious silence at this juncture. He raised his head and peered through the gloom around the mast. He could see nothing at all save the inky darkness there, but he heard a sound that needed no translation. It was the sound of a kiss.

"Meal mush and goat's milk!" said the sergeant.

(The end.)

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'TIS BRIEF, ANYWAY!

ONE feature about
Verse libel,
For which
We should
Be thankful:
If you don't understand it,
If it doesn't mean
Anything,
And if it lacks melody
And meter, and wit,
It has the brevity of it
Anyway!

Harry M. East, Jr.

Mr. Markey Meets Her Family

by Cora Schilling Lawson

"EVIE!" The voice came dimly to the ears of the sleepy girl. She stirred uneasily, pulled the covers up a little higher and tried to forget the unwelcome summons.

"Evie, you awake yet?"

There was no use deferring the issue. She sat up in bed.

"Gosh, yes! How'd you expect me to sleep with you shouting your head off? What do you want, anyway? It's not seven yet."

"I know, Evie," her father's voice came apologetically. "I know. But your mamma ain't feelin' well this mornin' and if you could get the breakfast—"

"For Pete's sake—what's the matter with her now?"

"Evie!" reprovingly. "That's no way to talk about your mamma. She says she couldn't sleep last night and she don't feel like gettin' up."

Evelyn threw back the covers indignantly. "Humph, neither do I, but that doesn't seem to matter. Oh, all right—I might as well. Seems as if I did everything around this house." She heard her father's steps padding back down the hall, but she continued her grumbled soliloquy. "Don't feel like getting up! Humph, I never do, but you don't see me getting the chance to lay around in bed."

She dressed hurriedly, shivering in the chill of the early May morning.

"Evie—ain't you nearly ready? Your mamma wants to speak to you before you go down."

Evelyn pulled open the door and faced her apologetic parent. He was a small man with a small, cautious face with small features that appeared to be gathered in the middle of it, puckered now into a frown of mild anxiety. He had an air of helpless perplexity. For nearly twenty-five years he had carried, without any particular ability, the burden of a growing family. Looking at him, Evelyn marveled how he had ever done it. Oh, papa was all right. It was just his bad luck. He seemed to land a job just about the time the business went to pieces; or just when he was established, a sudden shake-up of the force landed him again on the sidewalk.

"Your mamma wants to see you, Evie," he repeated. "She thinks you spoke to her pretty sharp last night, Evie, because she burned the dinner. You hurt her feelings. She's a sensitive woman—"

Evelyn nodded. She realized that her father was voicing one of his eternal pleas for peace. Perhaps she had spoken sharply last night, but she had spent over a dollar for the roast her mother let burn. She went down the heavy-aired, ill-ventilated hall and paused in mamma's doorway.

Mamma lay in bed, propped up on pillows. A wet handkerchief across her forehead and the heavy scent of camphor in

the air told of nervous developments. A cheap novel was but half concealed under the covers.

"Well?" Evelyn tried to put into her voice some of the sympathy she did not feel. "Sick again?"

Mamma sniffed dismally. "Evie—how can you talk so to your own mamma? When I was a girl—"

"I know, mamma, and I'm sorry you're sick. But I'm in a heck of a hurry—breakfast to get and I have to be at the office on time to-day. I've been late three days in succession and I'll be getting the can pretty soon. Don't know what this family 'd do if I did get bounced."

Mamma reached for her handkerchief. "That's right—start throwin' up how much you're doin' for us. It ain't your papa's fault he has such bad luck."

"No, nor Joe's fault he gambles away every cent he makes—or Andy's that he's too cussed lazy to get a job or— Oh, this bunch makes me sick." Then briskly: "Well, I have to beat it. Hope you feel better soon."

"Evie, ain't you even goin' to get me some breakfast—though I'm so sick I don't know as I could eat much—"

Evelyn's young voice broke in again. "Sure, I'll send you up some."

Mamma brightened hopefully. "Suppose there ain't time for hot biscuits?" she suggested.

"You're right. There's not. I tell you I have to be on time to-day. I'll get you some mush and toast—"

Mamma's voice rose in a wail. "Mush—when I'm sick! You'll be sorry some day. I won't be here always—"

"Oh, mamma, don't. I won't, either. What would you like—something I can get quick?"

Mamma deliberated. "I guess maybe I could eat some toast if you don't get it too hard, and a couple of soft-boiled eggs and a cup of coffee and some fruit—"

Evelyn backed toward the door. "All right," she promised. "I'll see what I can get."

She went on down into the kitchen, which smelled heavily of last night's burned meat. The fire her father had started had flickered hopelessly and gone out. Evelyn bit her lip.

When she had the fire burning she moved about deftly, stirring a pan of mush, making toast and coffee and setting the table in the kitchen. One by one the Kerns straggled down, all except Joe, who, having spent his night in cards and what passed for wine, was in no condition to appear.

But the rest were there. Andy, the second son, a gangling, noisily, useless and preoccupied youth of eighteen who was always promising to get a job and help out—but who managed to avoid all such unpleasantness. He belonged to a local baseball team, though, and batted rather well; also he was right up on all the latest sporting news. Lois, sixteen, hair bobbed, cheeks rouged, eyebrows plucked and lips a great red smear. If she had any ambition at all it was to be a movie actress and to avoid all of the housework and responsibility. She was still in high school by grace of indulgent teachers and Evelyn's importunings. And then there was Phil, fourteen, whose necktie invariably hung in his food, whose hands were vile and whose chief aim in life was to imitate a Paris apache.

"Where's Joe?" Evelyn demanded as they sat down to eat.

Mr. Kern coughed apologetically. "I—I couldn't wake him up, Evie. I guess he ain't feelin' well this mornin'."

Andy laughed uproariously, and Phil, in his mirth, managed to upset the cream before it had reached Evelyn. Not that she cared.

She eyed her father doubtfully. "See here, isn't he working now?"

"Why—fact is, Evie, he quit yesterday. I don't know just what the trouble was—"

Evelyn pushed back her chair. "Well, I know," she declared. "They found out he's been gambling again. They warned him once. Oh, damn! I never saw such a bunch. Honest, you're the limit—all of you! Him laying down on me cold when I'm working my head off to keep us out of the poor farm! How do you think you're going to live on my thirty a week, I'd like to know?"

"Why, Evie!" Papa raised a peeved spoon over his coffee. "How can you talk

so? You know we're all tryin' to help. Ain't my fault that old man Anderson had a grudge ag'in' me—"

"Grudge!" Evelyn snorted, pushing back her chair. "Great grief! Why—oh, you make me sick—all of you!" Clenching her fists impotently she banged out of the room and into the narrow hallway where her coat and hat were hung.

"Evie." Her father's voice floated nebulously from the kitchen. "Don't you want your breakfast?"

A sharp retort rose on her tongue, but she choked it down. What was the use? "No—I—I don't feel hungry this morning."

Walking briskly down town she considered the situation.

"That bunch! They make me so mad! Wonder how I ever got mixed up with them. Wonder what they'd do if I was to quit my job every time anything went wrong. Just wish I could. Wish I could clear out and leave them cold. That 'd bring them to their feet. They'd work before they'd starve. Gosh—if I only had the chance to go far away—where they'd never see me again—"

She sighed gustily as she entered the office.

"Is it as bad as all that?"

She started violently. She had thought the outer room deserted. And then she saw the man at the window, standing very straight and still, his hands thrust into his pockets. He was a tall, rangy young fellow. Above his too-wide collar his neck emerged with that peculiarly tense, alert look the Yankee's often takes, giving his head a far-flung angle, his profile a hint of the hatchet. His features were big, sharp cut, and his eyes were dark gray, long-lashed, deep set.

This was Stephen Markey, assistant manager of the importing department of the Bagley-Ashton Coffee Company.

"I could hear you sigh before you opened the door," he explained. "Did you work too late last night or did you try to mix in a little social stuff?"

She shook her head. "No—neither. It's—it's just—oh, nothing."

He looked at her shrewdly as he helped her take off her coat.

"Do you know I was just hoping you'd be early this morning."

"H-m, thought I'd better be or they'd be giving me the razz!"

"Not you," he protested. "You've got a job here as long as you want it, from what old Ashton says."

"Honest, Mr. Markey?"

"Don't call me Mr. Markey. Can't you say Steve?"

"Well, Steve, then."

He chuckled at her effort. "I was hoping you'd get here early," he repeated. "I wanted to see you alone."

There was something in his voice that had a very curious effect on Evelyn's heart. She was perfectly sure that it stopped beating, and when he spoke again the words sounded at least a thousand miles away.

"You dear little Puritan!"

For some reason Evelyn flushed under his scrutiny of her slender figure, her Sistine Madonna face—the gravest of large, dark eyes and the smoothest head of dark, coiled hair.

For some reason he, too, was embarrassed. "I—do you know you're the hardest girl to get acquainted with I ever saw? What's the matter—keeping a fellow off at arm's length all the time? I'm going to ask you once again if you'll let me come to see you—to-night. I want to talk about something special."

For a moment Evelyn's heart sang, but the song was soon dispelled by visions of papa in his stocking feet and suspendered shirt sleeves, of mamma's coquettish talk, of drunken Joe, of Phil and Andy, rude and riotous, of the vampish Lois. She thought, too, of the house, heavy with the odor of clothes and stale food, of the curtains dirty and dismal.

Just a moment's hesitation, then a slight shake of her smooth head.

"I'm sorry, but not to-night."

He looked at her sharply. "Nor any other night," he supplemented. "I might have known. What's the matter, Evelyn? Don't you like me?"

"It—it isn't that, Steve."

Their tête-à-tête was interrupted just then by the arrival of Helen and Maidie, accompanied by the adoring bookkeeper.

"Evelyn." Markey spoke very low. "Tell me just one thing. Are you engaged? Is there any other man?"

Evelyn's grave eyes looked directly into his for a moment. "No," she answered honestly. Then her eyes fell before the leap in his.

As he went from the room she slumped down more dejectedly than usual at her desk. She was always quiet—more quiet than the other girls who were comparing notes on the dance they had attended the night before. These girls with their good times and pretty clothes! Well, she could have them, too, if she didn't have to hand over every cent she made to keep her family out of the poorhouse—if she had a decent place to entertain her friends.

Take them out to the house? With mamma talking about her neuralgia and what swell chances her girls had to get married; with Joe coming in half drunk and evil-natured; with Lois outdoing the wildest movie vamp; with her father trying to touch the caller for a loan. Not much! She'd tried it once or twice. Never again—you bet!

And then she thought of Stephen Markey and sighed wearily. This wasn't the first time he had asked to call, had invited her to go to shows or dinners with him.

But it wasn't that so much as it was the way he had of looking at her. Evelyn felt, though vaguely, the more than interest behind his glance. She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly. It didn't matter. Nothing did—nothing but the dingy house on Maple Street and the indolent, dependent family living in it.

It was nearly six when she finished the stack of work on her desk. As she passed down the room between the long line of desks she heard a snatch of conversation between the filing clerk and the office boy. Just a snatch, but it was enough to start her heart pounding. Stephen Markey was going to Honduras to take charge of the firm's branch office there—at least, he had been offered the place. For a moment it seemed as if the floor were falling away beneath her feet; then with a weary little sigh she steadied herself and went into the rest room where Helen and Maidie were preparing for the street and for their waiting beaus.

"And he says it's a good chance all right," Helen was saying, "and he appreciated it, but he had a chance at something better right here. He finally admitted it was a girl," she finished.

"Never saw him with a girl in my life," Maidie objected, "except Theda Bara, here," nodding toward Evelyn, who flushed but said nothing.

"Well, I'm tellin' you," Helen drawled. "And if you want my opinion I'll say he's an awful nut throwin' away a chance like that."

Maidie smoothed her immaculate coiffure and yawned luxuriously. "Same here. Say," as the thought struck her, "why don't he take the girl down to Honduras with him?"

Helen shrugged her shoulders. "Say, I don't know everything. I had to pretend to be workin', and you know how low Markey always talks. But I did hear him say there was a girl, and she was so devoted to her family and so young he wouldn't think of tearin' her away."

Maidie laughed. "Guess his idea's a happy little flat right next to the old folks'. Not for me! When I get the chance I'm goin' to get as far off as the railroad'll take me."

They giggled appreciatively as they left the room. Alone Evelyn went to the mirror and surveyed herself with dissatisfaction. Her suit was shiny and rubbed off at the seams; her close-fitting hat proclaimed its cheapness from afar.

"Won't leave her family! Huh, wish I had half a chance! Just wish he wanted to take me!" And then as the realization swept over her she retreated from the mirror and sank down in a chair. He had said he wanted to see her about a special matter. He had asked if she were engaged—if there were another man!

For a moment she sat dazed, the blood pounding in her temples. She felt on fire. If only she could do something! But what? What would Helen or Maidie do in her place? They wouldn't stand by and let such a chance slide. For five minutes or more she sat without moving, trying to map out a

plan of action. How could she let Mr. Markey know that—if she were really the girl—she would be willing—glad to leave her family? He had until to-morrow to decide. Finally she got up and went uncertainly back into the main office.

II.

No. 518 Maple Street seemed dingier than usual in the half light as she turned in at the gate, somewhat later than usual. Too tired—or too excited to fumble for her key she rang the bell and waited.

"My God! Why don't you find your key instead of makin' me chase out here to let you in?" Lois grumbled. Then: "Mamma's got one of her spells again. She's sore because you forgot her breakfast."

For a moment remorse seized Evelyn, but it was soon followed by a wave of utter indifference. "Let her get her own," she retorted. "You'd think I was the servant around here, the way you all act."

She went out into the kitchen and planked a few bundles down on the table. "Good Heavens!" she cried out loudly. "Haven't you got supper started? It's nearly seven!"

Mamma rocked imperturbably in the squeaky rocker, a novel clutched in one fat hand. Her soiled kimono hung open, displaying a soiled camisole and faded jersey petticoat.

"Mamma!" Evelyn shrilled. "For Heaven's sake—seems to me when I buy the grub you could at least cook it."

Mamma raised her handkerchief to her eyes. "That's right, start runnin' on me right off. I don't know what you'd do if you didn't have your mamma to pick on. When I was a girl children was taught some respect. Here I lay with the neuralgia all over my head, and what do you care? Not even enough to bring me some breakfast! After all I've done for you—seems as if I could expect some consideration. But no. That's what I get—"

Evelyn interrupted this flow. "I got some chops for supper because I thought they'd cook quick. I was sure you'd have some potatoes cooked—though I ought to have known better, I guess. Suppose we open a can of beans. Lord, I get so sick of this everlasting chow out of cans." She chopped off a few pieces of kindling and started the fire. "Seems as if I had to do everything around here. You'd think with three boys there'd be some wood and kindling cut."

Mamma sighed heavily. "That's what a mother gets," she repeated dismally, then brightening. "There's a real elegant cake in the pantry," she conceded. "And so cheap—only forty-nine cents—"

Evelyn whirled suspiciously. "Where'd you get the money? If you used that I left for the laundry—"

Mamma held up a protesting hand. "Now, listen, before you go jumpin' all over me. I paid the laundry just like you said—"

"But the cake—"

"Well, I was just going to say Miss Maine says our credit's good—"

"Mamma, have you been charging things again?"

Mamma sniffed. "That's right, begrudge me every cent I spend. I never saw such a family! Think I can run the place without any money?"

"Run the place!" Evelyn looked around the dirty kitchen as she slapped the chops into a pan. "Looks like you were running the place."

"That's right, start findin' fault with the house now. That's the gratitude I get for all my slavin' and scrubbin'—"

"Oh, mamma! This place looks as if it had been scrubbed, don't it? Windows so dirty you can't see through them, and dust so thick you can't move without sneezing. Here, Lois, set the table, can't you? I don't see why I have to do everything. Some day I'll start eating uptown and then you'll have to get your own meals or starve."

But this sentence was unfortunate, for it reminded mamma of her forgotten breakfast. "That's about all you'd care," she wailed, and retired into a sulky silence which lasted through supper.

When the meal was over Evelyn carried the dishes out into the kitchen, but instead of washing them as usual she slipped away to her room.

"Hey, Evelyn!" Lois called up after her. "What you goin' to do do-night?"

"What do you suppose?" Evelyn retorted briefly. It would never do to let the family in on her plans. That would spoil everything.

She smoothed back the already smooth dark hair and coiled it low on her neck. Color? No, she thought olive skin with just a tint of pink showing through looked better than rouge. Besides, Lois had enough color for two. She removed her shabby skirt and severe blouse and put on instead a tailored dress of dark blue serge.

When she had finished she glanced for just a minute at her reflection. Despite the imperfections of the mirror she was satisfied. She looked just what Markey had called her, a little Puritan.

Stealthily she slipped downstairs and took her place in the little hall. It would never do to let the family suspect. With them on their best behavior the plan might slip.

From the living room which opened off the hall came the voices of mamma and Lois, engaged in a hot dispute. Occasionally papa's voice came, flat and deprecatory, trying to smooth things over. Poor papa! She felt sorry for him in a way. Pity, mixed with contempt.

Then she heard a step on the walk outside, the creaking of the old porch. Of course it might be Joe or Andy. With dangerous calm she threw open the door and stepped out.

"Oh, you surprised me," she said softly. "I was just coming out for a breath of air. Did you have any trouble finding the place?"

"Not a bit—not as much trouble as I had in getting the chance to come," Markey returned, handing her tribute in the way of candy. "I was surely glad to find the note saying your plans were changed and I might come to-night."

Above her low-voiced explanation came the voices of mamma and Lois.

"If you think I'm goin' to stick around home all the time like Evie does, you've got several good thinks coming! I'm not goin' to grind my life away in a musty old office, I'll tell the world."

"Ain't no sign you've got to make up like you was on the stage," mamma returned with unexpected spirit. Then sinking back to her usual whine: "I don't know what things are comin' to—with girls actin' the way they do. Dressin' up and paintin' and gaddin' off every night! When I was a girl—"

"Oh, for Gawd's sake, mamma, don't stage that act to-night!" Lois's voice came shrill and sharp. "Girls must have been awful pills those days!"

Mamma's outraged sniff sounded plainly through the cheap door.

"Henry Kern—are you goin' to sit there and let that girl call her own mamma a pill?"

Lois giggled. Papa's voice came apologetically, imploring peace. It was as good a time as any. With a little welcoming gesture, Evelyn opened the door and ushered in a very much abashed caller.

"This is Mr. Markey from our office," she began, conscious of mamma's outraged glance before that lady fled from the room. But before she was out of sight Mr. Markey had had a good chance to see the dingy, grease-spotted kimono, the straggly, uncombed hair. The next minute he was shaking hands with papa.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Markey," papa said, brightening a little and wondering whether the guest would stand for a small touch.

"Oh, Mr. Markey — you caveman!" Lois cooed, pretending to rub the fingers which he had scarcely touched. "My, you're strong!"

Mr. Markey smiled uncertainly and sat down in the nearest chair. It gave him an excellent view of the disheveled room with its lank, dingy curtains, unswept rug and gummy woodwork.

He turned to papa who was trying to make conversation. "And what is your line?" he asked with a show of interest.

Papa looked about helplessly. For a minute Evelyn felt sorry for him; he looked so inefficient, so down and out.

"Why—I ain't doin' much of anything right now. That is—"

"Times are very hard, of course," Mr. Markey sympathized.

"They're always hard for papa," Lois giggled with a vampish glance.

There was an unpleasant silence, broken finally by Phil, who burst in upon them.

"Say, I'm hungry! Hey, Evie, get me some chow."

"Phil, this is Mr. Markey," Evelyn murmured. "If you wanted anything to eat why weren't you home for supper?"

Phil ignored Mr. Markey. "There you go, bawlin' a fellow out the minute he gets home. Think I can stick around this joint all day on the chance of gettin' something to eat? I stuck around till nearly seven and there wasn't a sign of grub. Didn't know when you'd get home." And he stamped out.

Evelyn glanced at Mr. Markey whose face registered a polite blank.

Lois, sitting on the lumpy old sofa, surreptitiously powdered her already overwhite nose and dabbed her lips until the red smear resembled what she thought a Cupid's bow.

"Oh, Mr. Markey, you look so uncomfortable over in that hard chair. There's lots of room over here—for two," and she stirred the cushions around invitingly. A cloud of white dust arose.

Mr. Markey wisely remarked that he was very comfortable. That was more than could be said of the general atmosphere of the room. With obvious effort he tried to talk on various subjects, turning at last to conditions in the office.

Again Phil burst in upon them. "Say," he bawled, "where'd Andy go? Seen him lately? Bet he went to the prize fight. Oh, boy! that's where I'd like to be." He took out a cigarette and lighted it casually.

This was too much for Evelyn. "Phil, where did you get that thing?"

Phil grinned. "Swiped it off'n Lois. She's got a lot."

"Lois?" Evelyn repeated aghast.

"You—you damned little thief!" Lois was on her feet in a minute, natural color blazing through the rouge. "You leave my things alone, do you hear? If you don't— Oh, hell! I never saw such a bunch!" And she flounced out, presumably to keep her tryst with the corner drug store clerk.

"Sure wish I had the price to get to the prize fight," Phil began again, eying Mr. Markey hopefully. "If Evie weren't so darned tight— It's only fifty cents."

Mr. Markey's hand sought his pocket and emerged with a dollar which he held out to Phil.

Evelyn jumped to her feet. "Phil—don't you dare take that. Oh—he didn't mean it that way, Mr. Markey." Though she knew he did.

But argument was useless. Phil grabbed the coin and with a brief "Thanks, bo, you're all right," he dashed out.

Evelyn sank back, her eyes stormy, her cheeks crimson. It was upon this scene that mamma descended, puffing in her unaccustomed corset. Her dress was a hideous affair of medium blue trimmed with baby pink.

But mamma rose to the occasion and met Mr. Markey with a mixture of hearty welcome and gay coquetry.

"We're always so glad to have Evie's friends come," she gurgled. "But she didn't say anything—maybe she didn't know you was comin'. Most of the fellas that come to see her call up first and then—but to-night we were just havin' a comfy little evenin' at home. You know how people do, Mr. Markey."

He murmured a vague assent.

"Of course," mamma continued, "we usually stay cleaned up just grand and all ready because it ain't often that we're alone. With two girls and one as good lookin' as Evie, the house is usually awful full of company. But we're always so glad to have them. We want our girls to have a good time and their sweeties is always welcome. Ain't they, papa?"

Papa made an inarticulate sound which passed for assent.

"There ain't a better girl in the world than our Evie, Mr. Markey, though I'm sure you know it without my sayin' so." Mamma paused and Mr. Markey cleared his throat.

"Oh, mamma," Evelyn interrupted with a terrible glance, "let up on me."

"And modest, too, Mr. Markey. You see? Sometimes she gets awful tired workin' in that old office. It's no place for a

girl like Evie. She's a regular homebody and the man that gets her'll sure be lucky. And popular—you've no idea the number of men that wants to marry her—"

At ten o'clock Mr. Markey rose to go and Evelyn rose, too, fairly pushing papa back into his chair. Thank Heaven, it was over! That horrible fiasco. Instead of impressing Mr. Markey and making him want to take her away, it had merely disgusted him and cheapened her. With color flaming in her cheeks she preceded her caller out onto the rickety porch.

And then as if her cup of shame were not already full, a staggering figure shambled up the steps and fell heavily to the porch floor.

"Aw—what—in—hell—"

"Who is it?" Markey demanded crisply.

"It's Joe—my brother," Evelyn explained, her voice broken with an honest sob of shame. "He's been drinking. Papa—come and help Joe—"

"Don't need any hellup," Joe hiccuped, getting to his feet with drunken dignity and stumbling into the house.

Evelyn pulled the door shut against the noises from the inside.

"I'm sorry— Oh, what does that mean? I hate myself for letting you come to-night. I knew just how it would be! It's always that way—only worse sometimes. I'll never forgive myself—never—"

Mr. Markey interrupted gently. "Evelyn, don't. It isn't your fault. You're not like them. You're—you're a rose growing on a dung heap."

"But do you see why I never let you come before?" she insisted wildly. "Because I knew you'd be insulted. I never can have fun like other girls. I shouldn't have let you come to-night—only I heard—"

Markey took both of her hands in his and drew her to him.

"Evelyn," he began solemnly, "it seems like Providence. Listen, dear, I'm going to Honduras right away to be gone for years, and I want to take you with me."

And then and there, Evelyn wisely decided, that he should never know her share in the working of Providence.

Speed, Pep and Class

by James W. Egan

WHENEVER the wife screws up her mouth at the dinner table before springing something I scent trouble cooking. All I do is sit back and wait for the shock.

A few weeks ago I came home after the usual wild brawl for the daily cakes to find Amy's lips twisted into the well-known omen, and I steadied myself to block a wallop.

As Olga, our imported hired girl, brought in the bowls of fluid she optimistically insists is soup, the esteemed spouse opened up.

"Sam," she says, "I just received a long

letter from my brother Stephen, up in Applegrove, Oregon, this afternoon."

"And what does Brother Steve take his pen in hand to emit?" I gargle guardedly. "The crops or cows or whatever it is he raises haven't failed, have they?"

"Oh, no. But it seems Stephen's boy—our nephew—has made up his mind to visit California, and brother wants us to look after him while he's in Los Angeles."

"How perfectly lovely!" I warble with the fervent enthusiasm of a houseful of tenants giving three cheers for their landlord. "So our nephew is going to visit us? You know I don't know much about your brother's family, my dear. What is the lad's name, age, and general disposition?"

"Well, Cyril must be quite a young man now," remarks the half of the household who isn't forced to pay income tax. "He is either twenty-two or twenty-three, I believe."

"Cyril! Did you say Cyril?" I squawk. "I wonder if he looks like that sounds?"

"Are you trying to be funny, dear?" Amy asks sweetly. "As if his name made any difference in his appearance! It has been ten years since I've seen Cyril—that was some time before I met you, Sam—but from what I remember he was the noisiest boy in the neighborhood. He was continually breaking windows with his slingshot, and putting airgun bullets into the dog belonging to the people next door, and once he was almost arrested for stealing sacks from our grocer, and—"

"That's a pretty good record for a Cyril," I cut in. "Maybe he'll give us plenty to look after when he gets to Los Angeles, if those boyish habits have clung to him. Though I imagine he is a trifle too old for the slingshot and airgun stuff now, thanks be to Allah!"

"My brother writes," frowns the wife severely, "that if Cyril likes California he may locate here and—"

"He'll never go back, then," I yodel, just to prove I'm a regular, one-hundred-per-cent Californian.

"And he has saved up over a thousand dollars of his own, which he is anxious to invest profitably," she concludes.

"Ah! Perhaps I'll intrigue him into the firm. A thousand bananas makes a nice bunch," I chirp, more or less jokingly. As sole owner of the Thatcher Feather Pillow Works I was getting along fairly well, and not looking for extra capital. And I didn't suppose my business would excite Cyril into a fever, anyway.

"I wasn't thinking of that," observes the wife. "But you know we'll have to protect him from foolishly wasting his money, and it's apt to be a job. Stephen is placing responsibility on our shoulders. To a boy who never has been out of a small town in his life Los Angeles is going to offer temptations."

"Innocence abroad in the wicked metropolis, and up to us to pull the guardian angel racket, huh?" I groan. "Your brother is so good to us, my dear. Letting us provide free room, board and advice to this adventurous young nephew of his. When does Cyril bow in on us?"

"Stephen said he was starting at once, so he ought to be here in a day or two. Luckily we have a nice spare bedroom."

"But don't forget it has a folding bed in it, and you know how those trick couches are," I warn. "You may have to watch Cyril carefully for the first day or two. I wouldn't want to see the boy hurt. Or the bed."

"Sam, you exasperate me at times!" cries Amy. "What kind of a place do you think Applegrove is?"

"Wait until I see Cyril and I'll tell you," I answer. Fortunately Olga carried in the roast pork, nearly roasted, just then, and probably checked something fast and snappy from the wife.

I'll admit I didn't thrill joyously over the coming visit. I had a sweet vision of myself guarding a green country youth and his precious lettuce from a hungry horde, and I moaned mentally, if you follow me. Undoubtedly Cyril was going to be a bit of a burden, like a keg of lead on a crippled bookkeeper's shoulder.

Our nephew from Applegrove ambled in two nights later, during the evening put and take of Olga's chow. And I'm here to warble he handed both the wife and yours skeptically a brutal and unexpected jolt.

Cyril may never have meandered from

his Applegrove haunts before, but there was nothing of the village yokel in his present get-up. He had the same kind of clothes, shoes, silk shirt and haircut that marks the average young cookie along Broadway, and he wasn't packing any telescope grip or carpet bag, either.

"Hello, relatives, here I am!" he greets. "This is little Cyril Suggs, your nephew, just in from Applegrove, Oregon. Don't think too harshly of me on that account."

"You've certainly grown into quite a young man, Cyril, dear," utters the wife, presenting him with a kiss.

"It was bound to happen, Aunt Amy," he returns, and then shoves me a fist far better manicured than my own. "How are you, Uncle Sam? I'm a very lucky young man. One of the few lads in this great republic who can boast of two Uncle Sams—ha, ha! Laughter. The kid is clever. By the way, do you smoke, uncle?"

"No," I respond, somewhat dizzily. Cyril was not at all as anticipated.

"Neither do I, except before, after, and between meals," squawks Cyril. "Anyway, here is a cigar I bought for you. Keep it. You may run for office some day, and it 'll come in handy."

"You are just in time for dinner, such as it is," declares the wife, trying to seem not fussed herself. "How is my brother Stephen, and your mother?"

Amy kept him busy throughout the meal replying to a barrage of questions, and I had a chance to once-over this rather surprising nephew of ours. There seemed to be nothing particularly backward or backwoodsy about young Mr. Cyril Suggs.

After dinner the three of us journeyed down town to take in a show. We had to pass up two pictures Amy and I had wanted to see because Cyril claimed both of them already had been run in Applegrove and wound up in a vaudeville house. A Turkish coffee debauch in a highly incensed Oriental place topped off the evening, and both the wife and myself were weary when we regained the old family manse.

"What do you think of him, Sam?" Amy asks when Cyril is shunted off to the spare bedroom and the perils of the folding bed.

"I don't know," I confess to her. "Maybe it would be better if he were still addicted to airguns and slingshots. However—we'll see. At all events, he is no babe in the woods, my dear."

"He does seem kind of—of fresh. Still, that is a way young men have. For all his confident and bold airs we must remember he is a stranger in Los Angeles, and there are many things he doesn't know about."

"H-m!" I sniff, and let it ride at that.

Over the ham and eggs the next morning I tried to sound out Cyril as to his business plans—if he had any.

"You would like to locate in Los Angeles?" I remarked.

"Perhaps. I have around a thousand smackers I wouldn't mind investing here if I go to work, and I'm anxious to do that."

"What kind of work?" the wife wishes to know.

"Oh, I don't know that I can get just what I'd like, but—"

"Well, I run a place where we make feather pillows," I tell him. "Business is fair, and I think I could make room for you."

"A pillow factory? Sounds like there ought to be a flock of soft jobs around there, uncle. But I fear I'd never do. Any time I see pillows I feel an overwhelming impulse to park my head on them. I could never stay awake amid such alluring surroundings."

"I just offered it as a suggestion," I remark, not greatly dejected to have him decline the offer.

"And I thank you very much, uncle. I guess I'll have to look around a bit. I was thinking of giving the movies a whirl, perhaps—"

"That's a splendid idea," I agree. "The movies are just about as hard up for talent as Henry Ford is for cars. Yet with patience one can always wait for an opening. The first twenty or thirty years are usually the hardest."

"Listens entrancing," says Cyril. "The movies are out, then."

"Oh, I'll forgive you," I assure him. "Everybody gets that way the first time they come to California."

"That's tough!" Our nephew shrugs his shoulders. "All my life I've secretly craved to be a movie star or a detective, or something like that. But I'll find something I like here. I may be from a hick hamlet up in Oregon, but I hope I ain't so dumb as I might be. I got speed and pep, and a little class, I guess. That ain't such a bad mixture to win the old butterhorns with, is it?"

Our shy and violetlike relative spent the greater part of a week trotting hither and yon about Los Angeles, from the alligator farm to Long Beach, from the Mission Play to Mount Lowe. He had the wife and me stepping out nightly, and we breathed in relief when Cyril finally breezed over to Catalina Island for a couple of days.

Following this trip I missed him at dinner two or three nights in a row, and of course he wasn't usually down for an early breakfast once he got accustomed to the house. I saw less of Cyril than you do umbrellas in July.

"Where's our wandering Applegrovian to-night?" I finally inquire of the spouse.

"He's working, Sam," she informs me.

"At what?" I yodel.

"I don't know exactly. He's just taken it up. I think he is selling something or other. He told me he was on probation at first and would have to make good before securing a permanent job, and he says he doesn't want to tell me about it until he sees how he fares."

"Salesman, huh?" I gargle. "That's a good game for him, unless he's tackled real estate or oil stocks. It's hard to compete with four hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine others in the same lines. Surely it isn't one of those gags where one has to invest a few bananas first? He wouldn't fall for that?"

"No. He still has his thousand. I guess it was an accident he secured this place."

"Does he work nights, too?" I warble. "I don't see much of him."

"No, he doesn't work so late. But he's young and he likes to dance, and I think he's been experimenting at some of these cafés where they have dinner dances and the like. Nothing of that kind in Applegrove, you know."

"Perhaps some fair frail has bewitched him, and is keeping him out evenings?" I hint.

"If he gets acquainted with any girls I hope they are the right sort," Amy frets. "Some of them in this place could make a perfect fool of him, and he'd never know it. And what would Cyril's family say to me?"

"Don't you worry, my dear," I soothe. "Too much speed, pep, and class about Cyril for that. He admits it himself, doesn't he?"

A week or so went by without my seeing very much of my nephew or hearing a great deal about his line of work, and then one night I returned from the pillow works to note Amy's mouth screwed up in the old danger signal.

"Shoot, my dear!" I entreat. "Is it a real calamity, or is it just Olga quitting?"

"It isn't Olga! It's Cyril! Oh, Sam, I'm so worried! I knew a boy like him would—"

"He's married!" I butt in.

"No, thank goodness, and I hope it won't come to that! It's a girl, though. One of that—that kind of girls I was afraid of."

"How do you know? Cyril give himself away?"

"Not he! I heard the news through Mrs. Anderson. In the corner house, you know. Her son Paul is a great dancer, and he sees Cyril almost every night. And what he has told his mother!'

"Well, what has he told her?"

"About this woman that Cyril has become infatuated with. Paul Anderson says she is a painted, designing creature, the vampy sort, and that she has made a regular boob out of Cyril. He's crazy about her, and she's smart enough to make the most of it."

"This Paul Anderson must be a keen observer of the other sex," I comment. "Perhaps this girl—"

"Sam, don't be silly! Paul Anderson has lived in cities all his life. He has been around dance halls and such places for years. He has had experience, and Cyril is at heart only an innocent boy. He imagines the girls here are the same as in Applegrove."

"Most of them are," I murmur.

"Now, you know better. Why, if you'd heard Mrs. Anderson's opinion! I feel it in my bones this creature is going to make mischief. I'm so upset! What will Cyril's mother say to me if the boy is lured on by a bad woman? And Stephen! Of course the little sharper is after Cyril's savings. I think you'd better speak to him, Sam, at once!"

"Not on your life!" I balk. "Any time a fellow is knocked for a row of Cupids, it's always murder to bleat anything at him. Yet, somehow, I don't figure Cyril to let any dame make a sap out of him."

"Don't you know he isn't half as smart as he thinks he is? At heart he is ignorant of the world. He'll believe all a pretty girl tells him, never suspecting wicked motives behind it."

"Of course he may have been hooked by a female sharper," I concede, "and if so, it's up to us to do something. Best go slow, however. I think, my dear, if I were you I'd quietly cross-examine Cyril. You women understand the art of digging up that stuff."

I failed to see my nephew at breakfast that day—I knew he had come in late—and he was missing at dinner that evening, as usual. Amy was all excited, though.

"I coaxed a few things out of him before he left to-day," she says. "He is going around with this girl regularly. Her name is Neva Moskow—or supposed to be. It doesn't sound very good to me—and she lives at the Streamer Hotel. You know how high that is. And she isn't working anywhere. Still, Cyril thinks it is all right."

"Naturally you tried to point out—" I begin.

"I didn't dare say much. He seems to be hopelessly in love with her or something, and he got touchy the minute I talked a little. She has him standing on his head, the deceitful thing!"

"H-m!" I observe. "How did he meet her, in the first place?"

"At a dinner dance, in the Streamer café. She picked up an acquaintance through some shallow trick, I suppose, and he seems to have babbled most of his history to her. She knows he has a thousand or so, and she's after it! But do you think he'd believe anything said against her?"

"It's foolish to speak to him—like trying to tell a baby not to pull the cat's tail," I squawk. "If we knew for a fact Miss Neva Moskow was—"

"Why don't you go and see her, and have a little talk with her? Warn her to leave the boy alone!" asserts the wife with womanly viciousness.

"Help! Help!" I snort.

"You are not going to stand by idly and let her ruin Cyril!" the wife warbles.

Amy was all set. Upon such occasions a mere husband hasn't as much chance as the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. I was licked to start with. To avoid a jam I had to promise to take a few valuable hours away from the feather pillow industry and see what I could do with the troublesome Miss Neva Moskow.

Feeling nearly as foolish as a bird wearing his first silk hat I managed to meet the lady at the Streamer Hotel next afternoon.

Neva Moskow—if that was her real name—proved a very attractive woman several years older than Cyril. Her eyes were dark and handsome, but there was a hardness in them I didn't like. Right pronto I had a hunch there was danger in this woman.

I floundered around stupidly for a minute or two, and then jumped in with both feet.

"Miss Moskow," I gargle, "I believe you know my nephew Cyril fairly well, and I—I would like to talk to you of him."

"You mean Mr. Suggs—Cyril Suggs? Your nephew, Mr. Thatcher? Yes, I know him. We are—friends." She says it calmly enough.

"Well, I—well, I'm going to be candid with you, Miss Moskow." This stuff was fussing me all up. "Cyril is only a boy, a small town youth, who hasn't seen much of life. He takes things for granted that—'

"Just what are you driving at, Mr. Thatcher?" The woman's tone was loaded with ice.

I felt like a thirty-third degree sap, but I plunged on. Now that I had seen Neva Moskow I didn't trust her, and I might as well speak my little piece.

"As the boy's uncle I occupy the place

of his father here. I have to protect his interests. I'm not sure he knows his own mind yet, and I wouldn't advise any woman to take him too seriously, for—"

"Mr. Thatcher!" Neva Moskow blazes it out. "You are insulting, positively insulting. All this is uncalled for. I don't care to talk to you any longer. Cyril and I are friends, nothing more. I don't see any need of interference by his relatives, and I won't listen to you another second! Will you please go?"

Nicely burned up, I was forced to leave the presence of the woman with the uncomfortable feeling I had made a frightful goulash of everything. And yet I knew Neva Moskow wasn't to be trusted. She wasn't being honest with Nephew Cyril from Applegrove.

"I put my foot in it clear up to the knee," I report to Amy. "Cyril will hear about it and be sore, I suppose, and there'll be more trouble around this hacienda than a bunch of diplomats can stir up at a peace conference. Why did your brother ever let him get away from Applegrove? Speed and pep—he'll lose a lot of it before she's through with him."

"Just as I thought, the woman is an adventuress?" probes the wife.

"I think so. But what can be done? She is on her guard now, and if Cyril is crazy over her—good night!"

"You ought to talk to him!" Amy avers.

"Uhuh!" I squawk. "I ought to go in a hungry lion's cage and tickle him with a straw, too! No, I've talked too much now. Cyril doesn't seem to use the house only to sleep in, anyway. I presume he has given up his job and everything?"

"No, he's working. He said yesterday he was going to make some money here. Probably the foolish boy expects her to marry him and settle down."

"It would be a joke if she did," I yodel. "But I'll swear she's up to something else. These cocky kids never learn. They're all smart eggs until some dame comes along and spreads a bit of applesauce. Cyril is just like the rest of them."

"Oh, I'm worried!" the wife exclaims. "My brother's boy!"

That decided me. The next morning I called in an old acquaintance, Captain Delorme, who conducted a private detective agency, and spilled my suspicions. He agreed secretly to investigate Miss Neva Moskow's past, and with him on the job I felt a bit better.

Not for long. About the middle of the afternoon, while I was getting out a rush order, Amy phoned me.

"Oh, Sam!" comes her excited tones. "Cyril has just left the house. He came back after lunch, seeming to be keyed up over something, and told me not to worry if he was gone for a day or two. And I saw him count over a big roll of bills before he went away."

"Yes?" I mutter, confused.

"Don't you see, Sam? He must be running away with that woman, and he has drawn out his thousand from the bank. She has evidently determined to get it while the getting is good!"

"I just put Delorme, the detective, on the matter a few hours ago," I tell her. "If she is figuring on marrying Cyril it 'll be hard to stop her now. I don't know what I can do!"

"You must do something, Sam! I can never face my brother or his wife if this adventuress makes a fool out of that poor boy!"

"I'll get hold of Delorme and we'll do what we can!" I promise before hanging up. And I cursed Cyril with large abandon.

It was the detective who got hold of me, though. He hurried into my place of business a few seconds after Amy's news.

"There is something crooked about this Moskow woman!" he warbles. "She is mixed up with some others in something. Of that I'm sure. She has checked out of the Streamer and left no forwarding address. Left very abruptly, they tell me."

"Maybe this is the answer," and I let him have the latest report.

"Should we go to the police?" I conclude.

"Not yet," he objects. "I have a clew—or what may be a clew. An address in Hollywood. Seems she's been there several times with two or three men. We'd better get there and see what's to be found out."

Hiring a taxi, Delorme and I were whirled out to a bungalow deep in the Hollywood hills. Darkness was descending when we arrived.

"We may be running a risk, but we'd better go boldly ahead," my companion advises. "The place is dark and deserted-looking, ain't it?"

"Probably nobody here," I mutter, gloomily. The whole affair had me more than a little dizzy.

Delorme rapped loudly on the door. No answer. Again his knuckles fell.

This time we got action. The door opened, just enough to give us a glimpse of a man's figure in the dark.

"What do you want?" he chirps out real gruff.

"We are looking for a lady," begins the detective.

"Friends of Miss Moskow?" is the quick query.

"Yes. Is she here?" Delorme talks fast.

"Step right inside, both of you." It's almost a command we get.

Into the dark hallway both of us entered. As we did so the door was slammed behind us, and lights flashed up. I was dazed to see three or four gun muzzles directed at Delorme and myself. Four men were in the hallway, and each one was armed.

"Trapped!" snaps out Delorme. "What have we stumbled across?"

Perhaps you don't think I wondered, too. And I'll confess a fine handful of chills played tag along my spinal section.

"No false moves, you two!" barks the man who had opened the door. "Don't know just who you are, but we'll hold you for a while. You are both under arrest."

"What—are you police officers?" breaks out my companion. "Don't you know me—Captain Delorme?"

"I'll be hanged! It is Delorme!" utters one of our captors. "I'm Detective Sergeant Coakley. How come you are in this mess?"

"Hello, Coakley!" Delorme shows recognition. "I can soon explain. But why the mob with guns and everything? Neva Moskow must be a big time performer. Looks bad for your nephew, Thatcher."

The private detective told our story to Coakley. The latter nodded.

"You'd better come down with us and see the chief," he says. "The old man himself is interested in this case, and I'm working largely in the dark. Only I know the Moskow woman and some others are wanted, and that she is going to be hooked tonight, unless all things fall through. While others are attending to that end, I was told to take four men and raid this joint. We knocked it over a couple of hours ago and grabbed two guys, and hung around a while to see if any one else would show. We were going to grab you on suspicion."

"But what is this—this Moskow woman?" I yodel.

"The brains of a very dangerous gang of blackmailers, I imagine," is the reply. "That's about all I know. I haven't been working on the case until to-day. I'll leave a couple of men here, and take those two eggs and you fellows to the station. You and your friend had better see the chief in a hurry, Delorme."

Delorme and myself, accompanied by Coakley and two plain clothes officers and two handcuffed individuals, climbed into flivvers and sped to the central station.

Leaving his aides to book the captured twain, Coakley escorted Captain Delorme and your shakily to the chief's office. Not used to this kind of stuff my old head was rocking.

The head of the police department was in, and he listened very carefully to what was told him. He dismissed Coakley with some whispered instructions, and then looked thoughtfully at me.

"So you are much upset over your nephew's interest in this Moskow woman?" he utters. "Cyril Suggs—that's his name, is it?"

"Yes, chief; what is this woman and why are the police after her?" I blurt out. "This is terrible to me. I had an idea she might not be quite honest, but that there should be a gang and all that—poor Cyril!'

"It is a long story, Mr. Thatcher, but in a few minutes I hope to make it clear to you and Captain Delorme." The chief smiles a trifle. "And I wouldn't worry about the nephew too much, Thatcher.

He's probably all right. You wait a while in my office. I think Neva Moskow and the rest of her crowd are on their way here now."

"If I ain't cuckoo before this night's over I'll be lucky," I murmur to Delorme. "Never let a nephew visit you, especially if he comes from Applegrove, Oregon, and is full of speed, pep and class."

Ten or fifteen anxious minutes passed. Then the door of the chief's sanctum opened to admit Coakley, a handsome, bulky person with white hair, and lastly my nephew from Applegrove. To my astonishment, Cyril looked as bright as a bunch of nickels from the mint.

"Everett Sharp!" warbles Delorme, staring at the handsome white-haired gentleman. "He's in this, too!"

I knew the name, though not the man. Everett Sharp was the head of the biggest and best advertised private detective agency in Los Angeles, and had gained quite a reputation as the result of several spectacular cases. Had not Delorme been known to me I would have called in a Sharp operative.

"Chief, the job is done!" booms he of the white locks. "Your men and mine landed Neva and her rascals pretty as a whistle. You got to give the boy credit. He did his stuff in wonderful shape."

Startled, I saw him slap Cyril on the back. My nephew grinned.

Captain Delorme handed me a puzzled glare.

"Moskow caught with the goods, eh?" breathes the chief. "Fine! Fine! My boy, I congratulate you—and you, too, Sharp. Later we'll have a real chat, Suggs, but Sharp and I have business together—and, anyway, I think you'd better take your puzzled uncle, Mr. Thatcher, home. Clear up a mystery for him." A broad smile.

"I'll say so," adds Delorme.

Cyril seemed to see me for the first time.

"Why, hello, Uncle Sam! How did you get here?" he chirps.

"You young scoundrel!" I hurl at him. "There's some things you got to wise me to pronto. Your aunt and I have been—Well, I better call Amy, and tell her all is well, or at least seems to be."

"It is, uncle, old dear," he warbles.

Briefly over the wire I told the nearly frantic wife Cyril was O. K. and homeward bound with me. I didn't attempt to answer her million questions, but asked her to wait. I didn't have the answers yet myself. Once out of the station, I went after Cyril fiercely.

"Now, my dear young nephew," I gargle, "what's the big idea? What have you been slipping over while your uncle and aunt have been worried sick?"

Captain Delorme waited for his answer as eagerly as I did.

"I'm sorry you have worried, uncle," Cyril utters. "I'm afraid you jumped to some conclusions, and I couldn't put you right at the moment. The story will be on the front pages of the morning papers, but I'll sketch it briefly for you, old thing.

"You see, this has been all a game, Uncle Sam. My infatuation for Neva Moskow never was nothing but make believe. That isn't her real name, either. She has any number of them. She is one of the most dangerous women crooks in the country, and head of a bad gang of blackmailers. Some very wealthy people have been trimmed by her. In the East she is generally known as Nan Newcross."

"Nan Newcross! That's who she is? No wonder the police wanted to nab her!" ejaculates Delorme. "Well, well, well!"

"The police have been suspicious ever since the arrival in town of Neva Moskow. They weren't sure, but they thought she was the notorious Nan. With the coöperation of the Everett Sharp agency—Sharp has a client who was stung by one of the gang—it was hoped to set a trap and lead her on.

"That's how I hope to clutter up the landscape in this. I landed a job under Sharp some weeks ago. Rather, a test job. I had to make good to win a place as a regular, and Sharp told me to go out and show him. I always craved to be a movie actor or a detective, and since I couldn't be a screen scream I—"

"Amy said you were a salesman. That's what she thought," I interrupt.

"She didn't guess it very closely. Of course I didn't let her or you know very much, so I don't wonder she made a wrong jump. I wasn't going to blab of my connection with Sharp until the stunt was over—and possibly not then, if I flopped.

"I got the Moskow assignment because I fitted the rôle. At first I did rather like the woman, but I soon lost all pity. She's heartless.

"However, I played my part. In fact, I told her the truth. I pretended to fall for her hard; told her I had some money, and tried to make her think I was ripe to be plucked. I knew she figured on badgering it out of me sooner or later."

"The wife was so worried," I warble. "She heard the woman was no good, and she thought you, being young—"

"And silly, couldn't listen to reason," Cyril grins. "I didn't dare explain, uncle. I had to act as if I were goofy over Neva. By the way, you did me an awfully good turn yesterday or whenever it was you talked to the lady about me. It convinced her beyond a doubt I was the boob I seemed to be. At first she was suspicious because I may have overacted. And Neva is no Stella Stupid.

"Your line, though, did the trick. It apparently proved I was the sap I acted, and she went right on with her pretty plans.

"I won't tell you those now. Anyway, you know the badger racket. She coaxed me to get a thousand dollars ready, and then sprung a trap on me this evening. Another trap was sprung at the same time. Sharp and the police were all set, and got her and her two pals in the act.

"A Hollywood raid was pulled off in the hope of getting more of the gang, and I guess they have taken two suspicious parties who'll have some fast talking to do if they get away.

"Oi, yoi, uncle! You should have heard Neva's sweet remarks when she found she had been hooked! It took away all the shame I might feel for catching a woman. Though you don't have much pity for the sort that play her game."

"Another plume in Sharp's bonnet," mutters Captain Delorme. "That bird has all the luck in the world."

My detective friend parted from Cyril and me a bit out of sorts, and my astonishing nephew grinned some more.

"We raspberry all rivals," he comments. "I guess to-night has made me a regular—one of Sharp's sharpest. I know it's an awful crack, uncle, but I feel good."

When the wife heard the story I thought she never would get through with her gasping.

"Did you ever?" she cries. "A detective all the time, and leading this wicked woman on, instead of the other way around?"

Then something seemed to strike her.

"But, suppose, Cyril, there had been a slip, and you'd lost your money in the mix-up. I think it was silly to risk your thousand in the affair, no matter what the excuse. When I saw you counting it over this afternoon I wanted to tell you—"

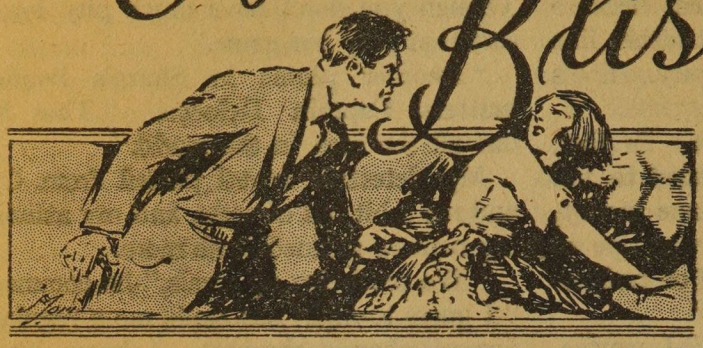
"Risk my thousand bananas! I guess not!" snorts Cyril. "Your nifty young nephew ain't that dumb. The Sharp agency furnished the old jack, believe me. My dough went into Los Angeles real estate ten days ago—they say it's bound to be safe in that. And I figure on staying here now. A great town for a young fellow with a little speed, pep and class. What do you say, Uncle Sam?"

As if I had anything to say!

ISABEL OSTRANDER

has written a corking new Detective Serial for us, to start in the near future. Further particulars later.

Ignorance is Blistering



by Hugh Addison

ELAINE ALLAN awoke with a start. The whine of the air brakes, sharp and shrill above the muffled clatter of the car wheels, had sounded like the whistle of the New England factory she had left behind forever.

She peered out at the skidding landscape, swathed in the indistinct gray of the new morning, and for a moment fear of the unknown into which she was speeding gripped her. Her future seemed as vague and uncertain as the cold and vaporish countryside. Panicky, she reached under her pillow and read, for the twentieth time, the letter that had lured her from the town of her birth into the bleak Northwest.

DEAR GIRL:

Come to Alberta and marry me. Money for fare and expenses is enclosed. Though we have never seen each other, I feel that neither of us will be disappointed.

Your lover forever,

COLIN HARDY.

As the train carried her swiftly toward the frontier settlement where her unknown lover was to meet her, Elaine reviewed again the circumstances that had led to this amazing journey—the romantic notion that had prompted her to slip her name and address into the toe of one of the factory socks; the resulting letter from Colin Hardy, fur trader in the wilds of Alberta, in which he had depicted his lonesome life and begged her to write to him; the resulting correspondence, and her final decision to escape from the toil and bondage of mill-town life by fleeing to a man whom she had never seen.

True, she had his photograph. She looked at it again, and wondered if her estimate of Hardy's character was correct. She wondered if such big, strong features really betokened honesty, competence, generosity, and a capacity for affection. She reflected that if they did not she would be a hideously disappointed girl, for, from the standpoint of good looks, there were suitors back East who, as the saying is, had Hardy beaten forty ways.

Not that the photograph showed an ugly man. He was merely homely. But his homeliness was indubitable. Only a mother or a cheap photographer could have called Colin Hardy handsome. His clothing had evidently never seen a presser's iron. His neck looked as rough as a blacksmith's rasp.

Even if he would make a desirable husband, however, how could she be sure that he would like her? He had rhapsodized over her photograph, but perhaps it had flattered her. She looked in a train mirror again, and saw a well-featured countenance that three years of mill toil had not robbed of its youthful bloom. She appraised her well-built figure slightly under medium height, and the cheap tailored suit that she hoped would look as smart to him as it did to her.

Around a bend in the railroad track she sighted Athabasca, civilization's last out-

post, from which she must float nearly one hundred miles down-stream to Colin Hardy's trading post. Quite a change from factory town life! With knitting looms clattering and humming around her from morning until night, week in and week out, she had reasoned that nothing on earth could be quite so desirable as life in a forest solitude. But now that solitude was at hand she was not so sure that she would like it.

Hardy, of course, had come up-stream to meet her. In a few moments she would meet him at the Athabasca station. A previous letter had stated his desire to do so, and she had first written and then wired him that she was coming. She shivered with alternate joy and trepidation.

Her first view of the village was not reassuring. It seemed to be a collection of old log houses and new shacks. The train drew into the station. Her great moment was at hand.

Half in rapture and half in fear, Elaine stood on the train platform, striving to pick out Colin Hardy from the crowd of men about the station. He would doubtless recognize her at once and come to her.

She was the last to alight. Many of the men had left. She saw no one who resembled the photograph she had received. There were some roughly attired men and one dapper-looking city man, but no one who looked like Colin Hardy. She was commencing to feel terribly alone when a voice sounded at her elbow.

"You're Miss Allan, aren't you?"

The voice was smooth and courteous. She turned to the speaker. It was the dapper-looking man who looked like a city resident.

"Y-yes," she said. "Are you—"

"I'm the man you expect to meet," he cut in quickly.

"Are you Colin Hardy?"

"Certainly."

For a moment Elaine thought that she would faint. The difference between this man and the Colin Hardy she had expected was so great as to be unnerving. The speaker was not only well dressed in neatly pressed city clothes, but he was as handsome as a motion-picture hero as well.

"You don't look like your photograph," she said with some asperity.

"I'll explain all about that. Let me take you to a hotel first."

He led her to the Northern Star, engaged a room for her, and said he would wait for her in the ladies' parlor until she was ready to talk to him. His manner was plainly proprietory. She went to her room and dropped into a chair.

She realized that she ought to be pleased because her unknown lover had turned out to be a handsome man. The homeliness of the photograph he had sent had been the one thing she had held against him. He looked generous and prosperous, and yet, such is the inconsistency of women, she felt grieved and disappointed because he was a better-looking man than she had expected.

After a while she donned a new dress and went down to the ladies' parlor.

"Some peach!" he ejaculated. "Lots better-looking than your photograph."

"So are you," said Elaine. Her tone was not enthusiastic.

"You want to know why, don't you?"

"I do," she affirmed.

"Well, let's sit together over here on the couch and I'll tell you."

"I'm quite comfortable here, Mr. Hardy."

"Hardy! That's a good joke."

"Aren't you Mr. Hardy?"

The man laughed again and shook his head.

"Not a chance, peachy. I'm not Mr. Hardy because there is no Mr. Hardy."

Elaine bristled.

"Indeed!" she ejaculated. "You said you were."

The man pulled his chair closer.

"I'll explain the whole thing from start to finish," he said. "In the first place, I didn't send you my real photograph because I wanted to spring a pleasant surprise on you. Figured that if you could love the roughneck shown in that photograph, you could love a better-looking man all the more. Tell the truth now; weren't you disappointed when the photograph showed an ugly man?"

"I was," Elaine admitted.

"There! You see I was right. It's lots easier to like me than him. Why, I just picked that photo of some unknown lumberjack up in a photographer's shop."

"What about telling me about your lonely life in the wilderness?" Elaine asked.

"Another pleasant surprise for you. Figured that if you could make up your mind to live in a wilderness a hundred miles from nowhere, you'd be delighted to find that I really mean to keep you in a city where there's paved streets and electric lights and theaters and everything."

"I suppose I ought to be pleased," Elaine admitted.

"Pleased isn't the word. You ought to be tickled to death."

"You said you were in the fur-trading business," Elaine reminded.

"So I am. But I'm no trader stationed in a wilderness. No, siree! I work for a fur house in the city. I've been making a buying trip down to Chippewyan, where I mailed those letters from. I don't live there always, you bet."

"You must make plenty of money, since you could afford to send for me. In fact, I don't quite understand why you did. I'm just a factory girl, as I said in my letters. Couldn't you find lots of girls in the city you live in, without sending two thousand miles for a factory girl?"

The man smiled in a fetching manner.

"Sure I could, but none so good-looking as you. And your letters show that you're intelligent as well."

Elaine made no reply. She realized that she ought to be glad because her unknown lover was not a homely and possibly uncouth backwoodsman, but somehow she was not.

"You said that your name isn't Hardy," she remarked. "May I ask what it is, and why you used the name of Hardy?"

"Sure you may. My real name is Reginald Rutherford. Nicer name than Colin Hardy—what? I just invented that name because, to tell you the truth, I didn't want to take any chances on getting into trouble by using my real name. Can you blame me? How did I know what kind of a woman you were? How did I know you were not playing a game to get a written proposal of marriage from me so you could sue me for breach of promise or something? You might have been an old hag, sending a false photograph just as I did, for all I could tell. Oh, I'm a foxy bird; I'll tell the world I am!"

Elaine rose and walked to the window. Rutherford rose too, and placed a well-shaped hand around her waist. She wriggled away.

"Not yet, please," she said. "I want to think."

Her thoughts were not roseate. She could not at first tell why she was disappointed, but she was. And then, as she reflected upon the unpolished but forceful diction of the numerous letters that bore the signature "Colin Hardy," and compared them with the suave speech of Reginald Rutherford, she commenced to doubt the truth of his statements. The more she thought about it, the more impossible it seemed that this man could have written those letters.

Another guest entered the ladies' parlor. Rutherford whispered in Elaine's ear:

"It's getting too crowded here. Let's go up to your room."

Elaine whirled upon him. "We're not married yet," she reminded him caustically.

"I know, but we soon will be. What's the difference? Don't be such a prude."

The third person went out, and they were again alone. But the incident had cleared Elaine's mind of doubt. The Colin Hardy of her correspondence could never have made the suggestion that Reginald Rutherford had. She faced him angrily.

"I don't believe a word you say!" she exclaimed. "You are *not* the man who wrote the letters I received. You are as different from that man as day is from night. You are better-looking, yes—but you are not half the man that he is. You are smooth; he was rough. You are tricky; he was straightforward and honest. I wouldn't marry you in a thousand years. I'd far rather live in a wilderness with the man who wrote me those wonderful letters than in any city with a sly thing like you. There *is* a Colin Hardy living, and he *did* write me those letters. I am going to find him!"

Furiously Elaine started out of the room, but Rutherford blocked her exit.

"Supposing I can *prove* that I wrote them?" he said with a smile that was half a sneer.

"You can't."

"I can. Shall I quote from some of them? How about this: 'I'm a plain man, dear, and I don't know how to make fancy speeches, but I am an honest man, and I know that I love you.'"

Elaine experienced a sudden sickish feeling of loneliness and helplessness. Those were indeed the very words that Colin Hardy had used.

"Or this," continued Reginald Rutherford: "'You must be one girl in a thousand, dear, to see anything to love in a rough bear like me.' How about that, heh? I sort of figured that was the line of guff to get a girl like you. Why, I could write it by the ream. Some little writer, I am."

Elaine pulled herself together like a pugilist who is getting the worst of it.

"I don't believe you yet," she stated. "You had some means of reading Mr. Hardy's letters before he sent them. That's why you can quote from his letters."

Rutherford leered in an ugly manner.

"That so?" he queried in a suave tone that was as menacing as the purr of a tiger. "Well, you've got those letters. Get them out and compare the handwriting with mine. Guess that 'll prove whether I wrote them or not, huh?"

Elaine went to her room and got her letters and came back. She pointed to the signature, Colin Hardy.

"Write that name exactly as it's written there, and I'll believe you wrote these letters; otherwise I won't," she said.

Rutherford grinned and seated himself at the writing table. Carelessly he snatched up a pen and quickly he scrawled the name, Colin Hardy.

Tensely Elaine compared it with the signature on her letters. Though she was no handwriting expert, the evidence before her eyes was beyond the question of doubt. The writing was identical; Rutherford had penned each and every one of the letters she had received.

"Satisfied now?" Rutherford grinned. "Now listen," he said gently. "I'm just as leery as you are about getting tied up in marriage to each other without first getting well acquainted. So why can't we be just pals for a while—sort of trial marriage or something?"

"No, thank you," said Elaine sadly.

"Well, a real marriage, then! Dammit, I'll stand for that if I have to. Right to-night. What do you say?"

"What I said before—that I don't want to marry you at all."

Rutherford controlled his rising anger with an effort.

"Please don't get angry," he said. "I was only handing you that trial-marriage stuff to try you out and see if you'd stand for it. Now that I know you won't, I like you all the better. Come on. Let's get married to-night. I'm crazy about you—honest I am."

Elaine shook her head. "I'm sorry—but I can't."

Rutherford made no further effort to control his anger.

"All right, then. You'll come across with that money I loaned you in an almighty hurry! Two hundred and fifty dollars. That's what I sent you to pay your fare and expenses out here to Alberta. Do I get it?"

Elaine gasped. The trip had cost more than she expected. She possessed hardly more than two hundred and fifty cents.

"Of course you'll get it," she said, "when I've had a chance to earn it."

Rutherford curled his handsome lips in a sneer.

"I'll get it right this minute or I'll have you locked up," he stated. "There's a law in Alberta against violating a contract and obtaining money under false pretenses. In one of your letters you agreed to come out and marry me if I sent you the money—a contract in black and white over your signature." He glared at her for a moment. "Will you marry me now?" he demanded in a less violent tone.

"I will not."

"All right. We'll see what the Mounted Police have to say about it." He snatched up his hat and left the ladies' parlor.

Up in her room, Elaine flung herself face

downward on her bed and wept. So this was the end of her romantic dream—marry a man she despised or be arrested for obtaining his money under false pretenses. What a fool she had been! What an insane notion it was to travel across the continent to marry a man she had never seen, when there were men in her own home town who wanted to marry her!

After a moment or two she rose and went to her open window and stood looking out at the peaceful forest that surrounded the town on every side. The mere sight of it soothed her. She commenced to realize the basic reason for her departure from the shrieking and clattering mill town of her birth. The solitude had called her. She was tired of cities with their artificiality and never-ending noise. She was a child of nature, and nature had called to her. She went down-stairs again to meet the officer, strangely refreshed.

Rutherford and the redcoat arrived presently. Rutherford explained to the officer how he had been "cheated" out of two hundred and fifty dollars, and Elaine did not deny that she had received the money.

The officer plainly sympathized with her when she explained why she could not repay the money and would not marry Rutherford, but he had his duty to perform.

"Maybe the commandant can get you out of your tangle," he said, "but my duty is clear. I must take you to him. Lucky, he lives right here in town. So, if you'll just step around to his office like as not he'll take up your case right away."

Despite the officer's sympathy, there remained the fact that the hand of the law was upon Elaine's shoulder and that she was being led away like a common thief.

"I'd like to get my suit-case—"

She never finished the sentence. The door flew open and a man burst in—the original of the photograph that Elaine had received. He stood for a moment glaring at the officer and at Rutherford, and Elaine could see that he was indeed as homely as the photograph had made him out to be. But she saw, too, the difference between his plain, unhandsome features, and the finely chiseled weakness of Rutherford's. Honor, courage, dependability—comparing this big shaggy man with the well-dressed city fellow was like comparing a St. Bernard dog with a snapping terrier.

"Are you Miss Allan?" His voice was uncultured but tender as a child's.

"Yes. Are you Colin Hardy?"

"I am." He took her little white hand in his great, hairy paw, and pressed it gently—and she knew then that her troubles were at an end.

Quickly she explained the presence of Rutherford and the officer. And as she did so the hand of the redcoat reached out and took a firm grip on the neatly pressed coat collar of the city man.

Hardy looked at Rutherford, and the fellow seemed to shrink visibly. Then he said to the officer:

"I won't prosecute, officer. Clear out, both of you. We want to be alone."

He turned to Elaine.

"Got here just in time, didn't I? It was because you thought to send a wire from Edmonton. I didn't get your letter saying you were coming. Rutherford got that, I guess, and held it out on me. You see, I'm in telegraphic touch with civilization, even though I do run a trading store in the wilderness." He went on to explain that Rutherford was a revengeful clerk of his whom he had been forced to discharge for trying to rob him.

That explained the fellow's effort to ruin Hardy's happiness, but there was still one point that Elaine didn't clearly understand.

"He wrote your name, and it was just exactly as you wrote it in your letters," she said.

Hardy looked uncomfortable.

"I'm ashamed to say it," he confessed, "but I never learned to write good, so I had that fellow write all my letters and sign my name to 'em, too. I dictated 'em, though. Mebbe some day you can teach me to write—yes?"

"I will," said Elaine. "But your case shows that ignorance isn't bliss, after all."

"Seems like ignorance is sort of blistering, you might say," said Colin Hardy.

And then Elaine knew she would always be happy with her outwardly rough but inwardly tender lover—for he possessed the saving sense of humor.

-temptation!
-tragedy!!
-triumph!!!

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