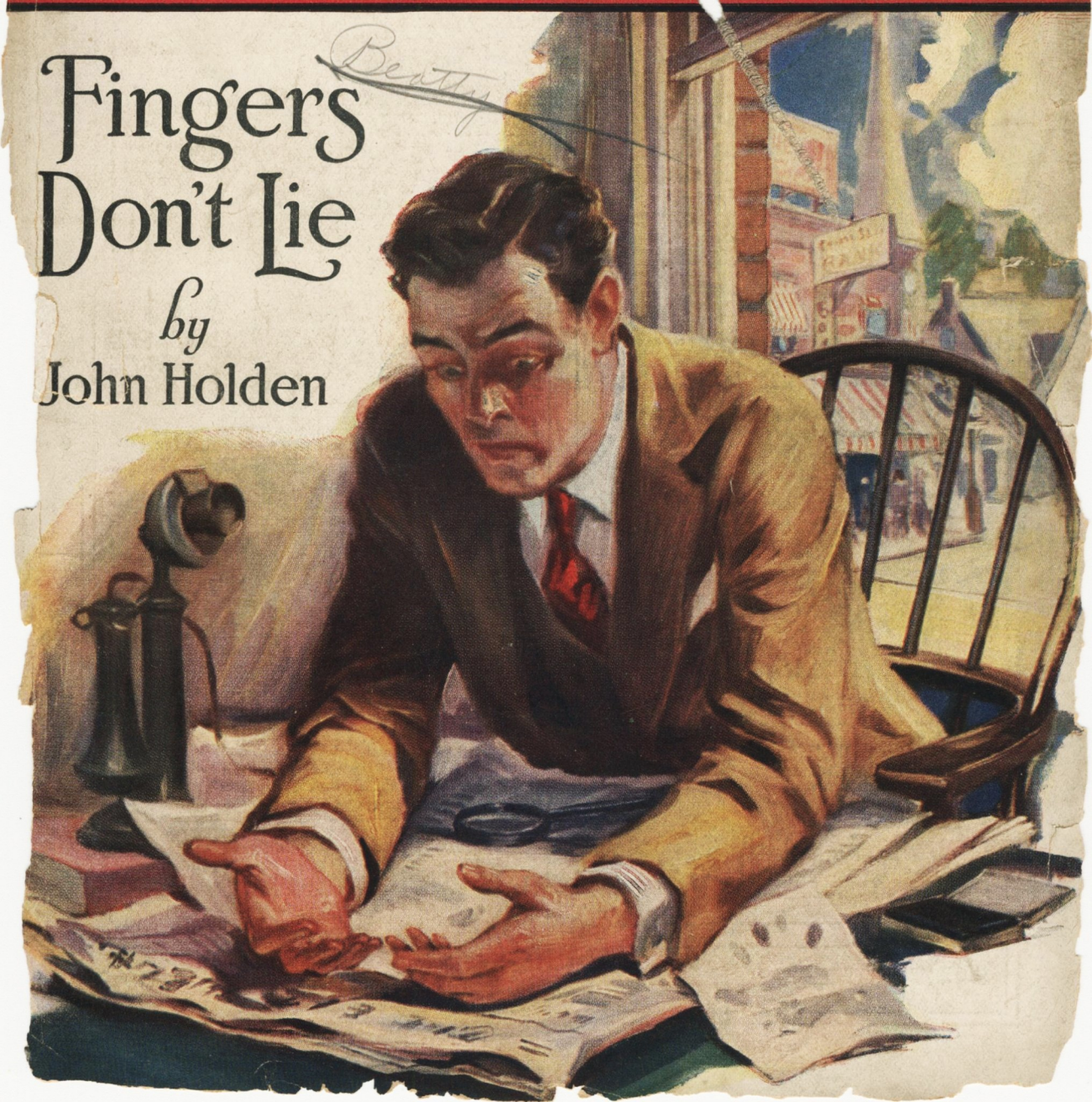
ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

FEB. 19

PRICE 10¢



Fingers Don't Lie

by

John Holden

Money-Making Tools

I need YOU with 100 firms BEGGING ME to send them more DRAFTSMEN.

Many offer to take BEGINNERS, at $50 a WEEK. Graduates can start at $90 and $100! GET BUSY!

Drafting is the BIG field, men. Every industry you can name BEGINS with the draftsman. Without mechanical drawings—by the thousands—every shop in the land would be STOPPED.

In fact, it is the SERIOUS SHORTAGE of draftsmen that brings this offer: *I will furnish all instruments, supplies, even to the table, to those who start now!*

PAY AS YOU GO Don't give me the excuse that you have no ready money for this golden opportunity. I am not so interested in *cash;* I want your *application.* I want at least 200 men to start *right now.* I want them ready to recommend by Spring! We will get a flood of letters saying "send us draftsmen," from every sort of industrial and engineering concern, and we *must* make good.

The first week's pay envelope of many a Dobe-trained draftsman has held enough to cover the entire cost of the course! Most students learn evenings, keeping on with their old work until ready to step into somebody's drafting room. The first month equips you to take on simple drafting jobs on the side. It helps you learn; I gladly permit this.

Well-Paid Positions Every Way You Turn

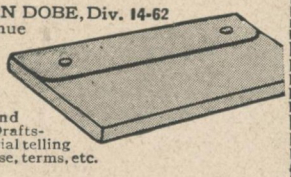
A draftsman soon forgets the days when he used to wonder where to get a job. Instead, he asks "What line of work interests me most?" And "What part of the country suits me best?" Twenty of my graduates went to Florida this year; three are in Japan; last month one wrote me from Ceylon. And I wish we had the count of how many Dobe draftsmen have become chiefs!

Positions loom up almost as soon as you are enrolled in a Dobe class! We receive requests *daily* for junior men—for men only partly through our course. "We'll take a *beginner,*" some concerns write us, "so long as he is a Dobe-trained man and has begun *right!*"

IT'S EASY and interesting to learn drafting. For drafting isn't "drawing"! You don't need any "talent." A draftsman uses *tools* for every line and every curve. You couldn't make them crooked if you tried! That's why drafting is so easily learned—and so interesting. *For you do everything by rule.* So, I guarantee to make *anyone* a finished draftsman; if you can read and write, you can learn this line. One of my students is 51 years old; another is just seventeen. *But they'll all be making a grown-up salary by Spring!*

WARNING! The special offer of *tools* is for immediate action. Don't expect me to hold it open indefinitely. Clip the coupon *now* for free book:

CHIEF DRAFTSMAN DOBE, Div. 14-62
1951 Lawrence Avenue
Chicago



Special Tool Offer

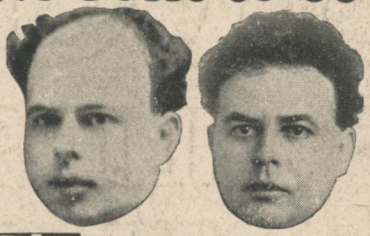
Send me FREE and POSTPAID Successful Draftsmanship Book and material telling all about your home course, terms, etc.

Name.....*Age*.....

Address.....

P. O.....*State*.....

No Joke to be Bald



Grow New Hair Quick

Let Me PROVE It To You FREE

What I accomplished on my own head, pictured above, I believe I can do for you, provided you are under 45 years of age and loss of hair was not caused by burns or scars. Anyhow, *I must succeed or you pay nothing.* No apparatus—my home treatment is simple, quick and inexpensive.

Send No Money Just your name and address and I will mail you full information with PHOTOGRAPHS, NAMES and addresses of men and women who have successfully used my treatment for dandruff, falling hair and particularly for baldness. **Write Now. A postal will do.**

VREELAND'S, 1142 Euclid-Windsor Bldg. CLEVELAND, OHIO

WANTED MEN—TO MAKE METAL TOYS AND NOVELTIES

Big demand for Ash-trays, Auto Radiator Ornaments, 5 and 10c Store Novelties, Soldiers and other all year sellers. We take care of selling goods you make; also buy them from you. Small investment puts you on road to success. WE FURNISH COMPLETE OUTFITS AND START YOU IN WELL-PAYING BUSINESS. No experience necessary. ACT NOW if you want to handle wholesale orders and share 1927 profits. Write for Free Catalog and full information. **METAL CAST PRODUCTS CO., Dept. A, 1696 Boston Road, New York.**

WE MATCH PANTS!

TO ANY SUIT Double the life of your coat and vest with pair of perfectly matched pants. **One Hundred Thousand Patterns.** Every pants hand tailored to your measure; no "ready mades." SEND SAMPLE or VEST. Our match sent **FREE** for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. Send piece of cloth or vest today!

SUPERIOR MATCH PANTS CO.
115 So. Dearborn St., Dept. 43, Chicago

BUNIONS GONE IN 15 DAYS

I end bunions forever with my new Pedodyne Solvent treatment. Pain stops almost instantly. Actual reduction of the enlarged growth starts so fast that your next pair of shoes can be a size smaller—often two sizes smaller.

PROVE IT FREE—Just send your name and address, no money, and the full treatment guaranteed to bring complete results may be yours to try. No obligations—Address

KAY LABORATORIES
Dept. C-320, 180 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill.

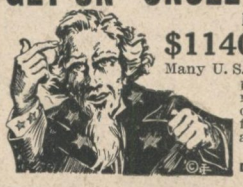
A PRIZE FIGHT STORY WITH A REAL WALLOP!

25¢ will bring you a copy of the March issue of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE containing CHARLES FRANCIS COE'S novelette of the prize ring, "CLASSIFIED."

In addition, the same edition contains one short novel, one other novelette and a dozen short stories. There are no continued stories in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY CO., Dept. G., 280 Broadway, New York

GET ON "UNCLE SAM'S" PAY ROLL



MEN—WOMEN 18 UP

$1140 to $3300 A YEAR

Many U. S. Government jobs obtainable. Experience usually unnecessary. Common education sufficient. Write today sure for free 32-page book with full particulars; list of positions and free sample coaching.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. G-284 Rochester, N. Y.

$7,500 A Year!

C. W. Birmingham of Ohio was formerly a clerk in a shop, earning $15 a week. Within a short time he has increased his earnings 900% so that, today, he is making $7,500 a year. The book—"Modern Salesmanship"—proved the first rung in his ladder to Success!

Now President

C. V. Champion of Illinois counts it a "red letter day" when he first read this remarkable book—"Modern Salesmanship." He says "It enabled me to learn more, earn more, and BE MORE!" Today he is president of his company and his earnings exceed $10,000 a year!

$1,000 A Week

D. D. Oliver of Norman, Oklahoma, was local manager of a mercantile business for 17 years —finally getting $200 a month. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes and started him on the road to big pay. Today he earns more in a week than he previously earned in **5 months** —or $1,000 in the last 7 days!

700% Increase

F. G. Walsh was a clerk earning $1,000 a year, and trying to support a wife and three children. He had to do something. N. S. T. A. training built up his income last year to $7,286—an increase of over 700 per cent.

—and They Started By Reading This Amazing Book!

Now—For a Limited Time Only—This Remarkable Man-Building, Salary-Raising Volume Is Offered FREE to Every Ambitious Man! If You Ever Aspire to Earn $10,000 a Year or More, Read It Without Fail.

Where Shall We Send *Your* Copy FREE?

NOW FREE

A BOOK! Just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it contains the most vivid and inspiring message any ambitious man can ever read! It reveals the facts and secrets that have led hundreds of ambitious men to the success beyond their fondest expectations! So powerful and far reaching has been the influence of this little volume, that it is no wonder a famous business genius has called it "The Most Amazing Book Ever Printed."

This vital book—"Modern Salesmanship"—contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid profession in the world. It reveals the real **truth** about the art of selling. It blasts dozens of old theories, explains the science of selling in simple terms, and tells exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen are achieved. And not only that—it outlines a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or dollar from his present position.

What This Astonishing Book Has Done!

The achievements of this remarkable book have already won world-wide recognition. The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of California who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to things he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training Association. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning $10,000 a year! Today he receives as much in 30 days as he used to receive in 365!

And then there's J. H. Cash of Atlanta. He, too, read "Modern Salesmanship" and found the answer within its pages. He quickly raised his salary from $75 to $500 a month and has every reason to hope for an even more brilliant future. And still they come! W. D. Clenny of Kansas City commenced making as high as $850 a month. F. M. Harris, a former telegrapher, became sales manager at $6,000 a year. O. H. Malfroot of Massachusetts became sales manager of his firm at a yearly income of over $10,000.

From $15 a Week to $7,500 a Year!

"A few years ago I was working in a shop for $15 a week. When my factory friends heard of my intention to become a salesman they laughed at me. Today these fellows are still working in a shop and I am making $7,500 per year. I can only speak *words* of praise for N. S. T. A. for it offered me a position which I took and raised me from a $15 a week job in the shop to $7,500 a year as a salesman." C. W. BIRMINGHAM, Ohio.

$100 a Week Increase!

"When I took up the National Salesmen's Training Association Course, I was selling shoes for $35 a week. Now I am earning an average of $135 a week. I attribute this remarkable progress to N. S. T. A. Training." JAMES JACOBSEN, Kentucky.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man of average intelligence can duplicate the success they have achieved—for their experience **proves** that salesmen are **made** —not born, as some people have foolishly believed.

Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet. And through the **National Demonstration Method**—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. system of SALESMANSHIP training—you can acquire the equivalent of actual experience while studying. Hundreds of men who never sold goods in their lives credit a large portion of their success to this remarkable training.

Free to Every Man

If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. We cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. Find out exactly what the underlying principles of salesmanship are—and how you can put them to work for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession. Mail the coupon now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
WORLD'S OLDEST AND LARGEST Exclusive SALES TRAINING INSTITUTION

Dept. B-2, N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. B-2,
N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Ill.

Without cost or obligation you may send me your free book, "Modern Salesmanship."

Name.....

Address.....

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

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

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXIV CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 19, 1927 NUMBER 2

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

BEGIN NEXT WEEK TO READ WHY

HE'S A PRINCE

By FRED MacISAAC

Action—humor—life, in five quick-stepping installments!

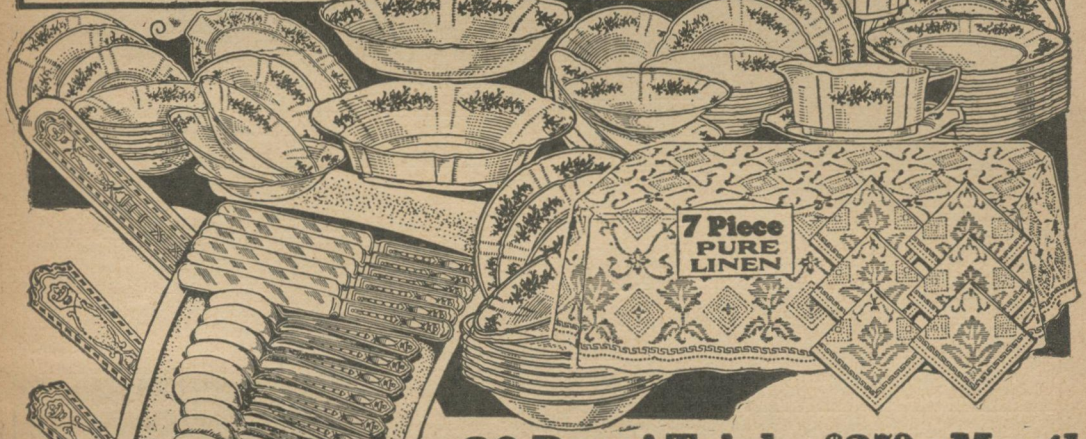
THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Reaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1927
Entered as second-class matter July 15, 1990, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

150 Pieces In All $1.00 DOWN

7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set — FREE

Extra special offer to those who hurry their order for this combination outfit shown here:—7 pieces GENUINE CUT GLASS: Pitcher of 2-qt. capacity and 6 tumblers of 9-oz. capacity. Each piece is pure, sparkling clear, thin and dainty; **hand cut decorations** consisting of large floral design with appropriate foliage. A useful and handsome set. Only a limited number — so act quick.

110-Piece Dinner Set



7 Piece PURE LINEN

26 Pc. SILVER SERVICE

26 Piece Silver Set
Pleasing pattern and popular polished finish. Each piece heavily silver plated on nickel silver base. Set consists of 6 knives, 6 forks, 6 dessert spoons, 6 teaspoons, 1 sugar shell, 1 butter knife.

30 Days' Trial—$2.70 a Month

Yes, only $1.00 with coupon below brings this 150-piece outfit (7-piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE) on 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied after trial, send it back at our expense and we'll refund your dollar plus all transportation charges you paid. If you decide to keep the outfit, start paying only $2.70 a month until you've paid our rock-bottom price — only $29.95 for the entire outfit with 7-piece Cut Glass Set FREE. 150 pieces in all—only $29.95—and a year to pay! Where else can you find a bargain like that and such easy terms?

Outfit consists of :—**110-piece Ivory Ware Dinner Set.** Complete service for 12 people. Popular Ivory Ware. Rich, creamy ivory color. Stamped with **Gold Leaf Decorations** as illustrated. Newest Gloria shape. Set consists of:— 12 dinner plates, 9 in.; 12 breakfast plates, 7 1-4 in.; 12 coupe soups, 7 1-4 in.; 12 fruit saucers, 5 1-2 in.; 12 oatmeal dishes, 6 1-4 in.; 12 cups, 12 saucers, 12 bread and butter plates, 6 in.; 1 oval vegetable dish, 9 in.; 1 round vegetable dish, 8 3-4 in.; 1 sugar bowl and cover (2 pieces); 1 platter, 11 in.; 1 platter; 13 1-2 in.; 1 covered vegetable dish (2 pieces); 1 gravy boat; 1 gravy boat stand; 1 bowl, 1 pint; 1 cream pitcher; 1 pickle dish; 1 butter dish, 7 1-2 in.

7-Piece Pure Linen Table Set. Large tablecloth, 54x70 in.; 6 napkins 14x14 in. made of **pure linen**, bleached to an attractive silver gray. Has beautiful Grecian self pattern. Will launder perfectly.

26-Piece Silver Set as described just below illustration to the left.

FREE 7 Pieces Genuine Cut Glass (as described above) if you send coupon **at once.** Shpg. wt., abt. 125 lbs. **Order by No. G9841A. $1 with coupon; $2.70 monthly. Price $29.95.**

SEND NOW!

Straus & Schram, Dept. 2272 Chicago

Straus & Schram, Dept. 2272 Chicago

Enclosed find $1. Ship special advertised 150 piece Combination Outfit, (7 piece genuine cut glass set FREE.) I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the Outfit, I will pay you $2.70 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the Outfit with the 7 piece cut glass set within 30 days and you are to **refund my money** and any freight or express charges I paid.

150 Piece Combination Outfit, No. G9841A, $29.95. (7 Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE.)

Name _____

St., R. F. D. or Box No. _____

Shipping Point _____

Post Office _____ *State* _____

Married or Single? _____ *Nationality or Color* _____

A CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$75 WEEKLY. MAN OR WOMAN WANTED WITH AMBITION AND INDUSTRY, TO DISTRIBUTE RAWLEIGH'S HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS TO STEADY USERS. FINE OPENINGS NEAR YOU. WE TRAIN AND HELP YOU SO YOU CAN MAKE UP TO $100 A WEEK OR MORE. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY. PLEASANT, PROFITABLE, DIGNIFIED WORK. WRITE TO-DAY. W. T. RAWLEIGH CO., DEPT. NY 5453, FREEPORT, ILLINOIS.

MAKE $75 A WEEK AND UP, SELLING OUR FINE, MADE-TO-MEASURE, ALL-WOOL SUITS, DIRECT TO WEARER—ALL ONE PRICE, $31.50. BIGGEST VALUES. COMMISSIONS IN ADVANCE. WE DELIVER AND COLLECT. 6x9 SWATCH SAMPLES FURNISHED. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., DEPT. B-409, CHICAGO.

Agents make larger profits selling well known Ho-Ro-Co Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles. Our lower prices give larger profits. Over 50,000 cans La-Em-Strait Hair Dressing sold last year. HO-RO-CO, 2702 Ho-Ro-Co Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

66 MILES ON 1 GALLON—Amazing, New, Wonderful Vapor Humidifier—Gas Saver—and Quick Starter. For all autos. Exclusive Factory Representatives wanted everywhere. 1 Free to introduce. CRITCHLOW, B-427, Wheaton, Ill.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. SOAPS, EXTRACTS, PERFUMES, TOILET GOODS. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. CARNATION CO., DEPT. 1040, ST. LOUIS, MO.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, opportunity to earn $35 to $100 weekly operating Ragsdale's original "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere; wholesale or retail. Big commercial candy book free. W. HILLYER RAGSDALE, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, Munsey Combination, 280 B'way, New York.

HELP WANTED

EARN $25 WEEKLY, SPARE TIME, WRITING FOR NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. DETAILS AND COPYRIGHT BOOK FREE. PRESS SYNDICATE, 997, ST. LOUIS, MO.

HELP WANTED—MALE

ALL MEN—WOMEN, 18—60, WANTING TO QUALIFY FOR PERMANENT GOVERNMENT POSITIONS, $35—$75 WEEKLY, HOME OR ELSEWHERE, WRITE, MR. OZMENT, 198, ST. LOUIS, MO.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER, RAILWAY MAIL CLERK and other government positions, write for particulars. MOKANE, A-12, Denver, Colo.

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

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

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

$10 IS ALL I ASK DOWN ON 20 ACRES IN MICH. POTATO BELT. Very easy terms. Near markets, lakes and streams. Write for particulars now. G. W. SWIGART, M-1276 First National Bank Building, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

$$$ FOR IDEAS. PHOTOPLAY PLOTS ACCEPTED IN ANY FORM. REVISED, CRITICIZED, PUBLISHED, COPYRIGHTED. ADVICE FREE. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO COMPANY, 209 SECURITY BLDG., SANTA MONICA & WESTERN AVENUE, HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$13.80 DAILY in advance (Send for sworn proof) Introducing New Insured Hosiery. 57 styles, 40 colors, guaranteed seven months. No capital or experience required. You simply take orders. We deliver and collect (or you can deliver, suit yourself). Credit given. PAY YOU DAILY, monthly bonus besides. Spring line now ready. We furnish samples. Spare time will do. MACOCHEE TEXTILE CO., Road 2704, Cincinnati, Ohio.

$25.00 DAILY SELLING RAINCOATS AND SLICKERS, $2.95. NEWEST COLORS, RED, BLUE, GREEN, ETC. OUTFIT FREE. COMMISSIONS DAILY. ELLIOTT BRADLEY, 241 VANBUREN, DEPT. 801, CHICAGO.

WE PAY $48 A WEEK, FURNISH AUTO And Expenses to introduce our Soap and Washing Powder. BUSS-BEACH COMPANY, Dept. A-96, Chippewa Falls, Wisc.

SELL TAILOR-MADE SHOES. Sensational new fitting discovery eliminates foot troubles; makes walking a pleasure. 75 men's and women's styles 60 leathers. Prices lower than stores. Big commissions. Free outfit. Free sample shoes. Tailor-Made Shoe System, 932 Wrightwood, Dept. OMC3, Chicago.

SALESMEN—NEW INVENTION beats vacuum sweeper and all its attachments. No electricity required. All complete only $2.95. OVER HALF PROFIT. Write O. P. MORGAN, MGR., 762 Grimes St., Fairfield, Iowa.

NEW WAY TO MAKE MONEY—WE SHOW YOU HOW. Earn $15 a day taking orders for our fine made-to-measure tailoring. Your own suit absolutely FREE. Write today for new style, convenient portfolio outfit, large all wool samples, etc. Furnished FREE. PROGRESS TAILORING COMPANY, Dept. B-109, Chicago.

Mirrors Resilvered At Home. Costs less 5 cents per square foot; you charge 75 cents. Immense profits plating auto parts, headlights, tableware, stoves. Refinishing metalware, etc. Outfits furnished. Details free. Write Sprinkle, Plater, 19, Marion, Ind.

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

DISTRICT AGENTS—Sell $23.50 All Wool Union Made Suits and Topcoats for large, old established firm. Wonderful values; one price. Liberal commissions in advance; money back guarantee. Expensive 9x13 swatch outfit FREE. Protected territory. Write 1-M HARVEY, Box 90, Chicago, Ill.

SONG WRITERS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our composer wrote many song hits. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 1472 Broadway, Dept. 109, New York, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for our free Evidence of Invention Blank and Guide Book, "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch of your invention for our Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms Reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 419, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for **FREE** Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch and description of invention for Inspection & Instructions free. Terms Reasonable. Prompt Attention. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 41-J Park Row, New York.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED ON CASH OR ROYALTY BASIS. Patented or unpatented. In business 24 years. Complete facilities. References. Write ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249 Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

"A cat may looke on a king."—HEYWOOD.

CLASSIFIED

By Charles Francis Coe

A yarn of a pug who looked longingly at a society Queen, made her, and then gave her the air, for the love of the roped arena—and another woman. It's a riot.

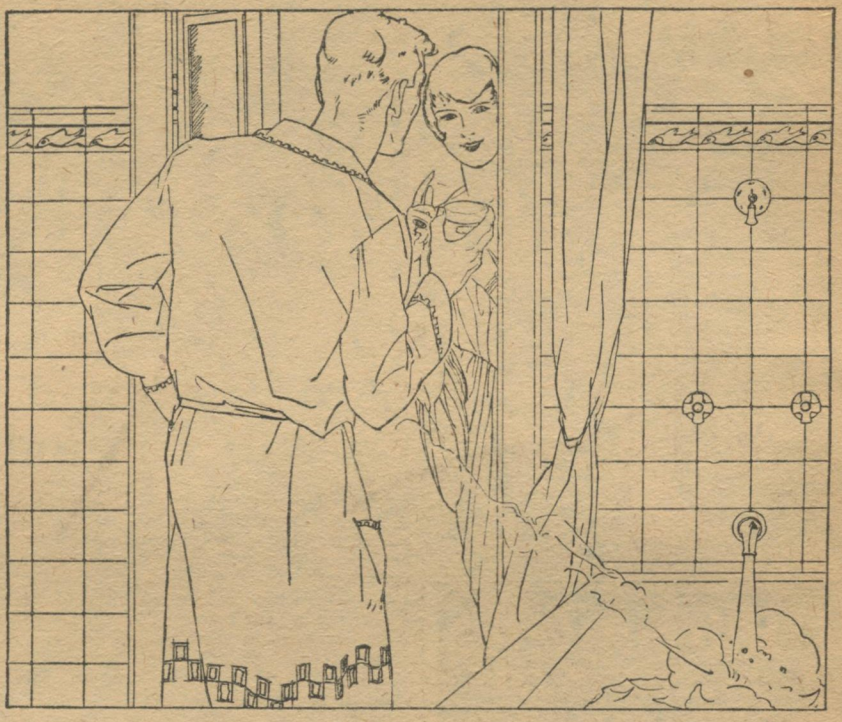
Be sure to read this complete novelette in the

March

MUNSEY

Now On Sale

"Wherever magazines are sold—25c a copy."

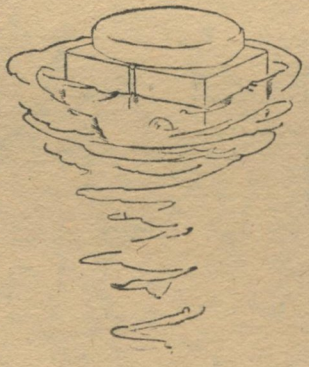


"You can't keep a good soap down!"*

THIS is a libelous portrait of a man of our acquaintance whose wife (gentle economist) tantalized him by the promise of Ivory for his bath—*as soon as he had used up his cake of sinker-soap!*

Unwilling to do further submarine searching for his leaden but elusive soap globule, yet loath to cross his smiling wife's wishes, our friend proceeded as follows:

1. Borrowed a cake of Ivory from his daughter.
2. Cemented sinker-soap to Ivory cake.
3. Placed the ill-mated pair in bath water, and proved Ivory a life-saver, as shown.



"It Floats"

At the present writing, the wedded soaps are wafer-thin—the sinker-soap from dissolution, the Ivory from lather-giving generosity; and thus one man has demonstrated the falsity of the adage that "you cannot eat your cake and have it, too."

PROCTER & GAMBLE

*In using this headline, we bow acknowledgment to hundreds of correspondents from coast to coast.

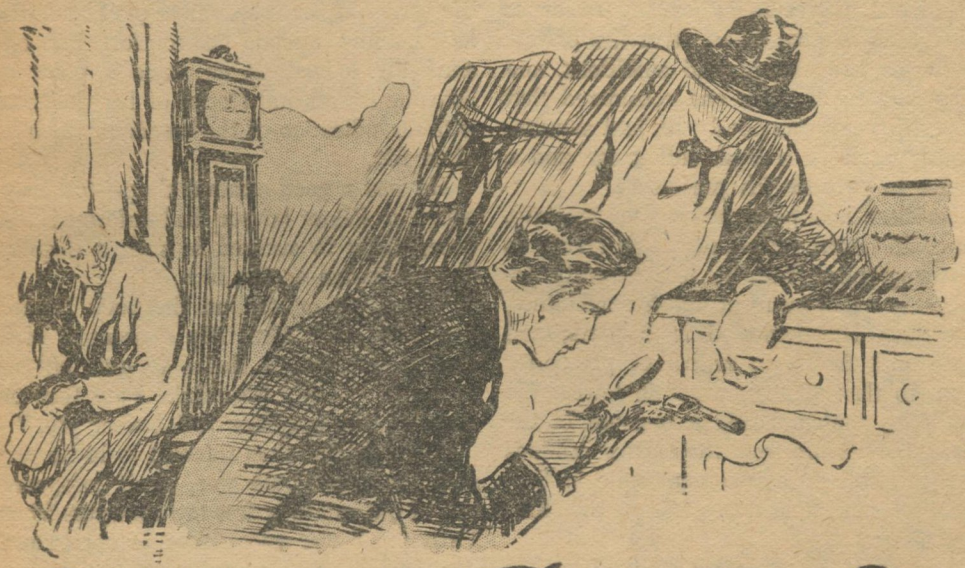
IVORY SOAP

99 44/100 % Pure

Luxury and economy are wedded in Guest Ivory—for wives who treasure their complexions. Guest Ivory costs only 5 cents because so many women won't use anything else.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXIV SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1927 NUMBER 2



Fingers Don't Lie

By JOHN HOLDEN

Author of "Prairie Shock," "The Great Mistake," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A NOISY NIGHT.

EVENING had brought to the Midwestern town of Sardanella no surcease from the discomfort of the day. A blanket of moist heat lay upon it like steam upon a stove, heavy and suffocating, an invisible menace to health and sanity.

No man wore a coat, few walked more than fifty steps without mopping perspiration from their brows. The grass of the numerous well-ordered lawns lay yellow and shriveled, notwithstanding that the inhabitants were still permitted to water them half an hour every day. Down town on Sardanella's one long business street the buildings and pavements radiated heat absorbed during the day like so many frying pans; uptown, bedrooms were like ovens.

At the house of Mrs. Bly, on Prairie Street, one of Sardanella's younger and less firmly established lawyers lay panting upon a bed which he had dragged up against a window overlooking the rear lawn. The lawn was a sizable one and well kept, with a big maple tree to shade it, and it ran

through to the rear street. Prairie Street was rather pretentious, with several fine residences, though the Bly house was not so very fine, and neither was the Hilliard residence next door.

The local member of the bar who now regarded the lawn outside his window with longing eyes was Sidney Carter. Too unprosperous as yet to afford any residence other than a room in an otherwise private house, he was earnest and ambitious, and fairly successful when one considered that only two years previously he had simultaneously attained a legal voting age and a license to practice his profession.

Business had been picking up recently. He could not as yet afford such a luxury as a stenographer, but he had recently indulged in a new outfit of well-fitting clothes, and these had imparted to his trim and rather tall figure an aspect of prosperity equal to that of any lawyer in town. He was even contemplating a removal in the not distant future from the narrow confines of a bedroom to a two-room suite in Sardanella's new apartment house, the Rivington Arms.

At present, however, the walls of his hot little bedroom pressed in upon him like the sides of an electric toaster. He tossed on his bed for half an hour, and then he was ready to admit that the nocturnal heat was too much for him. He rose and sat on the side of his bed, pyjamaed legs dangling listlessly, and the thought came to him that if he could only lie outside on the cool-looking grass he might be able to sleep.

That is, when the radio next door left off its squawking and whining and spitting, as it surely must do in a short while. He thought of his camping cot, stored in the basement, and recollection of many refreshing nights spent upon it motivated him to an action that he would not have contemplated at any other time.

In slippers and with a featherweight dressing gown covering his blue silk night attire—his taste in such things being fastidious—Carter went down the one flight of stairs to the hall and out to the front porch, which overlooked Prairie Street from a height of some nine feet and a distance of about the same.

Mrs. Bly was there, rocking and fanning, and addressing querulous remarks to herself anent the unprecedented duration of the hot spell. She was a somewhat oversized female of Hibernian birth, and, to hear her tell of it, she had seen days of much greater prosperity.

Carter thought she lived a fairly easy life as it was, but she was a good soul who left nothing undone to comfort her one and only lodger, so he made a point of listening to her dull stories of her dull past with no indication of the boredom which he often felt.

He was a good-natured chap—too easy-going, a fellow lawyer had informed him once, really to succeed in such a dog-eat-dog profession as the law.

"Sure, go on out on the back lawn if you want to," Mrs. Bly consented when Carter expressed a desire to quit his hot bedroom. "Only it's afraid I am that the radio of our neighbor will bother you."

The neighbor thus referred to in no very complimentary tone was, as it happened, one of the painfully few town lawyers whom Carter had ever vanquished in open court. Jerome Hilliard his name was, and he had been extremely peeved at the decision. He was an older man than Carter, though not really old nor even middle-aged. He was a bachelor, and he lived alone in the big house next door because it had been bequeathed to him and his sister by their deceased father. That is, except for one old and decrepit and half deaf manservant. The sister was said to be attending college in the East, and Carter had never seen her.

Carter did not like Jerome Hilliard and he did not have a very high regard for him either. It seemed doubtful if many people did—with the exception of old Wisdom Giles, the servant, who was fully as odd as his master, if not more so.

A brilliant fellow once, Hilliard had within the brief space of the past year become eccentric and queer. People said he was "going to the dogs"; in fact, Carter's courtroom victory over him was largely clouded by the suspicion that Hilliard had been half drunk on that occasion, and therefore in no condition to do his client justice.

Certain it was that Hilliard drank—"like a fish," as Mrs. Bly put it—and there was also a rumor that he had become a drug fiend. Recently his legal business had been more or less neglected, and, since the man had acquired the habit of argument, he sought the vocal practice on street corners and in cigar stores that he used to obtain in the practice of his profession.

In particular, the matter of Carter's courtroom triumph over him seemed to prey on his mind, so that he was moved to discuss it with Carter now and then, much to the latter's dislike.

"Circumstantial evidence—that's how you beat me, young fellow," Hilliard had stated on a street corner only a few days previously. "Evidence that wasn't any more right and proper than rain on a picnic day. One of these days I'm going to show you something about evidence; something that 'll make your eyes pop out. You watch and see. Yes!"

Carter had concealed his displeasure.

"Dare say you're right," he admitted. "Anyhow, beating you in court once does not mean anything. Chances are you can beat me next time."

"You said it. Beat you all, once I get going again. Yes! Cut out the wine and women one of these days, and then look out!"

Carter wanted to make the obvious remark that Hilliard would have to do his cutting-out with celerity if he hoped ever to redeem his former position, but he refrained. Hilliard's affairs were none of his business. The man was in a friendly mood at the moment, but any instant he might turn surly. That was the main trouble with him nowadays; one never knew what to expect from him. Better keep away from Hilliard and avoid useless argument.

Replying to his landlady's remark concerning the bothersome radio, Carter said: "Oh, I guess I can forget it if the air is cool enough to permit sleep." And forthwith he proceeded to bring out his cot and set it up.

The spot that Carter chose for its location was under the maple tree, as far as possible from the Hilliard dining room, where the radio appeared to be located. This dining room faced the Hilliard lawn, which adjoined the Bly one, being separated only by a low hedge.

Carter reasoned that Hilliard must have chosen his dining room to sit in because it overlooked the two lawns, but he could not be positive that the radio was located there because the house was in darkness. An odd thing, that business of sitting in a dark house on a night that was only faintly illuminated by a quarter-moon; but not out of keeping with the other actions of the owner.

Something else now rose to bother Carter as he set up his cot on the lawn, draped two bedsheets over it, placed a small pillow, and crawled in between the sheets. What if he should remain asleep on his cot after daybreak and be observed by passers-by, possibly with the covering kicked off?

"Have to wake up at daylight and scoot for the house," he muttered to himself, adding in a moment: "Confound that radio!"

It was an annoying instrument, sure enough; as raucous as the screech of a peacock and as interminable as a Congressman's speech. In fact, that was what the contraption was picking out of the air at the present moment—the speech of a Congressman, or some one of equal lung power—anyhow, a political speech of some sort that rasped on and on and on, with trite and tiresomely repeated phrases such as "good of our country," and "put the scoundrels out of office," and so on.

"Not an unmixed blessing, radios aren't," cogitated Carter. "More noise turned loose on a world that's noisy enough already; noise that man can't escape anywhere. Even in the middle of a desert, or at the north pole, some one packs one of the darned things."

He turned over and tried to sleep.

No use. He could sleep no better than in his bedroom. And only on account of the radio, because the air seemed to have grown cool enough. On and on the annoying instrument droned, hammering the heavy atmosphere with the dull phraseology of that endless speech.

Surely, thought Carter, the same man could not be speaking all the time; another

long-winded politician must have taken up the task of keeping the country from sleep. Fifteen minutes, twenty—at the end of half an hour the loud speaker was still going strong.

To make it all the more annoying, Carter could not quite follow the speech. A few words and phrases he could make out here and there, but for the most part it was a verbal blur. And such phrases! More vitriolic than at the start, though not less commonplace.

"Scoundrel!" "Blackmailer!" "Betrayer of women!" "Not another cent!" Those were a few of them.

Half minded to call out a request to shut off the destroyer of his rest, Carter sat on his cot, knees drawn up to his chin, and glared through the darkness at the adjoining house.

Huge and dark and glowering the Hilliard residence stood, evincing no sign of life save the drone of that infernal radio. Carter thought suddenly that maybe the house was empty, that the radio had been left in operation by mistake, that there was no need for him to endure its unspeakable annoyance.

But no. Some one was there. The owner himself, judging from the appearance of a dark shape that now grew out of the darkness and moved about uncertainly upon the rear porch, and disappeared back into the house of clamor.

The logical thing to do, Carter thought, was to call out a request to shut off the noise.

But he did not wish to do that. An argument would undoubtedly result, and argument with Jerome Hilliard was what Carter wished to avoid. The man was notoriously insistent upon what he considered to be his rights; probably he would raise more of a disturbance even than the radio.

Ten minutes more of auditory torment.

"My stars, what a speech!" groaned Carter. "Who would have thought that even a politician could talk so long on a hot night? Or maybe it isn't hot where he is. Though it could be lots hotter than any earthly spot, for all I care!"

More vain efforts to woo sleep.

And then Carter uttered a wish, half aloud, which he regretted the following instant.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT MORNING.

THE wish that Sidney Carter expressed to himself, though his voice might have been heard by a keen listener at a short distance, was to the effect that some one should give Jerome Hilliard a knock on the head.

Carter did not mean this literally, so that his perturbation when he realized that he had made such a wish was almost as extraordinary as the length of the radio speech.

There was a strong reason, however, for Carter's regret. One which he felt a bit ashamed of in his more logical moments, but which nevertheless motivated his conduct in no small degree.

Once he had wished evil upon two men, and the evil had followed with such breathtaking suddenness as to leave him shaking and quivering with undefinable dread.

The scene had been a championship tennis match in the East, with thousands of spectators on three sides of him. An airplane had come swooping down over the players and spectators repeatedly, throwing the former off their game and annoying the latter unspeakably.

No attention did it pay to the gestures of the officials to keep away. Lower and lower the plane swooped until the grinning faces of the flyers could plainly be seen, and the roar of the engine drowned out completely the voice of the umpire. Finally Carter, incensed because he missed hearing an important announcement, uttered the words:

"I wish you pests would take a tumble."

He had not really desired that harm should befall the flyers; had made the statement unthinkingly, as exasperated men do.

And yet, on the instant, the airplane had seemed to stand still, as though it struck an invisible wall. Then it flopped

over on its side in horrible imitation of a shot bird, fluttered, dropped like a stone, hit the earth, crushed the occupants to a horrible death.

A coincidence, of course. Common sense told Carter that his expressed desire had not caused the aviators' fall, that no malignant thought-wave from his exasperated brain had caused the collapse of their machine.

Nevertheless, the tragedy had occurred in such apparent obedience to his desire that for days and weeks he had been unable to rid himself of the dreadful thought that he had caused two deaths. Then and there he had resolved never again to wish evil upon any man. And now he had broken his resolution—had wished harm upon Jerome Hilliard.

Oh, well—it would be all right. Hilliard had not been hurt by his wish, and would not be. The coincidence of the tennis court could not happen again. It was absurd to think that it might. Such stuff was all right to read in impossible yarns like those of the Arabian Nights, but this was the twentieth century, when effects flow from adequate causes and nothing else.

Recovering from his few seconds of frightened regret, Carter now gazed at his eccentric neighbor's house, feeling as he did so a return of the annoyance which had been temporarily driven from his mind.

What an ugly structure it was! An eyesore in the daytime, with its dirty brown paint that was scaled off here and there to give it a diseased and leprous appearance, it was no less unbeautiful at night. Rather more so, with its pair of attic windows which blinked like evil eyes under the pallid and greenish moonlight.

Yet it was furnished, as Carter well knew, with taste and care—the influence of the deceased parents, or possibly of the absent sister, who, from all accounts, was quite an estimable young woman. At that, Jerome Hilliard was such a queer and contradictory character that it would be just like him to embellish his house inside and leave it ugly as sin without.

On and on rasped the radio speech, unchanging in tone and tempo save that the more violent words such as "blackmailer" and "scoundrel" seemed to become even more frequent and piercing.

A trifle drowsy now, despite his annoyance, Carter's mind churned upon the evil but fascinating thought that by wishing evil upon a fellow human he could bring evil to pass. What an odd gift that would be, what a fiendish one—if some one really possessed it, which of course no one did.

And yet, come to think of it, he himself, Sidney Carter, once had been somewhat of an odd fellow, just as Jerome Hilliard now was, and old Wisdom Giles, the male housekeeper, too. That habit of walking in his sleep, for instance.

Of course, all that belonged to the past. Carter had not walked in his sleep for years. But he had once. Had risen from his bed in the dead of night, dressed, perambulated the streets, actually talked to people—all while sound asleep.

Uncanny action.

But all that belonged to his half forgotten youth. No need to think of it now. There was a better way to seek sleep. Count imaginary sheep jumping over an imaginary fence. One, two, three—and the black one. One, two—

Damn the radio!

Why must he have such an unmitigated pest as Jerome Hilliard for a neighbor? What kind of mind did the man possess, to annoy his neighbors in that manner? Pig! Operating his nasty squawker late at night, when he must know that his neighbors desired sleep. Such a beastly hot night too. Hardly any cooler on the lawn than it had been back in the bedroom. Or maybe it seemed that way, thought Carter, because he kicked around so much.

It would serve Hilliard right if some one gave him a tap on the head. Just a little tap, of course. Not shoot him, or anything like that. So he would fall down but not hurt himself. Just feel a little of the pain and annoyance he was causing others. Then maybe the man woud learn manners.

Regretting this outburst of unexpressed ill-feeling, Carter tried once more to compose himself for sleep, and, strangely enough, found that he was succeeding. Gradually the radio grew less obnoxious;

actually became soft and soothing. The speaker's voice died down almost to nothing. Just a soft crooning, crooning. No harsh calling of names now. More like the whispered words of a lover. Hardly to be heard now—dying away—

Sleep!

Carter jerked into wakefulness as he felt the hot sun shining in his eyes. He sat up on his cot, bare feet on the cool grass, and gazed with alarm toward the rear sidewalk, from which any one who happened to be abroad so early could easily see him.

He had been asleep for many hours. The sun was bright and warm. The stillness was unbroken, save for the faint crowing of some distant cock over in the poorer part of town, where fowls were kept. No radio to annoy him now. The big Hilliard house was as silent as a funeral vault.

Rubbing his eyes, Carter cogitated. "Wonder when Hilliard turned the thing off?"

He gazed toward the window from which he believed the annoying speech had come on the previous night, and saw that it was wide open. Curtains fluttered to the light morning breeze, and gave the place a curiously empty aspect. "Nobody awake over there," said Carter to himself.

He stood up and looked down at his cot. "I'll take the sheets in and let it lie," he decided. "No use waking myself up any more than I have to. Back in bed I'll get another two hours' sleep."

He glanced toward the back porch of the Hilliard house and shook off more of his drowsiness.

"Hello! What's that?"

What he saw was a pair of shoes. But they lay in an odd position, sidewise, one atop the other, just outside the door that separated the Hilliard porch from the dining room, the kitchen being at the far side and also abutting on the porch. Carter wondered if human feet were inside them, and stepped closer for a better look.

Human feet indeed. With white socks curled down around hairy ankles that looked strangely inhuman; more like whitewashed sticks.

Wide awake now, and a bit alarmed, since it seemed unnatural that a man should go to sleep in such an awkward position, in an open doorway, Carter leaped lightly over the low hedge that separated the Bly and Hilliard properties, stepped up on the porch, and looked at a motionless human form that looked like nothing so much as a hastily-dropped bag of potatoes.

"Good Lord!" he cried.

And well he might, for Jerome Hilliard lay dead on the floor, obviously the victim of a murderer.

CHAPTER III.

FINGERPRINTS.

THE weapon that had killed Jerome Hilliard lay beside the body, and at his first sight of it Carter was greatly puzzled. It was a pistol of the ordinary sort, medium-calibred and nickel-plated, and it seemed impossible that such could have been exploded so near at hand during the night without awakening him.

This mystery was explained almost immediately, however, when he noticed a small cylinder attached to the barrel. He divined without examination that it was a silencer, and allowed the weapon to lie without touching it. He did not touch anything whatsoever, not even the body. Chief of Police Henry Burr would prefer that he should not, and Carter wished to do everything in his power to help solve the mystery of who had killed Hilliard.

He did not doubt for an instant that Hilliard had been murdered. The man's interest in life was strong, as was evidenced by his desire to hear a prosy but probably informative political speech. Never to Carter's knowledge had Hilliard's eccentricity taken a melancholy turn.

Carter did not have the slightest idea as to the identity of the slayer. In fact, he did not give much thought to the matter. He stepped to the Hilliard telephone and called Chief Burr, finally locating him at his house, then went to his room to wash and don his clothes.

Returning to the Hilliard house to stand guard over the body and any evidence that might be lying around unobserved until Chief Burr arrived, Carter noticed the dead

man's housekeeper, queer old Wisdom Giles, coming up the street, and for the first time a definite thought regarding the killer's identity came to him.

Old Wiz himself—he was commonly called by that name—might have done it, since he lived at the Hilliard house. At any rate, it would do no harm to learn where the man had spent the night.

"Good morning, Wiz," Carter greeted at the front gate, when the little old servant came sidling up in his curious, crablike manner. "Just getting in?"

The wizened old fellow wrinkled his clean-shaven and leathery face into a million grinning lines. He was a good-natured creature ordinarily, though he could upon occasion fly into dreadful rages, hopping around like a dropped Roman candle, streaking out blood-curdling oaths like balls of fire.

"Right ye are, Mr. Carter," he replied humorously and respectfully. "Kinda late, I suppose you think—or maybe I should say early—but then, we old codgers have to have our fun."

"Oh, surely. Visiting friends, I suppose?"

"Yep; stayed with 'em all night, I did."

Carter became serious.

"Then I suppose you don't know, Wiz, that Mr. Hilliard is dead?"

The old servant started, and blinked, and looked puzzled.

"Heh? What's that? Mr. Hilliard deaf, you say?"

"Dead."

"Heh? He's dead—dead—oh, you mean dead!" Old Wisdom Giles seemed suddenly to quiver all over. His gnarled old hand shook as he laid it on Carter's arm, and his withered lips twitched as he inquired with the pathos of a child:

"How—how, Mr. Hilliard? How did the boy die?" Carter recollected that Jerome Hilliard had never been anything but a boy to the old servant, who had been in the employ of the Hilliard family for years back, in the days when both the father and the mother were alive. "Where—where is he, Mr. Carter? Where's—little—Jerry?" The old fellow was catching his breath at each word.

Gently Carter led him to where the body lay.

"There, Wiz. But don't touch anything. He was murdered, I think, and we've got to keep intact any evidence there may be."

"Murdered?" Wiz stopped short, as though he had been hit. "Oh, God curse the man that did it! May his arms and legs be jerked out like rotten teeth, may they put him to bed with rattlesnakes, may he—but who could 'a' done it, Mr. Carter?"

"I don't know. That's what we've got to find out. You haven't any idea, I suppose?"

"God save me, no! But how was he killed?" Wiz spied the gun and would have grabbed it had not Carter held his arm. "Ah, with that devil's plaything! I told him—time and time again I told him—he oughtn't to keep it lying around."

"Oh! It was his, eh?"

"Yes, yes—got it in New York, he did, and kept showing it to every one and saying how some man that got hanged had used it to kill some one. A sooveneer, he called it—oh, yes. But 'twas something else again that I called it. Not for love nor money would I 'a' touched it, and many's the time I've told him so."

"Did he keep it anywhere in particular?"

"Yes, yes, right inside there in the dining room, in the top drawer of the sideboard—that I wouldn't use to keep anything else in, much as I needed the space, because of that cursed thing lying there, all shiny and glinty like the scales of a snake, ready to jump up and bite at a body any minute."

His first shock of discovery shaken off, Carter now busied himself as he waited for Chief Burr to arrive, with the problem of who had murdered Hilliard. He was sure that Wisdom Giles had not, though he would suggest to Burr that the housekeeper's story should be corroborated.

With Old Wiz eliminated, he had not the slightest idea who could have done it. So far as Carter knew, Hilliard had sat alone in his house on the previous evening listening to that dull radio speech which had annoyed him so much until finally he dropped off to sleep in spite of it. Of course, some

one could have visited Hilliard later on. Any one. An enemy or a burglar. Certainly some one had called on him and murdered him. Doubtless a clew to the person's identity could be found later on.

For a few seconds Carter was disturbed by the thought that he had wished evil on Hilliard before he went to sleep, and that on a previous occasion when he wished harm to two aviators harm had befallen them.

But only for a few seconds. It was ridiculous to assume that because of his wish—so quickly regretted, too—Jerome Hilliard had met his death.

Even if he possessed the supernatural power of making his wishes come true, which, of course, he did not, his expressed desire had been merely that Hilliard should be temporarily harmed, not done to death. No, there was no sense in worrying about that. The pistol had been fired by some human being, not by a jinni of the air that had hovered around, Arabian Nights fashion, in readiness to do human bidding.

Another and more alarming thought came to Carter. Maybe he himself had shot Hilliard. Once he had been a sleep-walker; had done strange things while unconscious. He recollected that he had gone to sleep on the previous night with the idea of reprisal upon Hilliard for annoying him strong in his mind.

But, no. That hypothesis, too, was absurd. Even in the unlikely event that his old boyhood malady had returned to him, he could not have entered the Hilliard house, and found a weapon that he knew nothing of, and fired it at a man who surely would have seen him coming, and returned to his cot, all without waking. Another thing: if he actually had accomplished that incredible feat, some evidence of his nocturnal journey would have met his eye when he woke up; and there had been none such.

"Absurd," said Carter to himself. "Silly even to think of such a thing."

"Heh?" queried old Wiz, and Carter was a bit surprised because he was sure he had not spoken aloud.

"Nothing," he replied.

He noticed that the old fellow seemed to be watching him and he resolved never to utter any of his thoughts aloud or even half aloud, as he had a habit of doing, because Wiz might arrive at the crazy conclusion that he did the killing and thus cause him a bit of inconvenience.

Presently Chief Henry Burr arrived. He was an intelligent man, big and strong, but well spoken and obliging. His age was about thirty-five and he had formerly been a big city policeman. He had with him a bull-necked officer of a more common type, called Foster, who remained in the background saying not a word while the chief, after viewing the remains and the weapon on the floor and the furniture, briefly questioned Carter.

"You haven't disturbed anything?"

"I was very careful not to; didn't let Wiz, either."

"That's good, there may be some clews if we can only find them."

Burr examined the floor adjacent to the body and the furniture.

"There was a bit of a struggle," he announced, "and that knocks out any possible suicide theory." He pointed to some scratches on the floor, to a chair that stood against the dining room sideboard near a fresh dent in the latter, which indicated that the chair had been hurled there, though it had not fallen over. And Carter agreed that the scratches as well as the dent had been made recently.

"Look at this clock, too, it's been knocked a little off balance." Burr indicated a tall grandfather's clock which was not running, the hands of which pointed to twenty-six minutes past three. "That shows when the struggle took place, sure as I'm a foot high. It got a jar that stopped it. See the old mark on the floor where it stood, an inch to the left?"

The mark was plainly discernible.

"Always kept the clock going, didn't he?" Burr asked Wiz.

"Oh, yes. One o' my jobs was to wind it. Going right and proper it was, when I left yesterday evening."

"Now for more bits of evidence." Burr continued to look around, and Carter did so, too.

As certain as he had been that he could not have murdered Hilliard while asleep,

Carter, nevertheless, felt relieved that the newly uncovered evidence corroborated his belief. A struggle had taken place before Hilliard met his death, and certainly a sleeping man could not struggle with another without awakening. It was odd, Carter thought, that the idea that he might have committed this crime persisted in his mind. Illogical it was to the point of absurdity, yet even now he could not oust it entirely.

Carter looked at the pistol, which lay on the floor near the body.

"I think there's a finger-print on that," he remarked to Burr. "Better pick it up carefully, eh?"

"I'll examine it before I touch it." Burr got down on his hands and knees beside the weapon, and, with the aid of a magnifying glass, scrutinized the shiny nickel sides and the black rubber stock. "There sure is!" he cried triumphantly, adding in an ordinary tone: "But it may be Hilliard's."

Burr seemed to be well versed in finger-prints and to have come prepared for just such a case as this, since he now took from his pocket a small inking pad and pressed it against every one of the dead man's fingers, which he, in turn, pressed against a sheet of white paper, thus securing a complete set of Jerome Hilliard's prints.

"This will prove whether it's a suicide case or not," he stated. "If they're his, he used the pistol on himself, despite the evidence of the furniture which indicated that he struggled with some one. If they're not, he was murdered and that's all there is to it."

Burr compared each of the prints he had just made with the one on the pistol and announced with satisfaction:

"Just as I thought. It's not his print that's on the gun. Therefore, he was murdered."

Carter had read about finger-prints in a general way and the essential part that they have played in the conviction of numberless criminals, but never had he actually come face to face with a finger-print case.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "It's wonderful how one can compare them, isn't it? May I take a close look at the print on the pistol?"

"Surely." Burr handed him his magnifying glass. "The print is on that shiny part between the butt and the barrel, plain as day. You see, the revolving barrel was oiled lately and the killer got oil on his fingers. He happened to press one of them against the shiny part, which had been rubbed smooth, and naturally he left his mark. Just in the right place, too, because when he dropped the pistol in his fright that part couldn't hit the floor and get rubbed free of the print."

Carter compared the pistol print with those made from the dead man's fingers.

"By Jove, you're right! This print on the gun is plain as can be, and it's nothing at all like any of Hilliard's. Beats all how prints can differ, eh? Out of all the billions of fingers in the world, only one could make this print on the nickel-plating—that's the theory, isn't it?"

"That's the actual fact; there's no theory about it."

"Find the person whose finger fits this print and you've got the murderer, eh?"

"Absolutely," confirmed Chief Burr. "And, unless I'm greatly mistaken, that won't take long."

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"WHAT I'm going to do right here and now," Chief Burr announced, "is to send for a photographer and have that finger-print on the gun registered permanently before it can get rubbed off or disappear in any other way." He had picked up the weapon very gingerly, only to find that the first print was the only one. "Maybe you wouldn't mind phoning him, eh, Carter? Try the house. He'll be up by this time."

Carter did as requested, and when he returned to Burr he noticed that the latter was engaged in an odd operation. He was sprinkling upon the pistol some sort of powder which had the effect of bringing out the finger-print with startling clearness.

"He sure made one grand error—the murderer did—when he left his mark on the weapon," Burr remarked. "Chances

are he's a burglar or some sort of crook and his prints are in a rogue's gallery, either mine or some other chief's. All I have to do is compare this print with those on record, and when I find the one it matches, there's my man. Bet anything he's a local thief, trying to get away with Hilliard's silverware. A big, strong man, too, because Hilliard pulled the gun on him, but he struggled with Hilliard for possession of it, and got it, and then used it."

"Good silverware," suddenly piped up Wisdom Giles, who had been sitting in a chair quietly staring down at the body.

"Yes," agreed Burr. "Hillard was queer that way. Fine silver, good furniture—and a house ugly as smallpox on the outside. Just like him, though."

"Vera is coming," croaked old Wiz in his froglike way.

"The sister," said Burr to Carter. "Guess you never saw her. Been attending college in the East for the last two years; ever since the father died. Good looker, mighty fine in every way."

"Enough beaus to fill this house—that's what she could have, did she want 'em," said Giles.

"And that's no joke," Burr agreed.

The photographer arrived at this moment, and arranged a suitable background for the weapon, and photographed it several times.

"There!" said Burr with satisfaction as he laid down the pistol less carefully. "Now we've got the evidence for keeps."

The photographer soon departed, full of awe and excitement, doubtless to spread the news, and Burr painstakingly resumed his search for more evidence. He examined the body, and the floor round about, and the whole dining room, which he had not permitted the photographer to enter.

"Nothing else," he said at last. "Not another scrap of evidence—which makes the print doubly valuable."

With his personal examination completed, Chief Burr now telephoned the coroner; and, while he awaited the latter's arrival, he questioned Carter as to how the murdered man had spent the previous evening.

"Just listening to his radio," the latter replied.

"Nobody with him?"

"Not a soul, so far as I know. But I couldn't see. He kept the house in darkness."

"You're sure he was here?"

"Yes; at least, I saw a figure like his moving around on the back porch and took it for granted it was he."

"What sort of radio stuff was he getting?"

"Political speech; a long and dull one. I grew a bit tired of hearing it, but still I didn't protest. Didn't want to argue with Hilliard and figured it would stop any minute."

The chief turned to Wisdom Giles.

"Where were you last night?"

The old servant turned with surprising celerity, as though he had been expecting the question.

"Me? Lots o' proof I got, Mr. Chief, about where I was. At the Old Men's Home, that's where."

Burr regarded him with suspicion.

"Queer place to be. What were you doing there?"

"Visitin'."

"Who?"

"Couple of old laddybucks like m'self. Going to join 'em some day, I am. All fixed, I've got it; my little dab of life insurance signed over to the home and all. Now and then I drop around, sort of to get used to the place, which is a right comfortable home and no mistake. Sometimes I stay the night, the sup'tendent being not a bad sort, and that's what I did last night. Right there in the dormitory with my friends, I stayed, asleep on a nice little comfortable bed, as any one of them can say."

"Complete alibi, eh?" Burr turned to Carter. "Guess that eliminates Wiz—not that I won't check up on his story, but I'm sure it's right. Don't suppose you know of any one who might have had it in for Hilliard, eh?"

"No, I don't. He seemed harmless enough. Exasperating at times, but not likely, it would seem, to make deadly enemies."

"That's how he looked to me, too. But still—say, isn't it possible, Carter, that some one might have been here with Hil-

liard last night, talking to him, only you didn't hear them on account of the radio?"

"Why—I don't know. I suppose so. But wouldn't Hilliard have shut off his radio if he were talking to some one?"

"No. You don't know these radio bugs like I do. Talk and eat and read and do everything but sleep with their loud speaker going full blast, hour after hour—that's what some of them do."

Carter grinned. "Guess it's possible to sleep with one going, too, judging by the way I dropped off last night."

The coroner arrived and examined the body.

"Been dead about three hours; not more than four at the outside," he pronounced. "Killed instantly."

"A-ha! That corroborates the clock. It was jolted in the struggle and stopped at three twenty-six, and that's just when Hilliard got the bullet," Burr stated.

Later in the morning an inquest was held. Carter testified as he had before Burr, Wisdom Giles repeated his story, the chief of police referred somewhat proudly to the evidence in his possession, and a verdict was quickly arrived at.

Jerome Hilliard had been murdered by a person unknown. The finger-print on the weapon undoubtedly was that of the murderer. The thing to do was to locate and arrest the person whose finger matched the print.

Chief Burr now testified, not quite so proudly, that he had been unable to find a corresponding print in his rogue's gallery. He expressed the hope that a further search at the county seat would reveal the wanted person.

"Aside from that, I'm having an enlarged photograph of the print published in the town newspaper," Burr stated. "That way it will be seen by every one and perhaps some private party can tip us off as to who it belongs to. If a little reward could be offered, that would make the murderer's detection all the more likely."

A reward was authorized.

The inquest was concluded and Carter proceeded to his office, there to reflect upon the first tragedy that had ever come to his immediate notice.

He considered that he had borne himself well at the inquest, had again attracted public attention, might possibly secure additional law practice as a result.

Ite was just as well that he had made no mention of the keen animosity he had felt toward Hilliard for keeping him awake with his radio. Such an admission could have done no possible good, and might have created a bit of prejudice against him, particularly on the part of such radio enthusiasts as believed they had a right to make noise all night if they wished.

If only he could aid in the detection of the murderer! Then he would secure plenty of credit and notice. If only he could capture the murderer, alone and unaided!

When the local newspaper came off the press that afternoon Carter secured a copy and spread it on his desk. There was a full account of the murder, with a rather complimentary notice of himself, and, as foretold by Chief Burr, a photograph of the finger-print found on the fatal weapon.

FIND THE OWNER AND EARN A REWARD

That was the caption underneath the print, and Carter wondered if he might be able to do it. He could use the reward as well as the publicity. His law practice was better than it had been, still his income was none too good, and he had more spare time on his hands than he desired.

He studied the photograph, much enlarged, of the murder's mark. Curious things, fingerprints. It was odd that, of the millions of people that inhabit the world, no two possess prints that are exactly alike. At first glance, those curious little lines on the inside of a person's thumb-tips and finger-tips seem to be all alike.

And yet, when examined, no two pairs of hands show exactly the same marks; in fact, no two fingers of one hand will make the same print. Carter knew that to be a fact; knew that scores of murderers have been caught and sent to the gallows on the evidence of their finger marks.

It was a subject that he would like to study more in detail. For instance, in just what manner did his own prints differ from those of the murderer?

An inking pad happened to be on Carter's desk, and now, partly because of his curiosity and partly because he had nothing better at the moment to do, he pressed the first finger of his right hand against the pad so as to get plenty of ink on it.

On a clean white sheet of paper he pressed this inked finger, expressing his satisfaction with a chuckle when he succeeded in making a good print at his first try.

He placed his print under that of the murderer, as shown by the newspaper photograph, and compared the two.

Suddenly Carter gasped and stared at the prints with terrified eyes.

The newspaper fingerprint, the one found on the fatal weapon, was his!

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "Does that mean that I did it? That I murdered a man in my sleep?"

CHAPTER V.

AWKWARD QUESTIONS.

DESPERATELY hoping that he had made a mistake, that his fingerprint merely resembled that found on the fatal weapon, Carter again compared the print he had just made from his own finger with the published one.

In both cases the marks formed an arch, with a short straight line below, then there were curved lines. He counted these and they were the same. He picked out a number of lines above the arch and traced them from the left side to the right, and in a very few minutes he knew that his first conclusion was correct. The published print was not merely like his; it was his. He was the man who was wanted for murder!

What a situation. Wanted for the worst of all possible crimes. With the practical certainty that if he were apprehended he would be convicted of a crime which he had not committed. At least, not knowingly. And he had concluded, too, that he could not possibly have committed it unknowingly.

The first thing to do, he decided, was to remove all evidence of the fact that he had been comparing his prints with the published one. No one must be permitted to guess that he had; no one must have his or her attention drawn to his prints at all.

The mere suspicion on the part of anybody that the published print was his would be sufficient to undo him. How in the world, with the evidence of his fingerprint standing against him, could he convince any one, let alone a judge and jury, that he had not fired the pistol shot that ended Jerome Hilliard's life?

With shaking hands Carter tore into little bits the sheet of white paper upon which he had stamped the imprint of his fingers. He was about to throw them into the waste-basket when he reflected that it would be better to burn them, and this he did, piling every scrap in an ash tray and setting them alight with a match. He watched the flames consume them, then ground the burned paper into a shapeless residue of ashes.

Now to get rid of the ink pad and wash the stain from his fingers. He must work fast, because if any one should enter and catch him with ink on his fingers, or with any fingerprinting implement in sight, exceedingly awkward questions might be asked.

He placed the ink pad in a small drawer in his safe, and carefully washed his fingers, and, with a deep intake of breath that signified some measure of relief, sat down to try and think of what he should do in case anyone should learn that the published fingerprint was his.

Carter was very glad now that it was he who had called Chief Burr's attention to the fact that the pistol bore a fingerprint, since Burr would not be likely to suspect that the print was that of the man who had called attention to it. It would have been better still, of course, to have wiped the print off without saying anything, but it was too late now to think of such a thing.

Seated at his desk, Carter looked at his fingers. What incriminating members they were! Almost any other sort of evidence that his body bore could be changed—moles could be removed, even the contour of his face altered—but those almost unnoticeable little marks on the tips of his fingers and thumbs could not be changed.

Even if they were removed with a sur-

geon's knife they would speedily grow in again; unless the entire fingertip was removed, and that in itself would incite suspicion. Those marks he must bear to the grave. All his life he must carry about with him the evidence of his right forefinger, which pointed to him as the murderer of Jerome Hilliard!

Again Carter wondered if he could possibly have killed Hilliard while asleep. He had been absolutely positive that he could not have done so. The evidence of struggle had seemed to prove conclusively that he could not, because how can a sleeping man come to grips with another man without being awakened?

Men have done strange things in their sleep, yes—but never had he read of a sleeper engaging in physical struggle without being awakened. He was as sure that such a thing was impossible as he was that he was sitting at his desk.

Carter leaped to his feet in so startled a manner when his door opened and Chief Burr entered without knocking that for one terrible instant he was sure he must have betrayed his guilty secret.

"H-hello, chief," he greeted with a tremendous effort to regain his composure. "What's new?"

Burr flopped into a chair and shook his head. "Not a thing, Carter, except that Hilliard's sister is in town. It seems she arrived on the early morning train, and registered at the hotel because she didn't want to break in on her brother at such an hour, and slept so late this morning that she didn't learn about the inquest until it was over. A good thing, too, I guess. She would have found Jerome dead and the shock would just about have knocked her out."

Carter was mildly interested. "Didn't the clerk know who she was? I should think he would have waked her up for the inquest."

"It never occurred to him that she was the dead man's sister. Dumb—that's what he is." The chief sighed in rather a discouraged manner. "I haven't heard from the county office yet, so I don't know if they've got that print that we found on the pistol or not. Some office has though. All the crooks get fingerprinted one time or another."

"Hope you're right," agreed Carter, trying to speak casually.

"Of course, it may not have been a known crook or criminal that killed Hilliard," continued Burr. "For all we know, it may have been some man that's led what the world calls a blameless life. Lots of criminals lead blameless lives, you know—before they did the one dirty deed."

Carter did not like that sort of talk. Burr might at any moment take a notion that some townsman of standing had committed the crime and decide to examine the fingerprints of every one whom Hilliard had ever known. Then where would he be?

"Anything I can do to help?" he suggested.

Burr drummed his fingers on Carter's desk, a bit of byplay that was highly distasteful to the lawyer. Anything and everything that had to do with fingers was beginning to get on his nerves. He was terribly afraid that he might say or do something that would call the chief's attention to his own incriminating digit.

"Well, it's just that that I called to see you about," said Burr. "Did you ever see anybody call on Hilliard previous to the night of the murder? Some woman, say? There's been talk that he had been getting a bit gay with some fast females."

Carter considered.

"Why, no, I can't say that I ever saw a woman visitor at Hilliard's. Not that I ever paid much attention. Why not ask Wisdom Giles? He'd know."

"I shall. But about you—your room isn't located where you could see into Hilliard's house or grounds, is it?"

"Not exactly. From my window, I can see part of his grounds, but not his house. Anyhow, I haven't been spending many of my evenings there. Just sleep at the house and nothing else. So Hilliard might have had visitors without me knowing anything about it."

"Last night was the first night you slept on the lawn?"

"Yes."

"And Hilliard kept you awake with his radio? Isn't that what you said?"

"He did, yes—but I didn't complain because I figured it would stop soon or I could go to sleep in spite of it."

"And you did?"

"Yes; the last thing I knew the radio was still going."

Chief Burr rose.

"Well, that's all. It was just about any previous visitors that I wanted to ask you. As you say, Giles may know something—your landlady, Mrs. Bly, as well."

"No harm to try them both."

"I'll do it." And the chief left, much to Carter's relief.

It was his custom to go around the corner to a lunch room about one o'clock each day and it was that time now. He rose and picked up his hat and then stood hesitant, reluctant to go outside where he would meet people.

Some one might mention fingerprints, perhaps start experimenting with their own fingers or his, and how could he prevent such a person from procuring the marks of his? The slightest indication that he did not wish his prints to be taken would be sufficient to direct suspicion at him.

"This thing," he muttered, "is beginning to get on my nerves. I mustn't let it. Must be myself. Act naturally. Give myself away sure if I don't."

Carter braced up and walked toward the lunchroom with apparent unconcern. He met two or three persons who made casual mention of the tragedy, but it was not until he was seated at the table that he heard a disquieting remark.

"Seems too bad you didn't wake up in time to see what was going on," an acquaintance observed. It was now known by every one that Carter had slept on the Bly lawn lot not more than a hundred feet from the Hilliard dining room where the tragedy occurred.

"Yes. I might have been able to prevent it, had I known," Carter replied.

"Should think you would have known, too, because, even if a pistol has got a silencer on it, it still makes a bit of a noise."

"So do I. In fact, it seems that several neighbors should have heard it since every one slept with all their windows open."

"Oh, well. You should worry. Since you're the man that found the fingerprint on the gun, no one can suspect that you had a hand in it."

"For which I'm duly thankful."

The conversation verged away from the one dangerous topic, and Carter got back to his office without being further alarmed. There he gave himself up to thinking about the case—having little to do on this particular day—and along about three thirty he reflected that he might as well go home. It was another stiflingly warm day and many business men had shut up shop.

But, no. He decided, with a fresh start of apprehension, that it might be dangerous to do that. Better not deviate from his previous habits. The least bit of unusual action might now attract attention toward him, and that was what he must avoid. So he waited until his usual closing hour and then walked to his rooming house.

Mrs. Bly was not about and he walked around to the rear lawn. Surely he might safely look around the place, further to satisfy himself that he could not possibly have crossed over to the next place in his sleep and engaged Hilliard in physical combat and shot him with a pistol he never had seen before and returned to his cot, all without awakening.

The daylight being still strong and bright, Carter first examined the ground where his cot had stood. Had he gone to the adjoining house in his sleep he must naturally have crossed the hedge, therefore some shred of his night clothing might be upon it. He recollected that he had jumped the hedge without touching it after he woke up, and, on returning to his cot, had again cleared it without touching it. But it seemed likely that he would have touched it had he crossed it in his sleep, therefore he examined it carefully.

He found nothing; no sign anywhere to indicate that he had done even so much as to rise from his cot without being aware of it.

He walked around to the front porch and sat there trying to cool off, and presently Mrs. Bly joined him.

Carter took pains not to betray the fact that something special was on his mind.

"Wonder if it will be so warm that I'll have to sleep outside again to-night," he remarked. "Kind of hate to, in a way, since I'm afraid people will see me after daylight and think I'm an awful sight. By the way, Mrs. Bly, did you happen to look out on the lawn last night and see me lying there?"

His landlady chuckled.

"That I did, my boy. And a sight you were, too. All sprawled out on the cot in the moonlight, with pyjamas and sheets and all, showing up like underwear that's been left on the grass to dry."

"Sound asleep, eh?"

"Dead to the world, Mr. Carter. Lying like a log of wood, if you'll excuse the reference."

Some relief in that assertion. "Got any idea what time it was when you looked out?"

"Divil a bit. Just some time in the night. I woke up and looked out and then I went back to sleep."

"Don't suppose anything was going on over at the Hilliard house just then, eh?"

"Not a thing. The poor man had shut off his radio. The place was still and quiet as an empty grave."

"I see. An awful mystery, his murder—eh?"

"All of that. Just at the present, that is. It 'll be no mystery when they find the man or woman who made that fingerprint."

"You think that the person whose fingerprint was found on the weapon killed him?"

"Of course. Who else? Isn't that the way murderers always give themselves away? Leave a mark of some kind that the law can take hold of and run down? And Chief Burr is no slouch of a runner-down, mark that."

Carter agreed. He retired to his room to freshen up a bit before going out to dinner, and there he pondered the mystery some more.

Was there any way in which his fingerprints could have got on the weapon without his having consciously touched it?

Yes, it seemed that there might be. The murderer might have contrived, by some unknown means, to get the prints of an innocent man on the weapon in order to divert suspicion from himself.

Carter felt greatly cheered by the thought. That must be what had occurred. Yes, he was sure of it. That would explain everything.

But how could such a deadly plot be carried through? Had the murderer carried the pistol to his side as he slept, and pressed it against his finger, and then used it to kill Hilliard? That seemed impossible, because in the struggle that obviously had occurred before Hilliard met his death, such a print would be obliterated. Did the murderer, after shooting his victim, press Carter's unconscious fingers against it and then place it where it was found? That seemed unlikely, too.

Oh, it was a puzzle! Carter was sure of his innocence, yet every way he turned evidence indicative of his guilt stared him in the face. Thank heaven, no one but himself knew anything about the evidence. But for how long would others remain in ignorance? At any moment, Chief Burr or another person might ask to see his prints, and he could not refuse to show them on pain of being instantly suspected.

After dinner Carter returned to his rooming house, largely because he did not wish to meet people who might question him. Mrs. Bly was on the porch again, with something new on her mind this time, because, while Carter was still several paces away, she beckoned him mysteriously, and, when he arrived, whispered:

"She's over there now."

"Who?"

"The sister—Vera Hilliard."

"Oh, yes; I heard of her down town."

"Hist! There she is now."

A girl had come out of the front door of the Hilliard house and now approached the Bly residence. Nervous as Carter was at the approach of any one who had a special interest in the Hilliard mystery, nevertheless, he found it difficult to regret her coming. She was so extremely attractive—slim, well-dressed, with an athletic swing to her steps that was very graceful. Ordinarily he would have desired her acquaintance. She looked so wholesome and clean, so healthy and vigorous, so intelligent.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Bly," she began, "but there are just a few questions I'd like to ask."

"No trouble at all, dear," replied the good-natured landlady, who seemed to know the girl quite well.

Carter had risen to his feet and now Mrs. Bly indicated him to the newcomer.

"Miss Hilliard, let me introduce my roomer, Mr. Carter."

The sad and wistful little smile that came to the girl's countenance made Carter wish instantly that he could do something to help her in her affliction.

"How d' you do, Mr. Carter," said Vera Hilliard.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED DEMAND.

SINCE Mrs. Bly had offered to help the sister of the murdered man in any way she could, it seemed to Carter that he could do no less.

"Glad to help you, too, if I can," he said. "It seems that I ought to be able to, since I slept just across the hedge from your back porch. But I'm such a sound sleeper that I'm afraid I can't. Not a sound did I hear, after I dropped off, till I awoke with the sun shining in my eyes next morning."

Carter noticed, as he said this, that Vera Hilliard was looking straight at him as though she were more interested in his reply than in Mrs. Bly's. He wondered why. Also he experienced a twinge of uneasiness as he wondered if he had said too much.

There really had been no need for him to point out, right at the beginning of their conversation, that he had not seen or heard anything. That, he reflected quickly, was one of the mistakes that guilty men so often make—endeavor too quickly to establish their innocence and thus attract suspicion.

"Thank you very much for your interest in the case, Mr. Carter," replied Miss Hilliard. "Of course, I didn't expect that you really could assist me." She sat down at Mrs. Bly's suggestion. "The sad part is that I might have prevented the tragedy by coming straight home early this morning instead of putting up at the hotel because I didn't want to awaken Jerome in the middle of the night; make a nuisance of myself right at the beginning, as it were."

Mrs. Bly protested: "Now don't go blaming yourself for anything like that, dearie. The chances are he was dead before your train ever arrived at all. It was a considerate thing for you to do, I'm thinking, and so would any one else."

"I quite agree," affirmed Carter.

But Miss Hilliard was still self-reproachful.

"Whether I should blame myself or not, I do." She looked pensively at Carter. "I have heard your story indirectly from Chief Burr. He was very good about telling me what progress, or rather lack of progress, had been made in unraveling the mystery. Poor old Wiz Giles was, too, though his knowledge is nothing at all. But perhaps, Mr. Carter, you'd be good enough to clear up one or two details that I'm hazy about. The house, for instance—was it quite dark all evening? I mean, wasn't there even the flicker of a candle or a match or something?"

"Not that I saw. Of course, you must consider that I was paying no particular attention."

Carter wondered nervously if that sounded too cautious, since he must not let her get the impression that he was lacking in frankness.

"Did the darkness seem odd to you?"

"I can't say that it did. Many people seem disinclined to have lights on hot nights. Darkness seems cooler, I think."

"I suppose so. Still, I believe that in a big house people usually keep one electric light turned on. In an adjoining room, perhaps."

"Probably you're right. But I'm quite sure there was no light whatever in your house."

Miss Hilliard mused, putting her hand up to her delicately modeled chin and staring out into the street, which now was growing dark.

"You did see Jerome, though?"

"Yes. At least I took it for granted that the figure I saw was your brother's."

"Oh! You're not sure?"

"Not absolutely, no. I couldn't make out his features in the darkness. But the figure was about the same—same height and breadth, made the same kind of movements, and so on."

"I see. And the radio was kept going all evening?"

"Yes."

"A political speech, Chief Burr told me. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like Jerome, all right. He liked political speeches. Why, I don't know, since he had no ambition to shine in politics himself. But I should think it would have annoyed you—trying to sleep, and having to endure a speech that probably didn't interest you."

"It did somewhat."

Miss Hilliard was mildly surprised. "Oh! I didn't know that. I gathered that you paid no attention. Did you tell Chief Burr that it annoyed you?"

Carter wondered if he had made a mistake, and hoped fervently that he had not. What a worrisome business it was—this thing of having something on his mind that he dared not disclose! One had to watch one's every word and syllable. No wonder murderers made slips of the tongue or hand that betrayed them. He laughed lightly in what he hoped was a care-free manner.

"Why, yes, I think so. Said I heard it, at any rate, and it sounded pretty dull. Really, though, it was just a slight annoyance for a few minutes before I dropped off to sleep. Not worth mentioning, either to Burr or to you."

Miss Hilliard seemed grateful.

"I imagine it annoyed you all right, only you're too considerate to say so. I know it would annoy me if I were trying to sleep. The speech continued for some time, didn't it?"

"Why, yes—quite awhile. Some political speeches are awfully long, you know. All the better for that, I suppose."

"I'm not so sure. Some speakers don't know the first thing about using the English language. Repeat frightfully. Use forty words to convey an impression that could be more clearly conveyed in twenty."

A girl of education and keen mentality, Carter thought, as well as personal attractiveness—a combination not found very often. He did not know whether he was glad or sorry she was like that. Really, she was the sort he had aways wanted to meet; the only kind in which he could take any real interest. But if she were too bright she might stumble on his secret.

Miss Hilliard remarked:

"Was there anything unusual about the speech, Mr. Carter? If there was, perhaps that would give us some sort of clew in addition to the finger-print."

"Why, no, there wasn't. Just the ordinary stuff about scoundrels in office, and so on. Rather a bitter speech, but then a good many politicians talk like that."

"Are you sure you didn't overhear any conversation in addition to the speech?"

"Quite."

"You don't think that any one could have been over there, talking to Jerome in the darkness, while the radio was giving out the speech?"

"Why, no. If there had been, surely the radio would have been turned off. I don't see how people can converse and listen to a speech too. Music, maybe, because one can sort of forget that and enjoy it at the same time; but a speech has to be really listened to, otherwise it's nothing but clamor. I hardly imagine that any one would want to listen to that speech merely for the musical cadence of the speaker's voice."

Miss Hilliard rose. "Well, I guess there is nothing more I can learn to-night, so I might as well be leaving."

Mrs. Bly asked: "Going to sleep alone in that big, empty house, Vera? I should think you'd be afraid. I wouldn't for anything."

"If anything was to be gained by sleeping in it, I'd do it; but I don't think anything would be, so I'm going to stay for the present with a girl friend. In fact, I'm going to keep the house tightly locked up, on the chance that there may be some clew in it that hasn't been observed."

"Old Wiz will stay at the Home, I suppose?"

"For the present, yes; he seems to like it there."

Carter was on his feet, too. Now that Miss Hilliard was about to depart, he realized that he liked to chat with her, liked to be near her. He could not tell exactly why. It was just that there was something about her; some odd quality of attraction that drew him, even though he realized that the keen-witted sister of the murdered man was a person whom it would be well for him to avoid.

"I take it," he observed, "that you mean to do a little detective work on your own account, Miss Hilliard?"

"I do. A good deal, perhaps, if the authorities don't quickly catch the person who left that finger-print on the pistol."

"That would be the guilty one, I suppose, eh?"

Carter knew very well that it was unwise to discuss finger-prints with Miss Hilliard, yet there he was doing it unthinkingly.

"Undoubtedly," she replied.

Her observation was disconcertingly emphatic. What would happen to him, he reflected quickly, if she discovered that they were his? A thing that she might well do, too, since she not only possessed the intelligence to dig deeply into any mystery, but was far more interested than any official.

"Well, I wish you success," he said.

"Thank you."

She gave Carter her hand in parting, and the feel of her warm fingers in his gave him a queer little thrill. He looked after her as she walked down the street and was deep in reverie when Mrs. Bly remarked:

"A dear, sweet girl, isn't she?"

Carter came back to earth with a jolt.

"Oh! Yes, indeed."

The landlady laughed slyly.

"Don't be going and losing your heart to her now, Mr. Carter. It's an easy thing to do, I'm thinking."

Carter felt that he was actually blushing, and rejoiced in the darkness that concealed his confusion.

"Don't be foolish."

"Go on with you now. I'm not so foolish as I look. Right this holy minute I'll bet you're wondering where and how you can meet her again."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Bly. You've got a romantic complex. But I've got to get to bed." He stepped to the door.

"Good night—and pleasant dreams."

In his room, Carter wondered if his keen-eyed landlady had stumbled on the truth. What could be the meaning of that thrill that had whipped through his nerves like electricity when he touched Vera Hilliard's hand? Why had her voice seemed so soft and musical? Why was he hoping—yes, he was!—that he might soon have a chance to chat with her again?

"Oh, Lord!" he muttered. "And me kidding myself that I've got no use for girls. Hot joke on me if I go crazy over her. With a deadly secret on my mind that she's likely to find out if I see her too often."

He mused for awhile, seated in a chair with his feet on the window sill, heedless of his stuffy bedroom now because of the vision in his mind.

"Darn it, I do want to see her again, and I shall! Secret be hanged! I didn't kill her brother—couldn't have—so why should I avoid her because I'm afraid she'll learn the finger-print is mine?"

He slept in his room that night, and his dreams were pleasant, notwithstanding the heat. They were about Vera Hilliard. And when he awoke, desire to see her again grew upon him with increased strength. But after awhile common sense came to his rescue and he muttered to himself:

"Got to keep away from her. Mustn't let her learn the print is mine. Should say not. She'd jump to the conclusion that I killed him—no romantic nonsense about that—and how could I prove that I didn't? Say I slept soundly all night? Bah! That assertion would amount to nothing. I can't prove that I did. A jury would hang me. They'd think I got sore about the radio and quarreled with Hilliard and one thing led to another. Hang me! That's what they'd do."

And yet, despite his desire not to see Vera Hilliard, Carter thrilled with pleasure when she entered his office late that afternoon.

"Delighted to see you!" he cried with spontaneous enthusiasm. "Sit down and tell me how I can help you."

"Thank you."

She sat on the opposite side of a narrow desk, and he could look directly into her eyes—enchanting eyes that drew him, body and soul—that drove wisdom and caution out of his mind.

Vera Hilliard was nervous and uneasy.

"I'm not sure you can help me at all. I just feel that I ought to talk to some lawyer, and I chose you because last night you showed such keen interest in my misfortune. First, I want to tell you what I mean to do."

"Go ahead."

"I mean to do a little investigating on my own account. I'm not entirely satisfied with the way Chief Burr is going about the business of detecting the murderer. He's not thorough enough. What I should like to do is to engage the very best detective available in New York. But I'm afraid I can't afford anything so expensive as that—at least not until I learn how the estate stands—so the next best thing seems to be to go ahead myself according to a theory I have."

"A logical procedure, I should say. In what way do you think the authorities aren't thorough enough?"

"In the matter of that finger-print. They seem to take it for granted that no one but a criminal could have made it. They've hunted through their rogues' galleries, and because they haven't found the print there they seem to think it can be found only in other galleries. To my mind, that's nonsense. The chances are that the murderer of Jerome has no criminal record."

Apprehension smote Carter.

"Why—er—I don't know about that. Can't see why any respectable citizen would want to murder him. Think it must have been a housebreaker myself."

"Well, I don't." Her vigorous assertion was like a stab. "I think the trouble between Jerome and his assailant was purely personal—had nothing to do with any ordinary crime like housebreaking. Anyhow, that's the theory I'm going to proceed on."

"What—er—what are you going to do?"

"Take the finger-prints of every person in Sardanella who has ever had any personal dealings whatsoever with my brother. Innocent persons can't reasonably object, and I don't care if they do. I'll get their prints anyhow. What do I care if I make myself obnoxious? The murder of one's only close relative is too serious a matter to admit trifling considerations."

Cold fear clutched Carter.

"Whom—whom do you propose to start on?" he asked, trying hard to keep his voice calm.

"I have started already—on our dear old servant, Wisdom Giles, even though I would have wagered my life on his innocence."

"The print wasn't his?"

"No."

"And now you're going to continue with—"

"You yourself, Mr. Carter."

CHAPTER VII.

IN HANDS OF DESTINY.

CARTER laughed. He hoped that he sounded mirthful and care-free, but only too well he knew that a mental state which almost suggested hysteria was back of his laugh. The one thing he had dreaded! But he must collect his faculties; must be calm and cool in this most perilous moment of his life.

"You must be joking," he said. "You surely can't think that I murdered your brother."

Miss Hilliard stared at him for a silent moment.

"I don't, no," she observed at last. "Nevertheless, a system is a system, and should be adhered to. I have at least fifty other friends and acquaintances of Jerome in mind at the present moment, and I don't really think that any one of them murdered him. Nevertheless, I mean to look at the finger-prints of every one of them."

Carter played for time.

"They'll object, you know. People always do. It's odd that they should, but they do. Finger-printing the whole population of the country would be a good thing in many ways, yet every time that any one

proposes it the project is balked—simply because people have the idea that finger-prints and criminals go together."

Miss Hilliard replied coldly:

"Wiz didn't object."

"He's different from most people."

"Well, as I've remarked already, I don't care what people think. The case is too important for mere objections to be heeded."

"But there's something that perhaps you haven't considered sufficiently. Is it wise to stir up opposition? Won't people be inclined to refrain from assisting you if you insist on treating them as suspects? Why not treat them so they'll help instead of hinder you?"

"Any one who really wants to help me won't object to doing what I ask."

"I don't agree. I want to help you, and yet I object very much to being finger-printed like a common criminal."

"Your objection is unreasonable."

"No, it isn't. And even if it is—what of it? If I don't like the idea, I just don't, and that's all there is to it."

Vera Hilliard stared.

"Your attitude, Mr. Carter, is a suspicious one. You talk as though you have something to fear from the showing of your finger-prints. Have you?"

Carter did not like to lie, but he felt that he must.

"I haven't—no."

More concentrated scrutiny, under which he writhed mentally. If only she were not so strong-willed. An ordinary girl, he thought, could be persuaded to give up such an unusual project.

"There is really a special reason, you know, why you should be finger-printed," the girl remarked tartly.

"What?"

"By your own admission, you spent the night not more than a hundred feet from the spot where Jerome met his death."

"But I was sound asleep; didn't know what went on."

"That's your assertion, but it isn't necessarily a fact. Another thing: you had reason to be vexed with brother because his radio annoyed you."

"Nonsense! The annoyance was so slight that I paid almost no attention to it."

"I doubt that. A radio can be a very serious annoyance when one is trying to sleep. I know that, because I myself have been annoyed in the same way almost to the point of wanting to break something over the annoyer's head."

"You aren't so tolerant as I."

Silence, while Vera Hilliard continued to scrutinize him. She rose, and Carter held his breath for an instant because it seemed as though she might abandon her idea. But what she said was:

"Well—I want your finger-prints."

He rose too, and tried to smile.

"What if I refuse?"

"I'll call the police, and make you."

Carter knew that she would. A new thought entered his mind, and he pretended to waive his objection.

"Oh, all right. I was only arguing about the principle of the thing. Of course I don't really object. Why should I? Come on and let's get it over with. But how are you going about the job? Do you know how to take finger-prints? I don't."

He hoped that she possessed no inking pad or other suitable implement.

But she answered, "I do, yes," and, taking a small pad from her bag, laid it on the table.

"Press your thumb and fingers on the pad, then on a sheet of clean paper," she instructed.

"All right. You want the hand that I use most, don't you?" He pressed his left hand on the pad and made the prints on one of his own letterheads. "There! Compare them with the published print, and you'll see they're as different as pins are from crowbars."

Miss Hilliard did so, laying the newspaper clipping down and making a careful comparison.

"They're different, yes. Anybody can see that." She started to pick up the clipping, and Carter again held his breath because it seemed that his scheme was going to win.

He wondered afterward if he had unwittingly betrayed his suspense, and if it was that which caused her to state:

"If you're left-handed how was it I got an impression that you're right handed?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you think it would be just as well for me to take your right-hand prints, too, while I'm about it?"

Knowing that too much concern would incite suspicion, he replied as carelessly as he could:

"Suit yourself. Makes no difference to me."

She laid down the clipping. "Then I shall. Your right hand, please." And she re-opened the ink-pad.

Now Carter was in for it. Refusal to permit her to take his right-hand prints could result only in the summoning of the police, and the securing of his prints by force. He might as well make the best of it and trust to luck to get him out of his predicament.

"Oh, all right." He held out his right hand. "Go ahead. There's the deadly member." He laughed scornfully in an effort to shame her out of her purpose, but she was not to be thus diverted.

"Thank you. Press the thumb and fingers on the pad, please, just as you did with your left hand, then on the sheet of paper."

Carter did so, blurring the print purposely. Miss Hilliard studied the resulting impression, and for another palpitating moment the lawyer hoped his ruse would succeed.

"Too blurred," she pronounced. "Try it again and do it properly. Each finger separately. The way you're fudging about and trying to put me off makes me almost think you're guilty."

No escape now. Carter made a clear impression and stood motionless, with fingers clenched, while the girl slowly made the comparison.

She straightened up suddenly, her face ashen.

"So!" she gasped. "They *are* yours. That's why you didn't want me to get them. You *are* the murderer of my brother."

Carter burst into frantic expostulation.

"I'm not, I tell you! I didn't want you to get them—no! Because I knew what you'd think. But I'm innocent. I haven't the slightest idea how my fingerprint came to be on the pistol. I swear I never consciously touched the thing."

Miss Hilliard's teeth bared to a scornful smile.

"Of course. Caught criminals always swear they're innocent. We'll go along to the police station, if you don't mind. I've got a car downstairs." She pointed to the door. "Go on."

Carter did not stir.

"Why can't you listen to reason?" he protested. "Why don't you let me help you find the person who put my prints on that weapon. Don't you know a man has got to have a motive for committing murder? I had none. Had no dealings with your brother. Hardly knew the man. By wasting your time on me you're just giving the real criminal a chance to escape."

The girl replied succinctly:

"Will you go peaceably or must I phone the police to come and get you?"

Carter did not wish her to telephone the police. By keeping them out of it some way of retaining his liberty might still occur to him.

"Oh, don't worry. I'll go. It's just the inconvenience that I object to. I've nothing to fear. The evidence of one's fingerprints isn't conclusive." He feared that it would be, however.

She motioned to the stairs and Carter started down them, she following at a distance of several paces. Desperately he tried to think of something—and could not.

"Get in, please." She pointed to the front seat of her brother's car, which she had taken possession of. "You've got to sit beside me. Can't trust you in the back."

Carter did as requested. Miss Hilliard sat at the wheel beside him, and the car moved off in the direction of the town lock-up.

One block they traversed—two. One more and they would be at the town hall. Half a block. The car was proceeding slowly, but none the less surely.

Unexpectedly the desperately sought-for idea flashed upon Carter. He reflected upon its feasibility for not more than two seconds, since every one counted, then acted.

He jerked from the breast pocket of his coat the fountain pen he carried there and jabbed it into Vera Hilliard's back.

"That's a gun," he hissed. "Stop at the town hall and you're a dead woman. Don't speak—don't make a move—just keep going. Do as you're told. I'm desperate. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Go on!"

He heard the gasping intake of her breath.

The town hall was now in front of them. Would his ruse succeed? Would she keep on going? He held his breath and jabbed the end of the fountain pen—the size and shape of a pistol muzzle—more fiercely into her back. The town hall was passed.

"Keep going till I tell you to stop," Carter commanded. "Right out into the country. There's a place where we're going to have another talk. Don't take a chance. A murderer stops at nothing."

Vera Hilliard regained her voice.

"Then you admit it?"

"Keep going!"

She did—to the outskirts of the town and along a lonesome country road, one mile, two miles, three.

"See that?" Carter indicated an empty farm house that stood a hundred yards or more back from the road. "Turn in and stop there."

She swung the car into a weed-grown lane that led to the repellent-looking building, and stopped in front of the latter.

"Now w-what?"

Carter noted that her tone indicated fright, and he was glad—yet sorry, too, because he had grown to care for Vera Hilliard, and now that his moment of extreme peril was past it hurt him to cause her pain.

"Out of the car and into the house." He knew the place was empty because on the previous Sunday he had looked through the cob-webby windows while on a hiking trip.

Vera obeyed, and he marched behind her, right hand in his coat pocket, with the end of the fountain pen showing through the cloth like the muzzle of a pistol.

He feared that the door would be locked, and he would be compelled to make her break a window-pane and climb through, but fortunately it was not. He opened it, ordered her in ahead of him, and followed.

The place was bare of furniture, nevertheless there was a box and a broken chair, both of which looked strong enough to serve as seats, also a few candle butts lying around.

It was evening now and dusk was settling upon the landscape. Inside the house the single-windowed room was darker than outside, so that, seeing the candle butts lying around, Carter decided to light one of them. A candle was not really necessary, but it would occupy Vera's time for a moment or so, and thus give her a chance to quiet down and perhaps overcome her fright.

With his left hand Carter drew a packet of matches from his coat pocket.

"See that candle butt on the window sill? Stand it on that shelf beside you and light it with these. I want to see what you're doing."

Vera picked up the candle indicated, but immediately laid it down.

"Ouch! It's soft and sticky. Been standing in the sun. My fingers sank right into it. I'll light another. She picked up another candle that was closer to the shelf and lighted it, and then sat on the one rickety chair, Carter having chosen the box.

"That'll do as well," he consented, and sat looking at her.

Silence for a long moment, and then Vera Hilliard spoke with something of the calmness she had shown in his office.

"Now that you've got me where you want me, what are you going to do?"

CHAPTER VIII.

VERA'S PROPOSITION.

"THE first thing I'm going to do," Carter replied, "is to tell you again, as emphatically as I can, that I'm as innocent of your brother's death as you are."

Vera Hilliard replied scornfully:

"Likely! Compelling me to come here at the point of a gun."

"At the point of a fountain pen, you should say. See for yourself." He exhib-

ited the pen, and she looked at it curiously.

"You're just saying that. You've got a gun somewhere else."

"Search me." He stood up.

"I'm too close to you now for comfort."

"Then I'll search myself." He turned out the contents of one pocket after another, and at last she seemed to be convinced.

"I guess I'll go then, if you don't mean to keep me here by force." She rose and stepped to the door.

"I mean to keep you here by persuasion. Please wait. It's just as important to you as to me that you should. I want to have a long and very serious talk with you."

She stood for a moment studying him, then reluctantly, she reseated herself and said: "Well?"

Carter cleared his throat. Never, in court or out, had he such reason to speak convincingly.

"I want to tell you, Miss Hilliard, that I'm just as much puzzled by the presence of my fingerprints on the weapon that killed your brother as you are. More, because you are convinced that I used it on him. If I did, it was in my sleep without knowing what I was doing."

"Thank you," said the girl ironically.

"That's a likely way to commit a murder," she added. "I've read about many curious explanations in murder cases, but never anything so absurd as that."

"I know it sounds absurd, but I really mean it. Remember, I only think it is barely possible that I did it. I'm practically certain that I did not. I'm saying this only because I'm trying to be frank."

"Why not be frank with the police instead of me? It's the law's business to try you, not mine. What's the idea of compelling me to act as judge and jury?"

Carter nervously tapped his foot on the bare floor.

"Oh, please listen and let me tell you everything. Can't you see I'm not the sort of person to kill any one? Why, I had no motive except the ridiculously inadequate one of having been annoyed by your brother's radio. Who ever heard of a man committing murder for such a cause?"

"Whoever heard of an innocent man's fingerprints being on a pistol that lay beside a murdered man's body?"

It seemed to Carter that he was butting his head against a stone wall. That in the face of the overwhelming evidence against him he could not install even a reasonable doubt of his guilt in Vera Hilliard's mind. Nevertheless, he must keep on trying. To surrender now, before he had a chance to learn what really had happened, meant practically to place a noose around his neck.

"Besides," continued Miss Hilliard. "I'm not so sure that you had no motive. Aren't you a lawyer? Weren't you in the same profession as Jerome? Didn't you ever come into opposition with him?"

"Only once—"

"There you are."

"But, I tell you, it didn't make enemies of us. He resented my victory a little—said the evidence was circumstantial and shouldn't be accepted as conclusive—but it was the judge who ruled against him, not I."

"Antagonism just the same. One thing could lead to another. Lawyers often become bitter enemies. Didn't you ever have arguments with Jerome about that case after it was decided?"

"He stopped me on the street to argue about it a few times, but I tell you—"

"You've told enough. Your statement that you had no motive except resentment over the radio is contradicted by your own admission that you argued over the legal case."

"Your brother argued, not I. He sought me out to talk about it. I never argued back at him."

"Not a single word?"

"Nothing that counted."

"Of course not"—sarcastically. "I can see quite plainly, Mr. Carter, that there may have been a great deal of professional jealousy between you."

Carter felt discouraged.

"If you'd just let me tell you everything in the frankest manner—let me try to help you puzzle out the mystery—I'm sure it would be better for both of us."

She remained obdurate and he said more emphatically:

"Do you think, if I were a real murderer, I'd admit that I have no gun at the present moment? Think I'd permit you to go away from here, if you want to, straight back to the police?"

"I may do that, may I?"

He hesitated briefly. "If you insist. But I want you to hear my story first."

She settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"Well, go ahead."

Carter did so. He described the heat on the night of the murder, his decision to sleep outside, the last things he heard and saw before he went to sleep, what happened when he awoke.

"You told me most of that before at Mrs. Bly's," the girl remarked impatiently.

"Yes. I'm repeating certain things in order to impress them on you. And now I'm going to tell you something that I didn't tell you then—that I've never told a single human being."

"I'm listening. But you'd better talk fast because it's getting too late to stay here alone with you."

Carter told her of his youthful habit of walking in his sleep.

"How do you mean?" Vera asked. "Did you walk far?"

"Out of the house and halfway down the block, on one occasion, before some one woke me up."

"How did that person wake you?"

"By touching me."

"Of course. A touch always awakens a sleep-walker. And yet you're inferring now that you could struggle with a strong man and actually kill him without being awakened."

"Pardon me, but I'm not. I'm just as convinced as you are that I couldn't have shot your brother while asleep. That's why I feel certain that I had nothing to do with your brother's murder, even though my fingerprint was found on the weapon. I'm just telling you everything so you'll realize I'm holding nothing back. I'm as puzzled over the affair as you are and I want your help in unraveling the puzzle. If we work together we may get somewhere. If we don't, the whole thing will remain a mystery."

"Go on."

"Now I'm coming to something that I don't want to tell you, that I wouldn't dream of telling you under any other circumstances, something that doesn't really need to be told because common sense indicates that it can have nothing whatever to do with your brother's death."

Miss Hilliard nodded, and Carter proceeded to tell her about the airplane episode—his unthinkingly muttered desire that the aviators should fall because they were annoying the tennis match spectators, the immediate disaster that overtook them as though in obedience to his expressed desire.

The girl peered at him.

"And you expressed a desire that Jerome should be harmed in a similar way?"

"No, I didn't. I muttered to myself: 'I wish some one would knock him on the head.' I said just that and nothing more; and instantly recanted it because there is just one chance in a million that I possess some strange power that brings such desires to a consummation."

For the first time, Miss Hilliard seemed to be somewhat impressed. She studied Carter in the dim light of the candle for a moment or more before she spoke:

"That explains nothing."

"Certainly not. I'm just mentioning it because I want to be absolutely frank, want to convince you that I'm holding back nothing whatsoever."

She rose impatiently.

"Oh such nonsense! Whatever you did, you certainly didn't cause Jerome's death merely by lying there on a cot and wishing harm to come to him. And it's equally certain that you didn't kill him unconsciously in your sleep with a weapon which you never saw before, and didn't know the location of. So all your talk amounts to nothing. I hope you've finished with it, so we can go back to town."

Carter realized that he had failed to impress her. She thought he was merely killing time.

"What to do in town? Go to the police?"

"Yes."

The one thing he must not let her do! But how to prevent it?

"Just a minute, please. I haven't finished talking yet. I've just finished leading up to what I think is the most logical explanation of my fingerprint being on the weapon."

"Well?" Vera reseated herself.

"I think that the murderer of your brother saw me lying there asleep on the cot immediately after he did the killing and noticed that my hand lay outside the covers. The thought came to him that he could throw the blame on me by causing my print to appear on the pistol, so he deliberately took it over to my cot and pressed the nickeled part against my finger, then carried it back to the body and laid it where it was found."

Miss Hilliard reflected.

"That does sound a bit more likely. Yes. At first thought, anyhow. But tell me: wouldn't he have been too scared by the noise of the gun, even though it had a silencer, to take a chance on getting caught if he remained on hand to do anything at all?"

"No. The sensible thing would be to obliterate all signs that he himself had committed the act, then to furnish signs that some one else did."

Again Miss Hilliard rose and looked significantly toward the door.

"Far-fetched," she pronounced. "Maybe the police will believe it, but I doubt it. Let's go back to town and put it up to them. I've stayed here longer now than I meant to."

How could he keep her from returning to the police? Would physical force be justified? Should he overpower her and tie her up and make his escape and thus tacitly confess to a crime that he had not committed, at least not consciously?

"Wait!" Another thought had come to him. "I've just recollected an act of mine which indicates more strongly than anything I've told you that I can't possibly be guilty."

She shrugged her shoulders wearily. "Oh, very well."

"Here's proof that even so skeptical a person as you must accept. I was the person who called Chief Burr's attention to the fact that the pistol bore fingerprints." He paused to let that statement sink in. "Surely you can see the significance of that. If I knew I was guilty, wouldn't I have wiped them out?"

A long pause.

"So you did that, did you? Why didn't you say so before?"

"Didn't think of it."

"That would indicate your innocence, yes. Far more than anything else you've said. That is, if you really did it." Vera scrutinized him sharply. "But how do I know that you're not just lying in order to escape before I can get you locked up?"

Carter smiled grimly.

"You can't get me locked up if I don't want you to. I'm stronger than you. I can get a long start merely by tying up up and gagging you. But that isn't my idea. I'm willing that you should ask Chief Burr for corroboration of my statement before you accept it as the truth."

She exhibited new interest.

"All right. I'll do that. I'll make you a proposition that you can't refuse if you're on the level; one that's as fair to you as to me."

"If it's really fair to me it's accepted before you state it."

"Here it is then: We'll drive back to town together and we'll go to Chief Burr. I'll ask him if you called his attention to the fingerprint, and if he says you did I shall have *some* reason to believe you're speaking the truth. Not *every* reason, because maybe the circumstances were such that you practically had to call his attention to them.

"Maybe you were both looking at them, and he would have seen them in another second; maybe you had no opportunity to erase them; you might have jumped at the chance to avert suspicion for the moment with the idea of wiping them out, ostensibly by accident, before they were made a matter of record.

"But if the chief does admit that you called his attention to them, I shall give you three days, no more and no less, in which to furnish me additional and more conclusive proof of your innocence. Then, if you have failed to do so, the authorities shall be told everything and you can try to

convince them that your discovery of the prints proclaims your innocence."

Carter reflected briefly. What if Chief Burr should discredit his truthful story? What if the chief had forgotten the incident? To confront Burr would be risky in view of the possible consequences, but it seemed the best thing he could do. He replied:

"I said your proposition was accepted before you made it and it is. Three days is a short time in which to compel me to find additional proof of my innocence, but if that's the longest period you can give me I'll have to be content. Let's go back to town."

They blew out the candle and went outdoors, and Carter noted that the evening seemed to have grown a trifle less warm. They motored back to town without a word, and stopped in front of the town hall. They found Chief Burr still in his office despite the comparative lateness of the hour, and Carter tensed as Vera Hilliard asked the significant question.

The chief hesitated.

"Why—er—I think Carter did call my attention to the fingerprint," he stated at last. "Yes, I'm sure he did. He said he thought there was a fingerprint on the gun, and I looked and saw there was. Why?"

"Oh, nothing much; just a little argument we had," replied the girl. Thank you, chief."

She nodded to Carter and they went out together. At the machine they paused.

"Well, you've won your respite," said Vera. "Three days it is, remember; seventy-two hours. At ten o'clock on the third night from to-night your time expires. You needn't beg for more time, or try to keep me away from the police in case you fail. I'll be watching for something of that sort, and you'll not have a chance to succeed."

"How about helping me?" queried Carter. "You want to find the murderer as much as I do, don't you?"

"I'll help you if I can, yes."

"Then I'll say good night; also that I thank you."

"Good night."

She entered the car and drove away, and Carter stood at the curb looking after her.

"Three days," he muttered. "Seventy-two hours in which to clear up the mystery. I'll need a lot of luck in order to do it."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

BLINDNESS

I HAVE stood on mighty hills,
Towering toward the blue,
The while I longed for daisies
In a field I knew;

Housed in great magnificence,
Restless I have lain,
Thinking of an old tin roof
And the sound of rain;

I am age as well as youth,
Never holding fast
To the present moment's joy,
Till that joy is past;

Teach me, Life, to look and see
Your great gift: the perfect *now!*
I am all humanity
And know not how!

Peter A. Lea.

STEPMOTHER?

DEAR little girl whose picture grew
Out of your father's words, in my mind.
Dear little girl, I wish I knew
If he cares! I'd be so kind
If he should give you and me to each other.
Would you like me, I wonder, for your mother?

Dear little unknown girl of his heart,
I see your face, like his somehow,
And I fancy you have his lips that part
In wonder, his dreaming eyes, his brow.
Have you his raging heart of flame?
He has not even told me your name.

You're eleven, and I'm nineteen.
Would we meet each other as wily foes?
There wouldn't be such a gulf between—
Or would there be? Who knows, who knows?
Would our love for him make us love? Would Fate
Out of that double love breed hate?

As we drove last night I thought of you.
I know there were words behind his lips
Clamoring, pushing to break through.
You and I are two white ships
That have sailed to his heart's safe harbor wide.
Shall we rest in its shelter, side by side?

You have never heard of me, do not know
That I exist; and you, too, to me
Are a dreamy, unreal phantom, oh,
Shall we pass in the night and never see?
Or shall we meet and cling and make
A world of our two worlds for his sake?

Little eleven-years-old, if I knew
You'd love me and want me at last and care,
I'd help him to say—as women do—
What he wants to say, but doesn't dare.
Speak to me, dear, and tell me whether
We shall make him happy, our man, together!

Mary Carolyn Davies.

The Man Hunt

By FLORIA HOWE BRUESS

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE crowd in the court room moved restlessly. Dale, standing by the open window, turned his haggard eyes to the tree tops across the small courtyard. Why were the jury so long? Surely there could be but one decision.

His eyes swung to the heavy face of the prisoner seated within the rail-inclosed square; as if drawn by that somber stare, the prisoner raised his eyes. With cold, contemptuous gaze he met Dale's stern eyes. His heavy brows lifted a mere fraction, as the sneer on his lips deepened.

Ah, the jury were returning, for the judge, clad in a long black robe and voluminous white wig, had entered, walking to his high built bench.

Instantly the atmosphere of the room changed. The officers became grave, reverent. A hush fell over the restless crowd. His honor dominated the scene as he stood calm, stately in his robes.

He was a symbol, and he was conscious of it. A man aloof from personalities, he gazed over the crowded room. Personal representative of the Dominion government, he weighed and delivered the law.

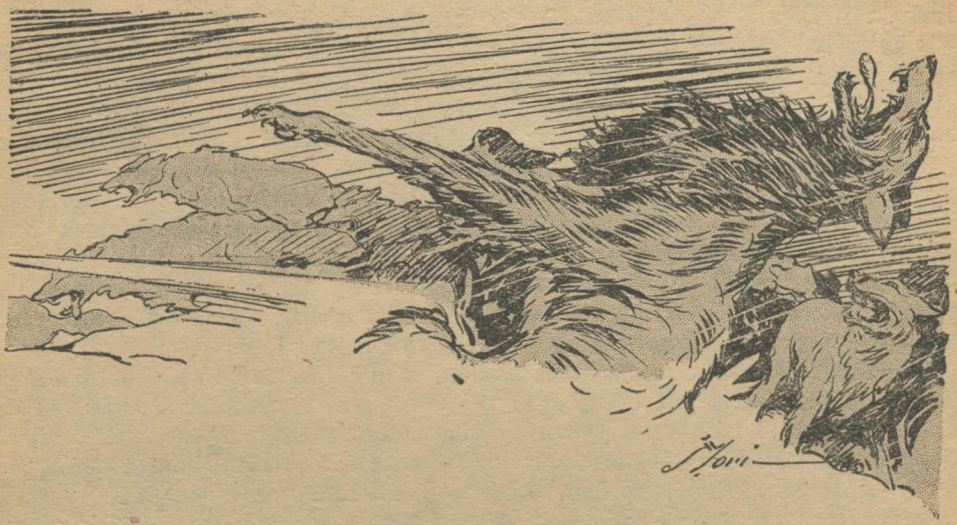
The jury filed in briskly, a consciousness of duty well done showing in their faces. The usual formula was enacted. With clenched hands Dale watched the bailiff as he unfolded the verdict. Scarcely he heard the drone of words—waiting—waiting—now—the verdict!

The court room became silent; it seemed the spectators held their breath; not a sigh was heard. "And we, the jury, find the defendant not guilty of the crime herein charged!" The words rang sonorously through the death-still room.

An incredulous, dazed look came into Dale's eyes. His face went gray. Dimly he heard the buzz of conversation as the spectators rose. Fiercely he saw Ward Chester, prisoner no longer, rise and bow to the twelve men in the jury box, a complacent smile wreathing his lips.

The watching man's fingers curled around the trigger of the Colt in his pocket. There was a flash—an explosion, shrill screams.

As Dale sprang through the open window to the five foot drop below, he saw the heavy figure of Ward Chester sink to the floor, the death hue on his face. As he



sprang into the saddle of his horse he heard shouts in the court room.

Digging his spurs in the animal's sides he rode down the street with the speed of the wind.

In the court room the bailiff's gavel sounded above the excited voices. Steadily he pounded as the din quieted. His honor's voice was heard.

"Sergeant Melrose, report this crime at headquarters immediately. Be quick."

Melrose saluted, turned and disappeared at a swinging run.

"I am a physician, your honor. May I examine the man?" a low voice asked.

"Gladly, doctor," the judge assented.

The great man was sorely perturbed. What a ghastly thing to occur in his court!

"Clear the room!" he ordered. "Well, doctor?"

His honor's voice was strained. Dr. Mason rose to his feet. His examination was completed.

"The man is dead, your honor," he said gravely.

II.

Sergeant Melrose swung down the street. Coming to a corner he crossed over to the headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police. A young sentry paced the path between neat rows of whitewashed stones; he came to attention as Melrose dashed up the steps.

An orderly kept guard in the wide hall. An atmosphere of formal, efficient ceremony lay over the immaculate building.

A red coated, blue trousered corporal stood before the door leading to the commissioner's room.

A brief word from Melrose and he was admitted to the presence. The man looked up, as he bent over his desk. Saluting, Melrose explained rapidly.

"Sir, it is my painful duty to inform you, Ward Chester, immediately on his acquittal, was shot at in the court room by John Dale—"

An abrupt exclamation from the commissioner made him pause.

"Is he dead?" the man asked harshly.

"I do not know—"

The great man of Edmonton turned his head toward a sergeant standing by the closed door. "Ascertain," he barked.

The young fellow's heels clicked together as he strode through the door.

"Where is Dale?" the crisp metallic voice asked.

"He jumped through an open window, got away on his horse—" Again Melrose paused at the sharp ejaculation from the commissioner.

The door opened.

"Sir," the young sergeant reported, "I talked with Judge Cary over the telephone. Mr. Chester is dead."

At the words action sprang to life. Buzzers were pressed, rapid orders were given, scarlet coated men passed in and out. In

a moment's lull Melrose stood by the commissioner.

"I know Dale well. I should like to be detailed on this case, sir," he said quietly.

"Right. I intended you should lead the men." The big man gazed searchingly at the rugged, strong face before him. "You may find the fugitive to-day, and—it may take you a year. Are you ready and willing to follow him, wherever he may lead you?"

"I am ready, willing, and anxious to do my duty, sir," Melrose answered, his steady eyes on the older man's fixed gaze.

The commissioner held out an envelope. "This letter authorizes you to claim any assistance, of any kind, wherever you may need it in his majesty's dominion. Bring your man back, sergeant; bring him back, dead or alive; but remember the noblest tradition of the Northwest Mounted is to use no unnecessary force, and no provocative measures. But get your man!"

"I will get him, sir." Melrose's voice held a low, hard note.

"Three men will accompany you for twelve hours. After that time return them and continue on alone. I need the men here. Trouble is brewing with the miners. I must be prepared."

The commissioner rose, held out his hand. "Good-by, sergeant. Good luck."

"I shall need ten minutes to don my frontier clothes, and say good-by to my mother," Melrose said quickly.

"Right." The interview was ended.

Ten minutes later Melrose rode with his men down the street the fugitive had taken. There were many who had seen the flight, and who were eager to tell the direction Dale had headed. Little groups of men stood in the courthouse yard, talking in low voices.

"They have taken Ward Chester to the undertaker's. He has no kin, you know. Some Chinese servants run his big house for him—"

"He was the richest man in town, wasn't he?" a voice interrupted.

"Yep. Made it in minin'!"

Swiftly the horses of the Mounted cantered through the long, wide street. The business section lay in the other end of the town. Soon they had left the more pretentious homes behind, and were on a dirt street lined with low, squat cabins.

The little cavalcade passed many men—miners, trappers in for their winter supplies, buckskin clad Indians. Many of them had stopped to stare after Dale's madly running horse.

Directions were freely given. Even had there been reason to withhold those directions, the powerful, far-reaching arm of the Northwest police was too greatly feared.

"All the man thought of was flight," Melrose reasoned grimly. "As soon as he comes to his senses he will take to cover."

They had reached the outskirts of the town. Before them lay the trail, the Athabaska trail, stretching through the heavily wooded forest.

"My hunch tells me to stick on the trail," Melrose said, as the men drew up their horses. "O'Carty, you strike through the woods, keeping in an easterly direction; you, Haro, ride west; and you work around here, Steele. I'm going north. If any of you get Dale, you'll find me on the trail. If you have no clew by dark, return to the town. My orders are to go on alone—"

The men wheeled their horses, each plunging into the woods, as Melrose cantered on by himself. The midday sun shone with a hazy light, for late fall was rapidly approaching. Over the rivers and lakes the geese were flying high, seeking the south. At night the air was filled with their cries.

The leaves on the flame-colored bushes were turning brown and parchmentlike, crumbling crisply under the horse's hoofs. The trail was deserted. Many times Melrose stood in his stirrups as he adjusted the field glasses to his eyes.

"I'm sure Dale has gone north," he told himself. "That's what I would do, were I in his boots. It's the safest place, the best cover—"

He cantered along, keen eyes on every foot of the ground. A dull glimmer of metal lay among the dried, curling leaves on the trail. Bending from his saddle, he scooped it up in his hand.

"Humph! A Colt shell, and recently dropped," he decided as he examined it under his magnifying glass. "There is no

discoloration or damp on it; and I have met no one in the past three hours. Careless of you, Dale, in refilling your gun, to drop that exploded shell."

Melrose slipped the metal in his pocket.

"I'm right," he thought exultantly. "Dale is not many miles ahead of me."

He cantered on, his eyes watching the ground closely, but his brain busy.

"The best way for me to do is to put myself literally in Dale's boots. What would I do if I were a fugitive with the positive assurance that I was being trailed? He knows by this time one of us is after him. Gibbins is the next station stop. I would know they have been wired there and are on the lookout. Would I try to get through to a train. I would *not.*"

Melrose paused, fitting the glasses again to his eyes. Powerful lenses they were that swept the trail ahead for many miles. On the stretches of brown, leaf-covered ground over the tree-clad hills nothing moved.

"From now on I am Dale, and must think as he will think," he said aloud, grimly.

The sun was losing its brilliance, a purple haze of approaching dusk filled the air. In the distance the tall steeple of a church shone.

"Gibbins," Melrose ejaculated.

He paused at the top of a steep hill, swept the country with his glasses. Approaching him on the trail was a horseman. Impatiently Melrose awaited the man.

"Pass any one on the trail?" he asked casually as the man drew abreast of him.

"One man; must have been hungry, too, for he bought all the grub I had in my saddlebags," was the answer. "But I'll feed up fine with the money he gave me when I reach Edmonton," the man concluded with a sheepish grin.

"Was he riding a bay horse?"

"He was. Pardner of yours?" the man called as he moved on.

But Melrose had touched the spur to his horse.

"Reckless, Dale. You are making it too easy for me," he soliloquized. "The boys have had a ripping search for you in the woods, but I'm right on your heels now."

He kept to the trail, swung past the small town of Oliver, was in the forest again. The dusk deepened. Melrose paused at a small stream that flowed musically over slabs of rock. While his thirsty horse drank he dismounted; after bathing his face and hands he drank of the crystal clear water.

"I'll bet a homestead Dale made a stop here too. He and his horse must be as thirsty as we were."

The light was growing too dim for a thorough search of the soft moss-covered ground. Throwing his electric torch over the moist earth, Melrose examined it carefully.

There were many hoof imprints, but Melrose knew the stream must be a popular watering place for the traveler. He went on. In an hour the blackness of night had enveloped the silent forest.

"Dale has to rest his horse, too," he thought. "Might as well camp now."

Taking his rolled blanket from the back of his saddle, he prepared for the night. He staked his horse, giving the animal enough length of rope to graze on the deep lush grass that was still green under its carpet of parchment-brown leaves. After making a lunch from the food in his saddlebag, he rolled up in the blanket, falling almost instantly asleep.

Two miles ahead of Melrose, Dale sat in the deep underbrush off the trail. With his back against a tree, he waited while his horse grazed.

On the soft breeze came the little sounds of night life. The melancholy "hoo" of an owl, the patter of soft padded feet crunching on the crisp forest carpet; toward the north sounded the long, hunger-filled bark of a coyote.

The breeze lifted its voice in a murmuring lullaby. Dale's lids closed over his weary, haggard eyes. Before he knew sleep was coming his head fell back against the trunk of the hemlock. Separated by a scant two miles, hunter and hunted slept.

III.

WHEN the sun was but an hour high, Dale left the trail.

"It's much slower going, in the forest,"

he told himself, "but it's a damn sight safer."

Slowly the horse picked his way through the heavy underbrush. Often Dale lay flat on the animal's neck to avoid being swept from his seat by the low-hanging branches of the trees. He heard the gurgle of a spring. Easing himself from his saddle, man and beast drank.

As he stood he became conscious of a sound, a sound that had been drumming on his consciousness for many minutes. He raised his head, listening intently.

The tones of a voice came to him, a voice grown hoarse with repeated shouting. There was a note of terror in it.

"Some one's in trouble, but who the devil would be in the forest?"

With the bridle over his arm he strode over the trackless ground. Snowshoe rabbits scurried before him as he went; from a dense culvert he saw the head of a fox peering out at him. The hoarse voice sounded nearer.

With his finger curled on the trigger of his automatic Melrose crept cautiously through the still forest, his horse at his heels.

Again the voice shouted—a despairing note was in the hoarse tones. Dale paused abruptly. It seemed the sound came from the bowels of the earth, yet his wary eyes saw nothing save trees, low growing brush, and a carpet of leaves stretching on all sides.

Scarcely breathing, he halted his horse. A low-spoken word to the highly intelligent animal, and Dale crept forward. Noiseless as he tried to be, nevertheless the dry twigs cracked beneath his feet. Immediately to the right of him the voice came, weakened, half sobbing; yet nothing could be seen.

"Where are you?" Dale's tones carried through the silence. He stepped across a great clump of brush and fallen, rotted logs, moss covered and green with decay.

"Don't move," called some one almost at his feet. "Back up, quick!"

Dale's eyes followed the sound. He looked down. There among the rotting wood, the decaying leaves, moved a head and pair of shoulders. In a gray, set face, dark, burning, despairing eyes met Dale's startled gaze.

"Back quick. Muskeg! I'm caught." The thick mud was already on Dale's boots as he sprang backward.

"My God, Melrose! Is it you?"

"It's Melrose, Dale. Looks like you win this hand."

"Are you detailed for me, Melrose?"

"I am, or was—about gone now."

"Where's your horse?"

"He got out, bolted, probably not far away. Been caught here for God knows how long—seems an eternity. Sinking all the time—" The voice grew faint.

Dale's first sensation was a surge of relief. A relief that left him quivering. With Melrose out of the way, it would be months, perhaps a year, before headquarters would send out another man. He could travel more leisurely, make Lac la Biche before the snow came, and then safety! His eyes fell again on that gray, agonized face. The man was sinking to a horrible death.

The eyes of the two men met, locked.

"My God, Melrose, I can't let you die like this!" Dale cried in a revulsion of feeling.

A flicker of hope lighted the imprisoned man's eyes.

Swiftly Dale ran back to his horse, loosened the rope that hung from his saddlehorn. As he quickly looped an end he said:

"Melrose, I'm going to get you out. My horse will pull you. All I ask is three hours' wait before you follow. That's fair enough."

"Fair enough," Melrose agreed faintly. "You'll probably have more, for I have to locate that beast of mine."

The rope swung through the air and fell around Melrose's shoulders. The knot tightened, sinking cruelly into the flesh as Dale's horse moved slowly, the other end tied to the saddlehorn.

Slowly, inch by inch, the man was drawn from the sucking black mud of the treacherous muskeg. He was freed to the waist, then to the hips, a ghastly object covered with slimy mud, shapeless, grotesque.

"You give me your word, Melrose?" Dale asked in a strained voice.

"Of honor," the man replied.

A step at a time Dale's horse moved. Gradually Melrose was extracted. The clinging mud gave forth a gurgling, vicious sound, as though resenting being robbed of its victim. Melrose was pulled out on his back, slowly, carefully, as Dale's horse moved under the low-voiced word from his master.

Across a rotting log, through the deceiving carpet of leaves and dead branches, the body was drawn. At last he stood on firm ground.

"This is sporting of you, Dale," the man said quietly.

"It was only decent," Dale returned. He watched Melrose a moment as the man scraped the mud from his clothing. "How did you know I was along here?" he asked curiously.

"When you left the trail and turned into the woods, you either dropped a live match, or knocked out live coals from your pipe. A small blaze was started. When I came along, I saw it. I knew you must have caused it, for no other traveler has passed, either going or coming."

He paused, a slow smile on his face.

"Good deduction," agreed Dale gravely. "By the bye, I suppose Chester is dead?"

"He is." The smile faded from Melrose's face.

The camaraderie of the past few moments died. Again it was hunter and hunted.

Dale having finished cleansing his rope, coiled it, returned it to his saddlehorn. The eyes of the two men hardened. Without a word Dale swung to his saddle, Melrose returned to his cleansing operation.

He did not watch Dale. He would play the game square. An hour later he found his horse. The animal's eyes still rolled with terror. He was quivering like an aspen, the thick mud still clinging to his legs and belly.

IV.

THE weather changed. Two days later the massed clouds spilled their rain. Long slant lines of silver crashed through the forest, with the noise of a machine gun. Long gaunt arms of forest monarchs bent, swayed together under the fiercely driven wind.

Dale was cold, wet, ravenously hungry. In a culvert between two hills he paused. So thickly woven were the needle-laden branches of pine and spruce that the little oasis was comparatively dry.

Dale, who had learned the trick of rope-snaring a rabbit from his woodsman father, had set his snare the previous night.

He removed the saddle from his horse, picketed the animal where the grazing was still fair, and took a fat jack-rabbit from his saddlebag.

Over a fire built of stripped tree bark and twigs he sat before it as the rabbit slowly roasted.

"This is dangerous," he thought. "If Melrose is in the vicinity, he will smell the smoke and the rabbit roasting, even though he does not see the fire."

He glanced up at the tops of the two hills. The atmosphere was inky black, and the little circle of firelight shone like a brilliant eye.

"He could get a bead on me before I could lift a finger, if he came to the top of the hill," Dale decided grimly. "But we both have to rest and eat, and those shots I heard this morning means he was doing some hunting. He's probably doing some cooking now, too. Lord, I wish I had some salt!"

The rabbit crackled brown, appetizing. What was left of the meal Dale deposited carefully in his saddlebag.

A week passed; during that time neither man sighted the other. The ominous gray of the sky deepened, the air became very cold. When Dale emerged from the cave wherein he had slept one night, he found the first snow blanketing the ground. Soft, feathery substance it was, in which every hoofprint showed clearly.

"I've got to ford the river—get to the other side." Dale spoke aloud, his eyes on the dark current of the Saskatchewan. He studied his horse critically, saw how thin that splendid animal was growing.

"Not a square meal for a long time, old fellow," he said affectionately, "and now the grass is gone." His eyes grew dark,

somber. "Got to change my tactics. I won't let you suffer, my friend."

He wondered how Melrose was feeding his horse. "Probably got a bag of oats back in Lavoy. Wish I had dared stop there too—"

Dale kept along the river bank until the stream narrowed. With anxious eyes he studied the swift current.

"You never have failed me, pal," he whispered to the nervous animal under him. "Get across, then I'll find food and rest for you. I'll leave you with Coty; we aren't far from his cabin now, and I'll make Lac la Biche on foot."

V.

As Melrose came to the top of a long, steep hill, he paused, fitting the powerful glasses to his eyes. He sat motionless, sweeping the white landscape. He saw fur-bearing animals stealing stealthily among the trees, but nothing else moved. He sat motionless, glasses to his eyes, for half an hour, sweeping the country.

To his right the broad waters of the Saskatchewan flowed swiftly. He turned his glasses on the river. Idly he watched a dark object in mid-stream.

"A moose," he thought. He studied the animal carefully. "By Jove!" he ejaculated sharply. "Where's his antlers?"

Long he watched, his hands beginning to tremble. The pupils behind the field glasses dilated.

"Dale!" he whispered. "My God, what nerve, what superb nerve!"

The big brown hat, the brown coat with its red flannel collar was unmistakable.

Breathlessly, he watched the frantic struggles of the horse, as the powerful current tore at him, twisting him from his goal.

Sometimes Dale sat up erect in the submerged saddle, sometimes he leaned far over his horse's neck, his face touching water, as he guided, urged, and calmed the animal.

Once they went under; Melrose held his breath until they appeared again. Foot by foot the animal fought for the opposite shore.

"They said Dale had the finest horse in Edmonton and by Jove he is that. If he makes shore he is the only horse in all Alberta that could accomplish the feat."

For the time, he forgot he was the hunter and that his quarry was drawing away from him, as he sat fascinated, stirred with a tremendous admiration for man and beast.

When the swirling water closed over the heads of the two, Melrose's fingers gripped the field glasses until his knuckles showed white. When they emerged, his big chest relaxed under the expelled breath.

Courageously the horse struggled. When he quivered with terror, a low, steady word from the man he loved quieted him. Well he knew the danger in the stream that tore at his body with fierce sweeping current. His sides heaved, his eyes became blurred.

He snorted the water from his distended nostrils. Exhausted, panting, his head was sinking for the last time when suddenly his hoofs struck sand. Dale swung from the saddle, and swam to shore, the choking, panting horse beside him.

As the animal clambered up the steep river bank, his feet slipped and he rolled back into the water. Melrose breathed deep, his face flushing as he watched that battle. Slowly the animal staggered to his feet.

"Come on, old fellow; come on," he heard the steady reassuring familiar voice say. Ever since his colt days he had heard and obeyed that voice.

Again he felt sand beneath his hoofs; exerting all his powerful strength he struggled to shore. Slipping as he took the steep bank, he made the top. For a moment, man and beast were silhouetted against the dark background, then Dale walking with his hand on the animal's tired drooping head disappeared from Melrose's focus.

The watching man relaxed; he wiped the sweat from his face.

"By Jove, that was the most exciting, the most daring feat I have ever witnessed," he said aloud.

Gradually, the excited admiration died from his face. The old stern, calculating expression crept in his eyes.

"Dale has tripped me good. Lord knows how long it will take me to find a portage,

or a stretch where I can cross," he muttered moodily as he cantered through the soft snow.

VI.

A WEARY, lean horse and a man on foot, who swayed as he walked, crossed the little clearing Coty, the trapper, had blazed around his cabin and outbuildings. There was a medley of shrill barks from the man's sled dogs, as the two came to a stop before the log built roomy cabin.

Coty, who was at an outdoor bench repairing a steel trap, dropped that death-dealing instrument in amazement as his eyes swept the two. For an instant he did not recognize John Dale.

A three weeks' growth of dark beard covered the weather-tanned, sunken cheeks. The steady blue eyes lay in darkened, sunken sockets. His black hair straggled down over his turned-up collar.

It was an unkempt, wild and haggard picture of the Dale he had known from boyhood. Coty's gaze rested on the thin, stumbling horse who walked beside his master.

"Food, Coty," Dale mumbled. "Food for us both. I'll talk later."

Amazement turned to action.

"A warm mash for the horse—quick," Coty ordered the staring eyed Indian who stood in the cabin door.

Dale staggered across the threshold, sank into the big deerskin covered chair. Within three minutes he was drinking steaming tea, eating ravenously the baked fish, and yellow cornbread spread generously with liquid bear fat.

Outside a wind blew chill and threatening; the gray light was fading fast. Presently Dale sat back. A long sigh trembled from his lips.

"I have known what it was to be tired, to be hungry before, but never like this, Coty," he said wearily.

His friend's rugged face became grave.

"Sleep, Johnnie, talk to-morrow," he urged.

"My horse?" Dale asked wearily.

"Has had a big warm mash. He is probably sleeping now—"

"I must tell you first, Coty. A Mounted is after me, and he sticks like a burr. He seems to have an uncanny way of bobbing up, when I think I've lost him—"

"What's the trouble, Johnnie?" His friend gazed at him gravely.

"Chester of Edmonton, the big miner—you know of him, had it in for Frank. A woman was the cause of it. I saw him, *saw* him, Coty, shoot Frank in our house just as I came in the door—"

A sharp ejaculation came from the listening man. "Hurt him bad?"

"Killed him," Dale said quietly. "I'll skip the details. There was only my word for it. No other witnesses. My brother was killed almost instantly. Chester was jailed, of course; but got out on bail. When the case came up, he had bought up alibis as to where he was at the time I said he shot Frank. He got away from me that night. To make it short, a jury brought in a not guilty verdict. As that verdict was being read, I heard Frank—the best pal, the best brother a man ever had—I heard his voice say again to me the words he whispered as he died: 'Make him pay, Johnny. Make him suffer. He's killed me in cold blood—' And the jury brought in a not guilty verdict. That murderer stood up bowing and smiling, and I shot him dead as he smiled, Coty."

The weary voice trailed away. Heavy lids dropped over the sunken eyes. His head fell back. Outraged nature claimed her reckoning. As the last word issued gropingly from his lips, Dale slept.

Coty picked up the thin figure and carried him in his powerful arms to the deep, soft, fur piled bunk. He covered Dale carefully, stood looking down a moment in the wan, pinched face.

"I've been friend to you boys ever since you was born," he said aloud slowly, "jist as I was a friend to your dad. Sleep on, Johnnie boy, I'll fight fer you if a damn red coat comes this way."

He returned to his bench and the repairing of his trap. His lips twisted as he worked. Often he raised deep, stern eyes, gazing across the clearing into the forest.

He called his Indian. "Watch. If you see any one comin', tell me quick," he directed.

The Indian grunted his comprehension of the order. Until the darkness of night inclosed the cabin, he paced the clearing, his strong bronze face alert, his beady, small eyes keen.

To his mind, the order meant one thing: "Look out for the Shagalasha." (Red Coats). Evidently the stranger who had come so thinly dressed when snow covered the ground, with no pack or grub box on his horse, was fleeing from the Shagalasha. It was enough, for with all his might the Indian hated the far-reaching, never-tiring arm of the law.

VII.

MELROSE rode down the cleared narrow street of the Indian settlement.

"This chase is lasting longer than I thought it would," he said grimly. "I must prepare for cold weather."

He spent the night in the settlement. From a French half breed he bought a caribou parka, duffels, mittens and capote, paying the man with gold from the money belt he wore next his skin.

He strapped a pack behind his saddle; a pack containing a caribou sleeping bag, a bag made with the hair sewn inside, the warmest bag used in the North; inside that bag was an extra blanket for his horse. Then came a bag of food.

Dried fish, dried strips of deer and moose meat. Ten pounds of yellow meal, tea, salt, a tin of bear's fat rendered, and a tin of matches. A sack of grain for his horse, was added to the pack. Man and beast rested and ate. At dawn they left.

The weather held good, though the sky continued gray and an ominous wind whistled its peculiarly high, shrill voice. The Athabaska river trail remained a clear, unbroken sheet of snow, still soft and crustless.

No travelers were on the trail for the mush snows had not yet come. The trappers were all busy in their cabins soaking their traps in fish oil, and animal grease.

They were busy making new moccasins, restringing snowshoes, going over their sleds, sharpening their skinning knives, piling high their winter fuel.

When Melrose swung onto the trail, the hoofprints of the horse who had preceded him lay faintly outlined. The soft snow swept by the ceaseless wind, had obliterated some the tracks, but enough were clear so Melrose had no difficulty in following.

"How can Dale keep going?" the man asked himself. "His horse has no food save possibly willow roots, and Dale must be out of matches for I have come across no camp fire ashes for three days."

A wonder seized him at the endurance of man and beast.

A week later the weather changed. The cry of the loon held a moaning note. A note of sadness, peculiarly yearning. It said that winter was creeping down slowly.

A crust formed on the soft snow; the swamps became silent, the cow moose fought her young from her side. On the air came the defiant challenge of bull to bull.

Padded feet moved more cautiously; the hunting, the fierce hunger season was beginning. Long since, the forest moon had lost its autumn red. Its light was of a cold, silvery sheen as it shone through the deepening frost in the air.

Melrose stooped from his saddle. For a week he had followed the faint, barely discernible hoof prints. Now he saw the imprint of boots beside those tracks. A high Western boot-heel had sunk in the soft snow; the freeze had held the impression.

"It is the beginning of the end, Dale. Your horse has given out. You are walking to save him."

Melrose spoke aloud. He had developed a habit of doing that of late. The constant loneliness of the trail was irritating.

His horse pricked his ears as the voice broke the silence. His walk quickened into a canter.

"Even you know that the end is in sight, eh, Billy?" Melrose said, a warmth in his voice. "I'll take Dale to Athabaska and we will get a train out of there. No more trail travel, Billy."

He glanced up at the sky, then toward the distant mountain range. Each peak had a delicate, fan shaped cloud that stretched up into the sky, with a waving motion.

It signified that a storm was raging among those peaks. The dry sand-like snow on the mountains was being driven so fiercely before the wind that it was being carried over and beyond the peaks. The waving banners of snow were wonderful in their beauty, but ominous in their portent.

Melrose watched the sight until the gray light died into the blackness of night, when he stopped and made camp. About midnight, the wind came roaring like a thousand lions.

It tore at the strapped blanket around the horse's back and belly. The animal whinnied nervously. It almost tore Melrose from his feet as he emerged from his sleeping bag. He placed his pack under his body to keep it from blowing away as he crept again into the warmth of caribou hide.

Sleep was gone. As he listened to the roar of the wind, felt the icy cold that was creeping earthward, he thought of Dale. Involuntarily he shuddered, as he thrust his head from the bag for an instant. The first blizzard of the year had struck in all its unleashed fury of wind and snow.

" Good heaven," the man thought. " Dale is on the trail, without bag, furs, or food."

He groaned at the sickening picture of his imagination. But Dale, strengthened by his two days' rest and good food at Coty's cabin, was thirty miles ahead of Melrose. He, too, had seen that storm raging in the mountains, and the experience he had had following his profession, an experience in which he had covered many thousands of miles in that Northland, had taught him its portent and he had prepared for it.

With a tin utensil from the pack Coty had provided him with, he dug a hole in a sand bank. Working steadily for hours, that hole took on comfortable proportions. Until darkness fell, he used his small hand ax, stripping bark from trees, cutting spruce branches which he threw on the narrow floor of his cave.

" I'll use them to block the entrance when the snow comes," he thought.

Soon he had a good fire going. Over that fire he placed his aluminium covered kettle. When the snow water had melted, he threw in a handful of evaporated potatoes, and another handful of evaporated onions. He covered the big kettle tightly, while the vegetables simmered slowly to their accustomed size and flavor.

The bark he had stripped from the trees he piled in a little mound just inside the cave.

" Finest splinters in the world to start a fire with," he said softly.

He skinned and cleaned the rabbit he had snared the previous day. Cutting it in pieces with the skinning knife Coty had pressed upon him, he carefully washed the fat white meat in snow, then deposited it in the big utensil. Adding salt and a small handful of rice to thicken the stew, he closed the receptacle tightly.

" There will be enough grub there to last me three days," he decided, " and I doubt if the blow lasts that long."

He sat by the fire, which winked like a red eye in the surrounding darkness. He reached for his pipe, then let his hand fall.

" Only after meals," he told himself, " or I'll run out of tobacco."

He lay before the fire, while his meal cooked. The grateful warmth of the glowing circle penetrated his clothing. The fragrant, appetizing odor of the cooking stew mingled with the soft hiss of the fire.

" If I were a cat I'd purr," thought Dale, a half smile lifting his lips. " This is deucedly comfortable."

He glanced at the high sand bank that had so conveniently lent itself for his housing. In the small coulee off the trail protected on all sides by rising hills, he was in a measure protected from the fiercest blasts of the steadily rising wind.

" How often have Frank and I sat like this around our fire waiting for our supper to cook, at the end of a long day of map making," Dale reflected wistfully.

He thought of the brother cut down while life for him was ringing like a full toned golden bell. Now he lay in a cut in the ground—a cut that is called—a grave. The boy, merry of tongue and eye, filled with warm human impulses, kindly toward all, struck down before the bud of life had had opportunity to flower.

" He was only twenty-four," Dale re-

called; "now he is gone." The aching melancholy in his eyes deepened. "I have avenged you, Frank," he whispered. "If there is a hell, and I believe there is, Chester is burning in it now—"

The menacing voice of the wind was strengthening into a gale. A dampness filled the air.

"How close you are to me to-night, Frank. I can almost feel you," the man murmured softly.

He raised the lid of the kettle. A fragrant volume of steam rushed forth. He lifted it from the fire. Mixing a handful of meal in a little snow water and rendered bear fat, he formed the cakes in his hands, then laid them on the glowing coals.

Gradually they cooked through, tanned to deep brown. He took them from the fire, laid them on a tin plate.

"Come on, Frank," he called, "supper's ready."

The words returned to him mockingly empty. Suddenly his head went down on his knees, a dry sob shook his body. The fragrant hot food was forgotten.

For two days and nights Dale lay in his sand hole, while the blizzard raved and shrieked like a madman, while it swept up and down the land over the river and hills. The trees trembled, swayed, those of younger growth broke. The air was white with falling snow. Over all that forest of the wild, nothing moved, no bark, or scream or howl was heard.

The river became a sheet of ice; a white gleam; the trees mere specks of black where they showed through their blankets of ermine.

VIII.

Melrose examined his horse carefully.

"The tips of your ears are nipped, Billy," he said. The animal was shivering and shaking under icy fingers that played over his body.

"I never knew the mush snows to come so early, or I should have bought a sled and a few dogs back in the settlement," Melrose muttered anxiously. "It must be thirty degrees below. A horse can't stand more than forty-five degrees. What if the weather turns colder?"

Rapidly he saddled the animal, slung the pack over his back. "You'll have to keep moving, Billy boy. My compass is still working, and we'll get on to Athabaska. You'll freeze if you don't get going."

It was the dawn of the third day of the blizzard. The snow had ceased, though a hard, biting wind still blew its freezing breath across the wide wastes. Slipping and stumbling over the uneven snow crust, occasionally going to his belly in deep drifts, the horse floundered on. His face to his eyes was covered with frost from his breath.

As the long muffler tied around Melrose's mouth and nose froze and hardened, he kept moving it to an unfrozen section of the cloth. As he traversed the river trail he kept a sharp lookout for Dale, expecting any moment to find his frozen body.

The forest creatures, driven from their holes, dens, and lairs by savage hunger, crept stealthily through the forest. Melrose saw a herd of caribou, their soft brown bodies and pure white flanks and legs outlined against the snow as their plows—horns—dug through the crust to get at the grass beneath.

Pausing a moment he watched a red-eyed ermine and a marten in fierce combat. The ermine won, and Melrose listened to the snap of its wickedly edged teeth as it tore the marten. A big snow-shoe rabbit hopped squealing in terror, a silent white furred lynx in close pursuit. Many times the high, infantlike wailing cry of the mountain lion floated through the forest.

As the gray day wore on, animal life was heard repeatedly. From over in the hills came the long, melancholy howl of the wolves as it changed into the hunt cry. Melrose knew that pack, lean from starvation, savage with hunger, had caught some scent, and were sweeping forward to their kill.

Involuntarily he shuddered. In all wild animal life there is no sound so terrifying, so blood chilling, as the hunt cry of the wolf. It is indescribable. Melrose felt his spine chill, and his heart contract as the howls, fiercely triumphant, came nearer and ever nearer.

"Their quarry must be coming this way," he thought.

He drew his rifle from its case, and laid it across the saddle. The short day was drawing to its close. Soon darkness would settle over primitive nature.

"Not a decent place to camp. Must keep moving until I find—" He paused in his reflections. Ahead of him came a band of gray bodies moving like specters in a half moon cordon. They ran silently now. Not a sound was heard, for their quarry was in sight.

The horse scent had come to them on the wind. With incredible speed they had covered the distance, for the motive power behind that speed was hunger—fierce, ravaging.

The horse threw up his head, snorting in terror. A tremor ran through his body. He took a step forward, then paused quivering.

His wild and rolling eyes were fixed on that band that had separated. Some had veered, were coming in at the rear to ham-string their quarry. The animal, trembling with terror, was deaf to Melrose's soothing words.

The man's eyes ran down his rifle sights, but just as he pulled the trigger the horse leaped forward. Taken unaware, Melrose pitched from the saddle and fell sprawling on the snow. The fear-crazed beast dashed forward, stirrups flying wildly.

Swiftly, silently, the wolves closed in. The air was filled with vicious snaps. There was a scream of pain as the wolves' teeth severed the ham-string. The horse went down, wolves at his throat, at his flanks.

Back in the hills other roaming bands had heard the deep-throated call of the pack that had made the kill. Like gray streaks they came over the snow in answer to that summons.

Melrose, his hair standing under his capote, ran swiftly. His horse was gone; no use in wasting precious shells. He would get away unobserved, if he could. Swiftly, silently he ran, his soul sickened at the sound of teeth on bone, the tearing of flesh.

For many minutes he ran unmolested, when the new pack caught his scent. With lifted voice they came at him. Turning, he fired at the leader, but either the excitement or the gathering gloom made his aim imperfect.

Rendered bold by starvation, they came at him. Forcing a control in his shaking hands, he fired again and again. Some shots went home. The pack, momentarily intimidated, broke, scattered, then closed in again.

Melrose had no time to reload completely. He got three shells in the magazine when the long gaunt bodies formed again. More cautiously now they approached, then suddenly they swung into a run. Melrose saw them coming.

"Oh, God," he breathed in an agonized sob.

IX.

DALE had lingered in his snug sand bank all that third day, a questioning eye on the lowering sky. He felt secure, for he could step to his small hill-top and scan the snow covered land for many miles.

"If Melrose is still on the trail," he argued, "he will pass on. The snow has covered my tracks. Then I can trail him. It will be safer for me."

So he had lingered. He made no fire that day, fearing the smoke would eddy over the small hills and so betray his presence. As the dusk deepened he felt secure, knowing that all travelers in the North stop at dark for food and rest, so he built his fire, prepared his food.

The wind had fallen, the air was peculiarly still and hushed, save for the voice of the fur-bearing creatures. As he sat by his fire the sound of shots came sharp, crackling.

Instantly Dale's hand was on his Colt, as he stood tense, with narrowed eyes. He heard the savage howls of the wolf pack.

Again the sharp crack of rifle shots. Then came a human voice lifted in one long, imploring shout—a shout filled with soul agony and despair.

"The wolves are closing in on a man." His mind raced to the thought. Pausing only to throw another armful of branches on his fire, with his gun in his hand he ran to the hill-top.

Through the gloom he could barely discern a fur clad figure running, with the

pack rapidly closing in. Without a thought of fear, absolutely devoid of the panic that had seized Melrose, Dale ran toward the figure.

"This way," he shouted. "Take this hill."

Melrose's numbed senses awakened under the shock of that human voice. He ran with new strength. Dale paused, took careful aim.

Under that steady pressure, each piece of steel became a death dealing instrument. Each time his gun spoke a wolf leaped in the air, to fall back, a limp and bleeding thing. The pack paused to devour him.

Down the hill Dale ran, caught the swaying, exhausted Melrose in his arms.

"Quick!" he urged. "Only a few more feet up the hill."

As the band gathered together and swept forward again, their forces depleted by five of their number, the men reached the hilltop. Down its side to the circle of fire at the bottom of the gully, was a matter of a few moments. Melrose fell beside the blaze breathing heavily. The eyes of the two men met.

"A truce, Melrose, until to-morrow," Dale said quietly.

"A truce," the other agreed, his lips still white and shaking.

Across the circle of fire, through the darkness that had fallen suddenly as a great black blanket, round yellow balls stared hungrily at the men. It seemed as though the eyes were suspended in mid-air, for the gloom swallowed the lean, ravenous bodies. Round and round that circle they moved.

"I'd get every damned one of them, but I must be careful with my ammunition," Dale said grimly. "I have a sand hole near here, but we dare not leave this fire. It's only a few feet, but far enough for one of the devils to be on us —before we make it. I have plenty of wood at hand. Can keep the fire going all night; but we won't have to. They will leave within an hour, I think."

"Dale," Melrose's voice was deep, "I know we are hunter and hunted, but here's my hand." He extended his mittened fingers. "God in heaven, man, you have saved me from a horrible death—twice you have saved me—" He paused, breathing heavily.

The men sat silent, eyes on the glaring yellow balls that stared at them from the darkness. An hour passed. Back in the forest came the full-throated hunt cry again. Instantly the wolves turned, and sped to their comrades.

Dale rose, stretched himself.

"Time for supper, Melrose," he grinned.

Melrose watched him silently as Dale filled the tin plate.

"You eat first. I'll follow. Only one plate and spoon," Dale said quietly. "Good old Coty fixed me up—"

"By the Lord Harry," ejaculated Melrose. "I'm damned if I'll hunt you any longer. I'll resign from the force—" His voice fell savage, bitter.

"You can't do it, sergeant," returned the other very quietly, very low.

Melrose stared before him into the blazing flame. After a time he spoke. "No, Dale. I can't do it. My duty—is my life—"

"I know it. And it will die—only when you die," the other returned in the same still voice.

He watched Melrose eat.

"For to-night we are comrades. We will smoke and eat together. By the bye, where did you get that fur outfit?" Dale questioned, a friendly warmth in his tones.

Soon the men were talking eagerly. Each was hungry for the voice of human companionship. The next morning was clear, with a dazzling sun.

"Keep due west by your compass, Melrose, and you will come to Le Gard's cabin. He will outfit you in grub and snowshoes if you pay him well enough," Dale spoke briskly.

Melrose watched him strap his blanket roll and pack to his back; then he said slowly: "You are not throwing me off the track, Dale? On your honor, will I find the trapper there?"

The eyes of the two men locked.

"On my honor, sergeant," Dale replied. "You know this is the land of my father and my father's father. I was born here. I know it, and I know the men."

"Yes. That is why I followed you here when we got out of Edmonton. I felt you would return here," Melrose said.

"You were right. And now good-by till we meet again?" There was a question in Dale's voice.

"Till we meet again," the other returned gravely.

The hands of the two men clasped warmly.

Dale turned. With somber eyes Melrose watched the fur-clad figure mount the little hill. At its crest Dale waved a mittened hand and disappeared.

Melrose stood as though staring at a vision—a vision of that slim, virile figure mounting the steps that led to the noose. His eyes darkened with pain as the sinister picture held his imagination.

"I still feel that in the end I will get Dale," he told himself, his breath coming heavily. "But God knows there will be no triumph in it for me. What a hellish thing a man's duty is, sometimes."

He started on the three-mile trip to Le Gard's cabin. It took him two hours to reach the place, for the going was hard in his mooseskin boots.

The cabin lay before him, a dark smudge on the carpet of snow. When his knock and call remained unanswered, he opened the door. The interior revealed signs of a permanent occupant; but the owner was gone. Dead ashes lay on the stone hearth and in the grate of the sheet-iron stove. An arctic cold enveloped the room.

"The man is away, on his trap lines, or perhaps at a line cabin," Melrose said aloud. From a mass of wood piled high in a corner he kindled a fire.

The dawn of a second day at the cabin broke before the owner returned. With a surge of relief, for the delay had irked him, Melrose heard the jingle of sled bells as the dogs drew into the little clearing.

His welcome was cordial, spontaneous. It is a treat, a real event in a trapper's life, when a traveler, stranger or friend, arrives. Outfitted with a good pair of snowshoes, a blanket and a box of food, Melrose left as the sun threw its crimson rays over the tree tops.

His host protested, would have kept him there a week, but Melrose was eager to be off. Dale had gained a twenty-six-hour advantage.

Ceaselessly, dazzlingly, the sun shone. It sparkled and glared, though no warmth lay in its fierce rays. The weather held at forty degrees below zero. The crust on the snow hardened.

Conditions were ideal for fast travel. Melrose met several team parties on the trail; among them the mail carrier with his seventeen-dog team. None of them had met a man traveling on snowshoes alone, they replied in answer to Melrose's hurried questions.

There were many imprints on the trail—boot, moccasin, dog, and sled runners. Melrose cursed his delay at the trapper's cabin.

X.

Far off the trail, on the frozen surface of Lesser Slave Lake, Dale stumbled, circled, and fought his way blindly. A water blister had formed over his eyes—the water blister of snow-blindness!

For two days he had crept along, ignorant of his direction, conscious only that he was on frozen water. Many times he dropped to his knees, digging savagely with his snowshoe, feeling with his mittened hand through the loose snow he had dug up, until his fingers encountered the ice of the lake.

His face grew pinched and gray under its heavy growth of beard. The agony in his eyes made him groan aloud. When he became exhausted he would crawl into his bag, the sleeping bag Coty had given him. He did not know whether it was day or night; when he crawled into the bag, or emerged, darkness was ever present.

Feverishly he listened for the sound of sled bells, the mush shout of men. Nothing broke the silence save the voices of animals. He heard the sound of hoofs as a band of moose crossed the ice near him, but he could not see them. Desperately he tried to get his location.

"I am not on the river, or I would hear the sound of travelers," he told himself.

There was no fuel for fire; he ate his remaining food raw. Under the diet of frozen meat and meal bread he weakened rapidly. Tortured by pain, he moved slowly.

There was no way to thaw out the long muffler he used to wrap around mouth and nose. It was frozen from end to end. Slowly his lungs became burned.

As he moved along he felt, with increasing anxiety, the tingle in his fingers and toes, in his elbows and knees. Well he knew what that tingle signified: he was beginning to freeze.

He beat his body with his arms, but the tingle persisted. Doggedly he forced his gait to the uttermost; movement was imperative. The appalling prospect of freezing rose nakedly before him. He felt no physical pain, save the intolerable burning of his blistered eyeballs.

The actual death by freezing is painless; it was the long, conscious effort against it that began to weaken Dale's mind. In a panic, he found his wits were wandering.

He pulled himself up sharply many times, when the realization of his incoherent muttering penetrated his mind. Despite his will, his mind would wander.

At times he was back in the University of Alberta; then his mind strayed off through the many trips he had made, head of his surveying party, with the Dominion government's map makers.

During that morning of constant groping effort he held many conversations that showed the close companionship, sympathetic understanding and affection that had existed between the brothers. Occasionally the fog that lay heavy on his brain lifted, and he realized the appalling thing that awaited him.

He stumbled, fell forward. For an instant he lifted his sightless eyes to the blinding sun above him.

"I'm coming, Frank," his voice broke in a strange tremor. Tears wrung from an agonized heart rolled from under his swollen lids. "It's taken my life, Frank, but I kept my word. Chester paid."

He struggled feebly for a few moments, then the thin body became still.

Across the lake a straggler from a caribou herd ran madly. In close pursuit came Henri, the French trapper, with his Indian, the hunter. Through Dale's hazy consciousness the reports from their rifles penetrated.

Reason struggled through the thick fog that numbed his brain. He struggled to his knees; exerting all his will power, he rose, swaying, to his feet, turning his blind eyes in the direction of the voices that came to him faintly.

He essayed a shout, but only a whisper came from his lips. Raising his arms, he waved them wildly. The voices grew nearer.

"*Diable!*" The amazed ejaculation came to him.

Again the fog pressed in, though he fought it with all his exhausted strength. Again he felt the somnolent torpidity numbing his senses. Fighting frantically, he swayed forward to his knees.

"*Nom de Dieu,*" a voice shouted. "Eet ees a man. *Allons,* Wasse. *En avant!*" the booming tones commanded.

The Indian ran forward. He soon outstripped his heavy-bodied master, as his snowshoes skinned over the hard crust. Swiftly he bent over Dale, raised the thin figure in his arms.

Throwing the limp form over his powerful shoulder as though Dale were but a sack of flour, he skimmed back to his slower moving master.

"To ze cabin. Ze hunt she mus' wait!" Henri cried. "T'ank de *bon Dieu* we come dis way!"

Swiftly the Indian, Wasse, made his way across the lake to the long, roomy cabin that stood near its edge. Before Henri had reached the place, Wasse had stripped Dale and was rubbing the unconscious man briskly with snow.

When Henri arrived he fell to also with a will, rubbing, beating, slapping the circulation into life; with handfuls of snow massaging vigorously the frost from hands, face and feet.

Silently the two men worked for many minutes, when Dale sighed deeply, raised his head, and opened his swollen eyelids. As Henri peered into those blistered eyes he understood the plight of the man he had found.

"The great sun god has stricken him," Wasse said in his native Cree.

"Ze snow blindness. *Vite,* brew ze tea leaves," Henri commanded.

As the Indian made the healing compresses, Henri wrapped Dale in a blanket and deposited him between bearskin rugs on the wide, low couch.

"You found me?" Dale whispered.

"*Oui.* Try not to talk. Eat, sleep, while ze tea leaves mak' a cure."

A great sob of thanksgiving welled in Dale's heart. He could not see the face of his Samaritan, but the big, booming, friendly voice filled his being with exquisite peace. He felt a bowl at his lips.

"Eat," that warm voice commanded. "Hot soup wit' rice in heem."

Warmed by the steaming food, by the fire that heated the cabin, his eyes soothed under the cooling, healing compresses, Dale's heart went out in a wordless prayer of thanks to the Omnipotent.

For a day and night he slept the sleep of complete exhaustion, while, unknown to himself and his host, the incipient fever mounted. At the end of a week his eyes were healed, his sight restored, but he murmured ceaselessly in delirium.

Henri turned the business of trapping over to his Indian. Day and night he battled for Dale's life. The dark angel spread his wings over the cabin, but Henri defied him, denying him entrance.

During those long weeks Melrose searched the little town of Athabaska, a town occupied almost entirely by the Indians and half-breeds. The hundred or so of white inhabitants operated the stores, the mission house and the school. Not a cabin escaped Melrose's hunt. He became perplexed.

"Strange," he told himself repeatedly. "I felt confident Dale would return here."

He delayed sending word to headquarters. Almost three months had elapsed since he had left Edmonton. When he reported he wanted to give definite information.

He decided to go to Lac la Biche, where he knew the cabin of Dale's father still stood; so he obtained a dog team in Athabasca.

XI.

THE last half of January passed. February came and went, and Dale was sitting up for the first time in all those weeks. A great wonder seized him at the continual care, the patience, of the bluff Henri. Yet he was chary with his words of thanks.

He knew these men of the North. Praise embarrassed them. Gratitude was both superfluous and unwelcome.

To Henri's way of thinking, he had done only the natural and expected thing. No great physician could have been more pleased over the recovery of a difficult and dangerous case than was Henri over Dale's convalescence.

With his returning strength a restlessness, an ever increasing urge to be getting on, possessed Dale; but Henri would not hear of it.

"Wha, you go out, an' burn again ze tender lungs I 'ave so nursed? *Non!* 'Ere you stay wid Henri till spring she com'. You hurry too much an' *sapristi!*" He spread his big hands suggestively.

Until spring! When first the words came to him Dale gasped in dismay. After reflection, "Why not?" he thought. "I am as safe here, perhaps, as in Lac la Biche." He raised his steady, deep eyes to Henri's anxiously watching gaze.

"My friend," he said slowly, "perhaps some day I may be able to help you as you have helped me. I shall stay until spring."

The quick smile widened Henri's lips. His black eyes glowed.

"*Tres bien!*" he roared. "That is ver' fine. Glad I am, me, Henri, that you stay. Soon you go wid me down ze trap lines. An hour or two, three, to get your strength back, *hein?*"

So the annual March blizzard found the men together, their mutual regard deepening into a rare friendship. With the good food and the long rest, Dale's thin body gained in weight.

When he surveyed himself in the small mirror, he said softly: "Even Frank would not know me with this heavy beard, and these twenty added pounds."

He laughed shortly.

"Fortune favors the bold son," he went on. "I'm going out and take my place—among men—"

He thought often of Melrose; wondered

where he was. "I hope the poor devil isn't scouting around to-night," he said aloud.

Henri blinked sleepily. The words meant nothing to him; he had asked Dale no questions, and the only information Dale had volunteered was that he was on his way to Lac la Biche when the snow blindness struck him.

"*Non, non,*" Henri said comfortably, as they sat before the cracking fire while the blizzard swept over the low cabin; "no one ees out to-night. Faugh, even ze wolves dey are in dere dens. Com', we play ze game of cards, *oui?*" he invited, his wide smile lighting his heavy dark face.

As the men walked to the long, log-built table, Dale stared around the cozy, cheery room with new appreciation. How snug it was in the fire and candlelight, with its bear and moose hide floor rugs, with its deep comfortable log-built chairs and wide couches.

Heads of moose and caribou antlers adorned the gray clay walls; horn racks of guns, and pipes stretched within easy reach. A long shelf of well thumbed books lay along one side; behind a deerskin curtain lay the provision house; a well stocked room, for Henri lived well.

He was a successful trapper, and his credit at the post company store was unlimited. Had he not trapped a black fox, that rarest and most valuable pelt, that very winter? Its rich, glowing beauty would bring him four hundred dollars alone; and last week had he not scraped the skin fat from two silver foxes that hung limp and glorious among the ermine and marten pelts in his pelt room?

"*Par Dieu,* eet ees ze good life *le bon Dieu* gif us, *oui?*" the man asked complacently as he ran the soiled, much-used cards between his big hands.

"It is, Henri," agreed Dale, "and the best thing of all that He gives us—is a friend."

Henri's black eyes beamed affectionately as Dale held them with his thoughtful, serious gaze.

The snow piled up around the house, the wind blew in a steady gale. Outside lay a tempest of white death; within the snug, tight cabin were warmth and safety.

The Indian, Wasse, crossed the room noiselessly, a log heavy with resin in his arms. After he had deposited it in the enormous fireplace he returned to his own small room.

He lay on his bunk, his thoughts on the young Cree girl, who that spring would braid her hair around her head; a symbol of her betrothal. When the berries ripened, she would come to his cabin—his bride.

Yes, the world was a good place. His black eyes glowed.

Each day Dale remained out longer, for spring was coming. A new warmth was stealing into the sun's rays, the ice was loosening in the lake. The snow became rivers of mushy water. The trapping season was ended.

The middle of April the men clasped hands, as they said good-by.

"Some day I shall see you again, my friend," Dale declared earnestly.

"*Oui.* Henri, he will look always for ze day to com'," exclaimed the other warmly.

With his pack slung on his back, Dale made his way across the great silent stretches. His destination was Whitecourt. From that station, the terminus of the Canadian National Railway, he intended getting into British Columbia.

Casually, without uneasiness—though he kept a wary eye open for Melrose—he mingled among the men at Whitecourt.

He bought a new outfit.

"Look like a surveyor now," he thought as he eyed himself. "Fit to travel any way."

As he stood idly on a street corner, snatches of conversation from a knot of men made him change his plans. He left Whitecourt, but not by train.

XII.

"THAT is what I call a good blue print, Johnson. Clear as print."

Dale looked up. He was seated at his work bench, the finished product of his draft lay before him.

"Glad it pleases you, sir," he answered.

McDermott, head of the company that was pushing the work of the new government road that was to stretch from Smoky

River to Erith, looked sharply at Dale, whom he knew as Johnson.

He liked the quiet voiced man, though often Dale perplexed him. He held aloof from the camp, his laughter was never heard, and it was rare that he smiled.

He lived alone in one of the many tents of the construction camp, on the banks of the river. An indefatigable worker, he moved serenely, apparently contented, through the camp; friends to all, but intimate of no man.

It was early June when he arrived. He had heard of the new undertaking while in Whitecourt and had come in quest of employment. He had little fear of detection; the heavy black beard changed him mightily.

During the long inaction at Henri's cabin, he had gained weight, and was still gaining. His former hundred and fifty pounds was now a hundred and ninety; the added avoirdupois sat well on his six feet one of height. His figure had broadened, deepened, grown powerful.

Madge, McDermott's daughter, stepped into the work tent. She was clad in riding togs, and carried her crop in her hand. Her deep, violet eyes swept the two men, as they rose to their feet.

"Who will accompany me?" she asked gayly. "I want a long canter on the river bank."

McDermott looked at Dale, watched the quick light deepen the blue of his eyes.

"You go," he said. "I'm not as fond of these long canters as I was. My girl is a bother"; he turned a smiling face on the glowing Madge. "But she's so crazy about the 'wilds' as she calls it, she would come."

Playfully the girl flipped her crop at her father.

"Old bear," she said, laughing softly. "Come on, Mr. Johnson, I'd rather have you anyway." She spoke lightly, but the warmth in her voice was unmistakable.

Dale glanced down at his flannel shirt, his khaki breeches that ended under dusty puttees.

"Never mind; we are not in Ottawa," Madge said quickly, reading his thought.

This quiet man, with his magnificent physique, with the keen blue eyes which shone startlingly clear against the tan of the skin, the blackness of thick hair and beard, was a fascinating study for the girl. His speech and bearing proclaimed him to be the gentleman he was.

"At first," she had told her father, "I thought your new recruit, Johnson, was a backwoods man. I had not talked with him ten minutes when I discovered my mistake. The man is educated, and of a decided culture."

Dale interested her, attracted her.

A girl confident in her beauty, accustomed to admiration from men, the very fact that Dale avoided her, lent fuel to her interest. She became piqued at his indifference, irritated at his avoidance of her. Intrigued by this new game, she devised ways of meeting him, talking with him, until Dale's armor slowly melted under her gay raillery. They became friends.

After the first month had passed, Dale was eating his meals in the McDermott dining tent, and not with the other men. McDermott found him an able assistant, capable, competent, of keen discrimination.

With amused tolerance he watched his daughter's inveiglement. Just once he warned her. "Have a care, Madge. You may find a lion sleeping in Johnson. I have seen a touch of fire in those blue eyes of his."

The girl had laughed delightedly. "I should like to hear the lion roar, dad."

Her father looked at her sharply. "Yet don't forget the lion can strike as well as roar."

And strike he did, at the very life blood of the girl, for her heart became involved. It was no longer a game with Madge to rouse Johnson's interest. It became an absorbing passion with her, for she gave him all the love of her vigorous young life.

She knew Dale returned that love; she read it in his eyes when they caressed her face. She heard it in the deep, repressed breath of the man, when she would link her arm through his, as they took their evening strolls along the river bank. She felt it in the warmth of his voice when he talked with her.

In the beginning, Dale had been happy as his friendship with Madge deepened.

Her companionship, her frank and gay nature gave a new joy to his repressed life. It was weeks before he knew why that joy had taken so deep a root.

Daily he found himself growing more impatient for the hour before supper in which he accompanied Madge on her ride, or down the river. When the wrapping of that friendship dissolved, showing the love that lay beneath it, Dale realized his passion for the girl with consternation.

Even as he prayed against it, wrestled with the temptation which rocked the very foundation of his character, his love grew.

In an agony of heart, he had prayed: "Oh, God, take this from me—or give me the strength to keep her from knowing—"

Yet Madge knew, and the slumbering woman in her awoke. The mists of her imagination stirred. Something was disarming her, tearing at her heart, sweetening her life.

When with Dale, she glowed with a hushed expectation; when he spoke to her in his suddenly tender voice, it was as though a note of music fell upon her heart. They loved—with their first love of mature man and woman, for Madge was twenty-five, and Dale was thirty-two.

The woman reached out for her mate—the man struggled and fought in his shadow enshrouded life for courage and strength to resist her appeal.

No shallow depths ran in either character; each was strong in individuality and their hears twined around each other in the soil of mutual love. Sometimes, an inflection in Madge's voice, a touch of her hand, lingering and electric, a long gaze from the violet depths of her eyes, tremulous, questioning, almost slipped the leash of Dale's control.

Words would swell from his heart, tremble on his lips, when he would catch them, bind them again in their chains. The repression became more difficult for the man as the weeks passed, for he was of impulsive temperament, as all kindly, ardent natures are.

Impatiently, Madge waited for the declaration that did not come. Dale had bound himself in an iron control.

"What is your first name, Mr. Johnson?" Madge asked as their horses walked neck to neck along the river bank. "You always sign J. What is the rest?"

"John," Dale replied idly. He was watching the setting sun quiver among the threads of her chestnut hair.

"Dear me. John Johnson. Sounds like a Swede. But I know you are as Canadian as I am. Where were you born—John?" The name came naturally, without hesitation from the girl's lips.

"I was born in Northern Alberta. My mother died when she brought my brother into the world—"

"Oh, you have a brother?" Madge asked eagerly. Her heart swelled. For the first time during this sweet summer, he was talking of himself.

As the silence lengthened, she looked at Dale. Her eyes widened at the change in his face. His gaze was straight ahead.

The intense blue of his eyes had darkened with pain; they seemed almost brown. His heavy brows were drawn together, his mouth had taken on a bitter line. Impulsively, she laid her warm hand on his.

"Forgive me if I have stirred unhappy memories?"

Dale turned his suddenly haggard face to her. "He was the finest boy, the best comrade a man ever had; and I lost him."

Quietly the girl waited. The two horses paused to nibble at the grass on the sides of the trail.

"He died?" she murmured gently.

"He was murdered." The harsh voice stung Madge like a lash.

"How he suffers!" she thought wistfully. "His murderer was brought to justice?" Her throbbingly sympathetic voice penetrated Dale's bitter thoughts.

"Justice? Aye, the justice of a blind law. A law that will not see. The murderer was acquitted. Yet retribution struck, quick and sure. I killed him."

Madge sat in stony, horrified silence. With a dazed look on his face, Dale gazed ahead, aghast at what he had done. The words had been wrung from his soul in that bitter moment of recollection before he realized he had uttered them.

A full moment passed. A moment that

seemed to hold the time of eternity. A groan filled with a soul's anguish burst from Dale's white lips.

He raised a shaking hand to wipe the sweat drops from his face. Oh, God, why had he betrayed himself?

The glorious, understanding heart of the girl went out to the stricken man. Leaning from her saddle she caught his shaking hand in hers; held it tightly between her warm palms.

Incredulously, Dale looked at her. Her heart lay naked in her misty eyes, her sweet lips were trembling.

He sprang from his horse, and swept her from her saddle. With a little sob she lay against his breast.

Tenderly, with a great reverence, he held her. With a shaking hand, he stroked gently, the waves of burnished hair.

"That is why you have never told me—you loved me, John?" Her voice throbbed, faltered on the words.

"That is why, you glorious girl," he murmured brokenly.

He felt the tremor in the body he held held so tenderly. She heard the deep broken breaths that came from the man's heart. The two horses turned questioning heads, then ambled ahead in search of the luscious grass.

"Tell me all about it, John," Madge said softly. "And hold me while you talk."

Breast to breast they stood, bathed in the crimson and gold banners of the setting sun. The waters of Smoky River shone like an opal.

In broken, pregnant words, Dale told her. Little shudders shook the listening girl.

"Do you think this Melrose is still searching for you?" she asked fearfully.

"Not a doubt of it, but I feel he would not recognize me if he saw me. My beard was of shorter growth, and I was thin when he last saw me—"

"I have wondered why you wore a beard, but I never dreamed of this—" Her voice broke.

"And you can love me knowing—" Dale paused.

"John," Madge's voice was solemn, "if a man killed my father, and the law freed that man, then I, too, would wreak retribution. I love you, dear, my dear."

Through the still air came the harsh summons of the supper gong. Madge drew herself gently from Dale's encircling arms.

"We must return, John. To-morrow, we shall ride again," she said gently.

During that long night Madge lay with wide, somber eyes staring through the darkness of her tent. The wind swept down from the mountains, rustling the tree tops with its cool breath. A nightbird over in the swamps raised his plaintive and mournful voice.

In the line of tents where the men slept, Dale sat on the edge of his cot, head buried in his arms. Toward dawn he strode to the entrance flap; stood looking out over the quiet camp toward Madge's tent.

"I have kept my promise to you, Frank," he murmured, "and I have wrecked my own happiness."

His resolve was made. Even if Madge and her father were willing, he could not marry the girl. He would not bring his dread apprehension, his constant suspense, into her life.

"I must always live amid the threatening clouds," he said as he gazed across the camp, "but for her, the sunlight."

XIII.

"I SHOULD like to go down the river in the canoe," Madge said, the following evening. "I want to spend our usual hour before supper on the water. I've been riding all day and am tired."

Dale gazed at the dark circled eyes. There was a haunting sadness in their violet depths. As the two walked to the river where the canoe lay, McDermott gazed after them with troubled eyes.

"It has come to my girl," he thought, "and love has not brought her happiness. I must have a talk with her. I like Johnson; he seems to be a man clear through, but I know nothing about him. Lord, I wish my girl's mother were living."

The man sighed heavily as he watched the two step into the canoe.

Under Dale's powerful stroke the craft swung down stream. They sat silent for a

time, each content to be near the other. After a bit, Madge leaned forward.

"I have thought it all out, John," she said gently. "Father must be told, and then with or against his wishes, I am going to marry you. We will leave Canada. Go to the States, or to England, wherever you prefer—"

"You glorious girl! God bless you," Dale murmured brokenly. "But I have thought it out, too, Madge. It would be a poor return I could give for your sacrifice, your love, if I let you share the life of a fugitive. For that, I shall always be."

"Yet, life with you would be happiness, John," Madge said wistfully. "I am willing to cast in my lot with you."

They swept down the river. For many minutes neither spoke. There are times when words are futile, when one can read the unspoken thought of the other. Presently Dale swung the canoe toward shore.

"For the last time," he said simply, "I want to hold you in my arms."

The girl's eyes grew misty. Silently she watched Dale's brooding face. When the canoe struck sand, he lifted her in his arms, and stepped ashore. Tenderly, he strained the weight of her body against him.

As they stood thus a horseman cantered slowly down the river trail. He saw the two figures, gazed steadily at Dale's back, watched the man's profile as Dale turned his head. He was about to enter the woods, and so continue his ride to the camp, when he heard Dale's voice.

Abruptly he reined in his horse. A low whistle of astonishment broke from his lips.

"His voice!" he thought swiftly. "I would know it any place, but how Dale has changed!"

Melrose drew his short barreled gun from his coat pocket; he was still dressed in his frontier costume, and so did not wear belt and holster.

He left his horse and stole noiselessly toward the absorbed man and woman.

"The end of the trail, Dale," he said gravely as he covered the other with his weapon.

With a sharp ejaculation Dale wheeled. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Madge stood as though turned to stone.

"Who is this man?" Madge whispered through stiff lips.

"Sergeant Melrose, of the Northwest Mounted." The words fell mechanically, without life, from Dale's white lips.

"How did you find me, Melrose?" he asked in that dull voice.

"After losing months around Athabaska and Lac la Biche, I doubled back to the town. There, a few weeks ago, I met a man named Henri, a trapper come in for supplies. Henri is a good natured chap, and a great talker." Melrose paused, then continued: "He was proud of his pulling you through snow-blindness and burned lungs. I got all the information I needed."

Henri, who would have cut off his hand before he would have knowingly injured him, was Dale's thought.

"But he did not know where I was making for when I left."

Madge quivered at the dull, hopeless tones. She stared unwinkingly at Melrose's gun.

"He had his Indian follow you for three days. The old fellow likes you; wanted to feel sure you were all right. I've lost a lot of time chasing down these clews; but when I heard about this road going through, I thought there might be just a chance that you had joined the outfit. You might have heard of it, as I did—in Whitecourt.

"We'll go on to the camp, Dale, and get another horse," Melrose continued. "Then we leave immediately for Edson. Will get a train out of there."

A sudden husky note crept into his voice. In the death-like face Dale turned on him, his first flash of triumph turned to ashes. The promotion he knew would follow this capture seemed as a worthless thing.

There was a flash of gray as Madge sprang forward, knocking the gun from Melrose's hand.

"Quick, in the canoe!" she cried hoarsely.

Even as she spoke Dale sprang to the boat. In an instant he had put out from shore, and was dipping his paddle with long, powerful strokes.

Meanwhile Madge twined her arms around Melrose. A desperate strength lay in those clinging arms. A few precious mo-

ments passed before the officer could extricate himself and recover his gun.

He sprang to his horse and tore down the trail. A bend in the river hid the fleeing canoe.

Madge fought a dizziness that was overwhelming her. Her heart beat in thick, suffocating throbs; the water of the river seemed to come up and engulf her. She slipped to her knees and forward to her face.

XIV.

As Melrose rounded the bend he saw the canoe far ahead of him. It was making swiftly, head on for the rapids.

Deliberately Dale drove the craft on. He knew those dangerous rapids, he knew the whirlpools that lay at the bottom of the falls ahead, yet he kept on.

"Better to die in the water," he thought, "than death on the gallows."

He did not attempt to make the opposite shore, for he knew Melrose's bullets would splinter the craft before he could get out of gun range. And in the river his body could be recovered.

He would not return to Edmonton, either alive or dead. In the whirlpool he would disappear, never to return.

Grimly he went down the long stretch of rapids that were filled with rocks. The waves were so large that they threatened to swamp the canoe. Through the spray he saw dimly Melrose's horse as he plunged along the bank. Faintly he heard the ping of bullets as the steel hit the water.

He entered a chute, about an eighth of a mile long; the water became deeper, the waves higher. When the boat entered a trough it was impossible for him to see over the top. Huge volumes of spray shrouded him when he emerged from the deep walled, watery cañon.

As the spray lifted he could see the shore. Nothing moved, he could hear no gun shots. For the first time an exultant breath rose to his lips.

Ahead of him the water was plunging madly over huge rocks. Guiding the craft with his paddle, he swept on between them. One moment he was in the trough of a wave, the surging torrent rushing around him; a moment later he was borne high on its crest, to dash on into the swirling, foamy rapids. He heard the roar of the falls ahead.

"Madge, glorious Madge," he thought "Do you know my last conscious thought is of you?"

The canoe leaped forward like a racehorse; enveloped in spray, he felt the boat fall. Ite took the leap safely. Half filled with water, the craft careened wildly. As Dale steadied her he saw the whirlpool in the distance.

A sudden surge of hope rose in him, for the river had narrowed. Thick growing trees spread their long arms out over the water.

With his powerful strength Dale shot the rapidly filling canoe across the rapids toward the nearest low hanging branch.

Standing in water, he poised, watched his chance. As the craft swept under that far-reaching bough he sprang, caught it in his hands. For a moment he hung suspended, the water boiling and raging beneath his dangling feet.

Hand over hand he went the length of that branch, until his body swung against the tree trunk. He lowered himself from bough to bough until he fell lightly on his feet.

A grim smile lighted his haggard face. "The trail lengthens, Melrose," he said aloud.

He stared around him. In the near distance the peaks of the Rockies rose majestic, snow crowned.

"The nearest station is Jasper," he reflected. "If I can make it I'm safe. Lucky I have some money on me."

He strode on briskly for an hour. The sun was setting behind the range when he paused.

He heard the soft thud of hoofs behind him and sprang behind a tree of enormous girth, but too late. Melrose was on him, drawn gun in his hand.

Through his powerful field glasses he had watched the canoe emerge from the cañon, take the leap at the falls, and had spurred his horse, until the beast was dripping lather.

"I repeat again, Dale, we have reached

the end of the trail. Walk on ahead. We shall make Jasper to-night."

His voice was hard, grim.

XV.

THE two men stood in the anteroom awaiting the commissioner's pleasure. Dale glanced down at the steel bracelets encircling his wrists.

"I won't put them on you if you give me your word you will make no further attempt at escape," Melrose had said.

"I will get away if I can," Dale had answered quietly, so the handcuffs linked his wrist to Melrose.

A red-coated, blue trousered sergeant beckoned. The men stepped forward briskly. The door of the commissioner's office closed behind them.

"I have the honor to report, sir, that I have returned with my prisoner," Melrose spoke tensely.

The commissioner turned his penetrating glance from Melrose's rugged, iron-jawed face to Dale, who met those eyes calmly. The waters were closing over him. Well, he would not cringe, was his thought.

"I want all the details later," the commissioner was saying. "I congratulate you, sergeant. The morale of the Northwest remains unbroken. I shall gazette your promotion, immediately. Now give me a sketch of the events of the past ten months."

He listened with impassive face as Melrose briefly outlined his long search. Then he said: "I have made many efforts to get in touch with you. All were unsuccessful." He paused, toying with his pencil.

"Step into my inner office," he went on. "Remain there until I summon you."

With peculiar gaze he watched the two men as they crossed the floor. When the door closed on them he reached for his telephone receiver.

Side by side the two men sat on the bench in the inner room. Melrose stared before him with unseeing eyes; finally he turned to the silent man at his side.

"Dale." His voice was husky. "Dale, I feel it is my own death that is approaching. My God, man, can you understand how I feel? This is agony for me. Many times on the ride back the temptation to loosen the bracelets, and turn my back on you, was so great I could hardly overcome it—" The husky voice broke.

"Thanks, Melrose," Dale replied simply. "I may have an inkling of how you feel—our acquaintance is of long standing—but an oath cannot be broken—by a man of honor. I kept my oath to Frank that Chester should suffer—you have kept your oath to the Dominion. We have both—" There was a tremor in the quiet voice.

"I have thought duty was the highest thing in life," Melrose went on, "but this time it is hell, Dale. Instead of feeling I have achieved something, I feel like—like—damn it, Dale, do you understand?"

His voice rose fiercely.

To Dale's astonishment a mist spread over Melrose's eyes. He stared incredulously.

"Yes, stare, if you will. Damn it, I'm not ashamed of that moisture."

"Melrose, you are making too much of what I did for you. Why man, any one with a grain of humanity would have done the same. And remember, I cherish no ill will toward you—" Dale's voice was deep. The tortured heart nakedly revealed in Melrose's eyes, stirred him to the depths.

The men sat silent a few moments. Finally Melrose said: "If there is anything that I can do for you, Dale? God, man, I'd cut my two hands off if it would help you."

Dale cleared his throat. He, too, was having trouble with that lump that would not swallow.

"Send word, if you will, to Madge McDermott, at the construction camp on Smoky River. Anything you can say to help her—after it's—over—I'll appreciate."

He looked down at Melrose's hand. A splash had traveled down those grizzled cheeks and had fallen on those weather-tanned fingers."

"She's the one woman, Melrose," he went on, "but I met her too late."

The deep melancholy in the low voice made Melrose quiver.

The men lapsed into silence, a clock on the desk ticked away the minutes.

"What are we waiting for?" Dale asked in a low voice.

"Commitment papers, probably. This is an unusual delay, however," his companion returned. "Dale, I never knew what real suffering was in my life until now."

"Take them off, Melrose." Dale indicated the handcuffs. "I won't make a break."

Clumsily Melrose fitted the key, for his fingers were shaking. The two men clasped hands; a long, deep gaze of farewell lay in their eyes.

Abruptly Dale strode to the window, and stood staring out at the distant tops of the Parliament houses. The door opened briskly. A corporal beckoned.

Heavily Melrose rose to his feet; waited until Dale crossed the room to his side. With lagging steps they walked to the outer office.

The commissioner stood in the center of the room. As the two men paused he stepped aside swiftly.

In a wheeled chair, blanket-covered, sat Ward Chester! At first the men did not recognized him. White, thin hair straggled to his collar, the pasty hued skin of his face hung in loose wrinkles from the once fat cheeks.

The eyes lay in hollow, darkened sockets. The once heavy figure was shriveled, emaciated.

"Good God!" The words broke simultaneously from the two amazed men.

"Ward Chester!" Melrose's voice came in a whoop of joy. Dale's dry lips could only whisper the name.

"Leave us alone." Chester's voice came quavering in the tones of an old man.

Melrose, mad with joy, threw his arms around Dale.

"He's alive!" he shouted. Then he recollected himself. With a flush on his rugged face he backed away; saluted the commissioner.

"It's quite all right, sergeant," the big man smiled. "Come with me; we will leave them alone."

At the door he said softly to the excited Melrose: "Chester refuses to prosecute Dale for shooting with intent to kill, so we can do nothing."

The man shrugged and gave Melrose a meaning look.

The silence in the room grew strained. Dale had not as yet adjusted himself to the shock of Chester's living presence.

"You wanted to make me pay, Dale," the voice came weary, quavering. "You have succeeded. I am paralyzed, I have lost the woman I love, I have lost many friends. Half the town believes I killed Frank. I have suffered, Dale. I shall suffer until the grave closes over me. Then God have mercy on my soul—" The weary voice trailed away.

"I thought you were dead," Dale said.

"Suspended animation. Wells, the undertaker, applied the usual tests they use—so he told me—before proceeding to embalm. When he pricked the skin at my wrist the blood came. Not satisfied with that, he also applied the hot iron to my other wrist. A blister formed, proving conclusively that life still lingered. Had I been dead the skin would have burned, but not blistered."

The weary voice paused.

"We are quits, Dale. Now go, man; get out of my sight—"

In a daze Dale turned, uncertainty in his steps.

"Melrose," he called in shaking voice.

The door was flung open. Taking Dale's arm Melrose led him from the room. They stepped out into the summer day.

Then realization came to Dale.

"Melrose, wire Madge. Tell her I'm leaving on the two-forty."

"Just have time enough to draw some cash from the bank, and pack a bag; meet me at the station—"

Oblivious to the stares of passers-by the two men faced each other, while their hands dug deep into the other's shoulders, glowing eyes deepening with joy. "Have them deliver the wire to the camp. I don't care what it costs—"

"Right-o," Melrose boomed.

The men separated, went swinging down the street. If they walked on asphalt they did not know it, for they were treading air.

THE END

Thundering Dawns

By WILL McMORROW

Author of "The Sun-Makers," "Wings of Adventure," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

STEWART HULL is released from Sing Sing prison, where he has served five years after a conviction for manslaughter on the false testimony of Edmund Sanderson, who has married Hull's *fiancée* after she rejected him at the time of his incarceration. Hull enlists in the Eighty-Eighth Regiment of New York, which becomes the One Hundred and Eighty-Eighth Infantry. During his training period he becomes acquainted with a delightful young girl named Martha Lane, only to learn that she is the cousin of Mr. Sanderson. To make matters worse, Sanderson, commissioned as a lieutenant, happens to be shifted to C Company of the One Hundred and Eighty-Eighth, in which Stewart Hull has been made a corporal. A few days later when, at the behest of his captain, Stewart is sparring with a member of his company, training for the regimental heavyweight boxing bouts, Lieutenant Sanderson comes by; and orders a sergeant to arrest Hull for fighting.

CHAPTER IX *(Continued).*

SANDERSON BUTTS IN.

"WE'LL investigate this cock-and-bull story about training," Sanderson continued. "Just now there happens to be a regulation against fighting in the camp, and I saw you deliberately abusing a man lower in rank than yourself. That's sufficient."

"Beg pardon, lieutenant," Sergeant Jennings interrupted disgustedly; "but Captain Donovan's own instructions were we were to train here."

"We'll see," Sanderson threatened, and turned on his heel.

"Good thing you kept your temper," Jennings said, as he unlaced Stewart's gloves. "I was afraid you'd get yourself in a peck of trouble by sassin' him back. You looked ready to murder him."

"I was," Stewart admitted grimly.

"He sure has been pickin' on you lately at drill. He likes you a lot. I can almost see the dots runnin' from them fishy eyes of his to you like they do in the funny pictures, every time he lamps you. I'd like to knock him from over them knock-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 12.

knees. I better see the old man, an' have him tell this bird about the fights. He thinks we're kiddin'."

He located the captain before Sanderson did, and later, when Sanderson made his complaint, Captain Celluloid Jim explained the matter satisfactorily, even if there was an undercurrent of sarcasm apparent. There was no particular love lost between Jim Donovan and his subordinate.

"You see," Celluloid Jim explained, looking up from the duty-roster he was busy on, "I've got the old-fashioned idea that a soldier should be a fighting man. So I encourage bouts. Besides, this has the sanction of the general. That ought to be good enough for both of us."

"Quite so," Sanderson said hastily. "I didn't know the general agreed."

"Another thing, lieutenant," Donovan drawled. "My men aren't telltales, but I hear you insinuated Hull and Jennings were lying to-day. I wouldn't do that, if I were you.

"Discipline is discipline, I know; but this isn't the Kaiser's outfit. These men aren't saluting machines. It isn't always safe to call an American soldier a liar to his face. He's liable to forget his general orders for a minute."

"I suppose they're the soul of honor," Sanderson sneered. "Enlisted men usually are. That's why they're in the ranks. Our friend Hull, for instance."

"What about Hull?" Donovan's gray eyebrows lowered threateningly. "I don't much care for your highfalutin' way of referring to my outfit, Lieutenant Sanderson. I'll back 'em to the last ditch, an' they'd back me, an' that's that! Corporal Hull is one of the best men in the company, since you mention it."

Sanderson shrugged his shoulders. "Do you know his record? I knew him in peace time, you know."

Donovan tapped his forehead. "I have the history of every man in the outfit right in here. I know his record better—not meaning to insinuate anything—better than I know yours. I think it's time for guard mount now. You're liable to be late."

Sanderson saluted and withdrew.

"Knew him in peace time, eh?" Celluloid Jim muttered, frowning at the wooden floor of the tent. "I wonder—I wonder now."

CHAPTER X.

SPITE WORK.

UNDER the deft management of Sergeant Jennings, the training periods progressed in the open space behind the tent. Sanderson, gone for a week's leave of absence to New York, was no longer a source of discord.

His platoon, to which Stewart and Jennings belonged, was temporarily taken over by one of the other company officers, Lieutenant Macadam, a keen enough sportsman to be interested in seeing the company win the regimental championship. He gave the boxing enthusiasts their own way as much as possible, only interfering to add a word of advice or encouragement.

Gradually Stewart began to build up the defense that Jennings so urgently pressed. The instinct of the fighter, without which lectures and volumes on boxing are wasted, little by little taught Stewart the uses of his elbows and padded hands in warding off crashing attacks with the minimum effort.

He fell naturally into his own style of crouch, shortening his neck, raising his shoulders, hollowing his stomach, protecting the vulnerable points of jaw, eyes, heart, and nerve centers, accepting the unavoidable blow where it would do the least harm.

Stewart soon learned to use his legs with the smallest amount of effort, in side-stepping, springing to the attack, leaping out of danger, responding instantly to the hurry calls from an alert brain. He learned to shift his head just the necessary couple of inches that meant the difference between an opponent's blow landing fairly, and missing—the difference between a possible knock-out and a slightly scraped ear. He caught on to the tricks of in-fighting, and the proper way to make and break from a clinch with the final jab.

All of this was not new to him, but the daily practice avoiding and counterbalanc-

ing the bisonlike rushes of the Greek, and the craftier boxing of Jennings and Finneran, brought the forgotten lessons home.

Preliminary bouts were held in the newly completed auditorium the week before the real bouts. They were short, five-round affairs to eliminate all but two contenders for the regimental championship.

Stewart found himself for the first time in his life in the center of a brilliantly lit ring facing several thousand eager men, noisily anxious for the fray.

"Feelin' kind of jumpy?" questioned Jennings, adjusting Stewart's gloves.

"Well, I'm not feeling so darned cocky about it."

"That 'll wear off. You ain't used to the crowd, that's all.

The first round revealed Jennings to be right. The slight nervousness Stewart felt was forgotten when the gong rang, and thereafter the man from Company C was too busy to worry. The fighter he was picked to face had quite a small reputation in his own way, judging by the applause that greeted him from his friends in the audience.

He was somewhat heavier than Stewart, but shorter, and lacked an inch or two of reach. His method was the rushing, slashing attack, using everything he had, horse, foot and guns, in order to reach a quick decision.

After boxing with Georgeopoulos, the Grecian cow-catcher, there was nothing dangerously new in this to Stewart. He caught a neat uppercut at the very beginning that made his head ring like a bell, but after that he fought warily, managing to close the other man's left eye in the second round, and coming in strongly at the end of the fourth with a terrific straight right that sank into the other's midriff, finishing him for the evening.

"Short but sweet!" chuckled Jennings, throwing a bathrobe around Stewart. "Boy! Company C is going into the main bout, an' somethin' tells me it's goin' to win! My pay for this month goes on you."

"Don't be too sure," Stewart warned him, rubbing a tender spot on his ribs, where a wild blow had landed. "They may not all be like this one."

"There's only one left," Jennings responded, pointing across the crowded auditorium now rapidly emptying. "That big guy with the broken nose there is your meat. He was the winner last night. See him near the door?"

Stewart took a look at the man indicated as he passed out the entrance. He did not look like anybody's "meat" unless it should be a pretty tough and indigestible variety of chuck steak. He had a menacing scowl beside the broken nose, a pair of blooming cauliflower ears, and the sinewy build of a man-eating gorilla.

"What d'ye think of him?" Jennings asked.

"If that's what you call my meat, I'm a vegetarian," Stewart said cheerfully. "Your month's pay begins to look bad. What is he by profession—a regular pug, or does he just look that way?"

"He's got a kind of a rep. 'Bull' Carroll is his name. He used to be regimental champion of the old Double Eights. He had to be pretty good to be that, but that don't always mean a lot."

"Seems to me I saw him somewhere," Stewart muttered in a puzzled undertone. "Probably at some armory bout a long time ago."

The remainder of the week passed quickly. Lieutenant Macadam excused Stewart from guard duty, which would have fallen due in the regular course the night before the big bout.

"The other men don't mind being pushed ahead on the roster," Macadam explained, "when it means giving you a chance to win the championship. Neither do I. Hop to it, now, Hull, and put in some intensive training. We're all rooting for you."

The day preceding the important affair the company tumbled shivering out of their cots at reveille roll-call, and found Lieutenant Sanderson waiting for them in the company street. He had returned the night before from his leave of absence, and Macadam was relieved of his temporary command.

Sanderson's smile as he looked along the line of sleepy faces was poisonous. He had not forgotten the snub he had received from old Jim Donovan. It soothed his feelings

to keep these "impertinent" enlisted men waiting under a chilling drizzle of rain while he told them a few things.

It was especially pleasant, since Captain Donovan was absent on leave to town, and would not be back until a few hours before the auditorium bouts. This left Sanderson, by virtue of seniority, in command of the company.

"Hereafter," he snarled spitefully, "I want to see a little more order around here. Some of you enlisted men seem to think you are running the company. There are one or two corporals here that need to be taken down a peg.

"Stand still there on the end! The rain isn't going to hurt you. I don't suppose all of you are used to anything better in peace time. Take the reports again, sergeant. You hurried through last time, and I'm afraid you missed some. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if half the company had deserted during the night."

He kept them waiting again after the top sergeant had made his report, and finally dismissed them. After mess he called for the first sergeant.

"I've been looking over the guard roster. I find Corporal Hull's name overlooked. He should go on guard in his turn to-night. What's the reason for it?"

The sergeant shifted his campaign hat from one hand to another. He foresaw trouble ahead.

"You see, lieutenant," he explained carefully, "the captain thought he ought to let him off, on account of the bouts to-morrow night. He represents the company—"

"Never heard of it." Sanderson's pudgy hand reached for the pen on the table. "Captain Donovan would have told me, I'm sure. I prefer to think it is an error. The man should do his duty like the rest. I'll change it now."

"But if the lieutenant will wait until Cap—"

"Stop talking back!" Sanderson snapped. "Do what I tell you. That's all."

The "top," a man of fifteen years' service in the Double Eights, left, very red, and fifteen minutes later Macadam hurried in.

"Say, Sanderson," he blurted, "what's the idea of throwing a monkey wrench into the works? Hull shouldn't go on twenty-four hours guard now, and come off guard an hour before the fight starts. He'll be in no condition."

"He only has to do his duty. He can't shirk with me."

"But you must know he'll get no rest in a guard tent, up half the night in this weather, posting his reliefs, and all day to-morrow—"

"The regulations," Sanderson interrupted smoothly, "make no provision for pugilism. I'm in charge here, and I'll carry out the regular orders. So save your breath. This fellow goes on guard, and I'm going to make it a point to see that he doesn't evade it, either. If he tries any of his low tricks on me by 'going sick,' I'll have him specially examined and punished."

"I don't know what's in your mind, Sanderson," said Macadam wrathfully; "but you're just about ruining our chances."

Sanderson raised his colorless eyebrows. "Really? I'm not worried about your chances, my dear Macadam. I don't believe in boxing anyway."

"Believe me, I wish you did. I'd take you on for a round or two for nothing a side. But what's the use of wasting time? As you say, you don't believe in fighting even for sport."

He slammed out, and Lieutenant Sanderson, still smirking, reached for the telephone.

"Hello! Headquarters? This is the athletic instructor of the second battalion speaking. Where is Private Bull Carroll quartered?"

CHAPTER XI.

BULL CARROLL MAKES A MISTAKE.

CLANG!

Stewart came out of his corner at the sound of the gong, and the clamor of the three thousand men of the Double Eights hushed to a murmur of expectant delight. Nothing enthralls the minds and hearts of Uncle Sam's fighting nephews as much as a ring battle, and, judging by the

looks of the two men sparring for an opening under the electric lights, this promised to be a real bout right from the start.

They were not disappointed.

Following the last minute instructions of Jennings to carry the fight to the other man's corner, Stewart pressed hard to land the first blow, rushing his man against the ropes in the first onset, and clipping two fast hooks to the body that brought Bull Carroll's scowl further into prominence. The champion fought warily, cautiously, with his close-cropped head sunk between hairy shoulders, with the steady coolness of long ring experience.

He had a wicked left, and knew how to make use of it. As he ducked a smashing right, he whipped one—two—three cutting ones to Stewart's ribs, raising red welts over the rippling muscles and bringing a roar of cheers from the smoke filled auditorium. Stewart covered quickly, but left an opening that Bull jumped for with a straight right that opened a cut beneath the younger man's left eye.

Blood trickled from the wound, and with the shouts of his supporters in his ears Bull leaped in, both arms swinging wide open. Twice he landed heavily over the heart. Stewart fell into a clinch, was separated, and stopped a driving smash again to the left eye that sent him reeling against the ropes just as the bell sounded for the end of the round.

Jennings was through the ropes in a jiffy, ministering to Stewart's injured eye, Georgeopoulos right behind.

"In my country"—he glared at Bull Carroll's corner—"we carry da knife for fight. I will loaned you one—"

"Shut up, you big dumb-bell," Jennings snapped, "an' rub his legs. If you had a little more sense you'd be almost human. How's it feelin', buddy?"

"All right, so far," Stewart gasped. "I feel last night's lack of sleep, though. How is the eye?"

"Good enough with the plaster. Keep it away from him. He'll be leadin' for it now. Get that right-hand piledriver of yourn workin'. He can't stand the gaff. Don't try to outbox him."

But in that second round Stewart did not find it easy to get his right into action. Bull Carroll opened first with a right to the face, cleverly blocking a return, danced out of danger, and plunged in again with a series of swift jabs, one of which started Stewart's left eye going again.

Desperately he tried to come to close quarters, and in his anxiety missed Bull widely, swinging around and leaving an exposed side that tempted Bull to try for a whirlwind finish.

He smashed an uppercut under Stewart's chin, and followed with a terrific hail of rights and lefts that brought Stewart to his knees in the center of the ring.

"Finish him, Bull! Finish him!" the benches yelled.

Stewart staggered to his feet at the count of six, and fell into a clinch while his brain fought madly to throw off the effects of that deadening blow. None knew better than he what the twenty-four hours of guard duty had done to lower his stamina—unless it were Sanderson, smiling in pleased anticipation, at the ring-side.

The referee broke them apart, and Bull charged again. But that few seconds grace had helped. Stewart met the rush with a straight-arm right that he had just sense enough left to deliver, and it had steam behind it. It caught Bull on that broken nose, and if it could do the nose little damage it succeeded in throwing him back on the defensive.

Stewart availed himself of the opportunity to lash out with two more stinging blows to the heart, and Bull gasped as his back struck the ropes. The bell found both men groggy with Bull the fresher of the two.

Jennings worked silently this time, rubbing, patching, refreshing his man for the round to come. Stewart felt tired and empty, but grinned through puffed-out lips at the anxiety on his second's face.

"Looks kind of bad for your pay-check, Jen, unless I make a quick comeback in the next frame."

"I ain't a-worryin' about the dough," Jennings answered gruffly. "I ain't a piker. It's a good scrap whether we win or lose, an' we'll win!"

"Sure!"

The gong hurtled Bull from his corner straight at his adversary. Stewart stepped aside on tired legs, and launched a driving one into the ominous frown that almost lifted Bull from his feet.

He cut loose savagely with a double-handful of rights and lefts to Stewart's ribs, and was met by another searing blow that closed one eye completely. A third ripping jab following on the others left its mark in a patch of red on the side below Bull's brawny left arm; and the good eye glittered dangerously.

Bull Carroll learned his art in a rough school whose axiom was that everything was fair in love and war—particularly war. To enrage an opponent, to use any trick to throw him off his guard, or make him lose the essential poise and coolness, these were permissible under that code.

As Stewart, badly mauled but efficient, bored in to the attack, Bull clinched and held.

"I got your number, bo," he whispered. "It's 2345 Sing Sing! You're yaller like all them crooks!"

Stewart wriggled free even before the referee's arm intervened. Bull Carroll's knowledge of men was limited after all. His experience had been that men went hot with rage, swung wildly, ran riot in a Berserker fury.

He had before him a tired man, worn out with lack of sleep and the battering of three rounds at the hands of an expert. The battle was already in Bull's hands only wanting the final rushing knockout. Bull had to try to gild the lily.

Stewart backed away blocking the blows that came his way. He was cold, but it was not the cold of fear, rather the chilled steel tempering of the fighting man on his mettle. There was only one thing for him to do while he had the strength to stand, and consciousness remained—to beat that leering plug-ugly to the canvas.

Wearily he warded off the vicious swing Bull aimed for his jaw, and sent a swift uppercut to the mouth in return. The scowling face before him receded, appeared again suddenly in a whirl of gloves, and Stewart found himself on the ground, propped on one arm, with a ringing in his ears louder than the roar of the fight fans in the auditorium, and the referee standing over him with fateful hand marking the seconds.

At the count of nine Stewart reeled to his feet, struggling for reason, covering up to guard against the hail of blows, fighting for time.

"Clinch! Clinch!" Jennings shouted above the pandemonium.

A murderous left to the stomach sent Stewart down again. It seemed to him that blow had torn him open. The ringing bell-like booming in his ears swelled louder. Faintly he could hear the waves of sound sweeping across the ring. Somehow, the instinct of the fighter brought him to his feet.

He had taken a long count—eight seconds—but in spite of the agony of that stomach blow, the damage done in the first knockdown was being repaired. The arteries of youth were again surging their red reserves into the battlefront—pushing back the veil of unconsciousness, pouring strength second by second into the flaccid muscles.

Bull stepped back coolly, and set himself for the final coup-de-grace. It was slow in coming. There was all the time in the world, Bull thought.

In that short pause, Stewart, with a last flicker of energy, lurched at his enemy, forced his tired arm to swing with deadly force at the unprotected jaw before him. It caught Bull fairly on the vulnerable angle, and shocked him into senselessness like the kick from a high voltage line.

It was a lucky punch, aimed more or less at random, but it had behind it all the reserve of power left in Stewart's body. No nerves could stand that crash of bone against bone. Bull Carroll went down to the canvas in a heap, and took the full count with hardly a move of his hairy arms.

Stewart felt his gloved hand raised aloft, and found Jennings, Georgeopoulos, Braisted, Lieutenant Macadam, and Celluloid Jim all around him in the ring at once, and all trying to talk at once, above the bedlam raised by the Double Eights.

"Good work, Hull!" Donovan congratulated in huge delight.

"Boy, oh, boy!" Jennings shouted. "What a wallop! I bet he felt that down

to his feet. An' me about to give up my dough two seconds before!"

But Stewart was looking beyond them at the rows of faces dimly discernible through one eye closed entirely, and the other blurred.

He could not be certain, but he wondered if he hadn't glimpsed for just a fleeting second, a pair of gray eyes underneath a big hat, in the group of women in the officers' section of the big hall, now emptying.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FAREWELL DANCE.

STEWART spent several days on light details, assigned to him by Captain Jim to rest up and restore Stewart's physiognomy to "normalcy" more suitable to the parade ground. The silver cup, donated by the officers of the regiment, was paraded along the company streets by the cheering members of Company C, flaunted in the faces of the unlucky units, and deposited in the auditorium glass case.

There was no purse or other reward involved in the winning of the regimental championship; the Double Eights were not of the breed of modern ring divas who will only sing to the clink of the cashier's cage. The Double Eights were satisfied with the joy of the battle, and the thrill of the conquest.

There were a good many men of different outfits that came around to congratulate Stewart. Among them came Bull Carroll. It had taken his handlers a full minute to bring him out of dreamland the night of the fight, and he was still bewildered by the unexpected turn that had changed an easy victory inside the ten-round limit to a decided defeat in three rounds.

He bore no ill-will. If he was ruthless and at times vicious in the ring, it was part of the game as he played it, and he showed a mild surprise that Stewart did not greet him effusively.

They were alone in the tent at the time, Stewart busy preparing for Saturday inspection.

"Take it from me, bo, 'at right of yourn got a mean dose of chloroform in it. I heard de birdies singin' me to sleep after I met dat sudden wallop. An' me t'inkin' I had yuh licked!"

"You did," Stewart agreed coldly, "until you pulled that line—you know the time I mean—when we were in a clinch. It was dirty business in a way, I don't mind telling you; but it lost you the championship. It braced me to win even when I was out on my feet."

"Say!" Carroll's eyes bulged. "You mean to tell me I lost—"

He smashed a heavy hand down on his knee. His lip curled in a threatening snarl.

"De dirty little skunk! An' me thinkin' he was tippin' me off right! Told me to get your nanny wid that!"

"Who told you?"

"Dat fish-eyed shavey, Sanderson! Came around special to put me wise yesterday. Made a cluck outa me in front of the crowd—dat's the guy I'm goin' to get, orficer or no orficer, an' when I do, s'help me, I'll make him wish he kidded somebody else!"

"Better go easy," Stewart warned. "Leavenworth jail is full of fellows that took a slam at their officers."

"Don't worry, bozo. I know my parsnips. But he ain't goin' to get away with makin' a bum outa Bull Carroll. I'll wait to get him right."

Jennings came in from drill, and shook his equipment from his shoulders onto his cot. He nodded to Carroll.

"Hello, Bull."

What Bull Carroll said as he went out might have been "Hello," but it sounded suspiciously as if he had left off the last letter. He was not feeling sociable.

Jennings forgot him immediately. There were more important topics to discuss.

"Heard the latest?" he queried. "Sanderson's been transferred—at his own request—to another company. We won't see so much of him now. He and the old man had a run-in. Celluloid Jim told him right out he was trying to pull the strings to get assigned to a training camp to get out of going over seas, an' Shifty Edmund didn't like that."

"Do you think Sanderson was really trying to duck the front?"

"Darned tootin' he was. A guy in headquarters gave me the low-down. But there was somethin' else wrong, I guess. Breitman heard Celluloid tell Sanderson he'd ought to be in jail breakin' rocks, or words to that effect. He didn't catch what they said. But I guess Shifty Eddie is goin' to have to smell gunpowder after all."

"Anything new about going across?" Stewart looked up eagerly.

"There's a rumor that we're down for the first unit to break camp some time this month. I got that from headquarters, too —this guy I know heard it from another guy that's 'dog-robber' for a brigadier. I don't know why they don't shove us across. The Froggies need us badly—"

"So do the British," Sarsfield added from the tent opening, as the rest of the squad came in. "Don't you men ever read the papers?"

"Don't believe what you see in the newspapers," Jennings scoffed. "I read a story the Germans have a gun shelling Paris from seventy miles or seven hundred, I forget which."

"Read between the lines," Sarsfield said impressively. "Discount the necessary exaggerations and propaganda, and you'll realize how badly we're needed right now in France. The Fifth British army has been wiped out—last week's drive smashed them to smithereens—the most disastrous defeat a British army has ever suffered in history. The French have their backs to the wall. There are no reserves to call on. That means us—and darned soon if we're going to do any good!"

"Right!" echoed Harrison. "I'm tired marking time here, too, sticking straw dummies with a bayonet."

"In my country," Georgeopoulos orated proudly, "we fight better as here. We throwa-da knife, and—"

"And the fork, too," suggested Finneran wearily. "I've watched you at mess. You're a mean battler with a plate of stew —an' by the way, lay off that 'my country' stuff. This is your country, not Greece."

"Sure," Georgeopolous agreed readily. "I gotta da paper. Thees my best country. I'm American snitzer—whadd'ye say that—sitsiten—"

"Stop sneezin' at us. How about goin' to town to-morrow, Stew? Some of the swell dames is throwin' a party in the town hall for the battalion—kind of a farewell racket with eats an' dancin'. I ain't stepped on a real lady's feet in a ballroom since the Master Steamfitters' Ball."

Stewart looked doubtful. "I dunno. I'm not much of a hand at dancing. I saw the notice on the bulletin board some time ago. I thought it was scheduled for May."

"They pushed it ahead on account of the talk of us draggin' out soon. Come ahead. The skirts will be nutty to meet the guy that K O'd Carroll."

The "guy that K O'd Carroll" did not appear to warm to that prospect, and went ahead putting a glossy polish on a pair of stubborn "issue" shoes. But the next evening he was on hand, among the jostling mob of drab uniforms and colorful dresses, trying to hide a healing but bluish eye in a corner, and at the same time to get a view of the crowd.

He had little hope of seeing Martha there, but the mere chance that he had not been mistaken in the glimpse in the auditorium inspired him to watch the entrances and exits for her. He wandered in and out of the talkative groups for an hour, and started down the stairs to go home.

Harrison, hurrying after him, touched him on the arm.

"What's your hurry, Hull? Some of the fair ones are curious to meet you. You're quite the lion here, you know. There's one especially—a humdinger, too—asked me to bring you around. We're on the balcony."

"Did you get her name?" Stewart was all interest. "Was it Lane?"

"I thought you'd change your mind," Harrison laughed. "It's some outlandish name—Hemswitcher, or Huffelbottam, or something Dutch, but she's a pippin—hey! Come back here! What's in a name?"

Ungraciously Stewart permitted himself to be led by the arm across the dance floor, through a passageway, and up to the balcony, half-hidden behind the drapery of American flags that festooned the hall.

"Here we are!" called Harrison gleefully, and a half dozen girls and dough-

boys waved their hands from a circle of chairs. "Captured the wild man as he was about to escape. Watch him; he's dangerous, Miss Riffle-fluger."

"Buttonschwager was the name," Stewart heard the pleasantest voice in the world announce, "but that was only to make it harder. Lane will do!"

She turned to Stewart, one slim, white arm, bare to the shoulder, extended in greeting, and he clung to the hand, and bowed dumbly around the circle as Harrison introduced him, and turned again to look down into the gray eyes, and they seemed brighter to Stewart Hull than the rhinestones that encircled her shining hair, just as her cheeks seemed to outmatch the pink of the gauzy scarf that draped her shoulders.

Beyond that his mind refused to function. A woman, versed in the art of the exclusive modiste, would have said her frock was of tulle, in which the lights of the rainbow lay imprisoned, that the silver brocaded shoes, inclosing the feet of a Cinderella, had been purchased in no Oklahoma town, that the lacy web of stocking peeping in a subtle curve beneath the dress, was the proudest product of the arts of France, that the green ostrich fan, a fragile branch from the Garden of Eden, meant the labor of many days in a Fifth Avenue shop.

The same wise person, learned in the lore of women, might also have pointed out that it had been Martha Lane that had discovered Stewart in the crowd below, and had sent Harrison galloping after him, and that, although Martha Lane had evaded dancing partners all evening, she readily consented to dance with Stewart Hull, much to the disgust of two first lieutenants and one captain who had been refused.

CHAPTER XIII.

VALE!

THEY made one circuit of the hall, Stewart dancing without particular grace, and bumping into several couples on the jammed floor; and Martha suggested they sit out the rest of the number.

Stewart agreed readily, and she led the way to a piazza opening on a rear garden. He found two vacant chairs in a corner.

"You will be cold here," he frowned. "I'm warm enough without this. These O. D. shirts are thick as blankets."

He took off his coat, and placed it across her shoulders. Despite her protests, she thrilled to the touch of the rough khaki.

"Those flimsy dresses girls wear are too thin," he growled, and she accepted the criticism of an expensive Paris frock meekly.

"Mother thinks so, too," she conceded. "I suppose they are more ornamental than useful. But you wouldn't have me come to a dance in a sweater."

"I wouldn't care if you did. It's not your clothes that I'm interested in so much as you your—"

"I won't risk it," she laughed. "I'm really a fright sometimes. But why didn't you answer my letter?"

"Your letter—to me? You wrote to me?"

"My letter—to you. I wrote to you," she mimicked. "I addressed it to the camp, and told you I was taking a job at the Y—running the library there for the soldiers. I expected to see you—that is, I wondered if you wanted to borrow a book occasionally—anyway Cousin Edmund showed up instead to pester me—"

"I get the play now," Stewart exclaimed savagely. "Cousin Edmund opened the letter. He'd have access to the mail as platoon commander. All the time I was wondering what had happened to you, and why you hadn't let me know."

"I think that's a perfectly awful thing to do," she said indignantly. "I'm glad now I was so rude to him when he showed up."

Stewart waved the matter of Cousin Edmund aside as an unpleasant subject.

"Don't let a little thing like that bother you. Our friend is capable of every low trick in the box. Tell me, were you only trying to do your bit, or did you have to get a job? You know I—well, I'd have been glad to help you out—I don't make much money as a corporal."

She smiled discreetly in the shadow of the veranda. She wondered what difference

it might make to this certain young man who had taken up so much of her waking thoughts if he should discover just how unnecessary it was that she should work at anything.

It was fortunate that Oklahoma was many leagues away, and the fame of the late Big Barney Lane, oil king, had not penetrated to Spartanburg. Stewart Hull was the type repelled rather than attracted by women with money.

"Well," she admitted, "I did have to find work in a way—I had—an urge—it was urgent—"

"I understand," he sympathized quickly. "I've known what it is to be up against it. It probably doesn't pay much, though. I'll scout around for a better paying job around town—"

"Please don't!" she said hurriedly. "Let's—let's talk about you."

An hour and a half later they were still talking, still sitting, regardless alike of catching cold or missing dances, in the same position, Stewart Hull leaning forward to catch a glimpse of the pale oval of her face, with the shadows of eyes and lips beneath the brilliant bandeau on her hair.

In that time they discussed many things—the bout in the auditorium, the school she had just left out West, his daily work in the camp, the war, the type of girl he preferred, the kind of man she liked best, her ambition to be a Red Cross nurse, his favorite color on a girl, the amusing people she met at the library, the proper way to do the Australian crawl, books, movie heroines, tennis, quail shooting, the Kaiser, the tango—everything but the most important thing under the sun that was happening to both of them—something no man or woman can paint on canvas, or put into sentences, or echo in music, or encompass, or evade, or forget forever once its sunshine has flowed into the heart.

Presently the conversation languished. They sat close together, silent, listening to the mournfully sweet strains of an Argentine tango coming faintly from the dance floor. She shivered, and clasped the khaki coat closer around her.

"You're cold?" he asked conscience-stricken. "I've kept you out—"

"No. It wasn't that," she whispered. "I was thinking—it came to me suddenly that now—at this moment, while we're dancing here, men are dying—here and there—in France and Belgium—in the mud and horror—"

He frowned into the darkness.

"You mustn't think of that. That's the rotten part of war; the women are the ones that stay home and suffer. They bear the brunt of it."

"Oh, I shouldn't, I know," she laughed weakly. "No one I know is there. I'm not much of a heroine. There were no brothers to send away, you see—"

Edmund Sanderson appeared in a patch of light from the open door. He looked around, caught sight of the couple in the shadow, and walked toward them. Martha did not complete her sentence. She drew a shade closer to Stewart, and watched Sanderson's jaunty approach. Some premonition of evil chilled her.

Sanderson bowed to her, but his shifty eyes were on Stewart.

"I've been looking for you, Hull. Orders just came to headquarters. We break camp next week for Newport News to take the boat for France. You are on a special detail to the port of embarkation, and must report there without delay. I—er—suggested your going ahead, knowing how anxious you were to get started. I'm afraid you'll not have another chance to get into town, though, before you go."

He turned to Martha. "Are you dancing?"

"No." The voice seemed to come from far away. "Go—away, please."

"Really?" he exclaimed. "I hope this is not bad news for you—also!"

Stewart pointed toward the open doorway. "You heard her, Sanderson. I give you my word if you don't go inside now, I'll take my chances of Leavenworth—"

Sanderson blinked threateningly, but decided not to call the turn. He had an idea from the bout just what might happen to him if his uniform failed to protect him, and he realized he was no brutally courageous Bull Carroll.

"I was about to go, Hull. Don't forget, my bullying friend, what I've told you.

You'll be busy from now until we leave camp. Better say good-by to your friends now."

"Perhaps," Martha faltered, standing up, "perhaps we should go in. I'm much colder than I—I was."

In the light that flowed from the open doorway her face was white—so white the gray eyes looked darker than Stewart had ever seen them. From the dance floor came the traditional singsong notice that the evening was over:

"Good night, ladies. Good night, ladies," the orchestra wailed. "Good night, ladies. We're going to leave you now!"

His hand groped for hers, and the shock of that contact, subtler than a radioed whisper, more powerful than all the dynamos in the world, seemed to throw them together. She clung to him, sobbing.

"Martha!" He fought with a cold lump that seemed to bother his throat. "Martha, dear, I've found you—and I'm to lose you again—but it will only be for awhile."

He pulled her chin up awkwardly and tenderly, and kissed her wet mouth.

"Now," she smiled uncertainly, "I have a soldier to worry about, and sit and count the hours. Listen! They're calling you away from me!"

Faintly, from the distant camp, borne on the night breeze, came the poignantly sweet notes of the bugles blowing "Taps!" Others, fainter, farther off, took up the mournful notes, like echoes fading slowly. calling the soldiers to sleep, to rest to strengthen themselves for the battle that awaited.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANCE.

THROUGH the gray fog, dipping and rolling on a greasy, gray sea, the transports lazed along, heavy with their human cargo. On the flanks of the convoy, like Arabs guarding a slow-moving caravan, the lithe, swift destroyers darted in and out of the line, circling about, watchful men sweeping every acre of ocean with powerful glasses, and examining every bit of wreckage for a submarine periscope.

It was getting close to the end of the journey, and they were passing through the danger zone.

On board their transport the Double Eights slept, ate, talked, gambled, yawned, and would have welcomed even a submarine scare to relieve the monotony of twelve days on a troopship.

Finneran and Harrison, in the galley of the officers' mess, to which they had been detailed as volunteer waiters, discussed the shortcomings of sea life with the colored cook.

"Ain't variety enough for me," grumbled Finneran. "Just the same thing day after day. No trees or scenery to look at. I don't think they's any such thing as a submarine. It's a lot of bunk. Who you fryin' the chicken for, Sam?"

"Dis yeah fowl," said the colored man proudly, "Ah am makin' foh a special delicate bite foh Mr. Sanderson. He's a real spohtin' gen'lman wid his money, an' he says he ain't used to eatin' common grub. Ah expeck he has a high-toned stomick."

"Stomach's upset thinkin' about goin' to war. I could make a bum outa that foul bird myself."

The sea cook shifted the pan farther back on the stove, and changed the subject quickly.

"Boss, you-all ain't never seed any ob dem Yew-boats yet, Ah reckon."

"Th' U-boats?" Harrison asked. "No. Have you?"

"Sho!" the black man responded readily. "Ah reckon Ah seen moh than a hundred. Dey don't skeer me none. No, sah!"

"What do they look like?"

The sea cook searched his imagination. "Kinda like a fish. Dey snoops along under the watah, an' gits underneath an' looks at you through a microscope to see what you-all is—"

"Exactly," Harrison agreed soberly. "As if you were an insect."

"Den the captain of the Yew-boat gets him a pocketful of torpeders, an' says: 'Ah think Ah'll jes lam him,' an' climbs into the conniving tower."

"Very appropriate name for it, too," commented Harrison. "But what—"

A bell sounded above their heads, another clamored in the near-by passage, followed by the crash of a big gun up forward. The sea cook dropped the frying pan as if he had been shot, made a flying jump for the nearest exit, and disappeared in a scramble of apron and feet. Finneran and Harrison consulted the slip bearing the number of their life raft, and followed after.

They found the company at their stations, with the top sergeant calling the roll, and making sure all the men had life preservers.

"Here you are," Stewart called, and tossed them their cork jackets.

"Hey," Finneran protested. "How about we guys that can't swim? These dofunnies ain't goin' to hold us up."

"Good chance to learn," grinned Breitman. "But you won't have to wet your feet this trip. Looks to me as if the destroyers got that one. They just dropped a depth bomb. See them?"

Over the surface of the sea the speedy craft circled, belching forth black smoke. They were like indignant hornets darting about their disturbed nest. The soldiers of the transports, the sailors that stood at their boat stations and falls, glued their eyes to a gray patch of ocean within the circle.

A film of oil appeared, staining the water, spreading its telltale message that another drama of the sea was finished, that another batch of German sailor men had died at their posts.

"Poor devils!" Sarsfield muttered. "They didn't have a chance."

"Hell!" Jennings snorted. "They got as much chance as they'd have given us. They rolled the bones and threw crap instead of a seven, that's all. Look who's here, will you?"

Sanderson came waddling along the deck. He had to waddle. In spite of the hurry and bustle he had managed to look out for himself first, which consisted in climbing into a patent "non-sinkable" suit he had brought along especially for such an occasion. It was the only one on board.

It was made of rubber, inflated with air, and covered him, as a diver's costume would, from neck to feet. He looked like a walking balloon with a pasty face stuck on top of it. As he ambled along he pumped more air into the affair with a little hand bicycle pump, and cast anxious glances over the side.

"Keep cool, men," he quavered. "Don't get excited."

The major commanding the battalion, a gaunt West Pointer, looked down from the bridge, where he had been standing without even a cork jacket—he had been too busy to think of himself—and dropped the cigarette from his mouth.

"What the devil is that diver doing down there?" he roared. "Let him go up forward with the—"

But the temptation had been too much for Finneran. As Sanderson shoved his way through to reach his own company, Finneran's clasp knife neatly pricked the non-sinkable suit. The whole rear compartment of the contraption exploded like a tire blowing out.

Sanderson leaped ahead as if he had received a charge of buckshot. He felt the flabby rear surface of his pneumatic preserver, now become a fatal weight if the boat should sink, and glared around him at the grinning faces of the Company C men.

"You did that, Hull," he snarled. "I'll have you court-martialed as—"

"Nonsense, lieutenant," broke in Celluloid Jim in a low voice. "Hull was nowhere near you. You're more frightened than hurt. Try a cork vest with the rest of us."

Sanderson turned his back abruptly, and walked away as a thin, reedy voice piped up from somewhere in the rear rank.

"Buy me a balloon, daddy?"

"Cut it out, there!" Donovan reprimanded. "Any of you comedians I catch disrespectful to any officer, no matter who it is, will get a nice, *cushy* job peelin' spuds for awhile. Dismiss the company, sergeant!"

The men broke ranks to spend the rest of the day watching for the first signs of land. Stewart Hull sat in a protected corner of the deck where the spring sunshine was not counteracted by the nipping ocean breeze, and read for the twentieth time, at least, the letters he had received from Martha just before sailing.

There were three of them, all pretty much alike, and they contained nothing of of interest to any one but one man in the world, and the sentiments expressed and repeated were the oldest in the world; but to Stewart each little pink sheet was a rare and precious thing.

"Stewart, dear"—he read one paragraph over and over again—"you must never think of that terrible time except to believe that everything will come out all right—that I love you, and that is all that counts. I have written to mother all about everything, and told her nothing in the world can keep us apart—"

He looked out over the sea, its somberness reflected in his face. He knew the world from the bitter experience of years. There had been time to think things over in the cold light of reason since that moment alone with her on the veranda of the town-hall.

Two things were certain. He could not marry Martha Lane with his past to throw its sinister shadow between her, and her world; that sacrifice she was prepared to make, but he would not acept it. The only alternative, upon which their happiness depended, was the doubtful one of proving his innocence of the crime for which he had suffered. More than ever must he drag that precious secret from Edmund Sanderson.

Sanderson might be killed—war was no respecter of persons—and carry the answer to that five-year-old riddle to the grave with him.

"Who are you goin' to slam now?" Finneran shouted, clapping Stewart forcibly on the back. "You look like you did the last round of the scrap. Stand up an' take a squint at Froggieland. It's showin' up!"

They crowded to the rail among the noisy, speculative Double Eights.

Through the lifting fog the dark outlines of the shore lighthouses appeared on the horizon. Beneath them, flat, barren in the distance, hardly to be told from the heaving swells that rolled across the skyline, a line of gray showed up.

Minute by minute, as the convoy plowed ahead, the soldiers watched the gray line widen, rise up from the water, turn slowly mauve; then, as the sun broke through the low-hanging clouds, it flashed on the green of trees and the white squares of houses—the *land of France.*

From the nearest transport came the murmur of cheers, and the booming of a military band rendering the "Marseillaise."

"Hey!" Finneran called from his perch astride a ventilator. "That ain't Paris, is it?"

"No, nor Los Angeles, either," Jennings answered. "You're some geography student. That's Brest. What's that you got, chicken?"

"Yeah. Try a piece of breast yourself. Grab it. This was cooked for a guy wid a delicate stomach. That's me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROLLING OF THE DRUMS.

DAWN found the men of the Double Eights crowding into the lighters that were rapidly emptying the convoy, load after load, to the shores of Brittany. Everywhere, in the streets, on the wharves, in the public squares of Brest, were the fighting men of Uncle Sam, each with rifle, equipment and blue barrack bag.

They stretched in long lines along the quay, they jammed the narrow alleys in endless columns, they swarmed over the piles of freight. Everywhere there was the bustle of debarkation, a chaos of men and horses, and mountains of supplies that would have dismayed anyone not aware of the order and system pervading the whole.

"Some crowd," commented Finneran, gazing about him. "Say! They must have pretty near the whole darn army here! Who'd they leave up the line to do the scrapping?"

"This ain't nothin'," Braisted assured him. "Hardly half a division. There's more on board yet, and twenty times as many scattered around the front line and back of it, an' fifty times as many comin' over—"

"Gee whiz! A guy don't amount to much in that kind of a crowd."

"Now you're learning," Sarsfield ap-

proved. "You're just a leaf in a vast forest tossed about by the greatest hurricane in history. You're just an infinitesimal atom—"

"Lay off me! I ain't called you no names for you to go spoutin' Spanish woids at me."

"Stop the chin-music on the end there," Celluloid Jim snapped out. "Right by squads! Pick up the bags! March!"

A ridiculously small locomotive attached to a string of third-class coaches awaited them at the railroad station, and, after waiting for several other crowded trains to pull out, the battalion was on its way, step by step, to the battle-front.

Late that night they detrained and marched to a village at the mouth of the Somme, where they met service conditions for the first time.

Barrack bags were turned in to the supply sergeants, American rifles exchanged for British Lee-Enfields, and gas masks and steel helmets issued. They discovered they were to be brigaded with the British.

"They'll sandwich us in," Donovan remarked, "between the veteran outfits of theirs so we can learn our job. Nothing like experienced soldiers around when the bullets begin to hum. But I guess the Double Eights don't need any wet nurses."

Contacts with the British were friendly enough, except in the case of Georgeopoulos, who, having located a bottle of cognac in an *estaminet*, reached the point where he felt the spirit of Thermopylae stirring within, and expressed it by neatly clipping an Australian serjeant-major over the head with the empty bottle.

Australians and the men of the Double Eights, both being of the fighting breed, the *estaminet* was shortly the scene of a general free-for-all before there was time for explanations.

Stewart, sitting in a corner, dodged a glass thrown with good aim by a man experienced in throwing bombs, and jumped up just in time to grapple with a big Yorkshireman wearing the insignia of the light infantry. There was a short tussle, and the man from Yorkshire went through the window carrying the frame with him.

By that time the proprietor, frantic at the destruction, brought back the Military Police, and order was restored.

"Who started this?" demanded the M. P. sergeant. He saluted as Sanderson and another officer appeared. "Been trouble here, sir."

Sanderson looked around, caught sight of Stewart's hand, which had been cut by the window glass, and smiled.

"I was passing by just in time," he said, pointing at Stewart. "That man started it, sergeant. Arrest him, and I'll appear against him later."

Stewart looked for Georgeopoulos. He was under a table sleeping off the effect of a bottle of cognac and a straight right to the chin. The sergeant-major was being led away by his friends.

Stewart shrugged his shoulders. "All right. But you've got the wrong man."

"This officer saw you," insisted the M. P. "Who was responsible if you weren't?"

"I'm not passing the buck," Stewart retorted. "Let's go."

He spent the night in the guard house, formerly the village *mairie*, and returned to his billet a private. Even the earnest assurances of Georgeopoulos that he was responsible for the fracas did not clear Stewart. The Greek got ten days' kitchen police for his trouble.

"I'm sorry, Hul," Celluloid Jim said when they were alone. "I consider you one of my best non-coms, and I have my private opinion about this matter; but an officer's word is supposed to be good, and Sanderson had it on you there."

Stewart said nothing, but saluted and left. He knew that if it had not been for Celluloid Jim there would have been worse in store for him at the special court-martial.

The weeks passed in intensive training. June came and went. July found them still practicing trench-raids, wave formations, gas defense, under the tutelage of the earnest British instructors. The Double Eights chafed at the delay.

"The darned war will be over before we get a crack at them," complained Harrison.

The Englishman instructing them in bomb-throwing grinned, and lobbed a Mills hand grenade into a practice trench.

"Don't fret, mate. You'll get your bloody fill of it yet. They're 'olding you ready for a big show. Maybe they'll let you 'ave a bit of fun yet. You'll get there Don't worry."

But July passed, and they were still waiting. At night enemy air-craft hummed in the sky, eerie, wasp-like figures of Fokkers and Albatrosses with black crosses painted on their lower wings, twisted and turned in the silver glow of the searchlights, and the bombs they carried boomed in the distance.

Motor trucks with their freight, human and metal, crawled past the billets during the day. Some times their place was taken by ponderous guns, swaying past, their mottled snouts to the rear, giant engines of destruction dragged unwillingly to work.

Sometimes the trucks bumping over the rutted roads were piled high with stretchers, blood-stained and muddy, with heaps of broken rifles, machine-guns, gun carriages—all the flotsam picked up in the black eddies of war.

The men of the Double Eights went ahead with their work, and wrapped themselves in their blankets each night tired out with the day's labor. Once they were detailed to lay a stretch of cable behind the lines, and they bent to the task with a will, to the agreeable surprise of the British officers, who were not used to cheerful trench-digging after four years of war.

Sarsfield had been appointed by Celluloid Jim temporary corporal of Stewart's squad, but both Donovan and Lieutenant Macadam, who commanded the platoon since Sanderson's exit, hoped to reinstate Stewart when the opportunity arrived.

Toward the end of August new trenches were dug in the cleared fields behind the village, and the Double Eights were instructed thoroughly in the science of close warfare.

Rumors, the mental relaxation of the soldier, flew about that these trenches were duplicates of one certain part of the famous Hindenburg Line, and that action awaited shortly. Barb-wire entanglements were laid, straw dummies set up, and day after day the battalion practiced attacking and carrying the trench system.

The beginning of September brought news of St. Mihiel, and the Double Eights clustered around the bulletins that published in terse military language the story of a glorious chapter in American history.

"We'll never get there," Jennings growled. "What are we being trained for —a bunch of rotten Military Police?"

Stewart looked up from a letter he was writing to a certain gray-eyed girl back home, and scratched meditatively. The Double Eights were being initiated into one of the horrors of war anyway—the unpopular "cooty."

"They're keeping us for show purposes," he offered. "Maybe they think we're conscientious objectors, and don't want to hurt our feelings."

But "they," the powers that rule the destinies of soldier-men, had not forgotten the Double Eights. Things began to move slowly. Motor cycle orderlies sputtered their explosive way to brigade headquarters, motor cars darted over the roads leading to divisional headquarters, there was much consulting of maps at G. H. Q., and the Double Eights, with the rest of the British division to which they were attached, one bright morning packed up their goods and chattels, and climbed aboard several hundred box cars marked with the familiar "40 men and 8 horses" stencil.

"No *bon*," said Finneran, who had picked up some A. E. F. French in the *estaminets*. "As far as I'm concerned, they can leave the *hommes* out, and put the horses back. I ain't no railroad hunkie —I'm a steamfitter that travels first class back home. I wouldn't do a horse out of a place to sleep."

Blankets, pup-tents, extra baggage of all kinds had been turned in before entraining. They carried only the light fighting pack, rifle, bayonet, entrenching tool, and ammunition. Stewart sat on his helmet, which made a kind of a rocking stool, and made himself as comfortable as possible for the journey.

All day long they traveled, stopping at sidings to let a train of ammunition and rations by, or waited while the long, silent, white trains with the red crosses painted

on the sides stole along with their silent cargoes.

Late in the afternoon they detrained and hiked. Night found the Double Eights, weary and racked, billeted in a ruined village where every barn and house gaped roofless to the black sky. Rations were distributed, and the men ate them cold, mouthing the "bully beef" and "MacConochy," British tinned foods, with no great relish in spite of their hunger.

"What's the name of this place?" Harrison asked, trying to make himself a bed in a bundle of straw with his slicker for covering. "Looks kind of battered up."

"I saw a sign 'Hautes Allaines' back there," Jennings said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "Celluloid Jim says it's only a few kilometers back of the line. Boy! We're gettin' close to Fritz!"

"He was here not so long ago by the look of things," Harrison muttered, and pulled a German bomb, a cylindrical affair with wooden handle, out from under his home-made bed. "I don't aim to sleep on one of his 'potato mashers.'"

Jennings tossed his cigarette through the open door, and rolled over.

"You'll see worse than that," he said sleepily. "I betcha we're goin' to hop off soon."

Marisinio, his eyes black pools in the light of the candle, made the sign of the cross on his breast, and joined his hands.

"For the love of Mike," Jennings complained to no one in particular, "if we start prayin' we'll all have the wind up."

Stewart patted the little Italian on the shoulder reassuringly, and stepped outside.

From the protection of shattered walls and ruined masonry the flickering candles of the billets made tiny points of light. Overhead, the cold light of the stars pinpricked an inky sky. Flashes, like heat-lightning on a hot summer's night, danced along the horizon. A rumble like falling walls, like the thunder of a growing storm, came from the distant, flashing skyline.

He turned at a touch on his arm, and found Sarsfield beside him. The history professor's eyes were set on the rumbling horizon like those of a seer who walks in visions.

"The drums are rolling," he whispered, "the drums of war. It's the battle line."

CHAPTER XVI.

SARSFIELD—MAKER OF HISTORY.

HAUTES ALLAINES, or rather the battered remains of that once-thriving French village, lay on top of a little hill, some four or five kilometers north of Peronne, and about fifteen kilometers west of the front line of the British forces.

Stretching diagonally across France, from Belgium to the south, was the famous Hindenburg Line, four lines of defense, a zone ranging from three to twelve miles in depth, covered with wire entanglements, trenches, block-houses, concrete machine-gun emplacements, every obstacle known to modern defensive warfare—the result of four years of intensive preparation on the part of the best organized army in Europe.

In front of it miles of desert, ruined villages, shell-pitted ground, devastated woods, obliterated countryside, extended for leagues in every direction, with not a green blade of grass, or a house, or a tree standing.

The German high-command, that had inspected its hidden labyrinths of concrete dugouts capable of hiding a whole regiment, its impregnable reinforced shelters for machine gunners, its forests of rusty barbwire, had pronounced their approval.

"The greatest wall in history," they said. "It is impossible that flesh and blood can prevail against it. It will never be broken."

But flesh and blood was going to try it—American, British, and French in one desperate assault, Pershing and the French general, Gouraud, between the Meuse and the fateful Argonne, and three British armies, coöperating with Foch's left wing.

Facing the British army of Rawlinson was Le Catelet, and a front of twelve miles of the worst part of the Hindenburg Line, and the center of the attack at that point confronted the two American divisions Rawlinson had held in reserve. The chance awaited by the Double Eights had come.

It did not need the rumors that spread through the rank and file to notify the Double Eights there was a big battle im-

pending. No one knew the day or the hour they were to go over the top, but every man realized the time was approaching when all the months of training and preparation were to be put to the test.

If they felt the seriousness of the big moment awaiting them, they did not show it. Theatricals are not natural to the American soldier. The only speech Company C heard was made by Celluloid Jim, and that was not a particularly brilliant piece of rhetoric.

"You boys know what's comin' off," he announced, the morning after their arrival at Hautes Allaines. "It's not goin' to be an easy job, but it's up to us to put it through. We're going to have a hard nut to crack out there at the hopping-off point, an' I know you're goin' to make good.

"Everything will be explained as well as we can to every individual man, so he'll know his part. It's a big affair, but even the smallest unit is important, and may mean success or failure. Pay particular attention to what you're told, keep your eye on the ball, and don't let them think back home we struck out the first time the regiment went to the bat."

All that day and the next the Double Eights spent among the abandoned trenches and wasted fields of Hautes Allaines, practicing the formation to be used in the attack, learning to advance a hundred yards in five minutes, and increasing the speed to a hundred yards in three minutes, as they would have to do with a rolling barrage and a smoke-screen in front.

Company officers explained to the noncoms the nature of the ground before Le Catelet and the liaison arrangements with the supporting artillery, and the units on either side. Now and then long range shells boomed in the distance.

"This," said Harrison ironically at the end of the second day, "begins to look serious. Reminds me of a dress rehearsal. Only no audience would stand for this as the eve of battle. It isn't dramatic enough."

"It's a waste of time," Finneran spoke up. "All we need to win this battle is Georgeopoulos and his bottle. Fill him up full of *vien blank* an' if he didn't draw a blank himself he'd chase old Hindenburg so far it wud cost him ten bucks to wire home for his fare back."

"In my country," Georgeopoulos conceded, downing a huge mouthful of "canned willy," and reaching for his canteen, "I run queeck as a mice—up hill, down hill—fast—no stop for air."

"Better start now," advised Finneran. "They's some mean guns over them hills. Take Shifty Eddie wid you. He'll show you how to step."

He spat into the muddy straw underfoot.

"That Sanderson bird will die of heart failure yet. He tried to get a transfer already to take a bombing course behind the lines, but the one-star Johnny in headquarters turned him down. What's up?"

Stewart stopped cleaning his rifle to listen. The shrill notes of a bugle came from the direction of battalion headquarters.

"Officers' call! Double time, too! There's something doing!"

Fifteen minutes later the whistle of the "top" sergeants brought the men of the Double Eights from their billets and shelters.

"Fall in, there! Make it snappy! We're moving up!"

The lines formed quickly, and moved off along a shattered road to the west. Company after company of the Double Eights, battalion after battalion, and behind them machine gun companies, ambulances, more battalions of other regiments, rolling artillery, swaying tanks, loaded trucks—all winding along the narrow road, and detouring through rutted fields to avoid shell-craters that yawned underfoot.

They passed through places where heaps of brick and plaster and broken beams told of the site of a village, alongside of ghostly woods that looked more like rows of splintered stumps, past mile after mile of caved-in trenches, rusting barb-wire, broken gun-carriages, dismantled tanks, heaps of shell cases, overturned motor trucks.

Along the side of the road were strewn cans of rations, haversacks, canteens, blankets, overcoats, slickers, rifles, bayonets, bombs, bandoliers of cartridges—every conceivable article of equipment, dis-

carded by wounded, or thrown away by marching men to lighten their burdens.

"Say," Jennings nudged Stewart, "wouldn't a guy make a fortune here in the junk business?"

Stewart grinned and plodded ahead.

Here and there were clusters of crosses stuck hastily in the ground, marking the resting places of the men who had died on the field. Some crosses had identification disks hung on them, most of them were rude affairs of unpainted wood, others were simply French or British bayonets bound together, and occasionally they were neatly painted gray-blue crosses with German names on them and the words: "Here rests in God."

The column of khaki-uniformed men wound over a hill, and dipped into the valley beyond. From the summit Stewart glimpsed, through the gathering darkness, flashes of yellow flame, shells exploding a mile or so away, and on either side other endless columns of troops creeping across the countryside, long lines of crowded trucks and countless batteries of guns, all moving toward the east—toward the Hindenburg Line that couldn't be broken.

"Like a deluge," Stewart thought. "A deluge of men, and horses, and guns."

They stopped beside the road at the command of Celluloid Jim and rested, smoking the inevitable cigarettes, and waited for orders, watching the flood of men and vehicles pass by. It was impossible to talk except in shouts.

The whole country seemed to shake with the reverberation of the guns. They were concealed behind every rise in ground, hidden behind every crumbling wall, lurking in gun-pits and woods, sending long tongues of flame into the darkness, and stunning the ear with the blasts of their firing, like the deafening explosions of giant firecrackers.

Above the crashing of the guns near by could be felt rather than heard the dull thunder of the big railway guns far to the rear working in unison—all sending their storm of hissing shells through the night—roaring their challenge from their huge metal throats at that impregnable Hindenburg Line that couldn't be broken.

Stewart felt his arm shaken. The top sergeant was pointing to a pile of wooden boxes and full gunny-sacks by the roadside.

"Draw your bombs and ammunition for the squad," he yelled. "Two bombs each man—two bandoliers—compree?"

Weighted down now with the extra burden of Mills hand grenades, and two hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition, the men once more took up the hike, in single file this time, across the uneven ground toward the front line. In the light of the flares that curved across the horizon, Stewart caught sight of other shadows moving in single file to the front line.

Shells—enemy shells this time—whirred across the barren fields, and leaped into life in a blinding flash and crash of high explosive. Two men carrying a stretcher with a still figure on it, hurried by him toward the rear. He jammed his steel helmet harder on his head, and followed the winding line in front.

A mile farther on, the path led along the top of a treeless ravine. A machine gun, somewhere up ahead, rattled sharply.

"Keep low, men," Celluloid Jim warned. "We stop here. Get down out of range."

Stewart jumped down into the shallow trench, already crowded with men. The machine gun from the enemy line rattled again, louder like a boy dragging a stick along a picket fence.

Sarsfield slid down the side of the ravine into the trench, and lay still.

Stewart bent over him quickly, easing him into a sitting position. The history professor's lean face had gone suddenly a waxen white. A dark spot spread on the khaki cloth that covered his chest.

"Sars, old man!" Stewart's throat tightened. "Sars!"

The dying man's eyelids closed.

"History," he whispered, "is a story—of man's struggle, gentlemen—of man's struggle—better things—upward—to the light—in this class, gentlemen—shall endeavor to — demonstrate — satisfac — torily—"

His head fell forward, the steel helmet covering his face.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

I'll Bet You My Job

By M. E. CHASE

FRED BRAND studied his cards. Then his shrewd, half opened eyes moved inquisitively from one face to the next of the four other sons of LaForte's first families, returning to Bud Fenner, hair tousled and shirt-band unbuttoned. The big pile was in front of Bud.

Through the cigarette haze Fred detected the suggestion of a smile about Bud's good-natured mouth.

Fred shoved a blue chip into the center, returned his gaze to his hand, then shoved another chip into the pot.

"I'll raise you one," he announced.

Carl Murray stayed in. John Kistle threw down his hand and yawned. George Morris stayed in. Bud Fenner stayed, and raised it three.

Carl and George threw down their hands. Fred hesitated, studying his hand. He glanced wistfully at Bud's pile. Bud was drawing calmly at his cigarette; but then, Bud would, regardless of what he held, for it made very little difference to him whether he lost or won. Not that Bud didn't need the money badly. He did. But Bud was that way.

"Call you," Fred said at last.

Bud, with an easy turn of the wrist, showed three jacks.

Fred threw his hand into the discard, unshown, and watched Bud increase his already big pile.

Carl glanced wistfully at Ted Arthur, stretched across the bed, cleaned out, and dead to the world now some five or six hours.

Outside, the church bells were ringing, and at that moment their respective parents were donning their hats and starting out for worship.

John consulted his watch in surprise, going over to the window overlooking deserted Main Street for a long breath of fresh June air.

"Well, guess I'll go home and get in a little nap before dinner time." He nodded as he stood there.

Carl and George thought they'd follow suit, George suggesting they first ring for more ice.

Fred sat still, looking menacingly at Bud's pile. He suggested: "Let's play one more hand before we go home."

This necessitated giving Bud another I O U for a fresh stake.

"We've got to separate Bud from part of that pile, anyhow," he said, with an attempt at lightness.

Groggy-eyed, the others sat down again, and John dealt.

George, Carl and John immediately threw down their hands.

Fred, with three bullets, jack and eight, was wide awake.

"Two," he called, picking up a pair of nines.

Bud drew one—a queen. Fred watched him closely as he picked the card up. But his countenance told him nothing.

"Three aces and a pair of nines!" Fred thought to himself as he eyed his own hand. "That 'd warrant bidding the last stitch to your back."

He shifted importantly in his chair, and after an effective pause he said:

"I'll bet you my job against your pile, Bud!"

Fred was for making quick work of it.

The others perked up at this.

"Imagine Bud Fenner writing ads for the First National Bank!" John laughed out loud.

"To be honest, Bud, did you ever see the inside of a bank?" Carl jeered.

"You're on," Bud answered Fred, ignoring the banter of the others. With his usual indifference Bud showed the astonished Fred four queens.

Fred threw his hand into the discard, unshown.

"I'm in need of a job, too," Bud remarked dryly, lighting a fresh cigarette, "and I haven't tried working in a bank yet. Might like it."

The other three looked askance at Fred, who sat squirming. Feeling the necessity for some action, he tore a sheet from his notebook and scratched off: "I O U my job, to be delivered thirty days from date, June 11."

With forced nonchalance, he handed this to Bud, who read it and passed it out for the others to see. Then he stowed it away in his watch trousers pocket.

"What do you know about advertising a bank?" George asked Bud.

"Not a damn thing, but I might as well try that as anything else. I've tried 'most everything—and got kicked out."

He voiced matter of factly what the whole town knew well.

"And what 're you going to do?" Carl turned to Fred, who was busying himself putting ice into five glasses.

Now, in a town of twenty thousand there aren't so many desirable jobs for promising young men, and Fred had just gambled away one of the most desirable that LaForte had to offer.

"What I'm interested to know is, how you are going to jimmy Bud into your job," John put down his glass to say.

"Oh, I won't go back on my word—don't worry," Fred assured the bantering crowd, trying hard to be game.

But how Fred was to jimmy Bud into his job was a worry that occupied most of his time from then on. He was honor bound to get Bud into it. Then his responsibility ceased.

If Bud couldn't hold the job down, why, that was Bud's ill-luck. And Fred felt dead certain that Bud never could make good.

With this assurance, he figured that the bank would be only too ready to take him back, after a short and probably sorry experience with Bud. And perhaps with an increase in salary. They would appreciate his true worth all the more by contrast. Thus his thoughts ran as he sat at his desk in his private office at the bank.

Before he left for the day he must write an advertisement for day after to-morrow's paper. But that was no task at all—that is, for him. He well knew what were the tabooed expressions to be excluded; he also knew equally well the few favored moss-back phrases that Roger Link, Sr., the bank president, took pleasure and pride in seeing over the bank's name.

So long as he made prominent use of such expressions as "our officers and directors are the leading men in the community," or "our bank offers unexcelled facilities," or "safety first," the old gentleman beamed approval.

And for him who knew the ropes so well it was a dead cinch to write this kind of stuff. No need to dig around for new ideas

—simply change the order of the old ads, and he was sitting pretty with very little work. It had been so long since he had taken occasion to more than scratch the topmost layer of his gray matter that it is doubtful if he could produce a really original piece of copy any more.

But while this was "duck soup" for Fred, he knew Bud Fenner would flounder about for a few days, or weeks at longest, and then be given the air. And how his own stock would go up!

But how was he to get Bud into the job?

Fred thought of the possibility of finding a better position some place, resigning and recommending Bud to the president.

Bud's reputation as a no-account rich man's son was only too well known; and of all places, a conservative bank such as the First National would be the least apt to consider him. Besides, Fred was giving satisfaction, and apparently there was no reason for any change.

And another thing, there wasn't a better job to be found in LaForte for a young man of their ages. Nor likely to be one in the near future.

Perhaps he could create one right there in the bank. For instance, if he could induce Mr. Link to put in an insurance department, he might be put at the head of it and given the title of assistant cashier.

So he began cultivating an acquaintance of his in the insurance business, in order to familiarize himself with that line sufficiently to talk with intelligence. And presently he very ostentatiously sought an interview with the president.

"Maybe it would be a good thing, Brand," Mr. Link commented after listening attentively, "but I have some doubts. But I'll think it over, and talk with you again."

That dismissed, he added: "Your ad in last night's paper showed up very well—good position."

A week went by, and he heard nothing more of his insurance idea. He tried to get in touch with Mr. Link again, but that gentleman seemed always out of the bank. So Fred decided he'd better think up another expedient, as almost half of his thirty days had gone by.

He wondered if he could buy Bud off with a month's salary by putting up some magnanimous story? He'd start out with: "Of course, I'm not trying to back down. But you don't know anything about advertising, and couldn't be expected to hold down a job that has taken me years to get on to. Now, I'll go through with the bet if you say so—not trying to crawl out, understand—but didn't know but maybe you would like to save yourself some hard work which wouldn't lead to anything; for Mr. Link, the president, is hard as the devil to please, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

Fred rehearsed in his mind what he might say to Bud.

"So you see, Bud, old man, you'd really be money ahead to take a month's salary." Yes, something like that, he'd work it.

He must get copy together for a blotter. He hunted out one used several months ago, changed the title, and added a new paragraph.

"Here, Miss Bristol, write this up on your machine and mark the three per cent to be emphasized." He handed it over to his stenographer with great show of superiority. She, almost his own age, might have resented this had she not had the intelligence to see and be amused by its funny side.

Back at her desk she smiled to herself as she read the copy over. "Isn't it funny what a man who puts up a big front can get by with?"

Miss Bristol handed the typed copy back to Fred, waited for him to read it over, which he did very critically, putting in a comma or two, underscoring the "three per cent" and the bank name. Then he returned it to her to send to the printer.

"I'm playing golf this afternoon and won't be back," he told her importantly, as he took his hat from the rack and left at ten minutes to three.

Bud Fenner, who was always available, and two older men with himself made up the foursome. He was figuring on taking Bud to dinner at the Country Club after the game, and there speak the little piece he'd been rehearsing the earlier part of the afternoon.

Of course, he'd start off with some idle

tips to Bud on how to handle the job, and the president of the bank, which latter was really the important feature. And Fred had mastered that well.

While he was waiting for his street car John Kistle came along in his machine and offered to drive Fred out, as he was going in that direction. Seated in the car and started, John asked: "Well, Fred, got your little scheme working out for jimmying Bud into your job?"

There was a note in John's question that Fred didn't like. It told him all too definitely that the other boys in the party were also watching and expecting him to renig. And if he did, well, he'd be the laughing stock of that little inner circle of his set. whose opinion mattered so much to him.

"You'll all be surprised when you see how things are going to work out." Fred made a gesture that was meant to imply: "I've got a lot more up my sleeve than you fellows ever dreamed of."

"What're you going to do when you hand over your job to Bud?" John persisted.

"That's what'll surprise you the most," he replied mysteriously.

On the strength of John's comments Fred decided he'd better not try to buy Bud off. He'd always carried the air of being more smugly situated than the other fellows.

At the club he ran into Roger Link, Jr., the cashier of the bank and son of the president. His foursome was teeing off just ahead of Fred's, and while Link awaited his turn he stepped over to Fred. "Isn't there work enough in your department to keep you busy until the rest leave?" he inquired.

"Working to-night after dinner," Fred justified himself.

He'd guessed for a long time that Link, Jr., hadn't much use for him, but this was the first open evidence. But Fred consoled himself, "I'm solid with his old man. Guess he's a little jealous of that fact."

While no one overheard what passed between the two, Link's manner was slightly embarrassing to Fred. To offset it he assumed a bravado with his crowd. But that, and his abominable game, made him altogether ridiculous.

A few days later rumors reached Fred's ears that Roger Link, Sr., and his wife were going abroad to be gone three months. And to his dismay they were leaving almost immediately.

Fred nudged his way through to another interview with the president on his insurance plan, which was turned down flat.

In a week now his thirty day period would be up. With the concern the crowd was showing his fool bet, he'd not dare show his face, if he couldn't produce. In that event like as not the real facts would leak out, and then he'd get his from the bank.

Now Roger Link, Jr., had some different notions about running a bank than those his father was putting into practice. And he meant to take this occasion to try them out.

First and foremost was the bank's advertising. He didn't like the stiff, cold blooded stuff the bank was using, not one bit. He sent for Fred Brand, the advertising manager.

"Brand," he began when the door was closed behind him in his father's private office, "I don't like your style of advertising."

Fred looked up in surprise and consternation. Roger Link, Sr., had been almost profuse in his approval of his work.

"Mr. Link, Sr., has been well pleased with it—has told me so many times," Fred retorted in a manner that suggested Roger Link, Jr., didn't know what he was talking about.

"That's all right, but while he is on his vacation we're going to try out something quite different, and see if we can't get better results. I want to get away from his harping on the banks standing in the community. The people don't care how important we think we are—what they are interested in is—how much can the bank do for them? You overlook that factor entirely in your ads.

"I want some ads that tell people—just common, every day people, how this bank and a bank account here can help them get the big things in life that they can't afford when they spend their money as fast as they make it. And no talking down

to them in these ads. Make it straight from the shoulder, man-to-man stuff. Do you get me?"

"Why, yes," Fred replied deliberately, and then shifted in his chair preparatory to telling the cashier why such advertising was all wrong.

"That kind of advertising isn't in keeping with the dignity of such an institution as the First National."

With this line of talk Fred had always won the president over on the few occasions when that gentleman differed with him. Fred had used this particular phrase until Mr. Link, Sr., had unconsciously grown to think of Fred himself in the same way. He would have been shocked indeed to know that his advertising manager ever strayed into a poker game.

Fred paused to permit this wise bit of advice to sink in.

But Roger Link, Jr., didn't react as his father had. Instead he exploded: "To hell with all this sham dignity. If you can write the kind of advertising I want, get busy and submit a half dozen ads. If you can't, I'll get some one who can."

"You are making a mistake, Mr. Link." Fred felt in duty bound to fight for the dear old conservative policy. "Your father isn't going to like it. I think perhaps I know what his ideas are on publicity better than you do, as I've been working very close to him for—"

"Submit me half a dozen ads such as I've outlined to you, and have them ready to-morrow afternoon," Mr. Link, Jr., repeated, ignoring Fred's rather presumptuous antagonism.

Be darned if Fred Brand was going to be a party to any such outrageous overstepping of the conventional bonds of dignified advertising. Roger Link, Jr., doesn't know the first thing about advertising, and then to presume to dictate to him. So ran Fred's thoughts as he returned to his desk that morning.

By noon he had decided upon his course: He would dope out some copy to suit the cashier, and then tell him that Bud Fenner wrote it, and recommend him for the job—that is, if the stuff went over he'd say Bud did it.

"I'll give him some stuff that 'll make his hair stand on end," Fred said to himself as he grabbed up his pencil to dash it off. But it didn't dash off so easily as Fred expected.

It was nearly five o'clock and he hadn't one ad that had any real snap to it—even he recognized that fact. And he hadn't worked as hard in years over copy.

"Wish you'd come back after dinner to-night so as to be here to type some copy I'm getting out in a hurry," he said to Miss Bristol. They worked late and hard over the six ads, and when they were finally done, he glanced over the headings and laughed derisively—"Farmers, Hitch Up With This Bank," "Is Your Surplus in Long Trousers?" "Grubstake Yourself with a Bankbook," "Nobody Home," "The Ghost Walks," "Are You a Target for the Hold-Up?"

"If he wants to appeal to the common crowd by talking to them in their own language, guess he ought to be tickled to death with these," Fred told his stenographer.

When he left the bank he dropped in at a little gathering he'd been asked to. And here he was reminded by each of the five men at the poker party that he had only five days of grace to pay up his debt of honor to Bud Fenner.

Fred said nothing, but looked very wise. Secretly he wondered if the cashier would take a man that he recommended. His father might, but he wasn't so certain of Link, Jr.

John Kistle joined Fred in his corner.

"How's your little surprise coming on?"

"All right. Almost ready to spring it," Fred smiled smugly.

"Well, none of us have lost interest in seeing how things are going to come out." John's smile also told Fred that they'd make it unbearable for him if he didn't produce.

Fred hadn't any notion of what he'd do himself in the event he did get Bud into his job. After the bold front he'd put up, he couldn't go around hunting a job in LaForte.

The next morning the cashier called Fred into his office.

"Got those ads ready?" he demanded skeptically.

Fred said not a word, but very disdainfully thrust his six comic sheets of copy at his superior. He stood at the window with a smirk on his face, watching Mr. Link read them over. But the cashier gave no sign of approval or disapproval.

"You didn't write these yourself, did you?" He finally looked up, still not the slightest indication of what his feelings might be.

"I should hope I'm not guilty of such work!" Fred sneered.

"Well, it's great stuff! Send me the man who is responsible for it—and we'll find a place for you some place else in the bank," Mr. Link, Jr., gave his verdict.

This was unexpected luck for Mr. Link to ask for the man who produced them.

Of course the cashier was surprised that Bud Fenner could settle down and produce anything, much less bank advertising, but if he had that in him, why, the job was his.

And that disposed of, Fred squared himself importantly. "This all works around nicely and I'm glad to leave some one in my place, for I'm leaving for—for New York—where—I've been offered a really big position."

There was only relief on Roger Link, Jr.'s face as he wished Fred a perfunctory "good luck."

When Miss Bristol returned from lunch, Fred called her to his desk, got up himself and closed the door of his office, and in low tones, instructed her under no circumstances to let any one know that he had written those six funny sheets. She promised readily.

"The conceit of that man!" she smiled to herself.

Then he instructed her to locate Bud and let him talk with him on the telephone. Presently the phone rang.

"Oh, hello, Bud—remember our little bet? Well, I'm now ready to do something about it—see you at the golf club this afternoon, in, say, an hour."

Fred folded up the six funny ads, pocketed them and started for the railroad station to get a time-table and make inquiries as to rates to New York City. Then he hopped a street car for the club to meet Bud, who was smoking on the veranda.

Fred ushered him to a more secluded spot, and began:

"Well, Bud, old boy, I suppose you had begun to think that with only three days before the time expired on our little bet, that you weren't going to get the job."

Fred waited significantly, but Bud had nothing to say. His cigarette was taking up his attention.

"You better pay attention to what I'm telling you, because I'm not going to be around to help you out—wish I could—but go on the job Monday morning, and by that time I'll be many miles from here. But I'm leaving all my files and a well trained stenographer. If you dig in, you ought to get along. I've given you a running start by writing up a few ads ahead for you."

Fred pulled the funny ads from his pocket.

"I made them different from mine on purpose so that it would look as though you really thought out some fresh ideas of your own. I showed these to Mr. Link, and after I saw he liked them, then I told him you wrote them and you were the man to put in my place in the new business campaign I've been trying to get the bank to put on.

"At first Link thought you wouldn't be heavy enough for the job; said you had a reputation for not staying put and called you a lounge lizard and a few things like that. You know he's heard talk around and you can't blame him much for feeling that way. But I told him that I knew you had the real stuff in you, and for that reason tried you out with these ads. Told him you had just never hit upon your kind of work. Just like that I talked to him until I finally got him to seeing things my way. So now it's up to you to back up the good recommendation I've given you."

"What's the salary?" was Bud's question.

"Well, I tried to get him to start you off with the same they've been paying me, but I don't know for sure whether I was able to get that over. But you'll get it in time, if you can prove you're worth it."

"How much have you been getting?"

Bud asked Fred now for information which he had never disclosed to any one, and which many had speculated upon. Fred had the swagger of a ten-thousand-dollar man, but folks suspected that he was drawing down possibly a fifth or a quarter of that, since the First National wasn't noted for its high salaries.

"That's something I promised Mr. Link I wouldn't tell any one," was Fred's handy reply, "but don't worry, he'll treat you right after you've been there awhile, if you make good—*if* you make good."

Fred paused again, and preened himself. "Now you may be wondering what I'm going to do—why I made that bet, and why I was willing to give up a good job."

Bud looked up as much as to say: "Well, you can tell me if you like, but if it's such a secret, don't strain your scruples telling me."

"I can't tell you the whole of it—yet, but this much I'll confide in you, and, of course, keep it under your hat. Mr. Roger Link, Sr., is having me go to New York and get the low-down on how the banks there are handling a certain kind of new business. Then if my report is to the good, we may do something here that 'll startle the town.

"That's about as much as I can tell you now. But I just thought you might like to know that you hadn't pushed me out into the cold."

"That's fine!" Bud muttered. "Look in at a few good shows and night clubs for me while you are in New York."

"I'll do that, too," Fred put in, then. "But as I said, I'm mighty sorry I won't have time to show you the ropes at the bank before I leave, but I'm pushed to the wall with work that I can't put onto any one else, as even Roger Link, Jr., doesn't know about what I'm going to New York for."

Feeling he had made the desired impression on Bud, Fred called the job done. He made some excuse about having an engagement, and went home.

There in the seclusion of his own room, his spirits dropped, as he wondered what he would run up against in New York. Yet they bounded again at the thought that he'd surely be appreciated back in his old job at the bank when Link, Sr., returned.

All Bud was interested in was how much he was going to get. That was fine for Fred. Link, Jr., might even oust him before his father got back.

Well, he'd made good his debt. The fellows wouldn't have the laugh on him. If Bud got fired, why, that was his own funeral. Fred grinned at the idea of Bud trying to write an ad, or knowing how to have one set up in type.

Saturday afternoon he bade good-by to his friends and even his family with the mysterious air of having been intrusted with an important secret mission.

Arriving in New York, he immediately set out to find a job in one of the banks, for Fred was very low in funds. New York, being the financial center of the country, with more banking inside its bounds than in his whole State of Indiana, Fred had little worry that he'd find something worthy of his ability. He had specimens of his work to prove his own statements as to his capabilities.

But the big New York banks didn't think much of these specimens. At last he got down to ten dollars, and began hunting for any kind of a job. One of the small outlying banks needed a bookkeeper, but they weren't inclined to accept Fred's word as to his ability, experience and integrity. So, rather than give the First National of LaForte as reference, and in that way let it leak out at home what he was actually doing, Fred gave up his chance of getting this much-needed job with its thirty-five dollars a week salary.

He got down to nothing and made the acquaintance of a pawnshop. In fact, he got very well acquainted with these institutions before he finally landed work as one of a gang making a new highway in New York State, fifty miles from the bright lights of Broadway. He rented a post office box, so that he might keep his whereabouts a dark secret.

He wrote home glowing accounts of the girl shows and gay cabarets, which on account of landing in New York only a shade better than broke, he had not yet seen.

However, disagreeable as all this was, he had the consoling thought that it wouldn't last but a little over two months until Roger Link, Sr., returned from Europe. And, meanwhile, folks back home were thinking of him with envy for the opportunity his confidential research mission was affording him to see, and be a part of the great city of New York.

Of course, he wasn't making any such impression back in LaForte as he imagined—but, the boys did remark to themselves: "Guess it wasn't all bluff after all. Fred's putting it over." They even felt a little ashamed for doubting that he would hand over his job to Bud.

Bud wasn't saying a word these days. He was getting down on the job at eight fifteen every morning and working until four, sometimes until five in the afternoon. And he was startling the town with his advertising. Folks had got so they glanced at the headlines on the front page of the paper and then opened to the First National's ad with much the same interest as they turned to the "funnies."

True, the older generation were shaking their heads and wagering that the senior Roger Link didn't know what was going on or he'd be trotting right back from Europe. The younger members of the community, and some of the older ones—strange as it may seem, these were among the more progressive business men—were looking with favor upon the slant Bud was giving the bank's ads.

"He's talking our language," they said.

At the golf club he was being lionized by men who'd given him the cold shoulder when he'd called at their homes to see their daughters, or dropped in at their offices in search of a job. These men asked him why he hadn't let them know he had some good publicity ideas up his sleeve.

While Bud basked to the full in this sudden sunshine of approval, he had nothing to say about the work he was doing. In fact, he was taking it all as naturally and gracefully for granted as was Benjamin Morris his great wheel factory, or Foster Murray his jewelry business.

But one thing jarred upon the sensibilities of these dear old first families—particularly the mothers and the daughters—Bud was stepping around with one of the girls from the bank. He even brought her to the country club dances. They contended, if he wants to run around with a "working girl" why doesn't he keep her in her own set and not intrude her upon them.

Margaret Tally, whose father was at the head of the gas and electric plant in LaForte, grew soft-hearted toward Bud. She told her mother: "You and the rest of the mothers have frightened Bud away from us girls. I don't blame him for picking up an outsider, but I'm going to be nice to him."

This last very defiantly. And her mother made no objection this time.

She was more than nice to Bud at the next Country Club dance. She even stooped to a little vamping. And then the other girls of her set followed her lead.

"Not so good," thought she when Beatrice Morris feigned a loose heel and danced Bud out onto the veranda and then strolled with him through the flower gardens.

Now once not so long ago, Beatrice had been almost engaged to Bud. Margaret contended that if she wanted him, she should have taken him then. Besides "that girl" Bud brought to the dance was now absorbing the attention of three of their most desirable young men.

Bud must have sensed this fact, too, for he dragged Beatrice back into the ballroom before the music for the next dance started and joined the group around "Trudy" as they were calling her. The rest of the evening he danced only once with any one else.

"Who is this Trudy Bristol person?" Beatrice asked Margaret.

They decided to find out. Their guarded inquiries brought them the information that she had come to LaForte a stranger from Chicago and lived in a boarding house. They gleaned that she was Bud's stenographer. Of course that didn't make matters any better.

"Going around with his typist," they mouthed to each other.

"Well, why not? He isn't married. Nothing wrong in that as I can see," George Morris defended Bud to his sister.

But it wasn't long before the girls began

to congratulate themselves that they hadn't vamped Bud away from his Trudy. Report ran that Bud wasn't sticking to business—that he was spending a great deal of his time about town when he should have been working.

It wasn't at all unusual to meet him out on the street in the middle of the forenoon. Even his stanchest friends had to admit that it simply wasn't in him to hold down a job.

Bud's father buttonholed him one evening as he was leaving to call on Trudy Bristol.

"Say, Bud," he began, "if you would only give as serious attention to your business as you are giving to this new girl you've picked up at the bank, you'd be a lot better off. It's common talk about town that you're loafing on the job again. I'm getting mighty tired of supporting you between jobs. If you lose this one, you can just light out from home. I was contributing to the support of my family when I was your age, and had some money saved up to get married on.

"If you lose this job, out you go from this house, but on the other hand, if you can hold it down for six months, I'll give you a little bonus of five hundred dollars. You'll be doing two months better than you've ever done before."

"Well, that's only a little over three months to go," Bud figured out loud.

"Then for the Lord's sake, forget this girl and get down to business. It doesn't look right for you to be going around with your stenographer," Mr. Fenner concluded.

On the strength of this Bud proposed to Trudy that night. But he didn't mend his ways in the least.

Now all this had been filtering through to Mrs. Brand, who was passing it on to her son, and after each long rehearsal of Bud's capers, she praised Fred for the big things he was doing in the great city of New York. Indeed, she was proud to bursting of this son of hers.

Of course LaForte was much too small for his ability. She dreamed that one day soon now he would be coming home with the grand manner of a Wall Street financier, and disclose some astounding mission he had accomplished.

His letters hinted at great success in his work, recognition from the big financiers and that he was meeting the right kind of people socially.

Meanwhile, in reality Fred was laying roads at five bucks a day, six days a week. And on Sunday he rested his sore muscles, and felt lonesome and tried to console himself that it would soon be over.

Roger Link, Sr., and wife were due back in two weeks now. His mother was keeping him posted on this point, and he was counting the days before he might come home to LaForte on a pretended visit. He was also saving up his money to make a splurge when he did so.

Then when he'd got his new job back, he'd put up a good story about meeting Mr. Link, Sr., in New York, and after much urging and an offer of an enormous increase in salary, he'd finally consented to return to his former position and straighten out the mess that Bud had made of things.

Meanwhile, the home boys were saying: "Bud must have written up a barrel of ads and form letters when he first went on the job, for he isn't in the bank long enough these days to write anything."

And their seniors were voicing their opinion: "Wonder that Roger Link, Jr., will put up with Bud. You know his father wouldn't stand for any monkey business of that kind. Guess the bank has been running itself since Roger, Sr., has been abroad."

Then one of the progressives spoke up: "Now I'm not so sure that Roger, Jr., doesn't know what he's doing."

That night Mrs. Brand listened to her husband repeat this talk, then sat down and wrote it to Fred, also telling him that Mr. Link, Sr., was expected back next Tuesday.

Upon receipt of this letter, Fred quit his job on the roads and spent a full day investing his accumulated savings in some natty clothes. He indulged in a walking stick, too. Then he took everything on the bill of fare at the barber shop—haircut, oil scalp massage, shave, facial, manicure. How the poor little manicurist did dig and scrape on his nails, and still they were a sorry sight!

His face and hands were too weather-beaten to please him. But he'd laugh that off as the result of surf bathing every afternoon all summer. Salt water reacts that way. He'd tell them something like that if any one should be so presumptuous as to notice it.

Mr. and Mrs. Roger Link, Sr., got into LaForte at ten o'clock Tuesday evening. Fred Brand arrived Wednesday morning at eight forty, just as business men were on their way to their respective offices. Fred gestured to them elaborately from his taxi as he crossed Main Street on his way up Michigan Avenue to his father's home.

No man was more eager to get to his desk that morning than the president of the First National. That had been the longest vacation he'd ever taken in his life. He never before could be persuaded that the bank could run without his presence there every day. Now he was anxious to see what had happened during his absence.

He glanced hurriedly over his accumulated mail. Then he picked up the newspaper of the evening before, straightened up with satisfaction as he read the front page account of his homecoming, and then turned to the inside pages to see if the bank was running an ad in that issue.

It was. And when Roger Link, Sr.'s eye caught the heading, he nearly hit the ceiling in his indignation.

He gave the electric button a savage punch, and while he was waiting for the stenographer to answer it, he controlled his wrath sufficiently to read the ad through.

> Some folks eat with their knives. Others don't. It's all a matter of early training. The same thing applies to the savings habit—it's easiest acquired while young. Open an account here for each of your children.

"Send Mr. Brand in to me at once," Mr. Link, Sr., snapped at the young woman standing in the doorway.

"Mr. Brand isn't here any longer," she replied.

"Where is Mr. Link, Jr., then?"

"He hasn't come in yet?"

"Well, who is responsible for this ridiculous advertisement?" he howled.

"Mr. Fenner."

"Mr. Fenner! What Fenner?"

"Bud Fenner." She drew back in alarm as the old gentleman leaped from his chair and started toward the back of the bank.

The staff, waiting to greet their chief, cleared the way and said not a word as he stalked angrily past them and up the stairs to the advertising department, where Bud was just putting on his hat to leave for the morning.

"Bud Fenner, who let you in this bank?" the president thundered.

Bud waited for what was coming next.

"Did you write this ridiculous ad? You young upstart to make my bank the laughing stock of the town! Keep your hat in your hand and get out of here."

Customers and staff in the main banking room shivered at this mad outburst. They half expected to see Bud hurled through the window into their midst.

"If you'll be seated, sir, I can show you—" Bud began.

"You can show me nothing—get out of here. Where's Brand?" Link turned to Miss Bristol.

"He's not here any longer," she told him timidly, "but, Mr. Link, if you'll only let us show you—"

He turned and left them. As he stalked back to his office, he ordered the switchboard operator to tell Brand to come down and see him at once.

Twenty minutes later, Fred, walking stick and all, swaggered into the presence of Roger Link, Sr.

Of a truth he had the world by the tail. And he flattered himself that his nifty appearance was impressing his old chief as he stepped into his private office.

Mr. Link paused in his wrath, struck by Fred Brand's added bearing.

"How did you come to leave and let that no-account Fenner into the advertising department?" he yelled at the young man.

With suave complacency, Brand told him:

"Mr. Link, Jr., didn't like our style of advertising, and when I found out what he did want, I left, as I wouldn't be guilty of turning out what they have been using."

Fred sat back in the chair across the big mahogany table from his old boss, entirely

satisfied with life and himself in particular. Things had turned out even better than he had dared plan.

"What are you doing now?" the president shot at him next.

"Why, I've been doing a little special work in New York and am just home for a little rest," Brand told him grandly.

"I want you to come back here!"

"Well, I've been doing considerably better in New York," Fred hesitated.

"What do you want to come back?"

"Why, I'd have to have twice what you were paying me before, or at least the prospect of getting that soon—that is, eventually." Brand was anxious to get all he could, yet did not wish to shut himself out of the job.

Just then Mr. Link, Jr., appeared in the doorway, his stenographer having whispered in his ear what had been going on. His father turned his wrath upon him full force. The son let him get it out of his system, while Brand sat by with an insulting smirk upon his face.

Then Link, Jr., left to return with a handful of neatly typed reports.

"What we are doing during your absence has been getting six times the volume of new business that Brand's advertising was pulling during the corresponding period a year ago," the cashier told his father, "and deposits have increased fifty thousand dollars."

The old gentleman paused in what he was about to say to glance over the proffered reports. Six times as much new business. Fifty thousand dollars new deposits. He must look into it.

At last he glanced up at Fred, who had lost much of his aplomb.

"Brand, you never showed me any reports, did you, come to think of it?"

Mr. Link, Jr., was called out to talk with a customer.

"Maybe you were doing so well in New York that you wouldn't be interested in anything we could offer you. Guess you're making too much money for a little bank like ours," the president went on.

"Well, I don't mean to be unreasonable in my demands. Of course, it doesn't cost as much to live in LaForte. I ought to have taken that into consideration and perhaps I did ask a little too much. Got used to big money in New York, you know. But got homesick and would take less for the sake of being with my folks again. Don't like the big city, *et cetera, et cetera,*" Fred went on at length.

"I'll see if we can find a place for you somewhere in the bank and we'll get in touch with you about it." Mr. Link was now almost cool to him.

Brand left, and the cashier returned to explain how Bud Fenner had gone out personally after business, that he was a good mixer, and doing good work.

This explained reports the president heard later of Bud's not attending to business because he was always on the street.

"Um, that so!" Link, Sr., was thoughtful. He liked the idea of his son being progressive, yet he argued: "That may all be, but there's a more dignified way of getting the same results."

Inside of three months, however, the president was coming to like that no-account, Bud Fenner. One day he dropped into the advertising department.

"Say, Fenner," he began, "where'd you ever get your training in advertising? How'd you know this jazz stuff of yours would bring results?"

Trudy Bristol shot a warning look at Bud, but he feigned not to catch it.

"Why, Miss Bristol here taught me most of all I know about advertising. She used to be in an advertising agency in Chicago before she came here to the bank," Bud explained.

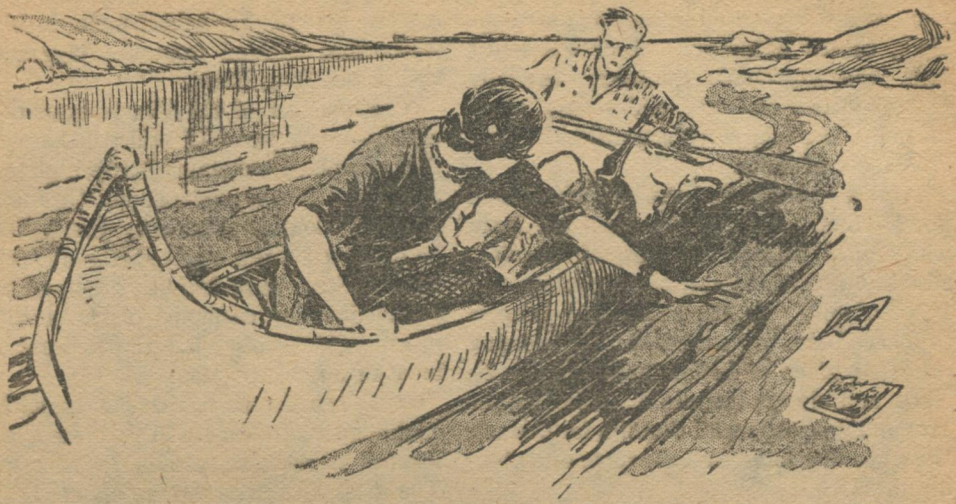
"Um! That so?" The president rubbed his hands together unctuously and looked appreciatively at an employee he'd never bothered to notice before.

"Perhaps we ought to raise the young lady's salary," he suggested.

"Too late!" Bud told him. "She's handing in her resignation this month."

The solitaire—which had come out of the five hundred dollars Bud won from his father—on her "busy" finger explained "why." And rumor about the bank confirmed the president's notion as to "who."

THE END



The Crucible

By SINCLAIR MURRAY

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

WHILE employed as the companion of Beatrice King, Sylvia Denby rejects the proposal of her employer, Marcus King, to be his mistress. King is a strange man, of tremendous force and power, with an almost mystifying dominance, and it was said by Beatrice King that she was actually his wife, and not his sister, as King maintained. Mr. and Mrs. Byfleet, keepers of Shadow Manor, wherein Sylvia was installed with her charge, behaved in a peculiar manner that emphasized the mystery of King. Sylvia flees from the house, and, under the name of Sylvia Dart, books passage to Canada, where her sweetheart, Jim Brent, whom she has not seen for seven years, is managing engineer of the Victrix mine, and is preparing there a home for her. Marcus King buys the mine, meets Sylvia on the boat while journeying to inspect his purchase, and compromises her with her fellow passengers by securing a stateroom de luxe, which she, in total innocence, accepts. He proposes that they travel through the wilderness to the mine together, with Sylvia posing as his niece, and she agrees, planning all the while to outwit him. Meanwhile Brent is agitated because he has received no letter from Sylvia; and is being caught in a current of life in which Dorothy Parfit, the daughter of the mill superintendent, something of a scalawag, is in love with him, and Bob Murdoch, mine foreman, in love with her, resents Brent's presence.

CHAPTER VII.

A CONTEST BETWEEN HERSELF.

IT was the middle of the next forenoon when Jim Brent stood in the cage at the shaft's mouth and sent two sharp signals to the engine room. Followed a whirl of mechanism, and instantly the daylight faded and he was dropped swiftly into the bowels of the earth. Past him the wet walls of the shaft sped upward, with occasional cavernous openings whence came strange and muffled sounds and in which he caught glimpses of distant candle flames. At the mouth of the third level the cage stopped.

He lighted his own candle, stuck it in a curved steel holder in the band of his wide-brimmed waterproof hat, and walked slowly along, stepping as one who traverses dangerous but well-known ground toward the breast of the third level.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 5.

To those who know it not, the belly of a mine is strange and threatening territory. Here, carved arduously out of the living rock, are man-made passages, generally glistening with moisture, and always, when the mine is alive, throbbing with the confused beat of labor.

It is a cavern of obscurity, where men pursue their duties like moles, and from which they emerge at night, or morning, streaked with slime and bearing every sign mark of toil. To the uninitiated there is mystery here, a confusion of booming echoes, periods of hollow and dripping silence, and always there is the searching for rare and precious metal that lies far beneath the spreading forest and the roots of springing grass.

Something of all this was what Brent used to feel when first he went underground in South Africa. It thrilled him with curiosity, seemed to invite and dared him to come farther, and suggested in a queer, mocking way that men were, after all, but pygmies, and, however they might delve in subterranean darkness, they were really only scraping a hand's breadth below the surface of the universe that would remain forever undisturbed.

He had lost most of that feeling now, though he was always interested when he went underground, and, in the case of the Victrix, regarded this part of his work as a very ordinary procedure. What most occupied him at the present moment was the state of affairs on the third level. Was the vein holding? The future of the mine depended very largely on this.

He found Murdoch at the best of these workings. Such was the tallness of the man that when he stood upright he was in constant danger of cracking his skull against the rocky roof, and habitually walked with his shoulders a little stooped. Now he was standing a few feet from a pounding drill whose clattering mechanism filled the level with a harsh metallic roar. He nodded when he saw Brent.

The latter put his mouth close behind the other man's ear. "It looks very good to me, after that last blast. Any free gold about?"

"No specimen stuff, but a good deal of this," replied Murdoch, picking up a fragment of quartz. He held it under a drip of water that trickled from the jagged roof and passed it to Brent.

The manager of the Victrix examined it closely—a fragment of milky-looking rock that resembled something between glass and alabaster. It was semiopaque. On the surface, and floating apparently just below it, he discerned a few small specks of varying shapes. Some were fine like grains of sand, others like tiny crumpled plates or leaves, others again resembling the delicate filament of an electric lamp.

It was good quartz, rich quartz, and the continuance of even half this present value insured remarkable profits for the mine. The most satisfactory thing about the Victrix was that this, the deepest point yet reached, was far more promising than anything above it.

"Have you sent much of this stuff to the mill?" he asked thoughtfully.

"A good deal of it has gone up in the last few days, but this is the best we've struck yet. What do you think it will run a ton?"

"It ought to yield fifty dollars on the plates, let alone what there is in the concentrates."

"Has Parfitt said anything about it?" ventured Murdoch.

Brent shook his head. "No, and I have not asked him. I'm going over to the mill now for a while." He paused for a moment. "Murdoch, I'd like to ask you something."

The foreman nodded, but felt a touch of embarrassment. "What's that, Mr. Brent?"

"I suppose you know that we're not getting out of this ore in bullion the result that we ought to get?"

"That's been the trouble all along, hasn't it?"

"Yes, and I take it that's the reason why the property was sold a few weeks ago, and why the new managing director is on his way here now. He's coming to ask me a question. The question will be, 'Where is the leak?'"

Murdoch moved a few yards nearer the shaft so as to get farther away from the

hammering drill and make speech less of an effort. Here he paused, trimmed his candle, and stared thoughtfully at its pin-point of flame.

"I reckon you've got your own ideas about that," he said thoughtfully.

Brent hedged. "Perhaps I have, and perhaps I'm wrong. But anyway I'm not in a position to say anything at the moment."

The big man looked him full in the face. "Well, sir, it's something of the same sort with me, but I'm saying nothing, either. At the same time, there's a good deal that goes on in camp that never reaches the manager."

"I've been mining long enough to know that, Murdoch." He hesitated a moment. "Where did you first meet Parfitt?"

"At the Black Master Mine in Cobalt."

"What was he doing there?"

"Concentrating silver ore before it went to the smelter."

"Then he had a position of trust at the Black Master?"

"You bet he had. That stuff was worth three dollars a pound as it came from the mine."

"Was he still there when you left to come to the Victrix?"

"No," said Murdoch slowly, "he wasn't." He was silent for a moment; then, with a significant gesture: "He'd been fired."

Brent drew a long breath. "Thank you for the information."

Murdoch colored hotly. "I'm not telling you anything more than every one knows in Cobalt and most of the men in camp. Parfitt may be all right, for all I know, and I'm not suggesting that he's not perfectly straight here. In fact," he added jerkily, "I'd be sorry to see him fired again."

He said this last with such genuine concern and with such a queer look of apprehension on his strong face that a glimmer of new light came to Brent.

"Has his daughter got any one else to depend on?" he asked thoughtfully.

"What in hell have you got to do with his daughter?" barked Murdoch, and turned on his heel.

Brent completed his inspection of the mine in troubled silence, was hoisted again to the surface, and, after visiting the magazine and checking over the number of cases of explosives stored carefully beneath its timber roof, turned thoughtfully toward the mill.

The ore, as it came from the shaft, was dumped from clattering steel cars to feed the crusher, the latter being a set of great mechanical jaws that champed steadily all day long at its rocky food and spewed it forth in a constant stream of finer fragments.

These went on to the pounding stamps, great vertical pistons of metal, each armed with a massive hammerhead that rose and fell with unending uproar and ground the quartz into a wet, slippery slime. The stamps were massive, irresistible, and under this metallic onslaught the very ground on which the mill stood was subjected to a continuous tremor.

One of Brent's first duties on arrival had been to assure himself of the mechanical condition of the mill, and he was overjoyed to find that it was nearly perfect. This made his present quandary more difficult. The ore was right, the appliances were right, and yet the result could not be called satisfactory.

He descended by a set of steep stairs from the crusher, and came out on the amalgamating floor. Here the pulverized quartz slid, in a thin fluid stream, over enormous plates of metal, plated with silver and coated with a thin skin of quicksilver.

It was to the latter that the tiny, liberated particles of gold became attached, while all other minerals that might be in the ore passed on unaffected. Thus, in time, the quicksilver thickened on the plates, becoming hard and stiff. The harder and stiffer it became, the more gold had been caught. The combination of this precious metal and quicksilver is what is known as amalgam.

Brent stood for awhile scrutinizing the streaming plates, aware that the large figure of Parfitt had halted, motionless, near the trembling timber frames that housed the plunging stamps. By the look of the amalgam there was nothing wrong

with the ore that was being treated at that particular moment.

The amalgam, as it clung to the silver surface, seemed thick and clean and heavy. Nor was there anything the matter with the mill, and he could tell at a glance that everything was running like a clock. Presently he crooked a finger at Parfitt, whereupon the latter came slowly round and stood beside him.

"Have you noticed any change in the ore lately?"

"Nothing except that it's a bit richer. The plates seem to be thickening up quite fast to-day."

Brent nodded. "They should be. This stuff comes from the third level. I've just been there; the vein looks splendid, and Murdoch tells me that it's the best ore he's ever sent up the shaft."

Parfitt rubbed his finger along the extreme edge of the amalgam. "Well, I don't think I'm missing any of it here."

Brent glanced at him beneath half lowered lids. "In that case, how do you account for the leak?"

"What leak?" said the man swiftly.

"The difference between what we've been actually getting out of this stuff since I came here and what we ought to get."

"How much do you make that, Mr. Brent?" asked Parfitt smoothly.

"Well, it's several dollars a ton, and it makes the difference between a loss and a good profit on a month's operation. It's about as much amalgam as—" He broke off with a dry laugh. "Well, I shouldn't have to tell you anything about amalgam."

"You don't, sir," said Parfitt, coloring a little.

"The serious point is that this shortage has been going on practically ever since the mill got down to steady work. That's more than a year ago. I know nothing about the early days of the property; but you do, so is there anything you can suggest?"

Parfitt locked his large fingers together and tried to appear judicial. "There's one thing which it occurs to me may be happening. That's the presence of foreign metal or mineral, which makes amalgamation imperfect."

"What do you suspect?"

"Nothing specially; but arsenic, for instance, would do it."

Brent shook his head. "I've made tests for arsenic, and found none."

"But it may not occur regularly in the ore, so it's quite possible you mightn't spot it."

"It's possible," countered Brent, "but very improbable."

Parfitt made a gesture. "I can't think of anything else. I'm sorry, too, because I hear the new managing director is coming out, and I'd like to make a good showing."

Brent looked up. "Who told you that?"

"Dorothy. She said you'd told her."

Brent laughed. "So I did, but I've been so busy assaying lately that it went out of my head. And he's bringing a young lady with him—at least, I suppose she's young."

"Will they be here long, sir?"

"I can't tell; it will depend entirely upon Mr. King."

"Is he a mining engineer himself?" asked Parfitt, with apparent carelessness.

"I don't know even that; but he represents the new owners, and is rather an important person."

Parfitt's large head made a slow, indefinite motion. "Well, anyway, it's a good thing the ore's running rich. He ought to be pleased with the Victrix."

Suddenly, as though it had nearly escaped him, he went on: "There's one thing I've been meaning to ask you for the last few days, Mr. Brent."

"Yes?"

"It's whether my girl can't do something to make your cabin more comfortable. I mean tidying it up every now and then, or a few finishing touches, or making curtains, or doing any of the things that most women understand."

Brent had not expected this, and felt a little touched.

"That's very kind of you, but would she care to do it?"

"Of course she would. She's told me so a dozen times, but didn't like to say it to you. Being the only girl in the camp, she feels she's got to be pretty careful."

"That's quite right of her, and I'm glad of it. So if she'd care to overhaul my diggings, I'm delighted to give her a free hand. As a matter of fact, Parfitt, we men are apt to become a bit too careless where there are no women about to criticise. That's why I've rather envied your manner of life ever since I came here. However," he added with a little laugh, "perhaps you won't have her for long."

The mill superintendent felt a glow of pleasure. He had been fishing about for something like this, and luck was better than he expected. He congratulated himself on his dexterity in pulling Dorothy's name into the conversation, for the girl had never suggested that she should do anything for Brent.

Perhaps, thought her father, that hundred and sixty dollars would be bread upon the waters and would return to him manifold.

"You know," he said suavely, "I've often wondered myself at being able to keep her. I rather think there's one man in this camp who'd be more than glad to have her if he could, to say nothing of half a dozen down in Cobalt."

Brent laughed and nodded. "I'm rather inclined to agree with you there; but perhaps, until the matter is further arranged and a bit more definite, we'd better not mention any names. And I'd like to see that amalgam half an inch thick by to-night. Good day to you."

Thus, in a far corner of the forest, there was being enacted in a pygmy community the ancient drama of love, desire, rivalry, and human effort, and toward this unconsciously journeyed the girl now known as Sylvia Dart, who was afraid to use her own name of Sylvia Denby because of her odd position.

When she landed at Montreal and drove with Marcus King to the great hotel, where he engaged for her a room that looked across at the great Roman Cathedral of St. Peter, securing for himself on the same side a distant apartment on another floor, she realized to the full that the die was cast and there was no more room for impulse or error on her part.

He had dared and provoked her into assuming an unimagined rôle, and she determined to act it with all the vivacity and skill and courage at her command. Already she had learned to meet King's look without a tremor, and if she guessed that in this new guise she seemed to have gained an even additional attraction, it roused in her no pulse of anxiety.

She was startled to discover in herself unexpected resources, of whose existence she had been hitherto ignorant. She was perfectly aware that this amazing excursion of hers could bear but one interpretation in the eyes of the world; she knew inexorably that its outcome would be final in one way or the other, and that she must either break King's will, or he must conquer hers. But, for all this, she flinched not at the test.

King proved himself an admirable guide, and in the few hours at their disposal before starting west they drove about the ancient city, viewing the great panorama that spread southward as they stood on the mountain top from which Montreal takes its name, noting the vast flood of the St. Lawrence River stretching to the far horizon, whence it flowed with the outpourings of a thousand lakes and lesser streams.

It was while they gazed at this that King asked her whether she would like to make a good part of the journey by water.

"It amounts to about the same thing," he said, "except perhaps the lake route takes a day longer. I've never gone that way myself, but every one tells me I ought to. You could put England into one of those lakes," he added with a smile, "and it would be an island."

Sylvia tried to imagine such a thing and failed. "I think that would be rather wonderful. Do you mind?"

"No, I'd like it myself. May I congratulate you?"

"On what?"

"Well, if I may say so, it seems to me that for the last two or three days you look better than ever."

"I feel better," she announced cheerfully.

"That's excellent news, but might one ask why?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"It interests me very much."

"Then, candidly, I think it's because I'm not nearly as much afraid of you as I was."

He laughed outright. "I never wanted you to be afraid of me."

"Oh," she said mockingly, "I do beg your pardon. How mistaken I must have been."

Involuntarily he moved a step closer. Never, he thought, had she been more irresistible than at that moment, and never before had he felt less sure of himself. He began to want her now in a different way, a new way that had in it less of the sheer desire of man for woman, and more of the companionable craving of one intelligence for another. He wondered what this might mean, and why she should seem the less approachable and vulnerable even as her power of attraction increased. Then he realized that she was smiling at him.

"I wonder," he said, "if there is in the making of you a great actress."

"Thank you for the compliment. Perhaps it is because one has to feel a part to do it well that I am making a fairly good beginning."

And he found no immediate answer to that.

They went on that night, reached the foot of the great lakes by the next afternoon, and took ship in a leviathan of a steamer that offered most of the comforts of the Mondania. The size of this vessel impressed Sylvia, whose idea of lakes was associated with those few and placid pools she had seen in England and which were thus characterized.

This one on which she now embarked seemed without end. Hour after hour, they ploughed across the sparkling blue expanse with no land in sight, and not till next morning did she see the shores again. These were low, heavily wooded, with the forest coming down to the water's edge, and here and there scattered clearings with groups of wooden houses, all destined to grow into populous centers before many more years passed.

The skies were high and blue, the air clear, sharp, and tingling, and this scene, so wide in its boundaries, so prophetic of the future it forecast, impressed her tremendously. Presently the vessel entered a vast river.

She turned to King who was leaning over the rail beside her.

"Well," she said, "I suppose this is nearly the end of the journey."

"No, we're about halfway. Where you are now you're a thousand miles from salt water."

"A thousand miles," she said wonderingly.

"Yes, and the biggest lake of all has yet to be crossed—that's Superior. This river we're in flows out of it."

Sylvia felt a little lost. She had never dreamed of distance like this. Then, suddenly, she remembered that this was the journey which Brent had ultimately expected her to make by herself. And yet he must have realized what it involved.

"In what direction is the Victrix from here?" she asked.

King pointed west. "Five or six hundred miles over there, so not very far now compared to what's behind you. And in an hour or so we're going to be lifted into Lake Superior."

They came to a gigantic lock where the vessel was lifted smoothly to an upper level while, from the decks Sylvia stared absorbed at the scenery around her. Two young cities faced each other here, one Canadian, one American, while between them roared the great rapids through which Superior discharges its immeasurable flood. The air was vibrant with their sound, a deep, soft rumble as of thunder.

Sylvia began to lose sense of time and space and distance. This was a new earth, and she was being carried through it by some power greater than herself which she could not question. Even King was quieter now, as though he, too, were impressed with the significance of their surrounding. Mile after mile they steamed across this inland sea, with only the beat of the engine to remind them that man was no stranger in these mysterious regions, but the puny master of all they contained.

They disembarked at Port Arthur, took a short rail journey still farther west, and

Sylvia found herself in the backwoods. She slept that night for the first time under canvas, and in the morning found King waiting.

"Now," he said, "the most interesting part of it all is about to begin. You crossed the ocean in a twenty thousand tonner, you came up the great lakes in a steamer of about five thousand tons, and you're about to continue in a craft that weighs, I think, rather less than yourself. Come and have a look."

"A canoe," she said quickly.

He nodded and led the way to the water's edge. There were two canoes already loaded, each with a man in bow and stern, and each prepared amidships to receive its passenger. They made a picture, resting thus lightly, like birds of passage, against the bank of a stream which she perceived was much larger than the Thames.

It flowed with a strong, smooth current between densely wooded banks, and, except for the group of tents where they had passed the night, there was no indication that the foot of man had ever penetrated this remoteness. It was all silent, lovely and inexpressibly alluring, and she experienced what was almost a pang of delight.

King saw this and nodded contentedly. "If you're ready," he said, "we'll push on."

The two guides steadied the canoe with their paddles against the land while she stepped in, and there began in utter silence the most entrancing voyage of all. She had never been in a canoe before, and the smoothness of its motion gave her a luxurious sense of pleasure. There was no sound except the regular dip of the paddle, for the guides were men used to the great silence in which they lived and often voyaged for hours without a word.

There were curves in the river, beyond which opened new vistas, always green, always enticing. At times a fish broke through the glassy surface, leaping clear, and curved like a bar of silver, while the ripples of its plunge spread in an ever widening circle till they died, lisping, on the dark, rocky shores.

They camped that night at the foot of a small rapid whose soft, hollow voice floated like music through the tremulous air. Sylvia's tent was pitched close beside it, and as darkness drew on she sat for a long time plunged in an overwhelming mood that Marcus King made no attempt to disturb.

For the first time in her life, she was yielding to the mystery of the wilderness which brought with it a deeper comprehension of life and all that life might mean. It made her in a strange way feel more forgiving toward the man who had offered her the greatest insult a woman can receive, though now she discerned that he was caught up in a passion so profound as to be well nigh uncontrollable.

On the other hand, and only a few miles ahead in this trackless forest was the one to whom she had pledged herself and on whose faith and understanding she so completely depended. The amazing thing was that it was almost certain that he would greet her as a stranger, not being aware that the supposed niece of King was actually herself. The girl to whom Jim Brent was promised was beyond the sea, as he thought.

It was during this moment of utter abstraction that there swam into Sylvia's mind a thought that left her breathless. Supposing if this lover of her youth, separated by so many leagues from the woman to whom he had impetuously pledged himself, were also to yield to the allurement that already had made so deep an impression on the soul of Marcus King.

Supposing that the sight of Sylvia Dart, arriving thus unexpectedly from the world of men, should begin to obliterate the vision of Sylvia Denby! Should such a thing happen, and now the girl felt swiftly convinced that it was more than possible, how extraordinary would be the position in which she found herself.

To be able to watch her lover, if indeed he was her lover, with loyalty struggling in his breast against the power of a new and unexpected attraction? Was anything better calculated to reveal the man. This conception broadened, deepened, and took an ever increasing hold on her imagination. And when, presently, she went to sleep with the song of the rapid lifting its eternal mel-

ody close beside her tent, she entered into virginal dreams with a smile on her lovely lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRIMITIVE MAN AND WOMAN.

THE wilderness has secrets of its own. It dares, allures, invites, mocks, taunts, and defies all in a breath. It can change the mood of man in the twinkling of an eye. It can lash with the whip of a slavedriver, and caress with langorous arms. At times, though utterly empty, it seems teeming and populous, while again it may be an abyss of loneliness that fills the soul with an unutterable hunger for companionship.

It was this latter element that possessed the mind of the manager of the Victrix on the morning when his managing director broke camp only fifteen miles away. Brent had no idea when Marcus King would arrive, but expected him within a few days.

Transportation in those regions was too uncertain to be governed by a time-table. Another mail had come in, and again there was no letter from Sylvia Denby. Brent puzzled over this, then shrugged his shoulders and tried to forget about it. It began to seem as though the girl regretted her decision, and was hoping that time would bring forgetfulness.

This thought had taken possession of him when, late in the afternoon, he completed a long series of assays, and, sitting by the cabin door, stared moodily at the lake. Presently he saw Dorothy coming across from the bungalow.

"You look very serious," she said laughingly. "What's the matter?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. I've been stewing in the office all day. Perhaps it is the gas from the furnace."

"In that case what would you say to a little change of air?"

"Would you like to prescribe?"

"Well, it just struck me that the fish generally bite well at sunset."

Brent heaved himself up with a grin. "All right, but you'll have to do all the work. I'm horribly lazy."

"Has Samson had his hair cut?" she said provocatively.

"Not yet, but it ought to be."

She sent him a mocking glance as they strolled down to the canoe. "Thinking of your visitor, aren't you?"

"No, I'd really forgotten about that."

She made a little curtsy. "Thanks for the compliment, though I'm aware you didn't mean it. Now please make yourself comfortable, and imagine I'm the engine of a motor boat or any other old means of locomotion. You needn't say a word unless you want to. I propose to spoil you for the next hour or so."

He leaned back luxuriously and the canoe moved from the land as a dry leaf drifts before the wind. Dorothy sat in the stern, her supple figure swaying a little with each stroke of her paddle. Her arms were bare to the elbow. He noted the graceful line of her shoulder and the round, smooth column of a throat that sun and wind had kissed into a delicate brown.

She wore no hat, her hair was piled in dark, loose coils, her face was quiet and, he thought, in a strange way tender. This was a new expression for Dorothy, and he did not remember having seen it before. She was very silent and her large eyes, which seemed in the softening light to be almost violet, were full of unspoken reflections. Over her rested the seal of the forest, claiming her as a free, untamed thing that was all its own.

Suddenly her mood changed, brightening as does the land when the sun breaks through a trailing mist, and she laughed merrily.

"I wouldn't think so frightfully hard if I were you. It's going to be quite all right."

"What is?" he countered.

"Everything. Mr. King is going to be delighted with the property, will approve of you, and probably raise your salary. And as for his niece—well—of course you must have guessed that already."

"Im afraid I haven't given his niece the consideration that perhaps she deserves," said Brent whimsically.

"You needn't bother, because that's all arranged too. She's going to be a raving beauty, who will promptly fall in love with

such a magnificent specimen of the cave man, and you will reciprocate without any hesitations at all; then you'll go off and be married and leave me wringing my hands in the rain. Now, what do you think of that?"

He laughed and shook his head. "Very touching indeed, and very well drawn, but absolutely inaccurate. For another thing, it's quite impossible."

"Nothing is impossible when there's a girl and a man and—" She paused, and then added daringly, "and a canoe."

"But it is in this case."

Dorothy sent him a quick glance. "You sound very mysterious." Her paddle halted in its smooth sweep, and she leaned a little forward. "Is it necessary to be so mysterious?"

Brent hesitated. "Would you like to hear a story?" he said slowly. "Nothing unusual about it; quite short and quite true."

Her lips quivered slightly. "I'd like to hear that story very much."

"Well, it's about a man who used to play with a girl when he was a boy, and they became great friends, the best of friends, in a way young people do when they are hobbledehoys, and bad luck came to their two families, and the boy had to go away to do for himself. He was only seventeen then. So before he went he and the girl—she was a long-legged girl with her hair down her back—plighted their troth with great ceremony and carved their hearts and initials on a tree, and swore by all the gods they'd wait for each other."

"Is that all? Because it's happening all the time? It's just play-making."

"No," he went on steadily; "and now to the rest of it. That boy was away for seven years, and all that time he wrote from wherever he happened to be, and the girl wrote back. The original understanding was never changed by either of them, and without putting it in actual words, and with no love making by letter, it was anticipated that they would be married as soon as the man was in a position that made it possible."

"And they hadn't seen each other all this time?"

Brent shook his head. "No, and they didn't even exchange photographs. All he had was a snapshot, which was mostly long legs and braided hair. Well, it happened at the end of seven years that the man did get a position which justified him in asking to marry her, and he did this at once by letter, and she wrote back the day she got that letter and carried out her part of the bargain, so the thing was settled."

"And you mean to say that she hadn't even seen him?"

"Not a glimpse," said Brent.

Dorothy drove her paddle deep into the still lake. "The girl's a fool."

Something in the voice and action supplied the touch that he needed, and Brent laughed outright.

"Perhaps she was, and perhaps he was, too, but after all they only lived up to their bargain. So now she's waiting for him to send for her, and no doubt wondering what he's like. In fact"—here he hesitated a moment—"it may be that she's wondering a good deal because the man hasn't had a line from her since that first letter."

"Then it's as clear as anything that she's afraid she's made a mistake and doesn't want to hurt his feelings by saying so."

"Possibly, but what can he do in the matter?"

Dorothy took a long breath. "I think," she hazarded, "that he might catch a few fish for supper, during which time his companion would be able to consider the matter a little more carefully."

Brent chuckled. "That," he said, "sounds to me like a word of wisdom."

They fished for the next half hour, and soon the bottom of the canoe was flecked with silver scales. The sun drooped lower, while across the lake began to steal the shadows of clustering pines that ringed its silent shore. Presently Dorothy reeled in her line, unscrewed her rod, and recaptured the light paddle.

"Let's go as far as the head of the river before we get back," she said; "my knees are rather stiff."

They floated across to a low point a few hundred yards away, that jutted out, making a sharp bend at the head of the stream. Rounding this bend on the way eastward, that is, on the journey to civilization, the

lake spread like a suddenly revealed panorama.

On the return journey the lake was just as suddenly lost, to be replaced by a dwindling perspective of the narrow waters of Lost River. Reaching the point Dorothy edged the canoe delicately shoreward, then stepped out and seated herself in the long grass. Brent followed her, lit his pipe, and began to smoke thoughtfully.

"Well," he said after a pause, "has the official advisor considered the matter in question?"

"She has."

"And the verdict?"

"The verdict is, that the two persons involved are in danger of making a serious mistake."

"I think the man admits that, but he is honorably bound."

"Yes, but for the time being only. The court decides that the only thing to be done is the wise thing. He must write to this girl, and say that his first letter must be held over and must not bind him till at least they have met each other.

"He should point out that it is quite possible they are unsuited, that he is considering her happiness as much as his own, and suggest in a perfectly polite way that each of them has again acted like a child. If the girl has any sense she will see that this is quite reasonable, and if she hasn't any, then she's not the kind of a girl he ought to marry. Does the prisoner at the bar desire to ask the court any question?"

Brent gave her a grave smile and did not answer. In the back of his mind was a hazy picture of the child in the beechwoods. Foolish, whimsical, and unreasonable, yes, he had been all of this, and now in the very forefront of life was another girl, a vivid striking reality who, he suddenly was assured, would make a boon companion to one whose lot it fell to live in the great spaces of the north. He did not yet love Dorothy Parfitt, and so far saw in her only the welcome playmate of his leisure hours.

But now it seemed that she was endowed with a capacity and power of perception he had not realized, and that, having come successfully through years of girlhood that were rough and unprotected and emerged from them with a sweet and untainted attraction, she would soon blossom into the companion that any man might well desire. This was a new vision of her and one that struck him with sudden significance.

And Dorothy, on her side, was aware of mingled feelings of increasing intensity. She wanted Brent for her own, had begun to want him soon after they met, wanted him for his strength, his candor and an unnameable something which made him different from all the other men she knew. He was one of that distinctive circle to which she aspired to belong.

There were traditions behind him, and unwritten laws of decency, manners, and habits that he instinctively followed. She longed to live in a different atmosphere from that dominated by the fat and shifty face of her father. She had dreams that would be verified and realized with a man like Brent.

Behind all this she knew that, once given a chance, she could rise and take her place beside women she had read about and envied for years. Her body was as beautiful as that of any of them, she felt assured that her perception was no less quick, and that she could develop an art of life that would successfully withstand the scrutiny of any eye, however critical. She was strong, fearless, and charged with innumerable ambitions.

So it came that while she loved the wilderness with all its changing beauty, she regarded it only as a temporary resting place from which she longed to step forth into the larger world beyond. Such was the girl who now clasped her slim brown fingers around her knees and looked thoughtfully at James Brent.

"Can you tell me something more about the man you spoke of?" she asked reflectively.

"Any information I have is at your service. I don't think he'd mind."

"Then what's he going to do with his life?"

"I don't think he's quite sure at the moment, except that it will be a good deal more than he's done in the past."

"You said he'd knocked about the world, didn't you?"

"Yes," grinned Brent, "all over the world. South Africa, Australia, in fact, pretty well the whole shop."

"Does he want to go back to England?"

Brent nodded. "He's always hoped for that. Most Britishers do. You find them in all corners of the earth, knocking about, doing strange things, wearing extraordinary clothes and pretending that they're perfectly happy and it's just what they want.

"But always in the back of their heads are pictures of England with soft gray sky, and country lanes where the wild roses grow, and villages with a slim spire sticking up among the thatched roofs, and cattle moving across green fields and—oh—a lot of things like that."

"Go on," she said softly.

"One can't very well explain except that it's home, and a Britisher hates to die away from home. He'd spend his last dollar to get back for that purpose. But, always, it seems, that the Old Country, like a mother, pats her children on the back and says: 'Now go off and make your fortune like a dear boy, then come back and tell me about it.'

"So off they go to the veldt and the plains and the backwoods and the high mountains, and the karroo, pretending they're glad to go, and all the time counting the days till they can get back to the winding lanes of Kent or Surrey and the roar of dear, dirty old London. The city is just as fascinating as the country.

"So every Britisher will tell you, no matter how little he knows about it. The dull sound of it that doesn't quite cease at night, but only softens, gets into your blood. Sometimes you curse it with the millions of strange faces that don't mean anything at all, but the queer fascination of it is still there.

"When you're in the country you ache to get up to town, and when you're in town you're often on edge to get out to the green fields. But it's all England, old-fashioned England, slow, deliberate, sometimes apparently stupid, but, at the bottom, very wise, very strong, and very understanding." He broke off and smiled whimsically. "Have I been talking fearful rot?"

"No," she said wistfully, "anything but that; and it's all strange and wonderful to me. Bob often tells me about Scotland, in fact," here she laughed a little, "he tells me about it whenever I give him the chance. He'd go on for hours about lonely lakes, and mountains that seem to have no trees on them and mists and things like that. He seems to love them, but they don't interest me very much. Didn't you ever get lonely when you were away off by yourself?"

"I did in Australia," he admitted, "but," he paused and then added slowly, "I haven't at the Victrix."

She sent him a quick, birdlike glance—"Why?"

"Well, for two reasons. One is that perhaps there hasn't been time, and the other, I think, must be on account of you."

Dorothy's pulse beat quicker. "You mean that?"

Her face was close to his and he looked straight into her dark, expressive eyes. They held more than friendship or even companionship. The language was more tender than that of a playmate. They were the eyes of a woman who hesitates not to show that she cares. He felt moved and, in a strange way, breathless.

"Has the prisoner at the bar now in his possession the snapshot of which he spoke a little while ago?"

Brent nodded. He knew that he was in the grip of a force stronger than himself, something profound, elemental, and not to be put aside. Slowly his hand moved to the breast pocket of the coat that lay beside him, and he brought out a small stained leather note case from which he extracted an envelope.

He gave her this without a word. Voices came to him in that moment, faint and warning, that breathed across the sea, proclaiming him a weakling. But, her beauty, wild and tender had touched him in the wilderness, touched him with that power which, from the beginning of time, has swayed the hearts of men and rewritten the pages of their life.

"Here it is," he said under his breath, holding it out to her.

Dorothy's fingers trembled in spite of herself as she drew out the photograph. It

was that of a long-legged girl sitting under a tree. There was a smile on the small, elfin face, and a promise of grace in the slim, thin figure. She was looking straight into the camera.

There was nothing notable about it, no special charm except that of youth, no marked type of feature. It was a swiftly taken glimpse of youth that was visibly moving onward into the waiting world. Dorothy stared at it, slipped it back into the envelope, then in a flash, impulse moved within her.

"There," she said quickly, and tore it across.

Blood rushed to Brent's temples and he snatched at her wrists. One of them escaped him and half the envelope jerked away, fluttered a few yards, and dropped lightly into the stream. A puff of wind took it and in the next moment it swam, like a tiny sail, round the point and disappeared.

"Why did you do that?" stammered Brent aghast.

She sent him a long strange look. "Don't you understand?" she whispered and put her arms around his neck.

The finger of destiny moves with utter certainty even in the silent places of the world. A little farther down the stream, the same wind of circumstances that wafted before it that tiny fragment of paper was delicately ruffling the surface of the waters where two canoes, their journey nearly at an end, moved slowly, but steadily, against the current.

Sylvia, in the leading one, had given herself up to pictures of the meeting so near at hand.

A thousand times she had wondered what her lover looked like now. Was he as big and broad as his boyhood promised? Was he as straight and strong? Had he still the same, good-natured, irresistible grin? Was it remotely possible there might come to him a suspicion of who she really was?

She was a little nervous as to this, but had decided that her introduction as King's niece made this most unlikely. She remembered vividly what she looked like seven years ago. And that was all changed now. Then came the whimsical thought that perhaps the niece of Marcus King might dim the vision of Sylvia Denby. She was smiling over this when King's voice reached her.

"We're very nearly there. Another quarter of an hour should do it and you ought to see the mine round this point. What's that in the water ahead of you? It looks like a letter of welcome. That would surely be unique."

Her hand was trailing over the side, and she picked out the white fragment as it floated past. Glancing at it idly, she saw something inside. She took it out with a sort of idle curiosity because it was, at any rate, evidence that humanity was somewhere close by.

In the next moment the world seemed blotted out. A cord tightened round her heart with strangling pressure, and she found it difficult to breathe. Here, between her fingers, sodden from the stream, was her lover's welcome to the wilderness. Out of the unknown had come his answer to the message of her trusting heart, obliterating every hope of happiness, choking every loyal impulse, robbing her of the refuge to which she had turned with such loving instinct in the time of stress. Her eyes became dim and there sounded a roaring in her ears.

"By Jove," said King, whose canoe was now but a little way behind, "look ahead a little to the left at the end of that point. There's a touching picture for you. It's a shame to disturb it."

Sylvia looked. She saw a tall, broad-shouldered young man, and a girl of rather less than her own height. The hair of the latter had fallen riotously over her shoulders, and the two stood in a close embrace, oblivious to all save the sight and touch of each other. It was love in the wilderness, and in those clinging arms was expressed all that its sudden flame could interpret. Man to woman and woman to man they stood, with the eternal forest around them.

Then into the abyss where the soul of Sylvia was plunging deeper and deeper, penetrated the smooth and cynical voice of Marcus King.

"I wonder if by any chance that fortunate young giant is the manager of the Victrix mine."

CHAPTER IX.

EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF.

ONE of the guides laughed outright, a mellow hearty laugh that rolled up stream and reached the preoccupied figures on the grassy point. Brent started, his arms fell to his side and, turning swiftly, he stood with his eyes fixed on the newcomers, a dusky red creeping into his tanned cheeks.

Dorothy moved back, also staring, and instinctively began to rearrange her tumbled hair. Of the two she was infinitely the less confused. Her eyes fastened on Sylvia and she felt recklessly triumphant.

"Can you tell us how far we are from the Victrix mine?" said King. "Sorry to have interrupted you at the moment."

Brent's flush grew deeper and he advanced slowly to the water's edge. "A little less than a mile. Is this Mr. King?"

"Yes, and I take it you're Mr. Brent?"

He indicated the other canoe with a wave of his hand, "My niece, Miss Dart. Sylvia, I'd like to introduce Mr. Brent."

The girl could never quite remember how she got through that moment. She was aware that Brent bowed with a constrained stiffness, hesitated awkwardly, and introduced his companion, Miss Parfitt. It was all unnatural and horribly unreal.

She had a dazed vision of the man who was her one time lover, of his size and obvious strength, and with this another vision, much clearer, of a dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, her dress carelessly open at the throat, who was regarding her with a strange look in which interest, contentment, and a sort of latent defiance were curiously mingled.

King had got out of his canoe and was smoking a cigarette while he apparently enjoyed the situation. It was all like a dream that took place in some strange wood and was dominated by these three figures. King's voice came in again:

"I hope you got my second cable saying that my niece was coming with me?"

Brent nodded and his gaze traveled to Sylvia with a sort of fascinated interest. The young giant was not only disconcerted and abashed, but memory had also begun to whisper to him, rousing a slow disturbance in the secret places of his brain. King's niece reminded him of some one he once had known, although, in a way, there was no real likeness.

Then he pitched on a girl he had met at a sheep farm in Australia, an English girl with hair and eyes like this. That must have been it. There was a little silence during which the fair stranger took no interest in him, but contemplated the far side of the lake where the edge of the mine clearing was visible. Finally he jerked himself back.

"Yes, I got both telegrams, but, of course, couldn't tell when you would get here. Have you had a good journey?"

"Excellent. We reached the head of the lakes three days ago, stopped for a few hours to get my niece some suitable things and had no trouble in finding guides and canoes." He paused, turned to Dorothy, and sent her a glance of unquestioned interest. "Do you live at the Victrix, Miss Parfitt?"

"Yes, my father has charge of the mill."

"Then he's a very important person and I'll be glad to meet him. If you're quite ready, Mr. Brent, we might as well go on."

There was a lingering suggestion in this that made Brent redden again, but he only nodded. They were about to embark when he stopped, paddle in hand.

"Perhaps you would like to go with me, Mr. King, and Miss Parfitt can take your canoe."

King smiled whimsically. "No, thanks. Why disturb such an excellent arrangement? By the way I hope my niece, being with me, doesn't raise any difficulty as to accommodation."

"Not at all; I was going to give her my cabin, and there's no difficulty about one for you."

Sylvia looked up and spoke for the first time. "Please, I couldn't think of turning you out." Her voice was low and tremulous.

"My dear," said King easily, "we're in

Mr. Brent's hands, and he knows what's feasible, while we don't."

Dorothy listened, thinking rapidly, till suddenly came an idea, as surprising as it was daring.

"Wouldn't it be better," she ventured, "if Miss Dart shared our cabin with me? Father could easily arrange to go to the men's quarters."

There was a little silence while the three canoes moved slowly and close to each other. It was King who spoke first.

"That's very kind of you, then," with a glance at Brent; "are there any other women in camp?"

The latter shook his head. "No others. The Victrix hasn't reached that point of civilization yet."

"I think," said King to Sylvia, "that's an excellent way out of it, and you and Miss Parfitt can look after each other."

The girl, still struggling with an overwhelming sense of revolt, made a quick, furtive scrutiny of Dorothy. Her plans were all upset now, and to live alone under the same roof with the one who had stolen her lover would be no more strange than the rest of it. There would be a double opportunity to act, and more reason than ever to hide the wound in her heart.

Also, this arrangement would, at any rate, keep her a little farther from Marcus King for the time being. She wondered what kind of a girl Dorothy really was, and felt piqued to make the discovery. As for Brent, she dared not think of him much as yet.

"If Miss Parfitt is sure I won't be too much trouble I'd be very glad," she said.

King nodded contentedly. "Then that's settled."

The rest of the journey occupied but a few moments, and Sylvia found herself at last at the Victrix mine, that haven of her thoughts which but a few weeks ago she had painted in such tender colors. There was no haven here now, but only a wild stage of nature on which had been produced an unexpected drama, one that demoralized all her plans and left her still in search of an anchorage where she might rest in safety.

She must remember that the dream of youth had passed as something not possessed of sufficient substance to withstand the test of life. She was Sylvia Dart, the niece of Marcus King. This to the outer world.

But in reality she was a girl who had pinned her faith to a promise that proved unstable, though it so lately held the prospect of happiness, and now found herself once more struggling against the hypnotic influence from which every avenue of escape seemed closed.

It was while this darkness enshrouded her brain that something pierced it like a flash of lightning. Sylvia Denby had lost her lover. Why should not Sylvia Dart regain him?

And while in the mind of one of these two, whose conflicting hopes were thrown into such intimate contact, moved thoughts like these, so in the mind of Dorothy moved other thoughts, no less significant, no less aspiring. Sylvia presented to her a type she had long desired to study.

She wanted to know how such girls spoke and acted, what their mannerisms were, their motions and attitudes. She did not desire to imitate, but only to learn, and thereby be able to soften whatever crudeness or roughness she might have acquired from such a life as hers. She saw, too, in Sylvia, a potential and dangerous rival.

She had more or less expected this, and beneath her joking prophecy of an hour ago had been a substratum of truth. But now, marking the smooth texture of Sylvia's skin, the fineness of her golden-brown hair, the curve of her lips, and the quiet, unstudied grace of every movement, the daughter of Christopher Parfitt realized that the danger might be very real, and all her skill would be required to meet it.

That, in truth, was why she had, with an impulsiveness that was only apparent, asked Sylvia to share the cabin. Her rival would thus, probably, see less of Brent. And, which was not less important, the object lesson would be close at hand.

A few moments later Sylvia found herself in Parfitt's bungalow. The walls were of heavy horizontal logs, neatly dove-tailed at the corners, varnished as to their smooth roundness, and having neatly plastered joints. These walls were, perhaps, eighteen

inches thick, the logs being those of large pine trees, and where the windows were cut through, small and square, they looked out under the overhanging eaves like the bright eyes of curious birds.

The floor was of wide sawn planks, and in each room, of which there were four, Parfitt had built a large, rough stone fireplace. In addition to this, the bungalow had two wrought iron stoves for winter use. He had bought some of the furniture, and the rest was made on the spot, exhibiting in its fashioning an excellent handicraft.

It was all clean, bright, and comfortable, with colored print curtains, illustrations from magazines in passe-partout on the walls, rows of flowers on the outer window-sills, and the substantial character of its structure, with the surrounding rampart of solid timber, kept it warm when the snow lay feet deep on its roof, and cool and restful in the heat of summer.

Sylvia, with spontaneous admiration, thought she had never seen anything more suitable to its purpose and surroundings. But to Dorothy it was only natural.

The latter led the way into Parfitt's room. "This is where you'll be, and I'll have it ready for you after supper. That'll be in about an hour. Meantime we'd better both walk up the mill, and I'll tell father he's going to be turned out." She hesitated a moment, and sent Sylvia a look of genuine interest. "Do you mind telling me where you got those clothes? I'm awfully curious."

"At a big shop in Port Arthur—the biggest one there, I think. Mr.—I mean my uncle, said that what I had traveled in wasn't suitable for the woods, and these seem to be just the thing."

"They are," said Dorothy slowly, with an intimate scrutiny of the well-cut tan coat and short skirt, the neat brown boots that came halfway to the knees, the loose shirt, open at the neck, and soft wide-brimmed brown hat with its twisted leather cord. "They're exactly what I ordered for myself a few days ago. In fact," she added, "they ought to be in by the next mail carrier."

There was something so ludicrous about this that Sylvia welcomed it. "So if we are not very careful, people will get us mixed up."

Dorothy shook her head. "No, you're inches taller than me, and slimmer. Then there's the difference in our coloring and hair. Now, I think we ought to go up to the mill and warn father."

They were just leaving the bungalow when Marcus King and Brent came across from the cabin of the latter. Sylvia stole a swift glance at the younger man's superb physique, and confessed to a little pang of jealousy. He had infinitely surpassed the promise of his youth, and not often in her life had she seen such a man.

He stood, straight as a young pine, his head a little back, and his muscles, even in repose, were eloquent of a vast reserve of strength. She had noted that he moved with an unusual lightness of step, and he had nothing of the uncouth clumsiness so often found in men of his stature.

His jaw was square, and at the moment his blue-gray eyes held the ghost of a twinkle. Beside him Marcus King seemed dwarfed, but there was something in the shrewd but passive face of the other man, something in the look of his quiet and assured expression, a faint note of authority in his manner and gesture, all proclaiming that if it came to a contest of intelligence and wits he had nothing to fear from his huge companion.

These were the two who loomed most importantly of all in Sylvia's life. Had it been decreed that she was to pass from the hands of one to those of the other?

"Settled down?" asked King.

"I will be by to-night. Isn't it all interesting. Is it just what you expected?"

"It couldn't very well be anything else, could it, Mr. Brent?"

The young man nodded. "I think the first comers made a pretty good job of it, though there's a heap to be done yet. Practically everything you see has been built with an ax."

King turned to Sylvia. "Have you everything you want, dear?"

The cool daring of it took her breath away, then she blushed violently. Brent, watching her, thought he had never seen a more lovely color. She suggested England.

Everything about her brought back an English spring, with violets, primroses, and white bell-like anemones scattered on sheltered banks that drank in the growing warmth of April suns. Dorothy caught that look.

"We're going to walk up to the mill to give my father notice. Come along, Miss Dart."

They went off along the winding trail, while the dull thunder of the mill grew constantly louder, filling the air with its low, deep drone. Presently it came in sight, a long, narrow building climbing in sections up a hill-side, its wooden wall pierced irregularly with small windows. In one corner ran a stream of what looked like milky mud, that lost itself in an adjoining depression.

"That's what they call tailings," said Dorothy. "It's the ore that has been crushed, and had all the gold taken out of it. When we go into the mill stand beside me and look out for the machinery. If it is all quite new to you it might be dangerous."

She opened a small door in the lower end of the building, and Sylvia was instantly deafened. She comprehended nothing of this mechanical mäelstrom except that it was one way in which men pounded fortunes out of the living rock. Dorothy pointed to a figure on the next higher floor, for inside the building also went up in steps. It was a large gross figure, and there was something elephantine in its walk. Sylvia heard a small voice behind her ear.

"That's father. He has charge of everything that goes on here. Come up and I'll introduce him."

Parfitt turned at that moment, and instantly guessing who this stranger was, met them half way. Dorothy shouted at him, and he put out a large, clammy palm.

"Glad to see you, Miss Dart." His voice was not loud, but had been trained to carry well in this tumult.

Sylvia nodded, and, though her lips moved he heard no echo of her answer. At this Dorothy laughed, instantly comprehending the difficulty, and delivered her ultimatum. Her father seemed in no way surprised, but Sylvia had not caught the glance that passed between the two, or the imperative straightening of the other girl's brows as she spoke.

"Of course," he said, "that's all right; there's nothing else to be done. But I wish," he went on smoothly, "I'd had more time to get ready for Miss Dart."

Something in his manner struck Sylvia as being too servile to be really hearty, and she experienced a faint distaste that was deepened, she knew not why, by his bland expression. Then, swiftly, she blamed herself for this. No one could more readily have surrendered his comfort and his house.

"It's very kind of you," she said, forming the words distinctly with her lips.

Parfitt waved a hand. "Anything you find that's all right, that's Dorothy's doing. She's made the bungalow what it is. Anything that isn't, is my fault. What are you going to do with me, daughter?"

"Men's quarters—there's plenty of room."

He nodded. "Want me to show Miss Dart round?"

"No, dad, not for a day or so, till she's rested. We're going to walk as far as the shaft now, and back to camp by the east trail. Don't forget the bungalow is the women's quarters, and men aren't wanted. Shall we go on, Miss Dart?"

Parfitt stood aside, making a half salute, and the two girls climbed up past the roaring stamps whose din, at this nearness, seemed unendurable, up past the great bins that fed the ore downward to be pulverized, up past the grunting crusher, that chewed steadily at irregularly shaped masses of rock, up along the narrow gauged track till they came to the shaft's mouth. Here Dorothy halted and pointed westward.

"About a thousand miles over there are the Rocky Mountains. Isn't it a big country? Now we'll go back the other way."

They were passing the shaft's mouth when the cage came to the surface and from it stepped a man in dripping oilskins. He took off his wide-brimmed waterproof cap, and pinched the wick of his candle. Then he looked up and caught sight of Dorothy and her companion. Sylvia, who was staring at him with interest, thought he looked like a handsome and disheveled god emerging from hidden caverns of the earth. He

was nearly as tall as Brent and, though not so broad, seemed nearly as strong. Dorothy beckoned imperiously and he came slowly forward.

"Bob, I want to introduce you to Miss Dart. She's just arrived and I'm showing her the sights. You're one of them."

Murdoch grinned like a boy and Sylvia took an instant liking to him. That face was a relief after Parfitt's. There was no mistaking this man's simple honesty. She put out a slim hand.

Murdoch hesitated an instant, till, surveying his own huge fist, he grinned again and shook his head. The fist was plastered with slime from the rocky walls of the Victrix and decorated with tiny islands of candle-grease. A month ago Sylvia would have shrunk from touching it, but now, everything had mysteriously changed, and she was not any more afraid of dirt—of that kind.

"I don't mind a bit," she said. "Won't you shake hands?"

Murdoch reddened like a girl: "Thanks very much just the same, but may I please wait an hour? It'll be much easier for you then. Do you remember what the negro said when a stranger asked him if he could change a ten-dollar bill?"

"No," smiled Sylvia, "please tell me."

"He said he couldn't, but was much obliged for the compliment. That's the way I feel now. Just got here, Miss Dart?"

"Yes," she said, "and it's all rather wonderful to me."

"Well, there isn't much here except a hole in the ground and some buildings on top, but that's about all you'll find at most mines, and," he added with a shade of discomfort, "if you'll excuse me, I'm going to have a wash."

They all laughed at that and he tramped off into the engine house.

"What a splendid man," said Sylvia looking after him.

Dorothy sent her a quick glance. "Think so?"

"Yes, he's, well, so obviously honest for one thing. You could trust a man like that anywhere with anything. What does he do here?"

Dorothy told her, and it only added to the other girl's interest. "Isn't that rather dangerous. I mean hasn't he to do with the dynamite and that kind of thing?"

"Yes, I suppose it's all dangerous in a way, I mean everything about mining. But one doesn't think about that when one's used to it. Of course, the forest fires are the worst of all."

"What is a forest fire?"

"Hell on earth," replied Dorothy soberly. There were visions in her mind that time could never obliterate. "If you can imagine a whole world around you—at least as much of it as you can see and a good deal more—being burned up, with you in the middle of it trying to find somewhere to hide, then you can get some faint idea of a big forest fire. But if you can't imagine that, I can only say you're lucky."

Sylvia stared at her appalled. "But where can one hide?"

"There's generally a lake within a short distance."

"You mean go out on the lake in boats?"

"No, I mean get into the lake and only stick your head out until the worst's over. But I wouldn't worry about that till the time comes, if it ever does. It probably won't with you. Now, I think we'd better get back to the bungalow. I'll cook supper, and you can show me where I go wrong."

It was a strange evening of that first day at the Victrix mine, real and yet unreal, and through it moved the figures of those who, Sylvia felt assured, were to be the participants in some approaching drama. A hundred yards from the bungalow she could see King and Brent talking earnestly, but only a faint echo of their voices reached her.

Several times she knew that the manager of the Victrix turned and was looking straight in her direction. The memory of what she had so suddenly encountered that afternoon was still searing her brain, but, in spite of it, she felt an almost overwhelming impulse to cry out to him, proclaiming who she was and demanding the redemption of his promise.

The idea was grotesque, she admitted that, but it would not quite desert her. She had come to the Victrix, announced and introduced as being one whose imaginary

name she had perforce assumed, nor could she now disclaim it without covering herself with doubt and suspicion. King was right when he called her a beautiful fool. She had discovered another girl in the arms of her lover and could not raise a finger of protest.

Now, by the last shuffle of the cards of fate, that other girl had become her close companion for the immediate future. Sylvia studied her closely and secretly admitted that she was capable of turning the head of almost any man, especially in surroundings so suggestive and intimate.

Counting back the days and dates, it appeared probable that Brent's impulsive and optimistic letter had been written before he had even seen Dorothy. If this were the case, it had not taken much to lure him from his faith. During past weeks, Sylvia had looked forward with quiet delight to long talks with her lover during which they would revive memories together and relieve the halcyon days of youth.

She had counted on this as being a bond between them. But now her mouth was sealed as to the past, and she was perforce a stranger to one she had taught herself to love until that moment when love died on the banks of Lost River.

But was love dead?

She admitted to herself that she did not know. Elusive fingers were touching her heart, and faint whispers reached her that while the eye might see clearly for the present, there stirred behind the shadows of the future something with its own secret promise. Even in the valley of doubt through which she walked, the vision of hope moved, like a friendly wraith beside her.

Marcus King for his part was no less conscious of the potency of days that were yet to come. He, too, had been studying Brent since his arrival, and found the manager of the Victrix very much what he had expected. Brent was more of a giant than one could anticipate, and as frank and honest as his letters had indicated, and, concluded King contentedly, that was about as far as it went.

The latter was in the way—at least had been in the way till the dramatic encounter on Lost River, and King perceived that even yet he might reassert himself as claimant for that which the older man had determined he should never achieve.

All this was in King's mind as, with infinite skill, he drew Brent out of himself, talked to him, explored him, establishing his powers and limitation. At the end of this he decided that his young manager was too hardworking to be jealous, too honest to be suspicious. There should be no trouble in deluding a boy like this.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN THE CURTAIN DROPS.

KING began his inspection of the Victrix next morning, and was, for him, unusually talkative as he strolled up the trail with Brent.

"I suppose," he said, "you're wondering who the new owners of the Victrix really are?"

Brent nodded. "I was."

"Well, Ores, Limited, is a small, but powerful syndicate made up of a limited number of wealthy men who, for some unexplained reason," here he laughed a little, "have entire faith in me. They accept my suggestions without question, and the past has given them no reason for regret."

"Then it is a recognized mining company?"

"Yes, though we try to avoid publicity as much as possible. We have all the money we need. The chairman is a man called Moffatt, but he does no executive work. To all practical purposes, I am Ores, Limited."

He said this so impersonally that Brent glanced at him with renewed interest. "How did you happen to acquire the Victrix?"

King's lips took on a peculiar curve. "I chanced to be looking about for something, the shares were cheap, I got some confidential information about the property that made it seem a good gamble—and the rest was easy."

"You act quickly.

King nodded. "It is not my habit to hesitate when I see what I want." He

paused and his voice changed a little. "Have you come to any conclusion yourself about the mine since your arrival?"

"Yes, several; the property looks better underground than I expected. The vein is strong and promises to be permanent to a considerable depth. May I ask if you are a technical man as well as managing director?"

"I've studied mining and metallurgy, and have the benefit of a good deal of experience."

Brent nodded with obvious satisfaction. "I'm glad of that. It helps a good deal. It's often difficult to make a situation like we have here seem clear to one who has no personal practical knowledge. Which would you like to see first, the mill or the mine?"

"I generally begin at the bottom and work up."

They reached the shaft mouth and as King stepped into the cage the young man saw at a glance that he was perfectly at home. The winding engine began to revolve and daylight vanished. King had put on suitable oil-skins and, when he stepped out at the third level, lit his candle and stuck it automatically in his hat.

They walked slowly, passing under stopes, now and again stepping carefully round the openings of other shafts that fell away beneath them. King said little, but he stopped where an experienced man would have stopped, asked curt questions that were much to the point, and altogether conducted himself like one to whom this booming abyss was as familiar as the streets of his native city. Finally they reached the end of the level and found Murdoch.

King was obviously pleased. Here the vein was wide and rich and promised well for the future. Staring at it, he gave a sardonic smile. The thought had just come to him that he had bought a property of questionable value in order to secure control of a certain woman. He was not only about to possess the latter, but the property would also without doubt become a valuable mine. Women and gold, he reflected, not infrequently went and came together.

On their return to the surface Murdoch went with them and was about to go on into the engine room when King called him back.

He had been struck with the man's appearance, but only after a personal talk could he fit his underground foreman with any degree of security into the drama which would shortly be enacted at the Victrix mine. This drama was already beginning to take form in his fertile brain. He sent a look to Brent signifying that he would join the latter in a few moments, seated himself beside Murdoch and took out his cigar case.

"Try one of these while we have a few minutes' chat."

Murdoch took the fragrant thing in his big fingers, lit it with extreme care, and inhaled luxuriously. There were no cigars like this at the Victrix.

"How long have you been on the property?" asked King affably.

"Since it started; that's about a year and a half now."

"Had you charge of all the underground work?"

"Yes, I put in the first shot on the main shaft, and have never left it."

"The mine is improving."

Murdoch nodded. "It will be a big one and a rich one if things keep on as they're going now."

"That's pretty much my own conclusion, so, under the circumstances, it's doubly unfortunate that the returns aren't better."

Murdoch scrutinized his cigar. "I've nothing to do with the returns, Mr. King. My job begins underground and ends there."

"I know that, and congratulate you on the way you're doing it. But I suppose you must have formed some idea."

"Idea of what?"

"Where the leak is," said King smoothly.

Murdoch sent him a little glance. Yes, he had an idea, one that had been moving in his brain with disturbing certainty for months. But it was not his business. His duty was to deliver good ore at the mouth of the shaft, and he had no concern with what might happen afterward. Further than that, there was another reason why he should not become involved in any investigation that might take place.

The day was perhaps not far away when what was bad fortune for others might prove good fortune to him, and he would be able to stand between Dorothy and the distress, which he felt sure now threatened her. That was why he so rarely visited the mill and so seldom spoke to Christopher Parfitt.

The memory of what he had seen when last he glanced through a window of the great rumbling building was still with him. Now he knew what King was fishing for, and guarded himself instinctively.

"Milling is not my business," he said slowly, "and I don't even know what the ore's worth. I can only guess at that and a guess isn't much use underground."

"Well," replied King casually, "it's a matter of a good deal of importance to everybody connected with the property, and I'm naturally quite in the dark myself. The fact remains that by assay test the ore you're sending up is worth a good deal more than we're getting out of it."

Murdoch's expensive cigar lost its taste, and he stopped smoking. "I reckon you'll have to ask Mr. Brent. He's the doctor here."

King smiled and nodded. "A fine chap, too. I was measuring you in my eye against him underground, and wondering which was the better man."

A little color crept into Murdoch's temple. That was what he, too, had been wondering of late, but not in the same way. Dorothy, it seemed, had decided that Brent was the better, though the end was not yet. He had tried to hate Brent but, being honest and fair and single-minded, had failed completely. He envied Brent horribly—and could go no further than that.

"Mr. Brent's a good man in the woods—or out of them," he said, "and I take it he knows his job. I try to know mine and do it. Better talk to him about the leak."

King laughed. "All right, I will. By the way, I suppose he'll have to enlarge that cabin of his before long."

Murdoch looked puzzled. "Why?"

"I got the impression he was going to be married soon. Isn't that the general understanding in the camp? If I'm wrong, I'd be much obliged if you'd tell me. One does not like to put one's foot in it in matters of that kind."

Murdoch's great fingers stiffened and his jaw projected like the ram of a battleship. "Who told you that?"

"No one, but it's a fairly natural conclusion, from a rather intimate scene I was unfortunate enough to interrupt as we came up Lost River last evening. However," he concluded with a laugh, "I'm probably quite mistaken." He paused and with an inward smile of sardonic perception, extended his cigar case. "Have another cigar, Murdoch?"

"Thanks," said Murdoch slowly, "but I reckon I won't. You can't get your teeth into 'em as you can with a pipe."

King nodded and strolled off well contented. By sheer chance he had lighted on something that might be extremely useful. So far, there had been no time to determine whether Brent had an enemy in camp; but here, at any rate, was a rival, and when a woman was concerned there was usually but a short step between rivalry and hatred. This thought was tucked away in his shrewd retentive brain when he caught up with Brent, who had walked slowly toward the mill.

"A fine chap, that Murdoch. A good miner, isn't he?"

"One of the best, and I'd trust him anywhere with anything. He began as a boy in the Scotch coal pits, then tin mining in Cornwall, then out to Canada. You can see what shape things are in yourself."

"Yes, excellent. There's no occasion for anxiety underground." He paused, looked curiously about, put his head back and breathed slowly through his nose.

"What is it?" said Brent, puzzled.

"Funny, but I thought I smelled fire."

The younger man shook his head. "No, thank Heaven, there's no fire about, and there's no wind. You'd have heard about it before this if there were."

King seemed a little unconvinced, but, with an effort, dismissed the subject. Instinct was at work in him, instinct born of ineffaceable memory, the only thing in the world that brought fear to his daring spirit. He laughed a little as they paused beside the tilting jaws of the great crusher.

"Parfitt, you told me, was the name of the mill superintendent?"

"Yes."

"You're satisfied with his work?"

"He's one of the most skillful men I've ever seen in a mill."

"And the mill runs continuously?"

"Practically. Sometimes we shut down for a few hours on Sunday for repairs, but beyond that we only hang up a single battery at a time to clean out the mortar box."

"Does Parfitt take the day shift?"

"Yes, but he's up there on and off through the night at no regular hours."

"Apparently keen on his work, then?"

"Yes; he seems to live for the mill."

"I think," said King slowly, "that after we've met it would be a good idea if something called you away and I had the opportunity of a few words with him alone. I often find that on these official visits, of which I make a good many, that the men do themselves more justice when they're not, so to speak, under the eye of the local authority. I put this to you because," he added smoothly, "I don't desire to seem in the position of trying to pump any of your employees without your knowledge."

There was something in the voice and manner that Brent liked instinctively. Nothing could be more fair or straightforward. Not every managing director, he thought, would take the trouble to explain himself thus.

"Certainly, and I hope you'll dig up something interesting."

They went down the narrow stairs, past the ore bins and thundering stamps, and found Parfitt on the amalgamating floor beside his streaming plates. His back was toward them, and they were quite near before he turned suddenly. Seeing King, he dried his wet hands and was introduced.

It may be that there exists some mysterious communication by which those who are shrewd, unscrupulous and deceptive recognize each other, some swiftly changing expression of the eye, some intangible signal known only to this formidable brotherhood—for brotherhood it is.

These two glanced at each other—one the product of worldly wisdom, refined in his person, cultured in his manner, distinguished in his bearing, carrying with him all the sign marks of one who knows the world; the other, large, uncouth of body, unkempt of appearance, suspiciously bland in gesture and mannerism, and filled only with the apparent desire to please.

But, in spite of the difference, the amazing fact remained that these two recognized each other, not as Marcus King, managing director, and Christopher Parfitt, mill superintendent, but as craftiness knows craftiness and guile knows guile. And of this not a trace appeared on the surface.

"I believe my niece is indebted to you for the use of your bungalow," began King genially.

"That's all right, sir, and she's welcome to it. Only too glad to oblige a lady in a place like this; sorry there isn't more to offer."

"From what she says, she's very comfortable with that good-looking daughter of yours, whom she was fortunate to find. One hardly expected to unearth that in the backwoods. By the way, I suppose you don't expect to keep her much longer." He broke off meaningly, with a quizzical glance at Brent.

"I don't exactly understand, sir." Parfitt's voice was colorless, but he felt a throb of excitement.

"Well, the next time you find Mr. Brent alone, ask him about it; he'll tell you."

The younger man felt hot and angry, but could not deny that to all appearances the conclusion was only natural. He mumbled something about assay work to be done at the office.

"Don't let me keep you," said King quickly. "I want to stay here for an hour or so."

Brent nodded and moved off, his great figure dwindling past the concentrating tables till he vanished through the door at the lower end of the mill. Then King bent his keen glance on the silvered plates beside him and touched the glistening amalgam with a smooth finger-tip. Something in that touch told Parfitt that his visitor was no stranger to such a place as this.

"You're getting good ore, Parfitt, from what I saw underground."

"We are, sir, and that's a fact."

"How much are you crushing a day?"

"About forty tons."

"And that's yielding on the plates how much?"

"About ten dollars a ton."

"Then, where are the other three?" King asked this casually, as though it were not a matter of great importance.

"What other three?"

"According to Mr. Brent's samples and assays, this stuff carries thirteen dollars a ton, free milling—that is thirteen dollars which these plates of yours ought to capture. But they're losing a quarter of it—or at any rate the company's not getting a quarter of it."

Parfitt became a little red. "Are you suggesting anything, Mr. King?"

"No, not yet," was the significant answer; "and it's not my habit to make suggestions. But sometimes I state facts. Nothing more to tell me about those lost three dollars? It amounts to between three and four thousand a month, as things go."

"Maybe Mr. Brent could tell you more than I can. There's nothing to hide here."

King felt a curious little thrill. Unexpectedly and out of the clear sky had come the one suggestion necessary to complete the web of his design. Never had his star seemed more in the ascendant than now. His manner toward Sylvia had been outwardly modified, but his passionate desire had changed not a whit. He was only breathing deeply for a moment before making one final and victorious move.

He proposed not only to discharge Brent, but also humiliate him in such a fashion that this young giant would no longer seem to Sylvia in any way desirable. Chance had favored King on Lost River, and now chance favored him again. He saw his way quite clearly. Then he measured Parfitt with a cold and merciless eye.

"Where did you put it?" he demanded curtly.

The other man's cheeks became purple. "What do you mean?"

"The amalgam you're stealing."

Parfitt raised a big fist and advanced on him suddenly. "By God—" he spluttered.

King did not stir a muscle, but there came from him a force that arrested the impending blow so that Parfitt's great arm slowly descended and hung slack. It was King's eyes that held him. He had never seen anything quite like them before. Then King's voice, icy, and with an edge like a knife.

"Do you like being in jail, Parfitt?"

"What are you talking about?" blustered the other.

"Listen a minute. I know a thief the minute I see him, and I know you already. Will you agree to have your cabin torn down before your eyes, roof and walls and the whole ground minutely searched? If there is found there nothing which is not your own, I undertake to build you another bigger and better, and give you a thousand dollars to boot. If there is anything found, you will naturally take the consequences. And by the way, there will be no preliminary visit on your part. Now, what do you say?"

Parfitt made one last attempt, then collapsed like a pricked balloon. He hung his head, his fat cheeks turned a grayish dirty yellow, and he seemed, all in a moment, weak and helpless. He still clung to the belief that King was, in some ways, as crooked as himself; but also realized that while King could produce proof by carrying out his proposal, he, on his own side, had no weapon of knowledge with which to strike back. No, the bungalow must not be examined.

"Well," he whispered shakily, "what are you going to do about it—send me to jail?"

"I'm ready to avoid that if you are."

"Go on," said Parfitt, his voice husky with anxiety.

"It can be avoided in a simple and practical manner. First by—"

"Putting back that amalgam," interrupted Parfitt. "I'll do it, sir."

"No," answered King coolly. "I'm not quite ready for that yet."

Parfitt stared at him. Now he knew beyond all certainty that this man was crooked.

"We will say nothing about the amalgam at the present moment except that it

must not leave whatever hiding place you have chosen. Do you understand that quite clearly?"

"Yes," said Parfitt humbly.

"Also, you will not question me or my motives. It will be quite sufficient for you in the meantime to do what you are told by me, without of course appearing to disregard any of Mr. Brent's instructions. Have you got that quite clearly?"

Parfitt nodded his head. He seemed half dazed.

"Then, the only present orders I have for you are to do your utmost to help on something which I assume you already, and naturally, want very much."

"What is that?"

"That your daughter should marry Brent."

Parfitt's heavy face was now a maze of perplexity. He was utterly lost, utterly confused and helpless.

"But why," he stammered, "should you—"

"Do as you're told, and don't ask questions," snapped King, and turned on his heel.

He did not return immediately to camp, but sat on a little knoll from which he could see the lake and the upper reaches of Lost River, and smoked for a contemplative half hour. He was fairly well content with progress so far. It had not taken long to absorb the details of the Victrix, and to his practiced and suspicious eye it was obvious at once that theft must be going on in the mill itself. There was only one thing there to steal; that was amalgam.

He wondered a little why Brent had not spotted this already, then concluded that the man was too spontaneously honest to have grasped the possibility as yet. But to King the thing had been instantly apparent. He had the cruel perception of those who consider all men crooked until something happens to demonstrate that they are not.

Over and above this discovery there were other interesting developments. The principal occupants of the Victrix camp were already being sorted out in their distinct relationship. He knew that Murdoch was in love with Dorothy Parfitt and deeply jealous of Brent. He knew that Dorothy's heart was set on Brent. He knew that Dorothy's father was a thief, and had shrewdly assumed that he would only be too glad to place the girl in a better position by marriage.

"And now," he said to himself, "I think it's time for a chat with my niece."

Sylvia was in the bungalow with Dorothy. She had insisted in doing her part of the domestic work, and the other girl was not a little impressed by the practical manner in which she did it. Dorothy had not seen this type before, and lost no opportunity of studying her visitor from every angle.

But, more than anything, Dorothy felt it imperative that she establish her position with regard to Brent. The manager of the Victrix was, she now considered, her man—hers by act and implication—and ever since the surprise on Lost River she had been secretly glad of what had taken place there.

It answered so many questions that might otherwise be asked. Now she was talking about Brent, little dreaming how sharply pointed were her words. And Sylvia, to whom they were barbed arrows, did not utter a single protest.

"I didn't see him," continued the girl, "till the evening after he got here. He was underground, and writing letters, and talking to father and Bob. So we've really only known each other for a few weeks. I thought he was awfully lonely, to begin with."

"He must have been," ventured Sylvia.

"Well, he didn't take long to get over that, and he hasn't looked lonely for the last month. What's the matter? Do you feel faint?"

Sylvia shook her head. "No, but perhaps I'm more tired than I thought I was. I didn't think sitting still in a canoe could be tiring."

"It isn't, generally. I always paddle myself, except with Jim, and even then he often settles down and has a rest. How long will your uncle be at the Victrix?"

"I'm not sure; he hasn't told me. But

I think there are a good many things to be settled with Mr. Brent."

Dorothy sent her a curious glance. "May I ask you something?"

"Yes, do."

"Then, why did you come away out to a place like this?"

"I—I just wanted to see what it was like in the backwoods. Whether it was the sort of thing one reads in books."

"Most books are all wrong about the backwoods," said Dorothy. "Was it hard to persuade your uncle to bring you along with him?"

"He was surprised that I wanted to come."

"Well, it seems funny to me, because I'm trying to get out. I say, are you engaged? I know you don't wear a ring."

Sylvia hesitated. "No," she said slowly, "I'm not engaged."

"Tell me something about what girls in England do and wear and talk about, and what the men are like."

It was rather a large order, but Sylvia did her best.

"I really don't think there's much difference," she concluded, "and English girls always seem ready to go to any part of the world with a man they're fond of, and I think we're really more practical than we sometimes look."

Dorothy nodded. "There's no doubt about you, at any rate. I wonder if I'll ever see you in England?"

"Are you going?"

"I hope so, when I'm married."

Sylvia controlled herself with an effort. "May I ask you the same question? Are you engaged?" The world seemed to stand still while she waited for the answer.

"Do you mean was there a regular proposal and acceptance, and all that?"

Sylvia nodded.

"No," was the candid reply, "I don't suppose I am—that is yet, but I would have been if you hadn't—well—come up Lost River the minute you did. Jim had just got over thinking he was in love with some imaginary girl he knew when he was a boy. Queer thing for a man to be like that, isn't it?"

"And he decided he wasn't?"

Dorothy smiled radiantly. "Well, I suppose you saw for yourself what he decided?"

Sylvia leaned back with a desperate effort at control. There was both joy and torture in what she had heard, nor did she know which was the more poignant. Dorothy's face became blurred, and just at this moment a knock sounded at the door.

"Any admission to visitors?" It was the voice of Marcus King.

Dorothy jumped to her feet. "Come in," she said gayly.

The door opened, and he halted on the threshold cool, debonair, and smiling a little.

"You two look extremely comfortable here. It's evidently the cabin de luxe of the camp." He turned to Sylvia. "Well, dear, how did you sleep?"

The girl bit her lip viciously. "Splendidly, thank you."

"So did I, and to-day would be quite perfect except for one thing."

"What is that?" put in Dorothy.

"That I haven't yet kissed my niece good morning." He walked across, bent over Sylvia, and she felt again the touch that filled her with inexplicable fear. Beneath it she seemed quite powerless. Then sudden revolt tingled in every vein, and she looked straight into his level eyes.

"Uncle thinks I'm very unresponsive," she said daringly, "and perhaps I am, but I can't help it. Where have you been all the morning?"

"Underground a good deal of the time, and then in the mill, where I had a talk with Miss Dorothy's father. Now, suppose you and I have a walk. Mr. Brent tells me the trail round the lake is quite good."

A subtle tone in his voice warned her that it was wisest to accede, and she got up with apparent readiness. King slipped his arm into hers.

"I see as much of my niece as I can," he said over his shoulder to Dorothy, "because I expect the inevitable will happen before long, and I may not see her any more. We'll be back in an hour or so."

Sylvia laughed. "I sometimes wonder," she hazarded with a veiled defiance,

"whether the average husband is half as attentive as the average uncle—especially my uncle?"

They strolled off, and she determined that he should speak first. Followed a little silence, then his lips took on an unwonted curve.

"If I may say so, my niece is developing unexpected talent."

"Am I?" she asked placidly.

"You're a much better actress than I anticipated, and the part suits you remarkably well, but," he added warningly, "don't let it become a habit."

"There will be hardly time for that," she countered.

"I agree." Her composure seemed to please him. "Don't you think now that it has all been rather well thought out?"

"It does great credit to the imagination of the playwright."

King laughed. "Thank you. It has been rather dramatic. I fancy that a good many girls would welcome the chance to get a bird's-eye view of their so-called lovers. He surely is an impressive young man, isn't he?"

She nodded carelessly. "Yes, quite."

"And evidently not immune to the appeal of your sex. But perhaps under the circumstances it was only natural that this should be so."

Sylvia's daring gathered strength. "It certainly looked natural."

"I agree. Pity the girl is going to be disappointed."

"Is she?"

"Yes, unquestionably. Your former admirer, Mr. James Brent, is a large and whited sepulcher."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Simply that by and by, when you are mine, completely mine, and content to be so, you will admit that you were well out of it so far as he is concerned."

The girl flushed hotly. "I will never be that."

He seemed unimpressed. "The prospect won't be so distasteful when James Brent leaves the Victrix camp with his head down. The manner of his leaving will be such that I don't think that dark beauty will be able to go with him. Queer, isn't it, that you should be on the stage when the curtain comes down?"

Such was the assurance in his voice that Sylvia felt shaken, till suddenly every memory of her youth rose in protest. Brent might waver in his faith through stress of loneliness and the nearness of a girl whose feelings for him were undisguised; he might err in judgment, and make even serious mistakes, but of his probity there could be no shadow of doubt.

He might not be shrewd and judicious, but without question he was supremely honest.

She grasped at this mentally, and drew therefrom a secret comfort. Then something whispered that whatever she might feel about Brent, nothing must appear on the surface. She had a part to play, but it was not the one allotted to her by Marcus King.

"Nothing could astonish me more than what you've just said," she replied slowly. "Are you actually sure of this? Isn't there possibly some mistake?"

"I'm not in the habit of guessing at important matters."

"I can hardly accept it—yet," she faltered.

"You're not asked to accept anything till it happens. I merely tell you this in order that you may not be misled by anything that goes on here, or seems not to be going on. Don't think for a moment that what I have decided about you"—here he looked at her dominantly—"has been changed by a fraction. I want you now more than ever I did, because in an odd way your attitude has made you even more desirable.

"And when the time comes, as inevitably it will, I will waken in you such a response as never could be stirred by a man like James Brent. Go on acting, because you know, and I know, that you can do nothing else, and when the curtain is rung down and the audience disappears and the lights are turned out, you will be alone on the stage with me. That," he concluded quietly, "is your destiny and you cannot escape it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Jogson's Partner

By HOWARD E. MORGAN

WHAT little individuality Banty Le Cote did have was overshadowed by the forceful personality of Soldier Jogson, his partner. At Sutton's Camp, Banty was usually referred to merely as "Jogson's partner."

Banty was a little fellow, with a sallow face, perpetually covered with several days' growth of sand-colored whiskers, mild, apologetic, blue eyes, and a slim, stooped figure that seemed forever cringing.

He was mild mannered in the extreme, had never been known to engage in any of the boisterous pastimes of the camp. His very voice was soft and hesitant.

On the infrequent occasions when he did choose to speak, if attention focused on him, he invariably became confused and relinquished the floor to whoever wanted it, or took refuge in an embarrassed silence, his point forgotten.

Soldier Jogson and Gus Dorn were enemies. They had fought twice in the Mohawk Saloon, but neither fight had gone to a finish.

The Jogson-Le Cote claim adjoined Dorn's. No one knew, for certain, what the feud was all about; it is doubtful if either of the two principals could have clearly presented the basis of argument.

Jogson and Dorn were both big men. Dorn was, by nature, a bully, gorilla-like of body, surly, cruel, black-whiskered—a huge, hairy brute of a man. Jogson was big and blond and roughly good natured, withal, a terrible fighter when aroused.

Fortunately, however he was seldom aroused to the fighting point. His heart was as big as his body. No man, down on his luck, ever turned away from Soldier Jogson empty-handed.

Due to the financial uncertainty of his calling, Jogson would have been in dire want himself many times, had it not been for the ever frugal Banty, who always came forth with funds when supplies or equipment were needed. Jogson treated Banty like a very small, but faithful dog. And Banty lived up to the part—that of a small—and faithful—dog.

He followed at Jogson's heels, wherever the big man went. Banty was always at

Jogson's elbow, to confirm the big miner's wildest story. Jogson would talk in his bellowing voice, and Banty would nod agreement.

Despite Banty's inferiority, physically and otherwise, it was well known that the two partners shared equally in the moderate yield from their claim. This fact added greatly to Jogson's popularity. Jogson did most of the hard work; Banty cooked and ran errands and helped out in the actual mining operations, when Jogson was under the weather, which was not often.

Unlike most little men, Banty was not even skilled in the use of firearms. But then, he seldom had use for a gun, for his own protection, at any rate.

He kept out of most arguments, and on those infrequent occasions when he did stumble into what looked like a fight, Jogson always took Banty's part, and, the fight was over, in so far as Banty was concerned, at any rate.

Most of the paying claims in the Moosehorn Hills, were within a radius of ten miles about Sutton's Camp. Most of the miners lived at the settlement and foregathered every night at the Mohawk Saloon, which cozy little hostelry just over the Alaskan border in Canada, did a thriving business. Things never really started to move at the Mohawk until Soldier Jogson and Gus Dorn arrived; these men, each owning many friends, ran the camp.

This particular night in late winter, neither Jogson nor Dorn appeared at the usual time. And, at the end of the first half hour, the little smoke-blurred room in the Mohawk was a babel of speculative chatter. Jogson and Dorn were sworn enemies; had they fought out there in the wilderness? Perhaps both of them were dead? Banty would know all about it, only—Banty was away.

Three days since the little man had started for Norton, the nearest town, for various supplies—candy, cigarettes and other dainties—which Sutton's Camp did not carry. He was due back, soon, but this didn't help the news-hungry men.

When they were on the point of organizing a searching party, Gus Dorn appeared. The bully's clothes were torn, his hat gone, black-whiskered face dirty and streaked with blood. His little rat-like eyes held a hunted, scared look.

"Soldier Jogson—is—dead," he said.

And observing no hint of suspicion in the miners' faces, he breathed more freely.

"He jumped me—at the claim; said I'd been robbin' him. We fought—"

He displayed scarred and bleeding knuckles to bear out this statement.

"—we fought—an' fought—on thet flat rock nigh my claim—you know. An'—an' —bimeby—Soldier slipped—an' fell—over the cliff. I tried t' ketch him—but—didn't quite make it. I—I was all in. There's a hundred foot drop—over that cliff—you know. He—he—he's dead—all right."

Dorn was in evident distress, and most of the assembled miners sympathized with him. When one strong man beats another strong man, in a stand up fight, even though the beaten man may die as a result of the battle, there is good cause for the victor to brag; he usually does so and his importance rises proportionately.

This is an accepted part of that crude code of ethics obtaining in the wilderness. But, when two strong men fight, and one is injured—or killed—accidentally, the survivor is only half a victor. The winner usually feels very badly about it, and rails at fate for having deprived him of the opportunity to beat his man four-square, without the intervention of accident.

Sutton's Camp figured that Gus Dorn—although he was known to be a cruel and malicious bully—felt badly because he had been deprived, by chance, of beating Soldier Jogson. Which was exactly what Gus wanted them to think.

Banty Le Cote returned late that night, in a driving snow storm. Dorn was gone when Banty arrived. The little man sidled across the room, the usual apologetic half grin on his stubble covered lips, his pale eyes squinting into the light—searching—searching for Soldier Jogson.

He got the story, bit by bit, from the reluctant miners. No one wanted to tell the little fellow; they weren't at all sure how he would take it. He'd probably mope around and make a gloomy nuisance of himself, until spring.

He wouldn't do anything about it, of course. There was nothing to do.

Banty sprang his first surprise, right at this point.

"How d'you *know* he's dead? Did any of you go out there an' look the place over? No, o' course you didn't. It's too comfortable, in here. A fine bunch o' bully boys, you be."

Banty Le Cote's weazened face was gray with rage. He spat disgustedly.

"We'll go—with you—Banty, an'—an'—but Gus said Soldier went over the cliff. Ain't really no use—we'll go along—if you say so—"

"T'hell you will. You-all stay right here where it's nice an' warm; might git yer feet wet an'—an' ketch cold. Me, I'm goin'—alone. An' tell that big ape, Dorn, fer me—*t' stay at this camp.* If he sneaks away I'll foller him, an' I'll git him—on suspicion. If he stays here—I—I may jest wanta talk to him, some."

With which amazing speech, Banty Le Cote sidled out into the night and away.

For the space of perhaps ten seconds a pin could have been heard to drop in the smoke-filled room. Each man looked at his neighbor in astonishment.

Banty Le Cote had said: "Tell that big ape, Dorn—" Yes, there was no question but what he had said it.

Banty Le Cote, that shriveled-up, mouse-hearted little runt, who, in the five years that Sutton's Camp had known him, had never before dared call his soul his own. It was unbelievable; they wouldn't have believed it, only they had heard it—with their own ears.

Of them all, Jean Russe, the proprietor of the Mohawk, knew Banty best. Russe was the first to break the astonished silence.

"I t'ink Banty was nervous—all excite. He don' know what he said, dat's sure. He all blow up inside to hear Soldier dead. We don' say not'ing to Gus, eh?"

And they didn't tell Gus Dorn in so many words, what Banty had said. Dorn got the impression just the same, that Banty suspected him; and the bully didn't like it.

He wasn't exactly afraid—no man need be afraid of Banty Le Cote—but, he appeared next day with a gun in his belt, just the same. Gus Dorn had never before carried a gun; few men at Sutton's Camp did go armed. What few fights there were, were settled with fists. Physical prowess counted far more at Sutton's Camp than marksmanship.

Of course, a man skilled at knife fighting was looked up to to a certain extent, but there were few of these so far east as Sutton's Camp.

Banty did not appear at the Mohawk the next night. On the second day following the unfortunate culmination of the Jogson-Dorn feud, a miner reported having seen Banty Le Cote passing his claim early in the day, driving his, Banty's, team of prize malemutes, at a breakneck pace; and, in the sled there had been a woman, a half breed girl from the mission at St. Croix.

This report brought forth much comment.

"Danged little coot; the minute Soldier passes out, he goes an' gits hisself a woman—"

"Soldier never did cotten to women—"

"Afraid of 'em, Soldier was—"

"Not Banty, though—"

While they were discussing this choice bit of news, Gus Dorn entered. His heavy face was white. In the palm of his hand he held a knife, a wooden-handled, sturdy-bladed, hunting knife.

"Somebody—threw this at me," he announced. He searched the room with nervous eyes.

"But they ain't a knife thrower in camp, Gus."

"I'm tellin' you, somebody threw this knife at me—missed me only by a hair, too—"

On the end of the bar sat a small keg filled with water; a tin mug was attached to this keg by a chain. Dorn filled the mug with water and raised it to his lips.

Just as the first swallow trickled down his throat, the mug was torn from his hand and jerked to the end of the chain with noisy clatter.

A knife, exactly like the other one, pierced that tin mug.

All eyes furtively circled the room. There

was no one in sight who could possibly have thrown that knife.

Gus Dorn's face was a sickly gray. His hairy hand fumbled at the gun in his belt. An amazed silence settled over the little room, all eyes turning to Gus Dorn.

And, in this silence, the outer door slammed, and Banty Le Cote sidled into the room. He grinned a doubtful greeting around at the half circle of attentive faces, and, without saying a word, crossed the floor and clumped up the rear stairs.

He returned almost immediately with a loosely wrapped bundle thrown over his shoulder. He and Jogson had a room at the Mohawk; evidently Banty was now staying at the cabin near the claim and was getting some clothes.

The little man came to a hesitating stop, near Dorn, and peered unblinkingly up into the bully's face.

"Well, what the hell's the matter with you," Dorn sputtered. "Whut d'you want?" He bellowed this latter.

Banty grinned apologetically. "Jest wanted t' make sure—you was—still here," he said, and still grinning, shuffled away.

From that night on, Gus Dorn was a changed man. The loud-mouthed, blustering bully was gone; there was fear in his shifting eyes, dread, as of some potent but intangible menace, in his nervous gestures.

There was no more knife throwing, but, at the end of the week, United States Marshal John Quarterlee, appeared at Sutton's Camp. With the marshal was Corporal Footman of the Canadian police.

Sutton's Camp was quick to grasp the possible meaning of this visit. The settlement itself was on Canadian soil; that spot where Soldier Jogson had met his death, was on United States soil. Evidently the two officers were investigating the killing of Soldier Jogson, and had come prepared to get their man.

However, if this was their object, they showed little interest in the matter. They seemed to know all about the affair; they did not ask questions. They were old friends were Quarterlee and Footman; they played checkers beside the stove in the Mohawk and enjoyed themselves hugely.

Dorn kept out of sight for the first day or so, but, when he found that the officers were apparently not in the least interested in his movements, he again took to frequenting his usual haunts.

Quarterlee and Footman had made the Mohawk their headquarters for upward of a week during which time there had been no sign of Banty Le Cote, when, one blustery Saturday night, when the Mohawk was full to overflowing with week-end visitors, in from more distant claims—Jogson's partner appeared.

The little man was evidently in fine fettle. As he angled apologetically through the crowd, he whistled tunelessly through his teeth. There was a flush of color in his sallow cheeks; happiness rode him; he wore it like a garment.

To those who, during five years, had never discovered the slightest trace of emotion of any sort in Banty Le Cote, his actions this night upon entering the Mohawk Saloon, constituted still another inexplicable change in the drab little man whom they had known as "Jogson's partner."

Dorn was drinking at one end of the bar. A whisky glass, half empty, stood at the big man's elbow. Banty sidled up close to Dorn, so close that his elbow touched the bully's.

Dorn turned, scowling fiercely.

"Well—" he questioned.

"Jest wanted t' see—if you was—still here," Banty grinned.

And then, whether by accident or intent no one was able definitely to say later, the whisky glass was knocked from the big man's hand as he lifted it to his lips. Perhaps a return of that nervous dread had caused it to slip from his fingers; perhaps Banty Le Cote jostled the bully's trembling arm; at any rate, the half filled glass crashed to the floor and smashed into a thousand tinkling pieces.

And Gus Dorn, bellowing like a wounded bull, turned, and, without the slightest warning struck Banty Le Cote full in the face with his clubbed fist. At the last moment, the little man threw up his hand in guard, but, force of the blow sent him sprawling backward.

He slid half the length of the floor on his back and brought up solidly against a

post. He came to his feet, slowly, wearily, and fumbled with his right hand at his belt.

The room cleared magically. Quarterlee and Footman, who had been eating supper, peered in, but neither made any move to interfere with whatever might be in the wind. Evidently they knew Banty Le Cote; knew that he was harmless.

Gus Dorn evidently was not so sure in this respect, however. Finding himself alone, he backed against the wall. There was that shifting look of fear in his pig-like eyes as he watched Banty Le Cote's fumbling movements.

Suddenly the bully seemed to lose all control of himself. He caught the gun from his belt. Yelled hoarsely. Then the tense bodied watchers saw something that they had never seen before; at least, they had never seen human hands accomplish a similar act with such speed and deftness.

A knife flashed into Banty Le Cote's right hand. His slim fingers described an amazingly rapid arc about his head—and that gleaming blade sped through the air, straight at Gus Dorn. The gun, half drawn, flew from the bully's fingers. He stared down, dazedly, at his numb hand.

Banty peered about apologetically at the breathless men.

"He drew first," he said.

Then, a quick change came over the little man. His slight body straightened. His thin lips tightened. From beneath his arm he snatched another knife.

Gus Dorn, unarmed, stared, horror-struck, fear-ridden. He stumbled back to the wall, arms outstretched, against the rough logs.

"You—you threw them knives. You—you—" he stuttered.

"Sure, I threw 'em, yaller dog."

Gus Dorn, his eyes on that glistening knife, saw death staring him in the face. The fleeting courage of a cornered animal, came to him. He grabbed for a chair.

But his clutching fingers never reached it. Something struck his arm, just above the elbow, pierced through and through the corded muscle, and imbedded itself deep in the spruce log wall.

Dorn knew it was a knife without looking. He was pinned to the wall, unless—Another knife flashed toward him. This one passed under his other arm, just grazing the skin, caught the heavy flannel shirt and pinned it to the wall.

He was caught. Dared not so much as move a muscle.

"Now, you kinky-haired polecat—start talkin'."

No man there would have recognized this as Banty Le Cote's voice. The timidity was gone. He stood erect, balancing on his toes; a third knife lay in his palm. The habitually smiling lips were twisted into a sneer.

"Whut—whut—whut—you mean—"

"You know danged well whut I mean. Tell 'em—about—Soldier Jogson. An'—tell the truth. Don't—don't lie—fer yore own good—it's apt t' make me mad. If I git mad—I'm apt t' let go with this other knife.

"Yeah, I know the officers are there, but I kin git this knife into yore carcass afore they kin draw a gun; an' I'd plumb enjoy hangin' fer the privilege o' sendin' you over the Big Divide—ahead of me. Talk right up now. You didn't fight. Start at the beginnin'—"

"I hit him—with a club—"

"What was he doin' all thet time?"

"He—he wasn't lookin'. I hit him—frum behind—an'—an'—pushed him—over—the cliff—"

Among men who fight according to no known rules, but who fight within certain definite limits of fairness, nevertheless, a cowardly blow—hitting a man from behind—is abhorred above all other crimes. If, as Gus Dorn had first claimed, he had *killed* Soldier Jogson in a fair fight—they would have thought none the worse of Dorn; the law probably would have taken the killer, but no man there would have given evidence against him.

But now—this—was different. Twenty weather-browned faces grew hard. Many pairs of feet shuffled. There were angry mutterings.

"You heard—" Banty Le Cote's shrill voice was exultant. "He hit Soldier in the back."

The mutterings grew louder.

"Guess mebbe Sutton's Camp won't hev

much use fer Mr. Gus Dorn—frum now on, eh?" The little man's face was flushed with excitement.

A dozen voices gave him the expected answer, accompanied by various degrees of lurid blasphemy.

"Hear thet, you yaller-bellied swine—yore done."

Swiftly, Banty Le Cote crossed the room, and yanked the two knives free. The little man cleansed the blade of the blood-covered knife between thumb and forefinger.

"Git," he said.

For a long minute, Gus Dorn watched the blood trickle from the ends of his fingers onto the sawdust-covered floor, then, holding the wounded arm with his other hand, he shuffled toward the door, eyes still cast downward.

Marshal Quarterlee stepped forward.

"Is—everything—all right, Banty?" he questioned, low-voiced.

"Yessir, all hunky-dory."

"Dorn!" the marshal called.

Gus Dorn hesitated at the door, like a frightened rabbit, undetermined whether to hold its ground, or flee.

"We're letting you go, Dorn. You're an American citizen, an' yore aimin' fer American soil. Understand? An' frum now on, yore watchin' yore step, right keerful. S'thet clear? I aim t' keep an eye on you—an' one more misstep—like this here—an'—I'm takin' you."

With which pointed statement, Marshal Quarterlee turned away and joined his fellow officer in the back room.

Banty Le Cote had run Gus Dorn, the bully of the settlement, out of camp! A marvel of marvels had come about. The weak had been made strong.

Sutton's Camp was supplied with ammunition sufficient to carry through the longest and dullest of winter night conversations. Still, there was one question left unsettled. If Dorn was a killer—as he confessed to be—why had John Quarterlee let him go? Or Footman? One or the other should have arrested him?

The answer to this last question in the Sutton's Camp mystery of mysteries, appeared several days later, in the person of a big tow-headed hulk of a man, who, white of face and with head covered by many snowy bandages, plodded into camp leaning on the shoulder of a slim, rosy-cheeked French-Indian girl.

Soldier Jogson!

Jogson made straight for the Mohawk. He carried a short-handled ax in his right hand.

"Where is he?" he bawled.

And while the girl, with much soft-voiced chatter quieted the sick man—they told him everything.

"Hell's bells, hell's bells, hell's bells!" was all he could say for a time. And then: "Banty—Banty—done it. Hell's bells!" And then he answered their questions.

"—the skunk hit me when I warn't lookin' an' pushed me over the cliff. I wasn't quite unconscious when I went over. I went t' sleep on the way down, though. I woke up, buried ten feet deep in a twenty foot drift, at the bottom o' Fraser's Gulch. If it hadn't been I was buried in the snow, I would of froze, sure. I was purty sick and had a hard job gittin' outa thet drift. It was dark an' snowin' hard. Then, Banty showed up swingin' a lantern and yellin'.

"We couldn't git outa thet gulch. Banty built a fire an' tried t' fix me up. I was in a bad way, though; I knew it, an' so did he. In the mornin' he got some Indians, an' they built a cabin right thar, at the bottom o' the gulch. Then Banty got a doctor an' a nurse from the mission at St. Croix. This — this — she — er — ah — Mamselle Frank, boys—an' Banty took turns a-watchin' me. I was purty sick, I guess.

"Fer quite a spell thar, it was nip an' tuck. I knew Banty got the police on here; in case I kicked off, Banty was goin' t' make danged sure Dorn hung. That was like Banty—but—this other—this knife throwin' an' all—hell's bells—"

Soldier Jogson rested his sore head in his hands. But he was not ill, as his fair nurse seemed to think. His heavy shoulders were shaking with laughter.

"Har, har, har—an'—t' think I been bullyin' thet little—hell cat—aroun' fer five year!"

THE END

The Mark of the Moccasin

A MYSTERY TALE

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Wild Paradise," "The Canon of Light," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE CORONER.

I FEEL myself at a loss when I attempt to set down the events of that day.

Could you imagine yourself, let us say, in a jungle down in Brazil, lying on your back, helpless? You are in this condition, we will pretend, because some one has bound you hands and feet. Then comes a giant vampire to crouch upon your chest.

This expresses in some degree my own experience. But it cannot express the emotions. No words can.

Let me start in by recording what happened to the octoroon Maizie.

Our suspicions were hour by hour focusing upon her. Miss Shirley meanwhile was occupied with deciphering the "Bible" of the late Pythagoras Awls.

As yet she had found nothing that bore on the present case. The manuscript was entitled: "The Miracles of Pythagoras Awls, Prophet of Light." It was divided into chapters and verses, written in a pseudo Biblical style, and grotesquely elaborated with myths of swamp devils, snake doctors, moccasins, trite aphorisms on death, and ridiculous little "miracles," like curing old colored mammies of rheumatism.

We suggested to Shirley that she jump to the last chapter and decipher that, be-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 29.

fore wading through the huge tome of nonsense.

But to return to Maizie: Of course, we suspected her of some trickery in regard to those photographs. She could have taken the camera, removed the film, and then presented us with a print of a negative which she herself had developed.

It would, of course, be a double negative, inasmuch as these spirit photographs, according to my belief, are merely a trick employing the use of two different negatives, one a picture of the scene and its living characters, the other a picture of the dead. Putting the two together gives you your spirit photograph.

But we investigated this hypothesis quickly enough. And we proved ourselves wrong. The doctor went to the drug store where Maizie had taken the film. The clerk affirmed that there had been merely the one film in the kodak—I mean to say, of course, the roll of films, with the usual number of six exposures.

There had been, he said, only one exposure, the one which he printed, and which we had seen. And on that one exposure were all the details revealed in the print—the room, the pile of clothes which was Pythagoras, and the face of Judge Scudder.

"It is the first bona fide spirit photograph I have ever seen," the doctor announced when he returned.

But I was not satisfied. By a process of elimination Maizie was the one culprit left. "Let us, in our ignorance of the camera and its tricks, go on the supposition, just for the sake of argument, that Maizie might have fabricated that picture."

"What then?" Shirley asked. I believe she was inimical to the idea. Although there was a burning enmity between her and the octoroon, she could not imagine a woman perpetuating the horrors that we had witnessed.

"I myself will ask, 'what then'?" I rejoined. "Is there no possible motive that you, knowing Maizie and her affairs, can ascribe?"

Shirley looked at me, and then at the doctor. Dr. Zobel, she noticed, was interested in my way of going about the matter.

"There is," Shirley said, as if with great difficulty.

We waited.

"Maizie has a fiancé," she announced finally. "He is a muskrat trapper, working in the marshes beyond the Sabine River. I believe she is violently in love with him."

Here she paused until the doctor pleaded with her to tell all she knew.

"He worries about her past life."

"Ah, that is something to talk about!" Dr. Zobel exclaimed.

I immediately sensed the fact the doctor had inadvertently made a reference to Maizie's rather suspicious position in this household. I saw Shirley turn a fiery red.

"Is her past in doubt?" I asked.

Shirley gave vent to a peculiar gasp of scorn and rage. I understood it easily enough.

The doctor's long yellow face writhed into a smile.

"Is it known—her past—outside of this household?" I asked, leading straight to the point.

"There you have it!" Dr. Zobel exclaimed. "If she did away with the mozo and with me, and with Deputy Marteau, who may have learned something in his confounded meddling with the affairs of this house, she might be able to wipe out her unsavory past.

"It sounds frightfully improbable. But you remember that the peculiar Being that has been seen by several of us, was as much like an animal as a man, and as much like a woman as an animal.

"And Maizie is a very strong woman. There is more probability of her working some of this physical violence, than, let us say, the little old Mexican Pasqual."

"Why do you think she killed Pythagoras?" I asked.

I was surprised at the readiness of the doctor's answer.

"She obtained an African poison from him."

"And wanted to cover up her tracks?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"What sort of a poison was this—do you happen to have any ideas on that point?"

"I have lots of ideas," said Dr. Zobel.

He wiped his glasses, took a drink of sherry, and then paced up and down the room, his head bowed, his hands behind his back. Suddenly he stopped and looked at me.

"I've told Shirley," he said. "I don't see why I can't tell you. You have helped us. You are a stranger to the case. I might make up some sort of case against you. But I can't.

"You were in Galveston all summer; you were there three weeks ago when the judge died, and as I understand, you were there for several weeks before.

"That makes you immune. You, and that ass Cronk, came into the case because fate yanked you in by the scruff of your neck. Unlucky for you.

"But since you're brave enough to stick it out—whereas Cronk is wise enough to withdraw and save his hide, I'm going to be frank with you."

He again resumed his pacing. Shirley and I waited respectfully.

Then he announced calmly:

"This is my explanation: Maizie, prompted by a malignant and savage nature, inherited from a remote Congo ancestor, has committed these crimes.

"And then, because she is a woman, and cannot without a violent shock to her womanly instinct commit murder, she wanted to undo the frightful work of her other self, the atavistic African self, and has attempted to resuscitate her victims."

I was so thoroughly impressed with this idea that I said: "What more is there to do then, doctor, but to call the sheriff?"

"By no means!" Shirley cried. "We must have more proof."

The doctor held up his hands in utter desperation.

"I'd like to talk to her," I said, recalling the fact that Maizie, whenever she was alone with me, seemed to speak frankly.

The other two agreed. But Shirley added:

"Remember what I think. She could not have done these things."

I thought it rather fine of the mistress of the house, who despite her violent antipathy for the octoroon, persisted in blinding herself to the obviousness of her guilt.

Maizie had retired to her room.

When I went in, I found that she was lying on her bed. The expression on her face, as she turned to look up, startled me.

She seemed terrified. Her splendid eyes were widened so that there was a rim of whites showing all around the velvet black irises. "What on earth has happened, mam'zelle?" I cried.

"We are all doomed in this terrible house. I beg you, m'sieu, go away. Escape. You yourself will be poisoned. We all will. Escape before it's too late."

"I'll get the doctor," I said.

"No, no, before God! Don't let him come in here. M'sieu!" she lowered her voice. It was a husky, trembling sort of moan. "M'sieu," she said piteously. "I beg you to tell the mistress my secret. Beg her to go away with you.

"Fly from the horror that has gripped this house. Once I know that she is safe, that you have taken her, I myself will steal away."

"I promise. Rest assured," I said. "But please let me bring in Dr. Zobel."

"Dr. Zobel! God!" she cried. "The fiend! The rattler! The murderer! He it is who has poisoned your friend Cronk, m'sieu. And *you* will be next. And then the mistress—or perhaps I myself!"

The luster had left her gorgeous eyes. It was only the recurrent spasms of fear that brought back their inherent beauty.

"Do you mean to say you're accusing the old doctor!" I gasped.

"I am. I know. I know of things that you cannot dream, m'sieu."

"What insane reason can you have to come out with such a statement as that!" I exclaimed. "First you swore up and down the mozo was guilty. And now—"

"The doctor has played tricks on us, m'sieu. He has blinded us all through fear. He has worked poisons on us—poisons that kill us, and then bring us to life! He has taken the judge's body so that we'll think the judge arose every night to commit these crimes!"

"How do you know that!" I cried.

"I saw him, last night, with a servant of his—whom he has kept away from this house. They went with a buggy to the St.

Roche Gardens. I followed. I saw them take the judge's body. It is the trick he has played on us all! The judge has not arisen each night as we have thought, m'sieu. It is that serpent, that maniac, Dr. Zobel, who has taken the body each night for his infernal experiments!"

My first thought was to go down again to the doctor, and tell him what had happened. But in view of the revelation that this woman had just made of the doctor's activities at night time, with his servant and buggy, I refrained. Besides, the woman made such a piteous plea to me to warn her mistress, that I could not help giving this duty the first place.

It struck me as extraordinarly dramatic how these two women, who had been like tigeresses ready to rend each other to pieces, now stood by one another when their lives were actually in danger.

If they felt this way, staying at their posts for each other's sake, you may imagine how I felt. Nothing could have induced me to leave the house, not unless I could take both Maizie and her young mistress with me.

But just what was I to do now, with this new revelation complicating all my plans? Could I accuse the doctor? Could I call in a sheriff and, with the meager proofs I had, point to the venerable old Dr. Zobel as the perpetrator of these crimes?

I went downstairs. I felt a peculiar sensation creep over me—perhaps the depressing effect of the gloomy old manse. It left me somewhat numb, as though my brain were telegraphing its orders to my muscles in an inefficient way.

I sat down, and rubbed my forehead. I tried to think.

What sort of man was this doctor?

He was a great friend of old Judge Scudder; he was a sort of father to Shirley; he was a second-rate country doctor, a hard drinker, irascible, imaginable, untrustworthy as a physician, perhaps untrustworthy as a friend—who knows?

I groped vainly for clews pointing to his guilt. I found myself in a haze. But out of that haze I was able to grasp at a few faint glimmers of light:

First, how about a motive?

There may have been different motives for each murder: The judge was his friend, but inasmuch as he was a rich man, there may have been the most easily tenable hypothesis of all: the doctor wanted some of that fortune.

The deputy was killed, let us say, because of his insulting attentions to Miss Shirley. The girl, I recalled, had confided in Dr. Zobel concerning that attack in her room the morning after the storm. This may have been a reason. Or else perhaps he wanted to get the deputy—as a representative of the law—off of the scene.

Then there was the mozo Pasqual. The doctor had pretended—let us use that word for the sake of argument—to suspect the mozo. The mozo perhaps had discovered something, and had to be put out of the way.

I could not help recalling the fact that when the mozo was killed, the doctor was the one person who did not show himself in the hallway or gallery after the murder.

Then there was Pythagoras Awls; you can think up any number of reasons why Pythagoras was put out of the way. He had "a secret." What was that secret? Well, it must have come into the old Negro fakir's possession long before I entered the scene. It may have come into his hands back there at Zopot's Bayou.

What relation he had with the doctor I don't know. But what relation would he be apt to have? Would not the two men be liable to cross each other in the discharge of their duties? Dr. Zobel as a coroner, passing judgment on the death of some Negro, might very naturally have run across this fakir who was a healer to the Negro population of Zopot's Bayou.

Perhaps—to let my imagination roam—the doctor came across some sort of African drug that the fakir was in the habit of using. Could that not have been the "secret?"

Let us say Pythagoras had a drug or a poison which baffled the doctor, which interested him, and which piqued him into an investigation. Perhaps he had found something really remarkable, and wanted to use it.

All these dreadful events may have been merely the result of a half-crazy old doctor

making experiments. It was a picturesque idea to say the least.

Most of these hypotheses were based merely on my own guess work. What actual clews did I have?

Well, there was the point about the stolen body of Judge Scudder. The possibility of some one taking that body from its tomb at night time and replacing it during the day, appealed to me as very plausible. It is just what a man might do who wanted to experiment, and yet who did not want the scandal of a molested grave to upset his schemes. The doctor had been seen in the act.

There were two other headlights in his behavior which I thought might be used against him: He was evasive in reporting the outcome of his autopsy on the deputy. Likewise he was evasive about his experiments at home.

Why was he evasive? Had he really returned to his home and studied up this matter? Or was this an alibi to attempt to prove his absence from the manse, when in reality he was right on the scene, carrying on his fiendish work?

One other point: Let us grant that Judge Scudder, when I saw him in the lobby of the Lone-Star Hotel, was actually alive. Well, then, who was responsible for the enormity of pronouncing him dead, and causing him to be entombed? Dr. Zobel, in his capacity of coroner, had this to explain.

I groped vainly for my next step. What was I to do? Should I call in the law? Had we not reduced this mystery to its least common multiple? With a strong case against Maizie, and an equally strong one against Dr. Zobel, was it not time now to make arrests?

I knew without the shadow of a doubt that Miss Shirley would object violently to this. She had protected Maizie, and for that reason I was very strongly of the belief that the octoroon was innocent. But could I go out and tell the sheriff to arrest Shirley's best friend, old Dr. Zobel?

I must see Miss Shirley; that was the one idea that my brain was fumbling with.

Miss Shirley was at this time in a sort of French drawing room on the second floor. I got up from the reed chair where I was sitting, and went up the stairs.

I remember now that the journey from that couch to the second floor seemed to take an astonishingly long time. I might say it seemed to take an hour—or rather that it seemed a year. The time was immeasurable.

A grotesque and seemingly irrelevant thought came to my mind: I thought of the drug hasheesh and its peculiar effect on one's sense of time. The hasheesh addict I have heard may observe a ball falling to the floor, and the motion will seem to him like a slow motion picture. His perception is so excited and acute that every movement of the ball, every twist and turn, every spot on it, is observable.

Miss Shirley came to the door. I believe I was hanging to the doorknob, after knocking, for the wait was long, and a fit of helplessness, of sickness, had swept over me.

I stood there looking at her, rubbing my eyes, trying to fathom the mystery of my being there face to face with her. At the same time the mystery of the doctor and his actions was churning my brain.

There stood the girl, her face as clear as burnished gold revealed in a light of intense brilliance. I saw every detail of her face, but even under what seemed to be a merciless light, I could find no imperfections. She was angelic.

I believe it was she who spoke first.

"What has happened to you?" she cried excitedly. "Why are you rubbing your eyes."

"Nothing has happened. I'm quite all right. A headache—"

"Where?" she asked.

Although I was rubbing my eyes and my forehead, I could not quite place the pain. It seemed to grip my whole body, surging upward like a flame—or rather a dull knife, and cleaving something inside my skull.

"Here," I said, pointing to my forehead. "No, not here—but in the back of my skull."

I saw the expression of her face change. Her eyes were dilated.

"How long have you had this pain?"

"Just now. It came suddenly," I said,

clinging again to the door to support myself. "It didn't come—like Cronk's. Cronk was poisoned—slowly poisoned, I reckon. But as for me—"

"Your face is white as a sheet," she said. "Come here. I want to help you."

I fell forward, sagging somewhat in the knees, and my whole weight rested against her slight form. It was extraordinary how strong that girl was. I believe she practically carried me to the davenport.

"I must get Dr. Zobel," she said.

"No!" I screamed. "Don't get him! He's poisoned me. Can't you understand? It's something that was in my hominy at breakfast. I'm poisoned."

A terrific horror of being buried before I was actually dead swept over me, and left me shuddering deathly sick, as if I had just fought against a fit.

It is peculiar, as I look back upon this incident, that my fevered brain groped for concepts and fears and ideas that had nothing to do with myself. Here I was—if I had only thought it out clearly—poisoned, most probably with a drug that would have the effect of putting me into a cataleptic trance.

The fear of being buried alive is one of the most ancient and most horrible fears ever invented by the devils of hell. And yet I was so confused, bewildered, that I was still harping back on that other problem: Was the doctor guilty? It was as if I were in a nightmare, and each new fear carried with it an echo of the previous one.

As I have just written, I even thought of Cronk.

Cronk had forsaken us. He had been gone many hours. From some points of view you would say he was good riddance, and whatever happened to him concerned us no longer.

But my friendship for him was not easily forgotten. He was wise—very wise indeed—to get out. But had he gotten out in time? He had been poisoned, too. But curiously, the drug had affected him in a different way. He had suffered for a long time with that headache, and so far as I knew the poison had not yet affected him in the normal exercise of his limbs, as it had affected me.

That in itself, however, was nothing unusual. Drugs, poisons, medicines of any kind, may have an almost diametrically opposite effect on two different individuals.

And yet I was vitally concerned about Cronk. He had gone home, I was fairly sure, under the influence of that drug. What might have become of him by now? Perhaps the paralyzing effect that it had on me had merely been postponed in his case. How did I know but that he was at this very moment lying in his bed at home helpless, in mortal agony, with no one to help him?

Combined with this fear for the safety of my friend there was my concern for Shirley Scudder. She must not be left in this house unprotected, while a half mad old doctor went around poisoning or otherwise murdering any one he fancied.

I realized at the same time that I could no longer be of any assistance to her. I could not protect her. Indeed, she was protecting me; she sat by me as I lay there, my arms heavy, inert, all but paralyzed.

"Go and see what's happened to Tim Cronk," I said. "He was poisoned. He must have help."

That was a good solution of the whole problem. It would get the girl out of the house, and at the same time Cronk, in his extremity, might be helped—yes, perhaps saved.

The girl went.

You might wonder how it happened that she could forsake me at a time like that. Well, the answer is simple: she left me with the doctor! You see, she did not suspect the doctor. And she believed that if any one could help me, most surely it would be Dr. Zobel, in whom since childhood she had put implicit faith.

He had already told us about discovering a poison. Just how much of a ruse, on the doctor's part, this was, I did not know.

Suffice it to say that, at the moment, I was thoroughly convinced that he was using this same poison indiscriminately on everybody in a blundering attempt to find out just what effect it had.

But there I was, left alone in the Scudder manse with the doctor. I say alone, because Maizie dared stay no longer. Once her mistress was gone, she herself withdrew. She left me alone—sick and helpless under the influence of that devastating, brain-torturing drug—to fight my own battles.

I fancy she understood well enough that she could not help me. Physically she was something of a coward. It was probably beyond her wildest dreams to imagine herself fighting that gaunt giant of a maniac, Dr. Zobel.

As I learned later, she did the thing that was most natural: now that her mistress, who had consistently opposed bringing in any more deputies or sheriffs or coroners, had temporarily withdrawn, Maizie felt at liberty to call in the law. She went directly for the sheriff. That was her one gesture in the attempt to save me. And it was quite apparent that she could have done nothing more.

The doctor entered before Shirley left, and upon assuring her that he would take care of me, and that she need not worry, he accompanied her to the door, and then, after what seemed to me an eternity, he came to my bedside.

He seemed to have grown in stature. I could have sworn that he was two feet taller. His face was revealed in the same ghastly light which I had seen shining upon the face of Shirley.

It was no doubt an effect of the drug. My vision was abnormally sharpened. I saw every mole, every wrinkle, every speck of color on the doctor's features as if I were looking through a microscope. The long, thin face was like a skull covered over with a tight parchment the color of a vivid chrome yellow. His eyes were cavernous, red-rimmed. One of them, magnified by the lens, was enormous, like the eyes of a cyclops.

The face came closer to me, bit by bit, and kept approaching long after I thought it must be smack up against my own. I felt his hand, a scrawny claw with the same yellow parchment, fumbling about my wrist.

There was no doubt in my mind but that he was having trouble finding my pulse. The poison had worked so far that I believe if Dr. Zobel were drunk enough he might have pronounced me dead. That at least was the thought that at that moment tortured me.

He was talking. His lips were moving. And I could hear a sort of thunderous jumble of words, but could make nothing out of them.

I myself could speak. Although when I had spoken I wondered what I had said. One thing I remember. I came right out with the accusation and the revelations which Maizie had preferred.

"*You were seen getting the judge's body from the tomb,*" I said.

I could not for the life of me understand the words that came from those slowly moving lips. But I saw him nod in assent. It was the last thing I remember. I was trying desperately to fight. But in trying to lift my arms I felt as though they were strapped to my body. How a man in a strait-jacket feels, how a man who is suddenly paralyzed feels, I do not know. But I do know how a drugged man feels. And I judge the panic that grips his brain is something of the same nature in all three cases.

You remember I started in writing by saying I had spent a night which was the most terrible of my life; that I had been through an experience like a man in some South American jungle, chained, and watching a vampire on his chest.

This was what was happening to me now. The doctor was actually filling a hypodermic needle with something from a bottle. I tried vainly to shout. My forehead was cold and damp. A current of fear gripped me as if I had clutched at a high-voltage wire. I writhed.

I remember I was able to roll from the bed, and in a frantic exertion of all the strength in my drugged muscles I reached the window.

I prayed God that the breath of air that swept in upon me would revive me enough so that I could hurl myself out of that window.

But I sank. A strong arm had encircled me about the neck. A weight was upon

my back. I felt two succinct stings strike me from behind, piercing my skin just under the skull.

CHAPTER XIX.

BACK TO LIFE.

I HAVE but one more event to record, one more night, and this report is finished. I had not written a line since that experience with Dr. Zobel. A number of days seem to pass. I doubt very much whether I could have given any kind of coherent account, even if I had tried, until the effects of that poison wore off.

I believe I may have lapsed into unconsciousness for a few minutes. Dr. Zobel says that is all. I had control of my faculties—that is to say, after a fashion. But just what drug this poison was like, there was no telling from my symptoms. The doctor said there is evidence of Jimson weed in the powder.

But to get back and record these events in their proper order:

Shirley, as I have said, had gone to town to the general store, in the top story of which Tim Cronk lived in a furnished room. His photography shop was one of a row of small stores across the street. Shirley was gone for some time; I judged for several hours.

Meanwhile, Dr. Zobel was administering to me. The injection which he gave me—in the manner I described to you when I was last writing on this report—was an antidote. He followed it up with other effectual means of expurgating the poison, and toward the end of the afternoon he even cooked me a bowl of broth.

Then for two hours I slept. At somewhere about sunset I awoke.

Now, the peculiarity of this whole experience lies in the fact that all the time I was being nursed by that yellow-faced, raw-boned giant of a man I believed him a murderer. I believed that he was trying his infernal experiments upon me. The notion which maintains that the mental state of a patient determines how sick he is, is pure bosh.

Consider my case:

I believed that I was being murdered. But I didn't die. I believed that a devil incarnate was slowly pushing me into my grave. But I got well. I awoke late that night, as I say, and aside from a splitting headache and a feeling of dizzy sickness, as one might have the morning after an orgy of strong drink, I was a sane and healthy man.

Let me use just the term "healthy." As for being sane—well, my sanity returned to me considerably later, when we solved the mystery of the Scudder murders.

I said the doctor was experimenting on me. Well, that is the truth, and nothing but the truth. He admitted it himself. But he said his experiment—which he entered into primarily to save my life—threw a light upon this whole series of events.

When I awoke late that evening I found myself in the second-story sitting room, where I had been all along. A lamp was on a table, surrounded by a cloud of flies and mosquitoes. By my bedside was Dr. Zobel himself.

"Where is Miss Shirley?" I asked.

"She has been gone on a visit of mercy to your friend Cronk."

"Is Cronk all right?"

"We don't know yet, suh," the gaunt old fellow said. "What I am especially interested in is your health."

"My head aches."

"It will pass away, I think. Have some more broth?"

"Is there more poison in it?" I asked pointedly.

"I hope not."

"I'm not hungry, or thirsty," I said.

I was determined to touch nothing more in that house. When the doctor fed me the broth previously, I was too weak and too terrified to resist him. I felt that I had my strength now.

I sat up in bed and looked about. I imagine I must have looked like some fevered man searching wildly for a window through which to escape.

"Stay where you are a minute. I have lots to tell you," the doctor said.

The voice, calm, dignified, even compassionate, compelled me to lie back again upon my pillow.

"You suspect me; I know that," the old gentleman went on. "I reckon you've got some cause to. That's one reason I'm going to explain everything that till now I've kept secret.

"My secret was too precious to give out to any stranger that chance happened to throw into this house. Just plain horse sense told me to keep my counsel to myself until I had more definite proof."

I waited for him to tell his story. He got up and paced the room in his customary way, his huge hands clasped behind him, his ungainly skull-like face tilted downward.

Presently he went on: "You may know that one of my hobbies has been the study of poisons—the poisons of all races. That may be one reason for your suspecting me. Judge Scudder, an ethnologist, has been of great help to me.

"In our research Shirley was our amanuensis. We have analyzed all poisons, the kaapi and curari of the Amazons, the ganja of the Hindus, the sap of the upas tree. We even investigated this story of the poison on the sinnet whipping of the Borneo arrows which they are said to obtain from sticking the arrows into corpses. I myself have made a study of the venom of serpents—the cobra's which affects the nerves, the rattler's which affects the blood.

"Now, then, to get back to our case," he went on. "I have the results of four autopsies. In all cases there was a certain poison, some primitive sort of powder in which I could detect evidence of purple foxglove."

"The mystery that baffles me," I said, "is just this: the deputy, the mozo, and Pythagoras Awls were all three killed by physical violence—not by poisoning."

"That's just the point! The question is, why was the poison given?"

"Your answer?"

"*It was given after death!*" Dr. Zobel answered.

I almost laughed. "Why poison a man after he's dead?"

"To bring him to life," the doctor snapped.

I could not help a grunt of scornful disbelief.

"Foxglove has a stimulating effect on the cardiac muscle," the doctor said. "Perhaps you don't know that. Likewise it relieves venous congestion, and elevates blood pressure."

"How can you elevate the blood pressure of a dead man, who has no blood pressure at all?"

"That's a good point, a very good point." The doctor spoke indulgently, I thought. But he really meant it. I had stumbled on a question which he himself had been puzzling over for many hours. But he had the answer:

"There was another poison."

"The moccasins!" I exclaimed instantly.

The doctor was out of patience. "Of course not. That was only some fool claptrap of Pythagoras Awls. There was no such poison in any of the four murdered men. But in the judge's cadaver, and in the deputy's, I found something else. What it was I am not prepared to say definitely.

"In looking the matter up in every book I possess on the subject, I found a similarity to the fish poison, one of the most powerful known, first discovered by the Malays, and used by them to tip arrows. The shrub from which it is obtained is called the *Daguelia elliptica*."

I could make nothing out of these revelations. Here were two poisons, both found in two victims.

"Just where do these discoveries lead us, doctor?" I asked helplesssly.

"Nowhere. But there is one thing to remember: the foxglove poison may have been used as an antidote."

"Where does that lead us?" I asked.

"Absolutely nowhere," he repeated, "except that it enabled me to save your life."

So that was what this gaunt giant had been doing with me! I looked up at him, and I remember that at this point my faith in him began to come back.

"Do you think," I said, "that every one who has been found with the two black dots at the top of the spine was inoculated with this—antidote?"

"I do. And I believe that in the case of Judge Scudder it actually worked."

"Worked! You mean it raised him from the dead?"

"Not the dead; but what seemed like death. It acted as an antidote to the other drug which I found in his intestines—the drug which had been administered to him probably in his coffee, and which had the effect of putting him in a coma."

"The coma that you yourself mistook for death?" I asked.

He nodded, adding, "That any doctor would have mistaken."

"Then we actually saw Judge Scudder in the lobby of the Lone Star Hotel!" I cried.

"Yes, and that was the end of him. When I examined him a second time—when Cronk, and the deputy, and you, examined him—he was actually dead."

"But how did he get back to his tomb?"

"Why ask me? You can make an intelligent guess as well as I. Some one took him back there—probably in an attempt to hush the whole business up."

"What I can't understand is this: Who would poison a victim, and then attempt to bring him to life?"

"Confound it all, I don't know!" the doctor exploded. "Unless it was a woman."

"Do you think it particularly plausible that an ignorant woman like Maizie could be called a 'master-mind'?" I asked.

He grunted. "Damned if I know what kind of a mind a woman has. And yet I have a suspicion that a woman is the perpetrator of these crimes."

"*A* woman!" I exclaimed. "You said *a* woman! Well, what other woman is there beside Maizie?"

The question immediately had the rather startling effect of evoking a thought of the beautiful and delicate Miss Shirley.

Dr. Zobel looked at his watch.

"Good Heavens, what's become of that girl!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XX.

COULD IT HAVE BEEN SHIRLEY?

I FANCY we both jumped at the same fear: Maizie was gone. So was Shirley. Wouldn't Maizie put on the finishing touches of her diabolical structure of crime by trailing her hated mistress?

"Look here?" the doctor cried excitedly: "You stay here. Lie quiet. Go to sleep. There is nothing for you to fear now. I'm going to leave you for a while. I'll ride to town and see what's become of Shirley."

I considered this an excellent idea, even though the prospect of remaining in that house alone did not appeal to me particularly.

A moment later the doctor was gone, and I could hear his horse and buggy passing out of the front gate.

I dozed off after a while into a deep sleep. I do not believe I even dreamed—my exhaustion was so complete. The fact is, I slept for eight straight hours.

When I awoke I saw the lamp burning, its wick turned low. Outside there was a mild wind whispering through the moss-hung oaks, the palmettoes, and rubber plants of the patio. The breath of the patio, mingling with a salt wind from the Gulf, was delicious.

At my bedside was Shirley.

She put her cool hand on my forehead when she saw that I had awakened.

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Two o'clock."

"When did you get back from Cronk's?"

"At sunset."

"And he's all right?"

"I don't know. He wasn't at home. I came back because I wanted to talk with Dr. Zobel. The doctor was gone; and he hasn't been back yet. I've been waiting ever since."

"I must have slept a long time," I said.

"Ever since I've been here—sitting at your bedside."

"Have you been sitting here since sunset—eight hours?"

She nodded. "I wanted to talk to you; I must talk to some one. But I didn't want to wake you—after your illness last evening. You were terribly sick."

"Go ahead; talk to me," I said.

I took her hand, but she withdrew it, a cloud coming to her face.

"Do you know who is suspected—of all of us?" she asked. Then immediately she answered. "I am."

"Nonsense," I laughed.

"You think so? Then look here. Your

own friend Cronk has analyzed the whole crime, and has chosen me." She had a sheaf of papers, scraps torn from a note book, on which I recognized the handwriting of Tim Cronk.

"Where in the world did you get this?" I asked.

"When I found Cronk's room," she said, "the door was locked. And there was no answer when I knocked. I searched the town for him, and when I learned he had not been seen anywhere, I was afraid that something serious had happened to him.

"You know he had been complaining for a long time about that headache. I thought perhaps he was in his room, helpless, drugged, perhaps unconscious, perhaps dead. I told the storekeeper that I feared Cronk might be sick, and need help.

"It is all I said, but the storekeeper, knowing who I was, did not hesitate to help me get into the room. There was a Yale lock on the door, but the storekeeper climbed in through a transom, and opened it from the inside.

"I didn't find Cronk there. But in the moment that I was in the room, my eye lit on these papers. They were out in full view on the desk—with no attempt having been made to hide them. I saw the name of Maizie, and of Deputy Marteau, and my curiosity got the better of me.

"I folded up the papers and, thanking the storekeeper, took them away with me.

"I read them.

"He was not such a numbskull as the doctor has thought all along. He had been studying over the crimes since he left this house, and making analyses of every one connected with them. He seemed to have some pretty clever ideas. He gave the possible motives of every one, not even sparing Dr. Zobel."

She handed me one of the papers. "I wish you would look at this."

"I will not take the time to set down here the many notes that Cronk had made upon the character of Maizie, and of the Mexican hostler, Pasqual, and of Pythagoras Awls.

The girl showed me all of them. No one had been spared from Cronk's keen genius of ratiocination. I reflected that he might possibly have busied himself with this occupation for the very wise reason that he wanted to look at the case from some other angle than that absorbing, blinding angle of spiritualism.

He might have done it to keep his mind anchored as best he could to the material world. Perhaps he did it in preparation for a paper on the materialization of a spirit. Who knows?

At any rate, he seems to have done some very clever thinking along materialistic lines, right at the time that he was most earnestly convinced that the murders were committed by supernatural forces.

And as a result of these elaborate hypotheses, and character studies, and carefully worked out motives, he had arrived unabashed at a conclusion against which the doctor and I had steadfastly shut our minds: Shirley Scudder was guilty!

She handed me one of the papers he had written. On top was the title: *"Notes on the Scudder woman."*

There was an unemotional, professional sort of phrase for you! Imagine writing of that delicate little girl, as the police refer to a suspect, "the Scudder woman!"

Down at the bottom of the page was the word scrawled in large writing: "Guilty!"

"I won't read the confounded stuff; it's sacrilege!" I said.

"Read it," she said, and I believe she added: "I need help."

I finally consented to read it. The damnable ass had put down on paper thoughts that the doctor and I would not even permit to well up from our remoter consciousness.

And yet those thoughts must have existed somewhere, not only in the doctor's mind but in my own. The doctor himself had said that a woman was the guilty one. The case against Maizie, thus far, was a very shabby one.

Who was left? We had faced each other with that one question—and then smothered it. The doctor had fled from it, by fleeing from the house—going, as he said, in search of Shirley Scudder.

And as I look back, I have the faint impression that that terrible fear was lurking somewhere within me. The murders seemed

the product of a master-mind. That was one aspect of the case which eliminated Maizie. It was one aspect which brought up Shirley Scudder to our minds.

I read Cronk's notes:

She has a Circe complex.

That was the first note. It had a world of meaning. Here was this strange girl, kept a sort of prisoner in an oak grove which was surrounded by high adobe walls. Her captor's death had made her the queen.

Beyond the grove no one existed. It was as much of a barrier as the seas that surrounded Circe's island. She was a witch, skilled in the lore of ancient books, her only knowledge. She had had no experience in compassion. There were no human beings except the octoroon whom she hated, and a Mexican mozo with one eye who smelled of the stables.

There were her swine. Others came to her palace, and were changed from living beings to something closer akin to the earth—as Circe had changed the sailors of Ulysses.

The notes went on as follows:

There are many books in the old judge's library on chemistry, astrology, ethnology. There is a laboratory with test tubes and minerals where, according to Dr. Zobel, the Scudder woman received a private education from her stepfather and the doctor. She is well educated. And it is for this reason she took a fancy almost at sight to Joe Bostwick, the school-teacher.

She is to be suspected in the matter of Judge Scudder's death because he died of poison—a strange poison, which must have been discovered after a long research in ethnology. The effects of the poison were not recognized by Dr. Zobel.

Her motive for doing away with Judge Scudder (1) He was a tyrant, a jailer to her, a miser. (2) He had great wealth. He kept the enjoyment of this wealth from her, just as he kept her from enjoying the adulation of men, which because of her beauty is her due. Joe Bostwick, the teacher, upon seeing her, was bewitched. And other men who are less wise in these matters than I would pay her the same homage by giving her their lives.

Another motive: Let us assume for a moment that inasmuch as she was a woman, there was a spark of mercy in her black soul. Her stepfather, it is said, suffered under a malady which seemed chronic, a fever commonly called in these parts the breakbone fever.

He begged for release, but had not the courage to take his own life. This may have started her on this unbelievable road. She liberated him, and thus liberated herself.

In covering up this crime she was forced to commit others which were more horrible. From Pythagoras Awls, the snake doctor, she may have learned where to procure certain of the drugs about which she had read in her ethnological survey. Therefore Awls had to be killed.

She bribed her slow-witted mozo to keep his mouth shut when he found her one day poisoning the coffee which the mozo served to the judge. The bribe was insufficient. The mozo had to be killed.

Motive for killing Deputy Marteau: (1) He represented the law, which at all times was abhorrent to her. (2) He insulted her by his unbridled passion which she herself kindled in him. She fought with him, a physical combat of a slender girl against a strong man, and he won, leaving her half-crazed in her rage, her person badly upset, her clothes torn. He kept his peace about the meeting, as she herself did. But he was put to death that night.

Another random note read as follows:

Upon the death of Deputy Marteau she was fervent in her appeal that the case be dropped. And at all times during the progress of the case she was violently opposed to bringing in the law.

I have analyzed the characters and motives of all the others who were in any way connected with these crimes. They have all been eliminated either by my calculations, or by death. The only one left is the Scudder woman, who is beyond any shadow of a doubt, guilty.

That was the end of the report, and I must say that it left me numb and speechless. And yet it had another effect—a very extraordinary one as I try to describe it now. It was like an echo of something I had heard in the remote past.

In wandering through the maze of fears and bewilderment during the past few days, had I actually entertained those thoughts myself? No, "entertain" is not the right word. I had submerged them, smothered them, fought madly against their creeping up out of the subconscious to horrify me. And yet I believe the thoughts were there. And those thoughts had been torturing poor old Doctor Zobel likewise!

I looked up at Shirley. "A pack of hideous lies!" I cried in a rage.

"On the contrary," she said calmly, "most of it is true."

"Most of it!" I gasped. "What in the name of Heaven do you mean by that?"

"Dr. Zobel was my tutor. In my education chemistry has been stressed more than any other subject—unless it was that hobby of my stepfather's—I mean ethnology. There's one point that's true—"

"We all know that," I admitted. "But what is there incriminating about such a fact, I'd like to know—"

"It's the basis that Cronk went on. He has patched together a hypothesis. He has used every possible premise that he could lay his hands on. Take for instance what he says about my living as a recluse on an island. That is true.

"The judge kept me virtually a prisoner in a jail. He hoarded his money—there's another truth. And this man Cronk seems to have found it significant. I have met no human beings—except Maizie and the old hostler and the doctor. *You* are the first man anywhere near my own age."

A vague sort of terror began to work upon me. If the law came in—as of course it must very soon—what would happen to us all if we had no solution to offer? Would our strange, incoherent evidence be believed by a jury? Would we not all be arraigned—and perhaps some of the innocent be accused, and proved guilty? Here was Shirley Scudder, for instance. What would happen to her if the due and clumsy processes of law began to entangle her?

In my desperation I groped about for some other theory—something that would hold water as well as Cronk's. All I could grasp in my blind gropings was the theory of a materialized spirit.

In other words, I had changed places with Cronk. I had been the skeptic, the believer in the actual; he was the believer in the supernatural.

Now he offered a strong case, based entirely on natural events; and I could only go back into the misty hypothesis that the gullible spiritualist, Tim Cronk, had clung to.

"There was spirit knocking," I said.

"A trick," she answered quickly. "Any one could pull the wool over our eyes, and play tricks like that."

"But why play such tricks?" I asked.

"To make the unlearned believe that Judge Scudder had arisen from the dead. To make it appear that he himself was the murderer of Awls, and the deputy, and the mozo."

"But there were wrappings in the judge's room—"

"Some one had the key to the back door. You know the mozo and Awls got in by that door. Some one else did."

I again thought of Maizie. Who else could have had the key?

As I thought back over the incident that happened in the judge's bedchamber, I remembered the cuff-link found on the floor.

"The same motive. A trick," the girl said. "It was taken from the judge's shirt, and dropped on the floor of his room so that it would appear that he had been there."

"And the bandanna which I clutched when I tried to grapple with the murderer up there on the third story?"

"It was thrust into your hand," she replied. "Unless through chance you happened to grasp it in your tussle."

Yes, surely enough. There was another jest played upon us all, to make us think that the judge was arisen and walking.

I was appalled. Every word the girl said seemed to make her own position more and more precarious. What would an impartial jury believe? What would the police, the law believe?

Here was Dr. Zobel, an old family friend already floundering about in his attempt to find a guilty person—*other than Shirley!* But would the law automatically bar her from the case, as I had done, and as Dr. Zobel had done?

"Do you realize that the very keenness of your observation would be used against you?" I exclaimed.

"I do. That's why I want your help. Dr. Zobel is beginning to weaken. He can find no one else—other than me! Now I come to you. Suppose I tell you that I'm guilty?"

I reached out and grasped her hands.

"Guilty or not!" I cried. "I want to

save you. I want to take you away. I'll take you across the border—now that there's no one here in the house to stop us. Come along."

I leaped from the davenport. I fancy that she was surprised at the strength which I had so quickly regained. "Come along. You'll be held. There's no doubt about it. You may be proved guilty. But I want you—"

I stopped the sentence at that word. I was going to say that I wanted her to leave everything and escape with me. But when I saw her eyes I realized that to stop the sentence there was to confess what I really meant.

"You want me even though you think I'm guilty?"

"I don't care what you've done! Before God, I want you!"

You may imagine the witchcraft this girl had—I believe that for a fleeting moment as I was making this confession of love to her, that I really thought she might have been the "master mind" in all this crime.

But it made no difference. It acted more as an enchantment. I was beside myself. I thought of no other consequences, except that we two escape from that house.

I saw a smile on her lips, that same bewitching, enigmatical smile that I had noticed many a time before. She came to me. And I enveloped her in my arms.

I kissed her. I wonder if a formless idea came to me, a picture of how Deputy Marteau had tried to embrace her, and of the fate that was in store for him as the result.

The fear of it was there in my subconscious self—an intoxicating, ravishing fear. I kissed her again, and she put her lips to mine. If death were payment for this, it would be worth it!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GIRL'S EXPLANATION.

SHIRLEY looked up at me and smiled. As I contemplate her actions now, I can understand them much better than I did in that moment of bewilderment and panic. She had found herself so inextricably tangled in the events of the past few days, that even her one remaining friend, Dr. Zobel, had doubted her. I was the only one left to turn to.

She came to me without the slightest attempt to vindicate herself first. She had even said: "Suppose that I tell you that I'm guilty." And I had at that very moment proclaimed my love for her.

My act had resulted in victory for myself in gaining this inestimable prize—the girl's love. It had resulted likewise as a triumph for her in finding one man who would fight for her no matter what happened.

And now, once that I held her in my arms I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that she was innocent. Nothing could have convinced me that she could have even dreamed of such crimes. If she had confessed with her own tongue that she was guilty, I would not have believed her.

Thus far her analysis of the crime, based partly on Cronk's astonishingly clever notes, seemed to carry us a long way toward a solution. But there were still many questions to be answered that had been bothering me ever since my first entrance into the manse.

In the first place, what was that peculiar shadowy form, like a crouching animal, that ran on all fours, as described by Pythagoras Awls?

"Let us call it the 'Master Mind,'" the girl said. "It was the murderer—and the mere fact that it crouched or slunk along on all fours, did not mean that it was an animal.

"The fact that it was shadowy was natural enough. We have all been worked up to a high tension. Any person slinking along through an oak grove will look like a shadow. And in the darkness there is no significance in the fact that the witness could not tell whether it was man or woman."

In other words, we had no clew yet as to whether the criminal was Dr. Zobel or the octoroon Maizie.

I was again swinging to the theory that this was all the work of Dr. Zobel. Suppose he had started in on his series of crimes, merely to experiment? Well, then,

the fact that he brought me out of my fainting fit, after I had been poisoned, did not exactly vindicate him. He might still be "experimenting."

"There are other things you haven't explained," I said. "Let's take the matter of the poisoned coffee."

"Yes, the coffee was poisoned," she said definitely.

"Who did it?"

"My mozo Pasqual."

"Then you think the first murder was committed by Pasqual? In that case we've got to find the murderer of Pasqual, and the solution is as far away as ever."

"Pasqual put the poison in the cup, thinking it was a cure for breakbone fever," the girl said.

"How do you know that?"

"By the very simple process of reading Pythagoras Awls's secret 'Bible.'"

"Is that where you've learned all this?" I exclaimed.

"Not exactly. Most of it was sheer nonsense, not worth the trouble it took to decipher it. There are two hundred and fifty chapters of miracles and panegyrics and prayers.

"In the last chapter I stumbled across a verse or two which gave me a key. No, it did not incriminate Awls. The old Negro was too crafty for that. But it did explain what had troubled me for a long time. Read this."

She showed me her translation of the cipher:

Chapter 250, verse 16: I purchased certain powders from one who learned their potency and constituents from beyond the grave. Which the number of these powders was two (2).

Verse 17: And one of these powders was a cure for breakbone fever. And the other—if injected into the neck of a dead man will cause same to arise from his grave. Selah!

Verse 18: And the one who sold me these wondrous medicaments bade me try same on whomsoever I wished, and my fame would be noised abroad in the land.

Verse 19: Wherefore a certain magistrate being sorely plagued with the breakbone, I offered him the first of these powders. But he would have none of my magic, and scoffed at me for my black complexion.

Verse 20: But in my compassion, I told the manservant of this magistrate to put the powder secretly in coffee, and offer it unto him for to drink thereof.

Verse 21: And he drank and, lo! he gave up the ghost, and died. For the powder was of no avail.

I looked up from reading.

"Of course, the magistrate is the judge, your stepfather," I said.

She nodded. "You can see by this that Pythagoras Awls in his ignorance poisoned the judge. We need hardly blame Awls."

"It won't do us much good," I said, "inasmuch as he's dead."

"And you can see that the mozo was an unwitting accomplice."

"And also dead," I added. "What I'd like to know is, who sold these poisons to Pythagoras Awls in the first place?"

"Some one who wanted to experiment," she replied readily, "and who wanted to hide behind the easily suspected quack doctor. This murderer, whom we may call the Master Mind was experimenting, but he let Awls take the risk."

"Who was this Master Mind?" I asked again.

"Read some more verses," she said.

Verse 22: The Prophet Pythagoras Awls, which same is myself, was sore afraid. And I said to myself: The white folks will think it was my breakbone cure which killed him. So I will give him this other powder, and raise him from the dead.

Verse 23: Wherefore I told the manservant to leave the coffin open wherein the magistrate was buried. And to leave the tomb open. For, said I, I will raise this gentleman from the dead.

Verse 24: So the manservant did same, and was sore afraid. And I told him to speak no word of the wonders he will see. Which being he was afraid of my witchcraft and charms he did like I commanded. Nor did he dast tell any man of the wonders.

Verse 25: So I injected the miracle powder and raised the man who was dead. Hear ye people! Read and be afraid! Selah! Tremble and be afraid afore your God. For this is the twenty-ninth (29) miracle performed by the Black Prophet, Mr. Pythagoras Awls.

Verse 26: And lo, I took this resurrected man to my cabin at Zopot's Bayou, and nursed him as a mother will nurse a child, and his strength came back in part. And in three (3) weeks he arose from his bed and walked.

Verse 27: And there was a great tempest

in the land on that night. And like the dove from the Arc this man wandered out into the tempest. Nor did he ever return.

"Pythagoras Awls," the girl explained, "did not see him; but you two men did. Still dulled by the effects of either the drug or the antidote he walked out in the storm.

"Like a dazed man, his mind worked automatically, directing his steps toward the Lone-Star Hotel, where in years gone by he spent much time at cards with his cronies. Your description of him, sitting at a table 'playing at invisible cards,' does not contradict Awls's Bible."

"It looks as if we have the whole story," I said, "except for one little point: Who was the Master Mind sitting by watching this ignorant old fakir fumbling around experimenting with the poison and its antidote?"

"It is easy enough to determine that," the girl said, "if you merely consider what happened next. Let us say the Master Mind was waiting for Pythagoras to call him and show the astonishing results of the experiment—or the 'miracle' as Pythagoras would call it.

"The Master Mind comes upon the scene, finds that the judge has escaped from the Negro's cabin, and trails him. The judge is found probably somewhere near the Lone-Star Hotel dying from exposure—or already dead; at any rate, he dies before morning.

"The serious consequences of the 'experiment' then come home to the Master Mind. The safest thing to do is to take his body back to the grave."

"The events seem to fit together perfectly," I said, astonished at the girl's uncanny sense. "Go on with the rest. There's the deputy's death."

"Pythagoras Awls had told him who the Master Mind was. The latter had probably overheard their conversation, and may have been listening at the keyhole. Late that night the deputy came to make the arrest. But the Master Mind was waiting for him at the top of the banister in the pitch dark, and tripped the deputy up deftly, sending him down the stair-well to his death."

"How do you account for the fact that the deputy had that headache, and was, according to Dr. Zobel, poisoned?"

"Previously an attempt had been made upon his life. The deputy, you remember, ate supper here at the house, and there was poison in his food. But the poison was too slow in working. The more violent method of throwing him over the banister had to be resorted to."

"Then how do you account for the two black marks?" I asked.

"A subterfuge. The Master Mind put them there to confound us, and make us all think that the devil was working in this house—in the body of the dead judge. The mozo had started that theory with his Mexican folk story, and it was a good one to work up. It was worked up carefully at every possible opportunity."

I thought these points over, and could see no possible flaw in the girl's hypothesis. "We'll dismiss the subject of the deputy," I said. "But that leaves a lot of questions concerning the mozo. Why was he killed?"

"Because of his relations with Pythagoras, which I've already told you. He bribed Pythagoras to keep his tongue quiet concerning that poison, which the mozo had put in the coffee. While he went into the judge's room to get his money, Pythagoras followed.

"The murderer had been in that room, having got in through the back door by a pass-key. It was an old-fashioned lock which any one could open. The murderer was there, making spirit rappings and building up the ghost drama.

"When Pythagoras was in the gloomy old room, and the candle was blown out—probably by the murderer—the latter jumped upon the old Negro; and that was the end of him. He was then hidden in the nearest convenient hiding place, the closet—and the marks of the 'moccasin' put upon him as a confounding signature."

As far as I could recall the baffling incidents of the past few days, I could think of none that were not cleared up by the girl's story.

"There is only one more question I have to ask," I said. "Who do you think this Master Mind was?"

"Once we have a story that cannot be broken down, a story that is upheld by all the clews we have thus far found, there need be no trouble in the world in solving this unknown quantity."

"Have you a solution?"

"I have."

But before she said the name we were startled by a peculiar sound at the door. It was a key being thrust into the lock and turned.

The girl turned white. Our eyes met in a mute, helpless understanding.

We were being imprisoned.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFINED IN AN INFERNO.

THE end came with astonishing suddenness.

Evidently the hand that directed that key was attempting to lock the door without making a sound, a trick that is well-nigh impossible in any lock, particularly with the old rusty doorlocks of the Scudder manse.

Instinctively I leaped for the door, banging up sharp against it.

I was too late. We were locked in.

I did not for the moment realize the fix that we were in. There was the window, and I had no doubt about my ability to climb down from it to the patio. But it was too dangerous a feat for the girl to attempt.

I looked at her.

It was quite apparent that she was far more frightened than I was. Even though she may have known who it was that had locked us in, the knowledge did not make the situation any less terrifying. It might, in fact, have made it more so.

I went directly to the window. My only thought now was to get her to safety; then I could return to the house and see who it was that had attempted to imprison us.

I leaned over the sill, and was peering down to the darkness thirty feet below, when I saw a streak of light dart out from the window of the room adjacent to us.

Our captor had evidently outguessed me and run to that window.

A revolver sent a lead slug whistling by my ear, and I thought better of attempting to climb down the wall of the house, carrying a girl.

I withdrew quickly back into the room.

Shirley rushed into my arms and clung there, her whole frame shuddering. I held her close, my distracted brain groping frantically for what to do. A feeling of utter panic came over me—the desperation of a trapped rat.

I released myself from her clutch, and picked up a chair, one of those oaken mission chairs, characteristic pieces of furniture in the judge's manse.

My intent was to smash through the door.

The door itself, however, was of such massive lumber that the chair, heavy as it was, crashed to pieces.

Then I noticed a very fearful thing.

Shirley noticed it at the same moment.

We smelled smoke.

It was coming over the transom—a faint cloud of it, which a moment later was thick and suffocating.

That arch villain, that demon, the Master Mind, was actually trying to wipe out all the evidence and witnesses that remained of his hideous crimes. And to that end had locked Shirley and me in the room, so that we would meet the same fate that had been dealt out to the deputy, Pythagoras Awls, and the rest.

We turned, dazed and panic-stricken, to the window.

Could we climb down a sheer wall of two stories by a drain pipe? Could we risk a fusillade from that man in the next room to ours? Could we smash the door, and run through the halls of a house that was on fire?

I reached down for Shirley's hand—the girl had sunk to her knees—and the next moment I was at the window sill.

It was at that moment, as I recollect in the confusion and panic that had overtaken us, that we heard an importunate banging at the door of the room.

"Open this here door!" a loud voice bellowed.

What in the world could this mean? Whose voice was it? It was not Dr. Zobel's

voice—nor was it his manner of speaking. It was a stranger.

A flash of light went through my mind, a conviction that some one else had been in this house during all these hours that we were trying to prove some one of our own number guilty and had failed for a very good reason.

"Open the door, if you don't want to be burned up, you crazy galoots!"

"We can't open it! It's locked from your side!" I shouted back.

At this the banging was redoubled, and there was a crash against it, as though the speaker had picked up a chair or a table and had tried to break it down, as I had done.

A thick oaken panel splintered through; and I remember there was a whiff of smoke. From the transom above a thick cloud poured in.

The man out there in the hall did not succeed in his attempt to force his way in. There was no more banging, no more crashing of a chair against the panels. Evidently the fire had increased suddenly enough to defeat his purpose; for he retreated abruptly, and I could hear the loud thumping of spurred boots on the stairs.

That fire, I am now of the opinion, must have been started considerably before we noticed it. The incendiarist had without a doubt been about his work while Shirley was expounding to me her detailed analysis of the crimes.

Our only hope now was to make a break for the staircase. I swung a chair against the partly crashed door, and succeeded with a few lusty strokes in breaking an adequate opening in the oaken panels. I dragged the girl through by the hand, and we dived into a cloud of smoke.

Blinded and choking, we stumbled toward the balustrade. The girl fell to her knees, and I followed her example. One last breath of air was allowed to us where, near the floor, the smoke was less dense.

Shirley, I believe, was attempting to tie a handkerchief about my mouth. But there was no time for this. I held my breath, lifted her in my arms, and raced down the stairs three or four steps at a time.

Then at the moment that I thought my lungs would surely burst I reached a door of the first floor. Here the girl slipped from my arms, and I am not so sure as we stood there choking and gasping for air but that she was supporting me more than I was supporting her.

Clouds of black smoke poured from the door through which we had escaped. Tongues of hot flame leaped down from the windows as if with a monstrous hunger to lap up these two mortals that were getting beyond the fire's reach.

I said we had escaped through the door, but I do not mean, by that, that we got very far.

As we staggered out on the flagstones of the patio a gun barked out from the pepperwoods.

A bullet dug into the adobe wall and another whistled past my ear just as we ducked behind the protection of a stone fountain.

Now, once we were safe, I noticed a very peculiar thing—or, rather, I remembered it after it had happened. During the excitement of passing through that gunfire my brain had not grasped its full significance. *But those two shots had come from two widely separate places!*

Just what could that mean? Here was some one inside the house—that is to say, he had been there just a few seconds ago. And here were two more men—one hidden in the pepperwoods, another in the canebrake a furlong away.

The fact that we were beleaguered by these men, perhaps by more, led me to think that the whole Scudder mystery may have been the work of a gang of bandits.

As I was puzzling over this aspect of the case I saw some one running from the canebrake to the grove of moss-hung oaks which was separated from it by a small field of swamp grass and shell mounds.

It so happened that in the starlight, and against one of those white shell mounds, I caught sight of his figure. He was running bent low, stealthily, like a cat. I say like a cat, not only because of his quick, crafty manner in sneaking off for those oaks, but because he ran, part of the way at least, on all fours.

I remembered that previous to my set-to with that unknown person on the third gallery of the house I had heard him running up the stairs, and that I had imagined, by the pattering of his hands and feet on the steps, that he was running up the stairs on all fours.

I recalled how every one who had seen him noticed the same peculiarity.

In the triumph of this revelation I forgot all about the existence of any one else—of the man who had tried to crash in our door, of the "gang" or whatever it was in ambush waiting for us and firing at us. All I wanted now was to get that one man.

I whispered quickly to Shirley to stay behind that fountain, and without another moment of hesitation, without another thought of consequences, I leaped out into the open and scurried like a mad coyote toward the oak grove. I quartered across the field, practically racing with the fugitive.

He paused, bewildered, turned back as if to head for the canebrake again, then for some reason or other thought better of it and tried to reach the pitch blackness of the oak grove.

I got there just behind him, and plunged headlong into a dense blackness, blotted out from the starlight by long pendent draperies of Spanish moss.

I sheered up so heavily against the fugitive that he let out a gasp for breath. A bony hand caught me with a sharp but glancing blow on the temple. I fell forward, but the one idea in my mind—to clutch him—was so tenacious, that I tackled him about the waist as I fell.

We rolled to the ground, and in the next moment each of us had our fingers buried in the other's throat.

I choked. My life breath was dammed, my head reeled, and a deadly numbness went down my spine. I felt, as those claw-like fingers tightened about my throat, that every muscle in my body was paralyzed except the muscles of my hand. My will was bent inexorably upon closing my hands tighter about that soft throat.

It was the one who had the strongest hands, the strongest will, who would outlast that combat. But I did not know, as my fingers relaxed and I rolled away as helpless as a log, just who had clung the longest.

I believe I was out of my head for a moment because of my slow, confused awakening to the realization that there were forms standing about me.

I looked up and saw that one of them—the one standing directly over me—had a lantern. The beams shot up, and lit a haggard, jaundiced face, a dilated Cyclopean eye. It was Dr. Zobel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ACCUSED.

A VIVID and gigantic tongue of flame leaped up from the background. A succession of smoke clouds rolled across the shell mounds, the canebrake, the swamp palmettoes. A lurid light, the burning manse, silhouetted the forms of men in tall-peaked sombreros.

Some of them had holsters and six-guns, some sawed-off shotguns. The light of the great flames shone on the breast of one of them, singling out a sheriff's star. But it was the doctor's gaunt giant frame that hypnotized my sight.

"Then—*you* are the man!" I exclaimed voicelessly.

"Stuff and nonsense!" the old gentleman grumbled. "We've got the man. Or at least you got him. He pretty nearly did you in, too, my boy! Lucky it is we jumped on him before he finished you!"

The man with the star kneeled down to me, and was about to clap manacles on my wrist.

"No—he's not the one, sheriff," the old doctor said. "This boy's innocent. There's your man."

"I'll listen to all that later," the sheriff said.

I recognized the voice of the man who had tried to break into our room. "Meanwhile, they're both to be handcuffed."

What in the world had happened, I could not in my bewilderment imagine. In that chaos of events, of tragedies, of the manse wrapped in roaring flames, one fear dominated all others: Where was the girl whom I had left behind that stone fountain?

The fiend, whoever it was, had tried to lock that girl—and myself—in a room, and had set fire to the house, in order to cover as many as possible of the remaining clews to his crime.

"The girl!" I cried, struggling up to my hands and knees. "Where is she! Shirley—Shirley!"

An arm had encircled my shoulders; a hand was at my lips with a flask of brandy. It was Shirley Scudder.

"You didn't have to worry about her," the sheriff said. "My deputies wasn't goin' to harm her. And leave me tell you that they wouldn't of shot so wild, if you hadn't had this here lady in tow. They were just firin' in the air to keep *you* from runnin' away. Them was my orders to the men."

I looked from face to face of the men of the posse.

Maizie was there. It was she who had summoned them.

And the man whom I had grappled with and choked was there.

It was Tim Cronk—Cronk, who was always interested in spiritualism, or old curios, or Negro songs and customs and horoscopes, and trick cards, and crazy schemes of making money; Tim Cronk who, as Pythagoras said in his Bible, had "learned from the dead" how to mix strange poisons; who had tried to fool us by writing up his "analysis" of the crime, and blaming Shirley.

Cronk had established an alibi by staying in Galveston while poor old Pythagoras Awls did the actual poisoning; he had tried to poison me, his only friend; the fiend had announced to the sheriff when the posse came, that I was the guilty man, and that I had locked myself in a room with the girl—and set fire to the house!

He was standing in the middle of the posse, his hands in manacles.

I arose, and without a doubt I staggered under the crushing impact of this dénouement. Shirley was at my side. She put her arms about me.

"It will be over soon," she said. "The truth is out."

"I'll take you away from here," I answered.

"Anywhere," she said. "Wherever you go, I'll go."

End of the Report as Written by Joe Bostwick.

EPILOGUE

When the district attorney had finished reading this report he came back into the sheriff's office.

Shirley Scudder, Dr. Zobel, the octoroon housekeeper, Maizie, the sheriff, and the school-teacher, Joe Bostwick, were there.

"I would like a word of explanation concerning several points," the district attorney said.

He turned to the sheaf of manuscript.

"Just who took those photographs, and how were they taken? Was there not one which showed the so-called spirit of the judge standing over the body of Pythagoras Awls?"

"I found some prints of the judge and of the judge's room, which Cronk had taken," the doctor said. "I went to Cronk's home right before the fire. I searched all through his effects. He had destroyed the actual negative which he made of the judge, and the other negative which he made of the body of Pythagoras Awls.

"But there was one negative, so dim that it took me a long time to make out a picture on it—in fact, it was like a clean piece of celluloid; but on close study of it, I saw the judge's face.

"It was taken during the day, perhaps when the sun was too low—out there in the cemetery. He probably took several pictures and destroyed them all; but he overlooked this particular one, for I found it in a bunch of discarded films. Because of its dimness it's natural that he overlooked it. All the good negatives he destroyed."

"But how did he get this spirit picture," the district attorney asked.

"By doubling two of his negatives together," Miss Shirley explained. "A negative of the judge—and one of the Negro snake-doctor's body. Both, of course, were taken in the daytime. I imagine he then made a print."

"But the print was developed at a drug store as I understood," the district attorney

objected. "And it was taken to the store by your housekeeper here."

"The doubling of the negatives had already been effected," Miss Shirley said. "Cronk evidently made a print of his own —after 'fixing up' his fake spirit negative. *Then he took a picture of that print.*

"This picture he did not develop; he merely left the film of it in the camera, and placed it on the sill of the transom. It was the cleverest bit of trickery he performed in the whole case.

"Naturally, we thought the film was *bona fide*—not for a moment dreaming that it could be the film already exposed, and already with the picture of a previously prepared print upon it.

"It was, needless to say, undeveloped. When Maizie took it to be developed, there was nothing for us to think but that it was actually a picture of what had happened in the judge's room.

"If we did believe it was a trick photograph, whom were we to suspect? Cronk? Certainly not. Maizie is the only one we could suspect."

"It was my discovery of that imperfect negative," the doctor said, "which convinced me that Cronk was guilty. That's why, when I found Cronk and this young man Bostwick here, in combat, I told the sheriff not to arrest Bostwick."

"I understand," the district attorney said. "But now then, there's one other point: I thought all these three weeks, and for some time before, that Tim Cronk was down in Galveston—with you, sir," he turned to the school-teacher.

"He was," the latter replied. "But he was merely establishing an alibi.

"But he had already made his plans with Pythagoras Awls, and was waiting for results. I have no doubt but that Awls, when he had been nursing the judge 'back to life,' wrote to Cronk to come up and see the results of the experiments.

"I remember that Cronk came home with me, more or less as if he had decided on the spur of the moment to give up his curio store down there on the beach. Most of those beach concessionaires stay until much later in the season."

"But the motive?" the district attorney said. "What possible motive could this demon have had in the first place?"

"To get money," Bostwick the teacher said. "He thought he had a trick that would look like a miracle—the miracle of raising a man from the dead. He wanted to get a prize of ten thousand dollars which had been offered by some millionaire crank, for proof that a man's ghost could be evoked.

"Here was Cronk with two poisons that would accomplish the trick—apparently the trick of raising a man from the dead. As soon as he was sure it would work, he intended, no doubt, to capitalize the trick. But it did not work.

"The judge soon would have died from the effects of the poison; so Cronk had to cover his tracks by murdering the judge, Pythagoras Awls, the deputy, and the mozo —and I have no doubt he would have murdered all of us in his desperate fear of being found out."

The district attorney handed the big sheaf of manuscript to the sheriff.

"Well, chief," he said. "I don't entertain any further doubt in this case. And I don't believe the trial jury will find any trouble in agreeing. This man Cronk will hang.

"As for these other folks," the district attorney said, "after a preliminary hearing during which we will get their affidavits concerning the correctness of this report I have just read, I can see no reasons why we should hold them. The grand jury, needless to say, will indict this man Cronk."

A week later Shirley and Bostwick took a train for New Orleans, and the doctor accompanied them. The latter said in answer to a reporter's question that "he was going on a honeymoon."

What they did at New Orleans does not concern this narrative. Suffice it to say that they were seen on Bayou Road between St. Claude and Rampart Streets, at the dwelling of a certain very old Franciscan friar—the same friar who had married Shirley's mother and father a generation before.

THE END

The Heritage

By E. K. MEANS

"YES, suh, she's done got de message to come up higher." Rev. Vinegar Atts spoke in a lugubrious voice, as he sat under a cedar tree nursing his fat stomach on his fat knees and mopping his fat face as he gazed at a dilapidated cabin in the yard before him.

"Ole Fuzz Paradee is makin' a slow bizzness of gwine up higher," Pap Curtain complained, his yellow, monkeylike face wrinkled with annoyance. "Here we been settin' up wid her fer fawty days an' she's still wid us."

"Atter a cullud pusson gits to be one hunder year ole, dey gits de habit of livin'," Figger Bush remarked, his pop eyes big with wisdom and his woolly hair assuming an oddly erect shape upon his head as he raised his eyebrows and wrinkled his forehead. "De white folks showed ole Fuzzy off as a octogeranium fer a long time. Den somebody read me de piece in de paper about her been promoted to centogeranium, or somepin' like dat. She wus one hunderd year old."

"You means centitudinarian," Vinegar Atts corrected him.

"Naw, dat ain't de word," Pap Curtain protested. "It's centipedorian."

"'Tain't dat," Skeeter Butts declared. "A centerpede is got a hunderd foots. Dis ole female is been movin' along through dat much age—centiyearilopian is de correck word."

"'Tain't so awful much diffunce about de word," Vinegar declared. "De fack is dat grammaw is come to de end of all her years—dis am de last."

"I wonder how come she got de name of Fuzz?" Skeeter inquired. "Dat ain't her nachel-bawn name. She started out callin' herself Nancy."

"I knows about dat," Vinegar laughed. "When she got so awful ole, she got kinder crazyfied in her head. She use to walk out in de fields an' pick de flossy tops offen de milk-weed an' de little fuzzy heads offen de dandelion, an' de dried-up tops offen de thistles an' she would put 'em in a bag an' save 'em."

"Yes, suh, dat's de way it wus," Pap Curtain agreed. "She reminded my mind of a squorl whut knowed dat winter wus comin' an' had to hole in somewhar. She

gethered up all dem soft flossy things like she wus aimin' to make herself a easy nest in her ole age, an' she useter go aroun' an' pick up all kinds of things an' save 'em."

"Yep. I reckolecks dat," Figger Bush chattered. "When she got so ole dat her eyesight gib out, de white folks had to he'p her out wid her livin', an' a committee of white folks come to dat cabin an' when de women seen dem bags an' boxes full of fuzz an' fluff, dey made her git rid of it. Lawd! She shore did hab boxes an' bags full of wuthless truck. Dey argufied her so much about 'em dat I guess she burned 'em up. Den she went blind an' couldn't git no mo'."

"So dey called her Fuzz because she tried to feather her nest in her ole age," Skeeter giggled when the testimony was all in.

The conversation ended when Dazzle Zenor came toward them from the cabin. They watched her advance, a slim, graceful, African beauty. It was her day to wait upon Fuzz and because Dazzle was the most attractive Ethiopian damsel in the town, these four men were sitting under the tree waiting to serve her at her call. She advanced now, a figure of glowing ebony in the blazing sunshine. Every man had the impression that Dazzle was a fitting name for her.

"Ole Fuzz is callin' fer Torm," she said.

"Torm ain't here," Skeeter grinned.

"Who is Torm?"

"Fuzz useter had a boy who called hisself Torm. Torm Paradee, dat wus de name he went by," Vinegar remarked thoughtfully. "But Torm, he jes' kinder oozed away gradual an' made hisself absent so easy dat he ain't bothered my mind fer might nigh onto my lifetime."

"Whut do she deesire wid Torm?" Figger Bush wanted to know.

"She ain't say," Dazzle replied. "But I kinder imagines she is got somepin she wants to say to her boy befo' she leaves."

"Mebbe she wants to leave him her forchine." Skeeter attempted a witticism.

"She ain't leavin' much," Vinegar said. "De white folks is been feedin' her fer thirty year jes' like a woodpecker feeds a little peckerwood."

"She's leavin' Torm," Figger pointed out.

"Naw. Torm left fust," Pap snapped.

"Well," Dazzle broke in on their foolishness. "Fuzzy is axin' fer Torm. My advices to you lazy niggers is to git her a Torm—torm-cat, or Blind Torm, or Peepin' Torm, or torm-boy. She's blind an' cain't tell one kind of torm from another."

"All right," Skeeter laughed, as she flirted around and started back to the house. "Us blacks will be agreeable an' git her some kind of Torm. Abbertize in all de leadin' noospapers."

II.

"WHAR we gwine git any nigger called Torm?" Vinegar demanded when Dazzle disappeared in the house. "De only Torm I knows is Kunnel Torm Gaitskill an' he's white. He's been givin' money to Fuzz to live on all dese days. Marse Torm's shore good dat way to niggers."

"Mebbe de Kunnel could tell us whar her Torm is at," Skeeter suggested.

"Naw!" Pap Curtain was excited with objections. "He'd tell us to look in all de jails, pen'tench'ries, po'-houses an' loontick asylums, an' ef we don't find him in none of dem places, he's done beat his maw to de pearly gates."

"Us ain't got time to hunt in all dem places," Figger Bush howled. "De world is full of jails, all of 'em built fer niggers."

"Us might abbertize fer him." Vinegar paused thoughtfully. "Dar ain't so awful many niggers in de world named Torm."

"Huh!" Skeeter grunted. "I didn't mean nothin' when I told Dazzle dat. You lie-bill a cullud pusson in de noospaper an' he'll change his name real prompt an' he'll dust away from the place he's at an' he'll change his color—ef he kin."

"Dat settles dat," Pap Curtain remarked. "Skeeter's done spoke de word."

"Looky here, fellers," Vinegar said earnestly. "Ole Fuzz ain't got long to stay wid us an' she wants some of her own kinnery wid her at de eend. She ain't leavin' nobody nothin' an' she ain't got no last words to say—she jes' craves fer her onliest chile to be around."

"Dat's right," added Figger Bush. "All of us is jes' innercent stand-buyers an' don't gib a durn, but she craves somebody to comfort her ole age an' mourn at de fun'ral."

"Whut kin we do about dat?" Pap asked impatiently. "Torm ain't here an' I don't know whar he is at an' I ain't gwine hunt him."

"Le's fake him!" Skeeter Butts suggested. "Dat ole woman is blind an' cain't see nothin'. She is mighty nigh deef an' cain't hear good. Niggers likes to play-act. Less git some obligin' nigger to play like he's Fuzzy's chile."

"None of us kin do it," Figger Bush remarked. "She knows us too good."

"Whut did Torm look like when you seed him last?" Pap Curtain asked Vinegar.

"He looked like a nigger," Vinegar answered. "But whut diffunce do dat make? She's blind an' cain't see his looks."

"Dat's so, all coons look alike to her."

"All we got to do is to hunt a young cullud man wid a kind heart an' tell him whut we want did," Vinegar asserted.

"All right, less hunt him!" Skeeter said as he arose from his chair. "We ain't got no time to waste."

The others promptly arose and the quartet started for the negro section of Tickfall. Down in front of the Hen-scratch, a place of business owned by Skeeter Butts, they found a negro man about twenty-five years old who had no visible means of support except the telephone pole against which he leaned.

"Us needs you, brudder," Vinegar Atts said solemnly. "Does you belong to any lodge?"

"I hold office in three," the man answered.

"Whut mought yo' name be?"

"Buck Ridge."

"Come wid us, brudder." Vinegar caught one arm and Pap Curtain grasped the other. "You is qualified to serve, an' we demands you in de name of de Nights of Darkness."

"Don't b'long!" Buck protested.

"Dat's how come we garnishees, you," Skeeter Butts laughed. "We needs a stranger from a strange land to ack like he has always knowed whut we is gwine tell him to know."

They conducted him to the top of the hill and seated him on the steps of the Shoo-fly Church. Then they offered him a cigar and proceeded to unfold their plan:

"A ole nigger woman is dyin' in a cabin over on de fur side of town. She ain't got no eyesight an' she ain't got but one kinnery. Dat kin is her boy, Torm, an' nobody knows whar he is at."

"Yes, suh," Buck nodded.

"Now we wants you to come wid us to dat cabin an' ack like you is her long-losted son whut is jes' come back in time to see her die."

"Shore! I ketch on," Buck said.

"Talk to her kinder lovin'like," Vinegar continued. "Mebbe she kin die in peace, feelin' like she had her boy wid her at de last sad wind-up."

"Mebbe she'll ax me questions I don't know de come-back to," Buck demurred. "How could I 'turn her a answer to somepin I don't know?"

"Us'll all be in de room wid you," Vinegar told him. "She cain't see nothin' an' won't know ef we is in de room or not."

"Ef she axes me questions an' I git stuck, you fellers will sneak up an' whisper me de answers real low. Is dat it?" Buck asked.

"Suttinly! Dat's it fer a fack! But we ain't need to whisper no replies. She cain't hear nothin'."

"All right, I'm wid you," Buck assented. "I don't b'long to you'alls lodge, but I'll he'p out feller lodge brudders in a tight."

A few minutes later, the five conspirators entered the door of Fuzz Paradee's cabin. Four of them walked bare-footed, having removed their shoes to insure silence as they moved around the room. Buck Ridge stamped in, and walked to the bed where he placed his hand upon the withered forehead of the aged woman.

"Howdy, maw!" he said, in a voice that could be heard a long distance.

"Who dat call me maw?" Fuzz demanded.

"Dis here is Torm done come back to see you," Buck bawled. "Don't you remember yo' little Torm?"

"When did you git outen de pen'tench'ry?" Fuzz demanded sharply.

"I got out recent!" Buck howled.

"Dat means you escaped away," Fuzz answered. "You wus in fer yo' nachel life. Ef de sheriff kotches you, you'll git sont back."

The perspiration broke out on Buck's face, and he began to make wild gestures to his friends to advance and render first aid.

"Tell her you got a pardon!" Pap whispered.

"I ain't escape away!" Buck shrieked in her ear. "De sheriff done sont me a parding."

"Dat's fine," Fuzz answered. "I knowed you wusn't in dar by rights. Dey sont you upon soupspicion. You didn't really kill dat nigger excusin' in self-defense."

"No'm. I ain't never kilt nobody—ouch!"

Vinegar pinched his arm to remind him that he was playing a part.

"Dat is, on puppus," Buck amended.

"But I warns you of danger, Torm," old Fuzz said. "Dat nigger's daddy has bragged his brags dat he wus gwine kill you instant ef you ever got out—an' he's livin' right here in dis town now."

"Dat's bad news!" Buck shouted. "I reckon I better be leavin' now."

He wiped the copious perspiration from his face and his eyes showed their whites as he glanced nervously at open windows and planned ways of escape.

"He'll kill you shore!" Fuzz told him. "Is you got any money?"

"Naw. I's busted."

Thereupon, Fuzz sat up feebly in the bed. She fumbled a string around her neck and drew up from the bosom of her dress a small buckskin bag. From the bag she brought forth two gold coins, twenty-dollar gold pieces, and handed them to him.

"Dese here money pieces will gib you a new start, Torm," she said. "I been savin' 'em fer you fer fawty year. I been hongry many times wid dis gold money wropped aroun' my neck, but I ain't even been tempted by starvation to spend de money I wus savin' fer my boy."

Buck took the money and it burned his hands like fire. He waved distress signals to his four bare-footed fellow conspirators. But not one of them responded to the call for help. They did not know how to render aid under the circumstances.

"Thank 'e, ma'am," Buck murmured huskily, dropping the scorching money on the floor and scrambling awkwardly to pick it up.

"An' now, Torm, I'm gittin' ole an' ain't gwine live many years longer," Fuzz murmured. "But I got a little somepin' hid out in de woods fer you."

"Yes'm," Buck mumbled.

"De white folks is been takin' keer of me fer years, an' I been savin' up an' savin' up. I wants you to send all de folks outen de house an' shut all de doors, an' I will tell you whar de treasure is hid at."

"Yes'm," Buck told her.

Buck arose and motioned to the four men to leave the room. In earnest pantomime, they gestured that Fuzz did not know they were present and to let them remain. But Buck dismissed them and shut the door with a loud slam.

Then he returned to the bedside and bent low to catch the whispered secret from the aged woman's lips.

III.

On the outside of the house the "big four" of Tickfall looked at each other with chagrin and consternation. What was the secret which Fuzz had to reveal?

"It's money!" Figger Bush cackled. "She's got bags of money hid somewhar an' we ain't hearin' whar it is. De white folks is been givin' her money fer fawty year an' she's been savin' it up an' hidin' it. Marse Torm owns a bank an' he's been droppin' de loose change outen dat bank into Fuzz's lap an' dat old hen has been scratchin' holes an' hidin' it."

"Who ever would hab' thunk it!" Vinegar Atts wailed. "Here my church needs money, an' dis ole woman dies an' tells a tee-total stranger whar de treasure is hid at, an' we led him to it!"

"Us led him, an' now us is gwine foller him." Pap Curtain was getting angry. "Dat coon ain't gittin' away from de

pleasure of my comp'ny an' de sight of my eyes as long as he lives from dis time on fer-ever."

"Naw! I don't deesire to be wid him dat long," Skeeter commented. "Less git out an' hunt up de sho'-'nuff son an' let him find de hid forchin an' 'vide wid us."

At that moment the door of the cabin opened and Buck Ridge came out. The four men made a simultaneous move in his direction, but Buck moved faster. He leaped over the low fence in the rear of the cabin and went through the woods like a swamp rabbit, the four men in hot pursuit. But Vinegar was fat and Figger was lazy, Pap was old and Skeeter was "town-raised" and soft, and it was not long until Buck had dodged like a brown shadow in the undergrowth and had disappeared.

"Now, fellers," Skeeter panted when they gave up the chase. "We got to find dat ole woman's real boy or she'll die an' go to hell an' come back here an' ha'nt us."

They hurried back to the cabin and entered the room where Fuzz Paradee lay.

"We jes' found out a discovery, Sister Paradee," Vinegar Atts bawled. "Dat nigger whut come in here jes' now an' tole you dat he wus yo' boy Torm, he wus lyin' to you. His name is Buck Ridge!"

"You is prankin' wid me, Revun," Fuzz answered with a note of full confidence in her tone. "Of co'se, he wus my boy. How come he knowed all about killin' dat man he kilt ef he warn't my Torm?"

"He didn't tell you about dat—you told him!" Skeeter squalled. "You jes' led him along an' he follered wid you!"

"Hush, Skeeter," Fuzz answered. "He tole me somepin about dat I ain't knowed myself ontil he said it—he tole me he done got a pardon."

Thereupon Skeeter shook his fist at Pap Curtain for having prompted Buck with that bit of information.

"Aw, come on out!" Pap Curtain snapped. "We is jes' losin' time foolin' wid dis ole ape. She ain't know nothin'."

The four men started out and met Dazzle Zenor. She was carrying a basket which contained milk and eggs and other things for the sick.

"Whar you been at, Dazzle?" Vinegar snapped in irate tones. "Why ain't you stay on yo' job when you is elected to nuss de sick? Ef you had been here somepin' awful wouldn't hab happened."

"Did it happen to you?" Dazzle smiled.

"It shore did."

"Nothin' awful enough to suit me ain't never happened to you yit!" Dazzle answered, and then remarked to the others, as she went in: "Wait fer de laugh on dat one!"

Four disconsolate men started down the road toward Tickfall, wondering what to do next.

"Oh, Lawdy!" Skeeter sighed. "Ef Buck Ridge don't git no mo' outen dis dan he has already got, he's rich. Fuzzy gib him two twenty-dollar gold pieces right befo' my eyes, an' I ain't seen mo' dan four of dem things in my whole life an' ain't never owned one."

"I never seen one of dem things in my life befo'," Figger Bush sighed. "Den I seen two at one time in another nigger's hand!"

"I bet Fuzz is got a thousan' of dem things hid away, an' now Buck knows whar dey is," Vinegar wailed.

At this point on the road, they met a little automobile and Vinegar made ridiculous gestures like a bob-tailed rooster trying to fly in order to stop the machine. Dr. Moseley, the physician of Tickfall, drew up beside them.

"Howdy, doc, is you gwine out to see ole Fuzzy Paradee?"

"No. What ails her?"

"Ain't she mighty nigh dead?" Vinegar asked.

"Well, I presume she is nearer death than she was one hundred years ago when she started," Dr. Moseley told him.

"She ain't more'n apt to die soon?" Vinegar asked in incredulous tones.

"Oh, sure! She's apt to die. She is now thirty years beyond the Scriptural allotment of three score years and ten—living on borrowed time, you know. But she is not at death's door. She's got no mind, no sight, no hearing; she's very feeble, but still going, and she may outlive us all!"

"Dat's shore news to us, Doc Moseley,"

Skeeter said. "We been figgerin' on how soon we would lay off from our wuck an' miss a day wearin' our lodge clothes an' gwine to de fun'ral."

"Don't order any flowers yet, Skeeter," Dr. Moseley laughed. "I've kept old Fuzz alive for many a year. My patients never give up until the hearse backs up at the door."

"We axes you dis, Doc Moseley," Pap Curtain broke in. "Fuzz is callin' fer her son, Torm. Does you know anything about dat boy?"

"Sure! Old Tom Axline lives out here at Shongaloon. He brings me a load of wood or a wild turkey or a sack of sweet potatoes now and then to pay me for taking care of his mother. Tom Axline is her son."

"But Tom is old, doc," Vinegar Atts protested.

"Certainly. He's eighty years old if he's a day. What about it?"

"I didn't think nobody's son wus dat old," Vinegar replied.

"He is not only that old, but he was in the penitentiary fifty years ago for killing a man. The governor pardoned him in a few months because he was convinced it was a case of self-defense."

"My gosh! All dat happened befo' us was borned," Figger Bush commented. "Seems strange to me dat anything could come to pass befo' my time!"

"I'm sure things would have happened differently if you had been among those present, Figger," Moseley laughed. "In fact the world has never been the same since you entered it." Then he stepped on the gas and covered them with dust as he went on.

Half an hour later, four excited men were traveling to Shongaloon in Skeeter's flivver, seeking Tom Axline. They found Tom seated upon his little porch, gazing at the slow-descending sun. He bore a rather unusual appearance, having a head of bushy hair and a face full of corkscrew whiskers. Four hounds bayed a welcome to the visitors, and Tom arose from his seat.

"Whut fotch you niggers here?" he demanded, speaking in the slow ponderosity of senility.

"Yo' maw is bein' robbed, Torm," Vinegar said. "We wants you to go to town wid us an' head off de robbers."

"Ef I goes, how will I git back?" Tom asked. "You-all will tote me in, an' den leave me dar. I ain't gwine!"

"You ain't understan' whut all dis is about," Vinegar told him.

And then the four started a garrulous narrative of the incidents of the day and urged Tom to accompany them to Tickfall, with the earnest assurance that they would bring him back to his house whenever he wanted to come.

"An' when we find yo' maw's money, we will gib you half of all we git," Figger Bush declared magnanimously.

"All dat stuff you is sayin' is a joke," Tom told them. "Maw ain't got no money. She ain't got no hid treasure neither. I'm knowed her all my past gone days an' she knows me an' she warn't fooled by no kid nigger whut rambled in an' tried to play like he wus her boy."

"My Gawd, fellers," Pap howled in desperation. "We is idjits fer foolin' wid dese here two ole folks. Bofe of 'em is in deir secont imbecility, an' you cain't even tell 'em nothin'. Who started all dis, anyhow?"

"You reckoleck Dazzle Zenor told us maw wus callin' fer Torm?" Vinegar grunted disgustedly.

"Of co'se, a fool woman is at de bottom of it," Pap sneered. "Whenever a man goes to actin' on a woman's notions, she makes a ring-tail monkey outen him. I favors leavin' dis ole white-wool baboon here an' gwine on back to town jes' by ourselves all alone."

"Me, too," Figger Bush agreed. "We might tote dis ole snoozer to town an' he'll git sick on us an' we'll hab to set up nights an' nuss him—make onion poultices an' feed him med'cine outen a bottle."

"Shore!" Pap Curtin added. "An' ef he got sick on us he'd be shore to up'n die on us an' I'm got to dig his grave an' lose my good time gwine to his las' fun'ral orgies. Less go home an' leave him!"

Pap and Figger had so thoroughly convinced themselves that Tom would get sick and die on them that they climbed into the

machine and honked the horn and bellowed for the others to come at once. The others came, but they brought Tom with them.

When they got back to Tickfall at midnight and hurried to the home of Fuzz Paradee, they glanced into the open door and had a big surprise. Buck Ridge was sitting beside the bed, talking and laughing with Dazzle Zenor.

IV.

Vinegar Atts marched in with Tom beside him and bawled:

"Sister Paradee, we done fotch you' son, Torm, to see you."

"Dat's fine," Fuzz answered.

"Howdy, maw?" Tom said.

The old woman reached up and ran her clawlike fingers in his hair and beard.

"It's my Torm all right," she said. "His face always wus like one of dese here woolly sheeps."

"Dey tells me you done got a hid treasure hid out, maw," Tom began. "Whar did you hide it, an' how come you hid dat treasure? Nobody ain't gwine steal nothin' you owns."

"Of co'se dey ain't, honey," Fuzz agreed. "But I hid it out fer my own sapisfaction. It makes you feel fine to own a hid treasure an' hab somepin to gib yo' kinnery when you die. I'm got enough fer you an' some of it kin be 'vided up amongst some of my friends."

"Whar is it hid at?" Tom asked, talking at the top of his voice so she could hear him.

"Is Buck Ridge still here?" Fuzz asked, turning her sightless eyes round the room.

"Yes'm. Here me!" Buck said.

"I done tole Buck whar de treasure wus hid at," Fuzz said, as she let herself down in the bed and turned her face away from them and toward the wall. "Now you chillun, git out an' lemme take a little nap."

She refused to discuss anything more, and the six men moved out of the house and stretched themselves upon the grass and slept until morning.

Then Buck Ridge opened the discussion by saying:

"How much money will you brudders bestow ef I tells you whar Fuzz has hid her treasure at?"

"How kin us know dat it is wuth money to find out?" Pap Curtain demanded.

"You got to be a spote an' take a chance," Buck told them. "Now I argufies dis way: Fuzz won't never need dat treasure agin. We kin git it an' use it now an' we won't hab to wait till Fuzz dies. I'll sell out whut I knows to all of you fer five dollars per each. She specified dat her boy gits some an' her friends git de rest. I ain't allowed none, but I sells my knowledge."

After much talk they all decided to buy and showed their money to Buck Ridge and told him it was his as soon as they were convinced that he was giving them the right information.

"Come wid me to Kunnel Torm Gaitskill an' we'll let dat white man hold de money. He owns a bank an' dem bankers knows how to hold on to it."

They took the money to the bank, asked Mr. Gaitskill to keep it for them, and then Buck led them aside and whispered:

"You will find de hid treasure in a ole grave vault on de Flournoy plantation whar Fuzz use to live. Dey moved the body out of de vault an' buried it in de cemingtery in town an' Fuzz hid her treasure in dat old grave. I don't even know whar dat plantation is at."

The men hurried away to visit the spot and verify this statement. Buck Ridge returned to the bank, talked to Colonel Gaitskill for a few minutes and then quietly left town. He was merely a visitor to the city, and his visit ended that day.

The "big four" found the Flournoy tomb walled up with loose brick. and when these were torn out they found the vault filled with boxes and bags.

Eagerly they brought them forth and opened them one at a time.

One box contained squirrel tails; one bag was full of tin covers from the top of pop bottles. Another box was filled with the floss from the milkweed, another bag was filled with the cork stoppers from countless bottles. All of the accumulation was of about the same worth and importance, the gathering of an aged and weakening brain,

actuated by the instinct of the squirrel and the pack-rat to lay up something before winter comes.

When Fuzzy became too feeble to care for herself and the while people had gone into her cabin to take some oversight and make some provision for her needs, they had found this junk piled up under her bed and had ordered her to dispose of it. It was all she had. It represented the accumulation of a lifetime of effort. Fearing that the white folks were planning to deprive her of it, she had conveyed it secretly to this spot.

Five men who had invested five dollars each in this sporting proposition hurried to the bank and called on Colonel Gaitskill and wanted their money back.

"You paid five dollars for information, boys," the colonel said. "Was that information correct?"

"Yes, suh."

"Then you have no money coming to you," he told them.

"Dat wus a pore investment, Marse Torm," Skeeter said sadly.

"It was not an investment. It was a speculation," Gaitskill informed them. "But was not altogether unprofitable. That Buck Ridge is quite a gentleman. He gave me that twenty-five dollars you paid him to help take care of Fuzz Paradee. He also turned over to me the two gold pieces that Fuzz gave him. He asked me to tell you that he ran from the door of the cabin because he thought you men were thieves and would rob him of the gold. So it is all right. Quite a profitable transaction."

"Yes, suh," Vinegar agreed reluctantly. "Us 'll git a little profit outen it, too. It'll be a great lesson to us."

THE END

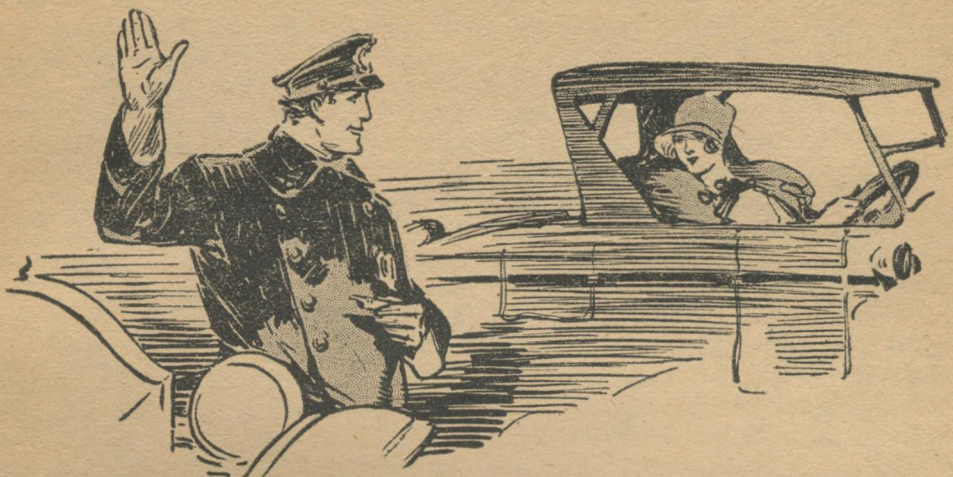
SOME DAY—SOMEWHERE

I'LL see you again, some day, somewhere,
Old pal, and the friendly clasp of your hand
And the light of your eyes and your smile will wear
A welcome fair in a lonely land,
For we who part we shall surely meet
Past the dusty shade of the winding sheet.

Then the tide of friendship shall surge once more
While the pulses of comradeship will beat,
And the Saga of fellowship of yore,
Its gains and losses, its tares and wheat,
Shall with mingled sadness and humor flow,
The turbulent tale of our long ago.

For that is the plan—and the severed tie
Is a transient loss, and the milling crowd
Breathes a toiling spirit that shall not die—
Just a night at an inn is the gloomy shroud—
Then dawn, old pal, with its joy and care;
I'll see you again, some day, somewhere.

Olin Lyman.



The Fright of Way

By ERIC HOWARD

"OF all the dumb tricks!" moaned Jasper P. Dukes. "Why am I—of all men the law-abidingest—blessed with such an offspring? Why? As if I didn't have enough publicity, of the wrong kind, without your busting into the papers! With your reputation for speeding and reckless driving, you have the nerve to knock a street car off the track! Oh, Lord!"

"Didn't!" corrected his daughter, defiantly. "Didn't knock any old street car off any old track! Wasn't my fault! Didn't do it!"

"Well, what did happen, then?" demanded Jasper P. "They got out an extra about it. News kids hollering your name up and down the streets! Lord, haven't you any shame? And don't you ever think of me? How do you suppose I feel? Having a lot of fellows come up and grin and say, 'Well, Jas, I see she's broke out again!' Making wise cracks about my daughter!

"Bah! And me trying to bring you up right, to be dignified and ladylike and all. And right in the middle of this law suit, besides getting plenty of publicity of my own. What did you have against the poor little yellow street car, anyway, that made you knock it off the track?"

"Didn't!" protested his daughter, with stubborn repetition. "Didn't do it. Wasn't my fault!"

"The extra says," her father waved the paper at her, "that you struck the car! I suppose they got it all wrong, eh?"

"I struck the car all right," admitted Doris, "but only after it had struck me! The darned old thing jumped the track when it saw me and hit me a side-swiping blow. I didn't knock it off the track at all. How could I? Think my little baby roadster could do that?"

"It's done worse than that!" snapped Jasper P. "Remember when you hit that milk wagon and churned up fifty pounds of butter before you got through? Remember that gasoline truck you knocked off the boulevard, 'cause it wouldn't get out of your way? Remember—"

He stopped, for lack of breath. He might

have gone on, had he been long-winded, for many minutes, repeating his daughter's violations of traffic rules and giving a history of her career as a driver.

But to what avail? Here she was, again in trouble. In worse trouble than ever before. So far she had not injured anybody. Beyond causing considerable damage to the various cars with which she had got entangled, the bills for which damage had been paid by Jasper P., she had injured no one. But this time—

"They say," he commented, solemnly, "that the traffic officer may die."

Sudden tears sprang to Doris's eyes. Involuntarily her father forgot his anger and laid his large hand over her tiny one.

"I'm—sorry—about him!" Doris sobbed. "But honest, dad, it wasn't my fault! They're just blaming me, because I've had so much bad luck. The reporters are just showing how smart they can be.

"The car jumped the track and hit me. I was standing still, ready to make a left hand turn. It was coming fast. Just before it got up to me the axle or something broke, and it jumped the track. I shifted into reverse and tried to get away. But of course I couldn't make it quick enough.

"The car hit me and knocked me into the machine behind me. There were about six collisions at that corner, all in six seconds. And as the street car jumped the track it struck that traffic officer. He was standing on his platform, right beside the tracks.

"The reporters don't know what happened. They're just playing it up this way because I was in it. But it wasn't my fault! And—he was—such a nice man!"

These last words, irrelevant as they seemed, came out in a sob.

"Who?" asked her distracted parent.

"The officer," Doris wept. "He—always used—to salute me, when I passed. And he has the nicest smile, and—I went to the Receiving Hospital but they wouldn't let me see him. He was unconscious. If—if he dies, I'll never drive a car again!"

"There, there!" Jasper P. patted her gently on the shoulder. "You're sure it wasn't your fault? Can we make the papers stop what they're saying?"

"It wasn't my fault!" repeated Doris. "It was the fault of the street car. And the papers are just blaming me because I've been the goat before, and also because they're on the side of the street railway company. Of course, they wouldn't blame it!"

"Ha!" grunted her father, approvingly. After all, she was truly his daughter. The street railway company happened to be one of his chief enemies.

"You're sure of that?" he asked again. "Can we prove it?"

"If anybody saw what happened we can," insisted Doris. "That officer—he would know."

"If he lives!" said Jasper P. "Well, I'll take a chance! Yes, sir! I'll have my lawyers file suit against the company! I guess that'll hold 'em! And I'll warn the papers to be careful. By golly, they can't blame us for what we didn't do!"

Jasper P. whirled around in his swivel chair and seized the telephone. In a moment he was connected with his attorneys—the firm of Sweeney, Isaacs, O'Malley & Cohen. While Doris listened admiringly, he directed the senior member of the firm, Mr. Sweeney, to get busy.

"Now," he turned to Doris, "we'll show 'em they can't do things like this to the Dukes family!"

The door of Jasper's office was opened by a timid, blond girl, his secretary.

"Mr. Dukes," she said, "there's a reporter from the *Star* to see Miss Doris."

The secretary ducked, expecting a volley of words. But Jasper P. smiled blandly.

"Send him in!" he directed, and his smile was like that of the cat watching the mouse.

A tall, thin, serious-faced, spectacled young man entered.

"I'm Weston, of the *Star*," he introduced himself with an awkward bow. "Er—about this accident, now—"

"Tell him exactly what happened, Doris," said Jasper P.

Doris spoke calmly and fluently. She described the accident in detail. She laid all the blame upon the defective street car.

"Now," she said, "if you want a scoop, or whatever you call it, locate that street

car. See if the front axle isn't broken. Get somebody who knows machinery to tell you whether *I* could have broken it. I'll bet they've hidden that car. This is part of their campaign against father. They're using this accident to fight him. If you're an honest man, and your paper isn't bought up by the railway company"—Doris spoke with great scorn—"you'll find and print the truth."

"Thanks," said Weston. "I'll look into it. Have you anything to say, Mr. Dukes?"

"Have I? Just you wait!" Whereupon Jasper P. launched into a veritable oration, in which the street railway company was denounced as an octopus, a snake in the grass, a malefactor of great wealth, and a soulless corporation.

Moreover, he announced that he was filing suit against the company, for damages to his daughter's car; and that if the papers didn't stop hounding him and his daughter there would be a half dozen libel suits started right away.

"Now," said he, "you print just what I said, or don't print a thing! Or, by golly, I'll put the *Star* out of business."

"Thanks," said Weston, his pencil flying over loose sheets of copy paper.

Mr. Dukes's threat was by no means an idle one. It was entirely possible that he could put the *Star* out of business.

He was one of Barport's richest men. His enterprises were many and various. Just now he was intent upon establishing a motorbus line that would cut deeply into the business of the street railway company. Back of this enterprise lay his long enmity for that company.

He was on the point of succeeding with it, when the railway company secured an injunction against him. The court order prevented him from operating his bus lines until his franchise, granted by a friendly board of supervisors, had been passed upon by the State railway commission. The injunction temporarily crippled his business, and as it was well known that two members of the railway commission had been highly paid attorneys for the street car company, there was some doubt as to whether his franchise would be allowed to stand.

All of this, naturally, aroused Mr. Dukes's ire. The papers had further angered him by their unanimous support of the street car company. They were even using this unfortunate accident, in which Doris was involved, as a weapon of war. Well, he would see about that!

Jasper P. Dukes was a fighter, and any fight in which he engaged was a fight to the finish.

"Run along home, Doris," he said. "I'll be busy. And don't worry—we'll take care of this thing."

"I'm going to the hospital again, dad. I've got to know how he is! That's the only thing I'm worried about."

"All right. Do that. And if we can do anything for him, go the limit."

II.

THE bed in the Receiving Hospital was scarcely long enough for the injured traffic officer. From the soles of his feet to the top of his dark red head he measured six feet and two inches.

He had recovered consciousness an hour after the accident. Now, with two ribs fractured and one arm broken, and bandages everywhere, all that could be seen of him was one merry blue eye, a straight nose and smiling lips that held a cigarette.

Larry Graham had been a traffic officer for three short months.

"And they told me," he observed gleefully to the nurse, "that I wouldn't get a vacation this year! Fooled 'em, didn't I? Say, how long are you going to keep me here?"

"Another day or so," said the nurse. "Until we think it's safe to move you. Then you'll go to another hospital. We haven't room here for permanent guests."

"Ha!" said Larry. "If you'd give me my clothes, I could get right up and walk out of here. Why, this is nothing! I've been hurt so much worse than this that they couldn't find all the pieces. Come on, be a nice girl and give me my clothes!"

The nurse laughed.

"You're the sixteenth man this week who has asked me for his clothes," she chuckled. "And you a policeman! Haven't you any respect for regulations?"

"Not personally," admitted Larry, with a wink of his one observable eye. "And I want something to eat, too!"

"They always do. Well, you'll get a glass of orange juice and one soft-boiled egg. I'll get them now."

"Have a heart!" pleaded Larry. "I always thought nurses were kind-hearted. I had one in France that would give me anything I asked for. If you—"

The nurse left him to talk to himself.

"Gee!" said Larry. "Here I get hurt doing my noble duty, and this is the way they treat me. Nothing to eat, and not enough of it. I know their system: they figure the pangs of hunger will make me forget my broken arm. When I get out of here, I'll pinch every doctor in this place every time they pass my corner! I'll—"

The nurse reappeared at the door.

"Stop talking to yourself," she said, "and rest. There's a lady here to see you. But you can't talk more than five minutes. It isn't good for your nerves."

"Nerves!" said Larry. "I haven't got any nerves! But I'll develop 'em if you keep on starving me the way you're doing! Who is she?"

"The notorious Doris Dukes," announced the nurse. "She's the one that knocked the street car off the track, isn't she? And hit you?"

"She did not!" Larry vehemently protested. "Why, she wouldn't do such a thing! And if she was a nurse, she'd give me what I ought to have to eat! She—"

"She" entered, and Larry raised himself on his good arm to get a better view of her.

Doris was dressed simply in a straight-line blue frock that matched her eyes. Her face, usually gay and piquant, was serious and subdued. Also, thought Larry, it was beautifully concerned.

He remembered how often he had seen her, as she swung her maroon roadster, with skill and audacity, through the thickest traffic. He remembered her friendly smile, the wave of her gloved hand.

"How do you do?" asked Doris, unable to say anything else. "I—I'm glad you aren't hurt any worse. You know—we—I—was afraid you wouldn't recover."

"What?" chuckled Larry. "Any time a little old yellow street car can knock me out! Why, say, if I had seen it coming, I'd have pushed it back on the track! But I was looking at you, and didn't see it. First thing I knew, it had jumped the rails and hit me. Must have been a broken axle, I guess."

"Oh!" cried Doris. "Then you don't blame me for what happened? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"How could I blame you?" queried Larry. "It was the street car's fault, of course."

"Everybody else is blaming me. The papers, and everybody. Any time there's an accident they try to blame me. Why, once they had me responsible for a wreck that happened ten miles from where I was. Just because I've been unlucky a few times."

"If you'll get me my clothes," Larry proclaimed, "—they've got them hidden somewhere around here—I'll get up and tell 'em a few things. Those old street cars are just about ready for the scrap heap anyway. No wonder an axle breaks, or the brakes or something gives way every now and then."

Of course, these words endeared Larry to Doris. But the words were not all. The merry gleam in his one visible eye, the character of his straight nose, the whimsical turn of his lips—he was, she thought, a very attractive person.

"The nurse said I could only stay five minutes," she said. "I—I must be going again."

"Oh, don't go!" begged Larry. "Why, since you've been here, I've almost forgotten how hungry I am. They're starving me—and if they keep it up, just before I begin to faint from hunger I'll get up and lick a couple of doctors. And they're going to move me to another hospital—they won't let me out!"

"They know what's best for you," said Doris. "You've been badly hurt."

"No!" cried Larry. "If I had my clothes and a square meal, I could get right up and walk down the street! Sure I could! And I want to go after that street car company. Of course, I've got insurance, but

I'm going to sue 'em, besides. Why should I let 'em get away with this? I'll show 'em they can't attack me that way. I know the law, and I know those cars were not inspected."

"You know the law? You mean, as a policeman?"

"No, I'm a lawyer. I couldn't get any practice, so I joined the force. Brawn, not brain, is what they pay for. Two hundred a month as a copper beats nothing as a lawyer, especially with an appetite like mine." He grinned. "Gee, I'm hungry!"

"Father is suing them, too," said Doris. "But the papers are all with them, and—"

"If I only had my clothes, and a square meal," repeated Larry, "I'd show 'em!"

The nurse reëntered with a thermometer in her hand.

"You can't talk any more," she said. "Open wide."

Doris smiled a good-by as the thermometer was thrust between his teeth, and Larry waved his good arm.

He was thinking how pretty and how kind Doris was. And, as she left the hospital, she was thinking how brave and cheerful he was. When two youngsters begin to think thus of each other, Daniel Cupid, Esquire, is taking aim.

"When do I eat?" demanded Larry. "What are you doing—trying to reduce me? If you'll send that doctor to me, I'll tell him a few things. I can cuss him, and I can't cuss you!"

"You men are all alike," observed the nurse, "and I'm going for your orange juice now."

"Orange juice!" growled Larry. "Make it apple sauce and banana oil!"

III.

"Now, now, young man," said the attorney for the street car company. "We're offering you a fine settlement. Just let this matter drop right where it is, and we'll look after you. There might be a place for you in the legal department, you know. They tell me you're a lawyer."

Larry, in another hospital now, propped himself on his good arm and looked the attorney in the eye.

"What are you trying to do—bribe an officer?" he asked, smiling. "No, sir, I'm going through with this. You bet I am!"

"I wouldn't, if I were you," cautioned the older man, famous as a diplomat. "Your position on the force—ahem!"

"I know you control the commissioner," agreed Larry. "But I don't care if I lose that job. You know as well as I do, those cars were not inspected. Your company's running a lot of old junk on its tracks. There's a wreck every week or so. And the public suffers. Now I'm not pretending to be a defender of the public—it ought to be able to defend itself—but this is my chance, and I'm going to use it."

"It will do you no good," sighed the older man. "If you would only be reasonable!"

"I know the system," went on Larry. "Trying to blame that little girl for what happened, when it was the fault of the car! You'd have blamed her in any case, no matter who she was, in order to make the public forget your rotten cars. But, considering who her father is, you blamed her doubly—had her written up by every newspaper as a sensationally reckless driver. She—"

"Perhaps," the attorney suavely interrupted, "her father has promised to retain you. We can make it more worth your while."

"He has not!" cried Larry. "And he will not! And you can't make it worth my while to do anything! This is my own affair, and my suit stands. Your company is a big fish, and I'm a little fish. But I'm a fighting little fish, sir, and I'm game to take on even a whale."

"Then it's a fight?" asked the attorney.

"It is, glory be!" announced Larry. "And may the best fish win! No personal hard feelings, sir, and I should be honored to have you oppose me in court."

The representative of the trolley company smiled, although he did not feel like smiling, and walked out.

"Nurse!" shouted Larry. "Isn't she here yet?"

The "she" of his question was Doris Dukes, who had called at the hospital every day since the accident.

Still bandaged, and his ribs requiring daily attention, Larry was restless with health and energy. They were feeding him now, for they were sure that he had sustained no serious internal injuries.

As he spoke, the nurse opened the door to admit Doris. She had brought him a small bouquet of roses.

"Hello, hello, hello!" cried Larry. "You're three minutes late, and I thought you weren't coming! And, say, I've got them jumping.

"They sent their leading counsel up here to bribe me! Yes! Oh, this is going to be good! As soon as I get out of here, I'll show 'em how to fight. Even if I lose the suit, think what it means! I'll show 'em up, just the same—show their careless disregard of public safety! And the people will be with me, all the way! When I get through, I'll be a lawyer in this man's town, and everybody'll know it! I can afford to lose the suit, at that."

"Father's bought the *Star*," announced Doris. "Now we'll have a paper behind us!"

"*We?*" asked Larry.

"Er—father and I," explained Doris, blushing a little. "And, of course, we'll have to play up your brave fight against the octopus."

"If I could only get out of here!" growled Larry.

"Larry, I think they want to keep you here! I was asking the doctor about you. I told him you wanted to go home, that you would have a regular nurse and a doctor calling every day. But he said you couldn't be moved in your present condition. Larry, are you sure you aren't badly injured?"

"Of course, I'm not!" protested Larry. "Why, I've been hurt much worse playing football—and, in France, why, compared with what I got there, this is pie *a la mode!*"

"Then," whispered Doris, "I think they're *keeping* you here. The doctor looked funny when he said you couldn't be moved. I think they've been ordered to keep you here—until—until this is forgotten."

"If that's it," said Larry, "and I think you're right, they're going to get fooled! Get my clothes! They're in a closet, down at the end of the hall. You'll know them, because they're a uniform. I'm still a cop! You get 'em, and wait outside. And I'll get out, if I have to bowl over every interne. Will you, Doris?"

"If—if I can," she promised, and retreated to the door.

She saw that the hall was empty. The closet door at the end was slightly open. She hurried to it. The blue of Larry's uniform—with his star pinned to the jacket—lay on top of a heap of clothing.

Hastily, Doris gathered these garments together, thrust them under her arm, and walked back to Larry's room.

"Here!" she said.

"Good!" He had barely time enough to get them under his bedclothes when his nurse returned to the room. Doris must go now.

"In ten minutes, about," promised Larry as she shook hands with him.

At the first opportunity, which was when the nurse next left the room, Larry struggled into his uniform. By reason of long training, he did it quickly. But not quite quickly enough.

The nurse, returning unexpectedly, saw him dressed. She called an interne. Larry stood defiant, fully determined upon leaving. His one good hand became a hard, clenched fist.

"Get back to bed!" commanded the interne. "You can't move!"

"What are you trying to do—hypnotize me?" asked Larry. "Not only can I move, but I can move you, if you don't get out of my way."

He advanced upon the interne. The latter attempted to grapple with him. Larry dragged him out into the hall, and flung him against the wall. The interne came back.

"They told us to keep you here, and we're going to do it?" he cried.

"Who told you?" growled Larry. "And who told you you could keep me here if I wanted to go?"

His good arm described a straight line, from the shoulder out. His hard fist landed on the pointed chin of the interne, who fell

against the wall and then slowly sank to the floor.

"One down, one cigar!" shouted Larry. "And if anybody else interferes with an officer, watch out!"

The nurses did not attempt to interfere, and the other interne who witnessed the defeat of his associate discreetly hurried away to a ward where he was not needed. Larry marched out through the hall to the office, lifted his cap to the girl at the desk, and walked out into the street.

"Ten minutes to the second!" said Doris, as he climbed in beside her in the maroon roadster.

"I didn't want 'em to think me ungrateful," he explained, "so I left another patient in my place. That ugly-looking interne!"

"Good!" exclaimed Doris. "He's the one that didn't want to let me in the other day. If anybody sees you in this car, they'll think I'm arrested again. But I don't care!"

"If you'll drive me to headquarters, I'll turn in my uniform. I want to tell 'em down there just what I think of 'em anyway. And after that, we'll get hold of a *Star* reporter and tell him a few things. The fight has just begun!"

It was as Larry said. The fight had just begun.

He had difficulty, first, in resigning from the force. The chief and the commissioner, neither of whom had noticed him before, offered him speedy promotion if he would remain.

That promotion, however, was conditional upon his testimony at the trial of Dukes versus the Barport Street Railway Company. Larry refused to be so conditioned.

"Why, I'm suing them myself!" said he. "And when I get through with them, it 'll have another name—the Barport Junk Company!"

His call upon the *Star* reporter was more cordial. It was Weston again who was assigned to the story, and he solemnly took down everything Larry said.

"This will be some story," he promised. "And I think you've got 'em beat. We found that car and had it examined. The axle had been cracked a long time. No inspection, of course. Go to it! The boss will back you to the limit."

"I'd fight 'em whether he did or not," said Larry. "But so much the better. Every little helps."

The papers that night were full of Larry. Even those opposed to Jasper P. Dukes had to report Larry's doings or be scooped by rivals. And Larry's doings were full of interest.

It was not often that a humble traffic cop resigned from the force, denouncing his superiors; escaped from a hospital after knocking down an interne and in spite of a broken arm and three cracked ribs; turned out to be a fighting lawyer; filed suit against a large corporation and promised to win the suit; and otherwise demonstrated his right to the headlines—America's true Hall of Fame. Larry became the city's idol, and the public flocked to his side and championed his cause with its customary fickleness.

In the days that followed, Larry gave the people no chance to forget him. Each edition of the *Star*, tardily followed by the other papers, contained a new and startling sensation.

In reporting the doings of Larry, the papers neglected Doris and her father. Doris was no longer pointed out as that menace to society, the reckless driver. For which she was heartily grateful.

"Dad wants you to come to dinner tonight," she said to Larry, the morning he opened his law office.

"Why?" he asked.

"Well," Doris laughed frankly, "first, because he likes you. And second, of course, because you've been responsible for scaring the State railway commission into passing favorably on his franchise. They were afraid not to, after you started your fight. So now his busses have the—fright of way!"

Larry laughed.

"All right, I'll come," he said. "But it will be—to see you!"

Doris was going toward the door, when Larry caught her.

"I said," he repeated, "it would be—to see you."

"I heard you," she replied, her hand on the knob.

"Well?"

"Well?" she also asked.

Larry seized her hand and pulled her away from the door.

"Doris," he said lightly, "I'm only a poor policeman—"

"Dad's going to offer you a job as counsel," observed Doris, irrelevantly.

"I can't take it!" Larry shook his head. "That would be as bad as taking a job from the other side, almost. I've made this fight on my own. I'll win my suit. And with that start I shall have a very respectable law practice. As I say, I'm only a poor policeman, Doris, but—" And he flung his useful arm about her, leaned over and kissed her lips. "Doris!"

Doris freed herself, after a moment, and darted for the door.

"I'll see you to-night," she smiled. "Until then—" And she blew him a kiss from the tips of her slender fingers.

Whereupon Larry, in sheer exuberance, picked up a fat law book and sent it crashing against the wall.

"Gee!" he said to himself. "I must be more careful. I forgot those books aren't paid for yet!"

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

A WORD FOR WILDERNESS

I LIKE the luxuries of life as well as any man—
Soft carpets, room-with-bath, seaside hotels—
But, say, the scentless breezes from a mere electric fan
Aren't like the wind that's sweet with woodland smells!

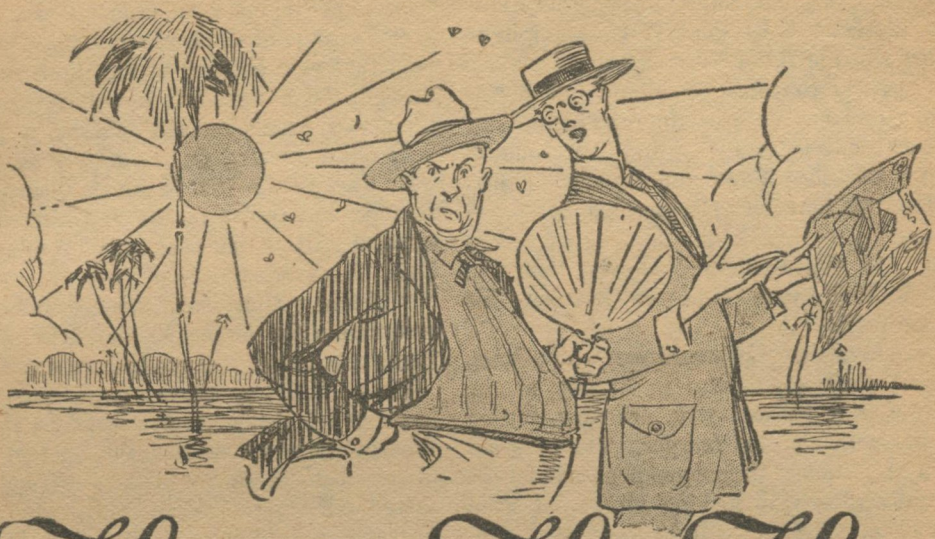
I'm civilized, of course—I have an office and a flat;
I like to boast and boost our growing city;
And when it comes to opera and cultured things like that,
I say for folks to miss them is a pity.

But though I use push-button lights and ride a subway train,
And live man-made machine-life with a will,
I sometimes wish for savages and wilderness again,
With camp fires on some far and lonely hill.

And so, although I boost to build new cities every day,
Sometimes tall walls seem sort of stiff and cramping,
And then I thank the great red gods that I can slip away
And still find outdoor loneliness for camping.

I do like humming business life as well as any man—
Great modern cities are a sight to see—
But, brother, let us watch our step and save, now while we can,
Some *wilderness* for our posterity!

S. Omar Barker.



Florida Fla-Fla

By THOMAS THURSDAY

ACCORDING to the scientific lads, the history of the world is divided into a number of eras, with such tasty names as the paleolithic age, the Jurassic age, the neolithic age, the Pleistocene age, and so on until your tongue gets twisted. But down in the land of the Great Sand Rush—meaning feverish Florida—there ain't no such eras, so help them Ponce de Leon!

Ask any hectic real estate boob-banger, and he will admit that, although it may be true that the Lord created the heavens and earth in six days, He spent four of the six in topping off Florida. During the other two days He created all the rest, and, having two minutes to spare, He dashed off California.

I wouldn't fool you. If you don't believe it, come on down and sniff the cuckoo climate in the Sunshine State—when it don't pour five days out of six. But let's get down to business, before you get the notion that this is another one of those articles on the chin-whisker of America.

Me and Ballyhoo Burns had listened to the siren yelp of hopical America—which would be positively frostproof if it wasn't for the frost—and promptly set sail for the port of hissing men, viz., Miami. Being well trained in the gyps and hokum of the circus and carnival world, we figgered that we should be right at home in Miami, not knowing that the burg had already filled its quota of grifters.

After pulling off one trick that netted us a little cash and a grand surprise, we immediately outfitted ourselves in a complete set of habercashery, meaning linen knickers, golf stockings, whoops-my-dear silk shirts, and zebra-striped oxfords.

"The cash capital of the firm is now two hundred and sixty bucks," announces Ballyhoo, as we lounged on the verandah of the Royal Palms Out Hotel.

"Enough to get out of this trap and back to Broadway with," I suggests.

"Why go back to Broadway when we have enough jack to promote a new subdivision?" he wants to know. "Listen! For a hundred and fifty bucks I can get an option on two hundred and ten acres

of the best jungle and cypress swamp land in Florida. That done, I'll telegraph an ad up to the *Billboard,* and get a trainload of grifters to come down and peddle the goo to the unsuspecting public. They should clean up big. And we wouldn't have to rob widows and orphans, either. Doc, this here boom is easy pie for showmen!"

"Are you thinking," I says, "on the basis that there ain't no jails in this vicinity?"

"There may be hoosegows," he admits, "but they don't seem to fit any of the strong-arm realtors that are now getting away with assorted murder. The cells are only big enough to fit some poor colored lad who was caught looking cross-eyed at a chicken. Take it from me, our subdivision will be more legitimate than lots of 'em, and I don't mean perhaps!"

"Suppose we do grab the acreage, how do we promote it? We gotta have a coupla sucker busses to carry the cash customers out to see the land, and then we got to have a field office painted like a Greenwich Village restaurant or a circus animal wagon."

"Why worry about trifles? The bus stuff will be easy to handle. Once I show one of the motor makers that I have real Florida land behind me I can get fifty busses for a dollar down and a sheriff a week. As to the field office, all I do is give the order and pay for it out of the profits of the first lot sales. Promoter—that's me all over, kid."

"Raw," I remarks.

"So's oysters. You can get away with arson down here. You can spot the late Jesse James two horses and a complete set of whiskers, and beat him to the State line."

So that's how we got started, and that's how we ran into Mr. John Chitty Knight and the snappy Waldo Granger. As the monkey remarked to the banyan tree, thereby hangs a tail!

II.

WITHIN the following two weeks these weird items positively took place:

An option on two hundred and ten acres of some of the best muck and swamp land that ever listened to the wind singing through the Everglades; two thirty-passenger busses, sought but not paid for; a spiffy field office, erected on the only land that wasn't knee-deep—not in June, but in semi-swamp; and twelve of the best circus and carnival grifters that ever cursed a midway, f.o.b. Times Square, New York.

"Listen, you tramps," begins Ballyhoo, assembling the bunch in the field office, "how much have you got in hard cash?"

Hoop-la McCoy breaks down and confesses to ten dollars and no cents; Paddle-Wheel O'Levy felt positive that he still had fifteen bucks in his hip pocket, although he shared an upper berth with Hoop-la; Cock-Eyed Snyder—the best shill in the tent world—said he would have had at least forty-five berries, but for the fact that the conductor discovers him playing hide-and-go-seek in the lavatory and made him pay his fare. The other lads all had a few dimes and nickels annoying them, all of which was amazing.

"Great!" beams Ballyhoo. "Now, then, I want all you side-mouth talkers to invest in complete realtors' uniforms. No guy can peddle sand lots with long pants."

"What d'yer mean, uniforms?" yelps Paddle-Wheel. "I ain't no kid show ticket taker!"

"You're out of order," says Ballyhoo. "I ain't talking about any brass-button uniform. I mean the kind that will make you look like a cross between a golf champ and a sporting goods store wax-dummy. In other words, scatter down town and deck yourselves out in the same mess that you now see me and Doc wearing. That done, you'll be realtors."

After much heavy thinking, Ballyhoo decides to name the dub-division Lago De Leon, the Fountain of Youth and Profit. Just to jolly the folks along, we adds the following sub-titles: the Magic City; Where Summer Spends the Winter; America's Own Riviera; Where Dollars Grow Like Weeds. All of which was fine-sounding pish-posh, whiff-woof, and banana lubricant.

Three days later our first busload of frenzied land-sand grabbers are raced up to

the Lago De Leon field office, and the boys begin to work on the customers like a cyclone in Kansas. The lads were all togged out in white knickers, riotous colored stockings, topped off with Avenue A Panama hats; and if it wasn't for the shape of their pans and Chuck Connors's lingo, they'd have passed as gentlemen.

Hoop-la McCoy was the first to break the ice by selling two lots to a retired brain-user from Cape Cod, and as soon as he gets the old boy's check he dashes over to Ballyhoo and demands his commission immediately. Showmen know showmen!

Before the beautiful Florida sun had set —behind the rain clouds—the boys had peddled almost ten thousand dollars' worth of mosquito playgrounds, and it looked like a clean sleep. Of course, we had the customers all hipped up about how the place would look when the improvements were completed; in fact, they got a bird's-eye view of it from our circulars and maps.

For instance, to the left would be the proposed million-dollar Hotel Lago de Leon—Moorish type, y' know—where each room would be fit for a sheik to shoot crap in, or knock his brains out against the stucco, if desired; each room would have a private bath—baths should be private, eh? —with hot and cold running water by day and night.

Said hotel would have a giant natatorium, a Grecian marble swimming-pool, unexcelled cuisine, and any number of other innovations that would cause such lads as John McE. Bowman and Kid Statler to think their drums were igloos. Then we pointed out where the proposed golf links would be, all of which would be started just as soon as Walter Hagen arrived and laid out the course.

This would positively be the greatest cuff—I mean golf—links in Sunniland, which is slang for Florida. In fact, Jack Rockefeller, the well-known caddy user of Ormond, would be glad to come down and try 'em out.

Next we indicated the seven proposed bullevards—" bull " is very good—which would weave in and out of the grounds like a beautiful spider's web, not to mention—though that's what we did—the miles and miles of concrete roads connected with said bullevards, all fringed with palms, both royal and itching.

However, one old lad didn't take to the proposed golf course as nicely as he should. When Cock-eyed Snyder pointed out the fact that all lot owners would be entitled to a life membership in the Lago De Leon Golf and Country Club, the breezy Yank strokes his Spanish moss goatee, and squints sharply at Cock-eyed.

" Whar did you come from, neighbor?" he asks.

" Chicago," says Cock-eyed.

" Wal, did *you* play golf in Chicago?"

" Er, no. But I was the best crap-shooter around the Loop!" snaps Cock-eyed, forgetting himself.

" When you lay out a checker or a domino course, lemme know," says the old lad. " Meantime, whut time does the bus start back?"

Well, during the next two weeks, things went along nice and snappy. The grifters took to the real estate game like kittens to catnip, and reaped in more money than they ever did before.

Suddenly, things took a different turn, as the flivver driver observed when his steering gear snapped. For one thing, the lads were not used to important money, and it went to their heads like moonshine in a Seminole.

Hoop-la McCoy was the first to collapse under the strain of easy money, and began to pay more attention to salt water bathing and shady palms than to real estate. Next, Paddle-wheel O'Levy noted that his bank roll had ballooned so it busted his pockets, after which he promptly found a shady spot—with a damsel by his side—and sipped Caffeine Cola by the quart.

Similar inactivities began to be recognized among the boys, and when the sales for the week registered absolute zero, Ballyhoo assembled his sleeping cuties and proceeded to lay down the jaw.

" I want you stew-bums to understand," he snorts, " that I imported you to work, not snore. Get me? Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves! I put you next to the easiest graft that you ever heard of

and you lay down like a mattress. If you don't wake up and shake a leg, I'll chase you ragged. That's that!"

"This here climate ain't suited to my constitution," says Paddle-wheel, with an ill-bred yawn.

"What," says Hoop-la, "do you take us for? We're troupers, ain't we? Well, when showmen get hold of easy jack, in an easy climate, what d'yer expect?"

"I think I got the flu or somethin'," complains Cock-eyed Snyder. "I wake up in the morning and I feel sleepy. Besides, I got more than five hundred bucks in my sock."

"Bah," hoots Ballyhoo, "that's the trouble with you fatheads. You ain't used to real money. Soon as you get an extra dime in your pocket, you retire under a palm tree, and dream you're Hank Ford. Anyway, you could have sold more sand while you was at it if you didn't all talk out of the side of your traps, like a bunch of roughnecks, which same you are. What this sales force needs is a coupla educated and cultured lads to talk to the highbrows. Why, for two bits—yes, for even less than that—"

The sudden and unexpected entrance of a tall, dignified-looking gent, wearing hoot-owl glasses, stopped the tirade. The stranger no more than steps foot in the office when Paddle-wheel gets up enough ambition to rise and try to sell him some choice and fancy lots.

Before Paddle-wheel gets fairly under way, the other lads wake up and start in to work on the newcomer like he was a rube on the fair grounds. The well-poised lad listens patiently for a moment, then looks pained all over.

"My dear fellows," he finally says, with just a hint of an English accent, "I'm afraid that you have not studied the science of selling. If you'll pardon the observation, which is well meant, I dare say that your approach is a trifle bizarre. Now, if you will listen to me for at least fifteen minutes, I shall—"

"What d'yer think this is," says Cock-eyed, "a hall?"

"A hall is not essential," smiles the well-bred bozo.

"This guy is peddling a year's subscription to *The Farmers' Home Pal*," grunts Paddle-wheel.

"Shut up, you hopheads!" snaps Ballyhoo, speaking for the first time.

"Permit me to introduce myself," goes on the lad. "My name is John Chitty Knight, and I'm interested in the newer salesmanship; I mean to say, efficient salesmanship. That is why I called. I have decided to connect myself with your sales force in order to try out some new selling theories that I have formulated."

"What d'yer work with—a gun?" demands the uncouth Hoop-la.

"Shut up!" yelps Ballyhoo. "Can't you tell a gentleman when you see one? Mr. Knight is a regular gentleman, and you bums ain't ever been near enough to a gent to know one on sight. Er—I'm very glad to have you with us, Mr. Knight. It's a pleasure to hear a guy talk who knows the king's English."

"I know the king's English m'self," snarls Paddle-wheel.

"He ain't Irish, 'at's a cinch!" adds Hoop-la.

For the next half hour while the grifters listened pop-eyed, Mr. Knight explained that he was immensely interested in the higher forms of salesmanship—whatever that is—and that he wished to connect himself with the Lago De Leon sales force in order to test out some pet theories of his that he had worked on for the past two years.

Ballyhoo broke down and confessed that he was tickled silly to have a gent of refinement and culture on his list, and told Mr. Knight that he hoped the roughnecks would not annoy him too much.

"Pay no attention to these hams," he says. "I want you to go ahead and dig up some highbrow customers. I know you're the lad who can talk to 'em like a Dutch uncle. You ought to be able to get big birds like Morgan, Ford, Firestone, Edison and maybe Cal Coolidge interested in buying a home-site in Lago De Leon. Meantime, good hunting!"

So that, my children, was how it was that Mr. John Chitty Knight was added to our bright and brilliant sales force; and

when John concluded his performance—well, that's the end of the story, and this isn't!

III.

A FEW days after we had annexed Mr. Knight to our zoo, me and Ballyhoo flivvered up to Rio Del Cocoa to see about some delinquent abstracts. As we reached the railroad terminal, the twelve thirty from Jacksonville, and points freezing, puffed into the station.

The train had hardly stopped before a breezy-looking lad hopped off the first Pullman and immediately showed signs of possessing speed, pep and ginger in habit forming quantities. He was a flipper between twenty-five and thirty and self-confidence stuck out of his face like hyacinths in the St. John's River.

"There's a man after my own heart," remarks Ballyhoo. "I bet he could convince a giraffe that long necks were worthless."

The lad rushed over like a galloping tornado and, as he reached us, drops his kister on my toes.

"Hello, fellows!" he greets. "Say, whereinhell is the nearest live real estate office?"

"Looking for some choice land?" asks Ballyhoo, scenting a customer.

"Yeh—land to sell!" he flings back with a smile that would have melted the pyramids. "If I can't peddle this stuff they got down here, with all the ballyhooing that's been going on about it, I'll eat your hat. Listen! Before I left Noo York I made a bet with myself that I'd sell everything but the Indian River to *somebody*. Er—hey, taxi!" he breaks off, as he spots a chocolate-tinted Jehu cruising along.

"Never mind the taxi," snaps Ballyhoo. "If you're looking for land to sell, just hop into this tram of mine, and I'll show you the best thing in Florida. I pay twenty per cent commission—real money—and we stand for everything but the truth. The reason we don't stand for the truth about our sub-division is because we don't want to be too distinctive—different from the others, what I mean. When would you like to start?"

"Start? Say, feller, I went to work for you the moment you said you had land to sell! Have a few of my cards—here."

He dives into his vest pocket and tosses us forty cents' worth of pasteboards, reading: *Waldo Granger—Motto: Speed, Dash, and Pep.*

"Fine!" says Ballyhoo. "I need a guy like you on my sales force like Ford needs fiddlers. Le's go!"

Before Waldo had been on the force for a week he showed so much energy that the grifters began to shoot nasty digs in his direction. Paddle-wheel tells me in confidence that he's just a flash in the pan, while Hoop-la claims that he's positive that Waldo was peddling the sand plots to his own relatives.

As to Mr. John Chitty Knight, he had sold but one wee lot since he joined the outfit. He would go out after a prospect, spend a week on his trail, then come back empty-handed.

"I wonder," I says to Ballyhoo one day, "what's the matter with that highbrow gent? I know he puts up some great spiels to the prospects, but I think his line of patter goes over their heads and lands in the Gulf of Mexico. That baby belongs on the lecture platform, if you ask me. He's too good for this racket."

"I don't care if he never sells a dime's worth. This outfit needs a polished gent around to offset all the roughnecks. He's got a corking appearance and he knows more about the English language than the guys who invented it. Personally, I admit that I don't know what he's talking about, but it sounds great and impresses the prospects—although I know they don't buy. I don't think they get his drift—he's a bit too deep, and the damn fool tells the exact truth."

To say they didn't get his drift was putting it mildly. I happened to hear Mr. Knight working on a coupla plumber's assistants one day, and he spilled something like this:

"Another thing that should be understood, my dear Mr. McPipe," he says, "is that Lago De Leon is ideally situated. Permit me to give you some accurately tabulated climatological data about Florida, the

Wonder State. Thus: For the locality of Lago De Leon, where the mean annual precipitation is forty inches, the mean actual temperature is seventy-five degrees. Now, my dear Mr. McPipe, how does that compare with other parts of Florida? Well, permit me to quote you some *bona-fide* figures: In the year 1878 there was a precipitation of 89.07 inches at Miami, in Dade County, with 25.10 inches for September alone. In 1897 we have 87.07 inches for Palm Beach County, while Fort Myers gives us 82.64 for the year 1853."

"Hot dog!" says Mr. McPipe.

"To be sure," goes on Mr. Knight, "I have selected these figures at random. You will please note, sir, that I do not mention Escambia County's 125.64 inches for 1878, nor its 127.24 inches for 1879, because those are exceptional."

"You said a mouthful!" agrees Mr. McPipe.

"Now, let us examine comparative figures."

"Shoot, kid," says Mr. McPipe.

"For record heat, let us take Northern Florida. For cold, I shall take Southern Florida, and we shall find how they compare with Lago De Leon. That, I judge, is exceptionally fair, don't you think?"

"I'll tell the woild!" admits Mr. McPipe.

"Every one of the seventeen observatories in Florida records one hundred degrees or over. Lake City, in the north interior, and Marianna in the northwest, have each one hundred and six degrees. As to cold, we learn that twenty-four out of twenty-five observatories in Southern Florida have noted temperatures under freezing. Do I make myself clear, my dear Mr. McPipe?"

"Yeah," says Mr. McPipe. "But, say, mister, I ain't interested in Babe Ruth's battin' average, see? I wanna know about buyin' a coupla lots and gettin' rich; see?"

Do you get the idea?

Meantime, the other lads were getting so lazy that Ballyhoo has me go around to the hotel each morning and ask the clerk to please pull the fire-alarm switch.

"I guess Waldo Granger is the only real hustler we got," says Ballyhoo one day, after he comes in and finds the whole gang basking in the shade of Spanish moss-laden oak. "The climate's got 'em, or something. Listen to Paddle-wheel snore!"

Just then Waldo dashes up, full speed, and jams his brakes midst a cloud of dust.

"Sold two more this morning, Mr. Burns," he shouts to Ballyhoo. "I should have clicked off four, but one prospect drops dead and the other went back to Noo York to get warm."

Then Waldo gets a peek at the sleeping cuties.

"What's that—a cemetery?" he wants to know. "The lads don't seem to have much ambition. Do you know, I used to be like that, myself, once upon a time. Dead all over, what I mean! But I bet the same thing that woke me up will wake them up. No kidding, I got something that will put new life and ginger in those babies. Wait and see!"

Five days after, we noted a decided change in the speed of the grifters. Paddle-wheel actually lost his mind, or something, and got out of bed at the unheard of hour of 9 A.M. What's more, he sold a small lot the same afternoon, his first in weeks.

Cock-eyed came breezing around with six prospects, and succeeded in selling a few acres of perfect sand. The others were hipped up, too, and me and Ballyhoo began to wonder what sort of magic ointment Waldo had been feeding them.

"Not that I care much," says Ballyhoo to Waldo, "but d'yer mind telling me what sort of scheme you used to unhook the hook-worm from those Rip Van Winkles?"

"Sure," says Waldo. "Come over here, boss." He leads us over to his flivver, lifts up the seat, and digs out a genuine synthetic lamb-skin-bound book. It was a brilliant green and was about the size of a copy of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY.

"Do you see this book?" he says, with great pride.

"We do," I says, "but what has a book got to do with waking up the departed?"

"Everything!" enthuses Waldo. "As Napoleon once remarked to a few of his pals: 'The rulers of the world are the readers of books!' Nap. hit the head right on the nail. As to this book, you will ob-

serve that its title is 'Successful Salesmanship.' Believe it or not, before I run across this eye-opener, I was nothing but an underpaid department store clerk, in a humdrum job. Then I chanced to run into this book, studied it, and—well, you know the result!"

"All of which don't answer my question," says Ballyhoo. "I want to know by what feats of magic and legerdemain you revived those ease-takers?"

"Why, don't you understand? I made 'em all study the book; and it woke 'em up like it woke me up! It's a great tome, Mr. Burns, and all the boys sent in two bucks for a copy, and they should get it any day now."

"Sauce from the apple!" laughs Ballyhoo. "Those lads can't read anything but 'Mutt and Jeff,' and the racing reports. Those guys got as much use for litterchure as I have for six legs. Waldo, be your years!"

"I don't give a hoot whether you believe it or not," says Waldo. "One thing is certain: Once they were fast asleep and now they are fast awake. Think it over, boss!"

"Oh, I admit you woke 'em up, all right," replies Ballyhoo. "But I bet you gave 'em some special brand of cracker moonshine."

Waldo snorts and breezes away.

Just to show you to what extent Paddle-wheel had been aroused, he comes into the field office one day with four assorted prospects. One's a Connecticut Yankee, one's a Greek, another's a Hebrew, while the last is no less than a full-bred Scotchman. Some quartet!

Two hours later he succeeds in selling one lot to the Hebrew, two to the Connecticut Yankee, three to the Greek and, when the Scotchman notes what the others have bought, he gnashes his teeth and buys four lots in a row. Hoot mon!

Naturally, me and Ballyhoo figgers that if a skullnumb like Paddle-wheel, with all his side-mouth talk, could perform a miracle like that, then a cultured gent like John Chitty Knight should be able to sell tanglefoot to flies. But, as a matter of fact, in all the time Mr. Knight had been with us, he had sold but one lot, and that to a geologist who wished to experiment with the soil.

All of which puzzles us toot sweet. Mr. Knight had all the ear-marks of being the world's greatest salesman, but he simply failed to click, and that's a fact.

In my opinion, he was a bit too highbrow for a lowbrow job, and to make matters worse for him, he insisted upon telling the exact truth. I never heard him stretch the truth or tell a lie in any shape, storm or manner, and from the way he spoke he could have sold me summer underwear if I was an Eskimo!

As to the show lads, they could look a prospect plumb in the pan and tell 'im that our soil would grow anything, from grapefruit to buckwheat. As Ballyhoo once remarked to me about Paddle-wheel's line of fla-fla: "If I don't watch out, Paddle-wheel will be telling the customers that our soil is so good that you can plant a Ford and raise a Rolls-Royce. He's too good!"

Although Waldo Granger and John Chitty Knight were on the same sales force, they had never met face to face. Mr. Knight would be away from the office for a week at a time, chasing some prospect, and when he did come in, Waldo would be out.

Soon after the lads drifted into the field office, each with a copy of "Successful Salesmanship" hugged tight under their wings. No fooling, they looked like a flock of rah-rah freshman *en route* to the classroom.

"What's it all about?" grins Ballyhoo.

"This book is the toad's tonsils!" exclaims Hoop-la.

"Feller," says Paddle-wheel to Hoop-la, "better not lose it. If you do, you'll try to swipe mine, and then another good lad will be hanged for murder!"

"Speaking of this book," says Hoop-la, "it's my idea of the real McCoy. If it wasn't for me studying it, I'd still be browsing in the sunshine, twiddling my fingers, while the grapefruit bounced off my nut."

"Them's my sentiments," O K's Cock-eyed. "Waldo sure did us a good turn when he calls our attention to it."

This gets me and Ballyhoo dizzy.

"Somebody's kidding us, doc," he says to me. "It may be true that 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' stirred up the people and started the Civil War, but you can't tell me that anything short of applied dynamite could wake up you tramps. Blooey for that stuff!"

"How much," I asks Hoop-la, "did you have to pay for that mess?"

"Two bucks net," he says. "And it's worth more than fifty times the price of admission!"

"So's Miami!" snorts Ballyhoo. "Er—lemme see the damn thing, will you? If a book like that could arouse a bevy of stoneheads like you, it ought to make a champion sand-peddler out of a educated gent like John Chitty Knight. Pass over the dope, Hoop-la."

Reluctantly, Hoop-la passes over his copy. Ballyhoo grabs it, opens the cover and takes a squint at the fly-leaf. A moment later his eyes begin to pop, after which he collapses against the wall.

"Hey, doc!" he yelps at me. "For the luvva Mike, take a look at this!"

I pick up the book from the floor, imbibe in a quick slant—and promptly get knocked for a home run. Honest, it was the shock of a lifetime!

This is what my dazed eyes read: "Successful Salesmanship—A Book of Inspiration For All Who Aspire To Sell—*By John Chitty Knight.*"

Good Knight!

THE END

PATCHWORK

LIKE patchwork blocks of many a shade
Your life is pieced, and mine.
'Tis Fate who plies the tailor's trade
And plans out each design;

White blocks stand for lovely things—
Weddings, births and christenings;
Red, for acts we shrink to name—
Malice, anger, lust and shame;

Blue, for happiness—dear days
Kept in memory always;
Gray, for hours of calm content,
Lingering after laughter went;

Black, when the beloved stepped
From life's circle—and we wept;
Silver-gold, for love to last,
Rain or shine when youth is past!

Of motley blocks and fabrics strange,
With stitching that endures,
Which none may ravel out or change,
Fate sews my life and yours!

Mazie V. Caruthers

THE READER'S VIEWPOINT

HEREWITH a letter that came a long way to express the writer's opinion of ARGOSY stories. He is an engineer engaged in diamond mining and his views give one a fresh slant on analyzing magazine fiction.

TSHIKAPA, BELGIAN CONGO, AFRICA.

I am glad to submit my opinion on the Western story controversy that is now raging, in hopes of, at least, helping to avert disaster. I take the side of those who wish a great variety on the program and against those who wish only one type of story and I am anxious to tell you why.

In the Belgian Congo, Central Africa, a white man, surrounded by negroes, beasts, little ants, rare experiences, *et cetera,* realizes perhaps more so than in other lands that his evening mood is influenced entirely by the events and circumstances encountered during the day in his adventure and, for me, my evening mood is my reading mood, and each night it is different. Some evenings I am lonesome, and when I can find a little story in the ARGOSY that brings back the right memory I am contented. I must find the right story for the right mood and if there are too many of one type my chances of contentment are slim. I wish to have a large variety to select from. One or two Western stories in one issue is sufficient.

I select the story I wish to read by the illustration which appears on its opening page; if it appeals to my mood I read it. Also, I find it interesting to discover the situation in the story which gave the artist his inspiration for the picture and compare his imagination with mine. I would like to see more illustrations.

Thusly, I have voiced the opinions of myself and other ARGOSY fans that are holding down the dark continent of Africa. C. L. H.

BROOKLINE, MASS.

In regard to Western stories, what has become of the wonderful authors, Charles Alden Seltzer, Max Brand, *et cetera?* I personally would like very much to have the Westerns continued. I cannot get enough of Seltzer's stories. I do not care for stories like "The Radio Man," "Beasts," *et cetera.* MARION H. F.

MIAMI, FLA.

One lucky day, about a year ago, I discovered your ARGOSY. I was beginning to tire of the magazines I had been reading for years, and in my search for something new bought my first copy and have been buying it ever since. It is the ideal magazine; got them all beat at any price, in my opinion, and my only regret is that I hadn't read it long ago. I especially like the arrangements made in the way of serials, having one end and a new one start each week. I save all the back numbers, and every week have a whole story of book length to read. Short stories have been getting rather stale with me, but I find most of yours very interesting and well worth the cost of the magazine alone.

As to my views on the Western stories, I think the fewer of them the better. Read one or two of them and you've read them all. The same old bunk every time, most of them, though occasionally one reads a good one, but they are rather scarce.

I inclose check for a year's subscription. Also include a year of that very excellent detective story magazine your company also prints, called *Flynn's Weekly.* R. T. B.

LAKE WORTH, FLA.

I have been a constant reader and ardent admirer of the ARGOSY for thirty-five years and rather feel myself a "pioneer" in the ARGOSY realm. I have never written you before, but have been reading lately so many other comments that I made up my mind to have my say also. I surely hated to come to the end of "Moonglow" and "Twin Bridges." Also "Red Darkness," by George Worts, in November 18, 1922, issue, is an incomparable story, and living right near where the scenes were laid I know his descriptions of the country and the people are true to life.

I suppose we must continue to have some "woolly Western" stories, but personally it would suit me just as well if they were put in a separate edition so the Western lovers might get what they want without being bothered with the "trash" that appeals to a great many of those that don't appreciate the "He-men of the 'wide open spaces.'" Let them have the Western ARGOSY and give us our good old ARGOSY-ALLSTORY. There never was a better magazine published than the ARGOSY would be with a few of the Westerns eliminated. E. K. Means is good, so is Charles Francis Coe. Also like the Mme. Storey and the Semi Dual stories.

A sincere admirer of ARGOSY just as it is and always has been. MRS. C. H. M.

TOLEDO, OHIO.

Would like to express my opinion on Western and "different" stories.

"Moonglow" is one of the best stories it has been my privilege to read, and I was sorry it had to end. As to "Twin Bridges" being a "different" story, I must say that I consider it as just an ordinary short story. A story to be different must be highly imaginative or have a touch of the weird.

I am a lover of the scientific type of story, and I also like Westerns. It seems to me that your magazine is publishing too many Westerns. Why

not let us have some stories of the future, of voyages to other planets, or of the fourth dimension? However, live up to your title and have all-stories. W. S. B.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

Every one else seems to be writing to you and expressing his or her opinion, so I feel that I have a right to do the same since I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for too many years to keep count of, and regard it as the best magazine published in the world to-day of its kind.

In my humble opinion you are publishing far too many Western stories, all of which generally have the same stereotyped plot and differ only in the names of the characters. I enjoyed "Moonglow," by Charles Francis Coe, very much, and I like business stories and improbable stories such as the Tarzan yarns by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the stories of adventure on the other planets and the moon.

My favorite author is Fred MacIsaac. I like every story he writes, and I wish you'd tell him for me that he's A-1 as far as I'm concerned.

Also you have not printed a story by Edgar Franklin in a good many months, and I'm sorry, too, because Edgar Franklin writes splendid stories, which are very funny, and he gets his characters in and out of the most amazing and amusing situations imaginable. Please let us have more stories in the ARGOSY by Mr. Franklin.

My present subscription to the ARGOSY expires in a few weeks, and I am inclosing a check for four dollars. N. S.

CLAY CITY, IND.

I have been a steady reader of the ARGOSY for several years. I have read fiction of all kinds and by all authors, such as Zane Grey, Porter, and several sets of books and prefer the ARGOSY, as it always has a variety. I think the serial "On to Florida" was just great and I also think the one starting as I write, "The Devil's Saddle," will be good. So give us more Westerns and like "On to Florida." L. D. R.

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO.

I have been reading the Reader's Viewpoint with interest, and want to add my bit to the discussion.

This letter has for its real object, however, the following questions: (1) Are you going to continue the Reader's Viewpoint, or are you going to drop it after awhile? For the luvva Lil, stay with us. When I was a boy, the first thing I read in the old ARGOSY was the Log Book. (2) For Heaven's sake, when are you going to give us the sequels to Edgar Rice Burroughs's "Moon Men" and Will McMorrow's "Sun Makers"? If I remember rightly, you promised us the sequel on the former, and implied that there would be a sequel to the latter. I have been scanning the contents page for months, hoping to see the announcement of one of these sequels. Put me out of my misery by printing them, will you?

And as for the Western story business—why not use some common sense as you did years ago? In those days of Seltzer's "Drag Harlan" and John Frederick's "Luck" you seemed to maintain the right proportion of Westerns. But in these modern days, when the publishers' yen runs to the Western story craze, you forget yourself and plunge into the swim, too—and even drag the *Munsey* down into the sea of ever increasing Westerns. Don't you realize that the Western field is too crowded already? Count 'em—a dozen—more than double the number of five years ago. Too many for the Western field, don't you think? All of which means, to make a long story short, a little less emphasis on the Westerns in the ARGOSY—one a week is *enough!*

Fred MacIsaac's "Those Lima Eyes" is the liveliest story I have read in years. Attaboy, Mac, you're not a coming writer—you've already "came"!

Well, this is all I can say in one breath, so I'll relieve your agony, *but don't forget the "Moon Men" and "Sun Makers" sequels!*

A. J. M.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Have enjoyed reading the ARGOSY for four years. About a year ago we were forced to cut down on our magazine supply and chose the ARGOSY as the best bet for our money. Were always fond of Western stories, but have been filled up with them in the past year. Having been over the whole route, Don Waters's "On to Florida" was doubly enjoyable. Spent a night in one of "Brother Brown's" (?) cabins in North Carolina. Let's have more of the so-called "different" stories, also Footner's Mme. Storey. M. E. A.

RUXTON, MD.

In regard to your query concerning Western stories I think that there are far too many already. They seem to dominate the magazine. It is not like what it was in the olden days.

I like the Albert and Viola tales very much. The only fault I can find with them is that they do not appear often enough.

I also liked "Queen's Pawn," "Whispered" and "Roll Your Own" very much.

Trusting not to see so many Westerns in the future, L. J., JR.

JACKSON, MICH.

Your request for readers' comments on Westerns, I feel I must answer. I say fewer, if anything. I really think the present policy of a variety of stories is the best. Men usually prefer Western stories, but women the different kind.

"Moonglow" was marvelous; entirely a story in its own class. "Twin Bridges" was the only story of George Worts's worth reading. Please ask him to write more stories of this kind and not waste his talent on nonsense.

MRS. E. W. B.

P. S.—Is the author of "The Seal of Satan" and "The Great Commander" still a secret?

$10.80 For All Three

9 FT x 12 FT CONGOLEUM GENUINE GOLD SEAL ART RUG

With Two Extra Congoleum Rugs

$1.00 DOWN

Clip the coupon below. Write your name and address plainly. Pin a dollar bill to it — mail at once. We will ship immediately—all three rugs on approval in one complete neat package. No trouble to lay. **If satisfactory, just send a dollar a month.**

Order by No. M4C2521. Background of mellow two-tone taupe. This jaspe, or water-silk effect has large, colorful figure in all of four corners. Stunning wide banded border with richly colored figures.

30 Days Free Trial

Not just one rug, but three! Three Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs! The prettiest and most artistic Congoleum Rug pattern ever produced. A brand new pattern, never before shown — a pattern of exquisite style, perfect taste, lovely colorings.

A great, big, beautiful, room size 9 foot by 12 foot Genuine Congoleum Art Rug, and two companion rugs to match. **All three Rugs for TEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY CENTS.**

Thrifty Credit

You might almost say—All three for ONE DOLLAR! One dollar down—one dollar a month. **Simply pin a dollar bill to the coupon** — about a year to pay afterwards, easily and conveniently. Beauty, utility, home comfort; housekeeping satisfaction that no housekeeper **should miss,** for the odd dollar now and then she will **never miss.**

Guaranteed Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum **Art Rugs!** All three Art Rugs bear the famous Congoleum Art Rug Gold Seal—the famous Gold Seal that can't be placed on "seconds," or damaged goods, or imitations.

The Gold Seal means complete satisfaction or money back. No **ifs, ands or buts** about THAT.

Congoleum is the **only** guaranteed floor covering. Congoleum is the floor covering **that changed the housekeeping habits of a nation.**

Here it is offered to you, in all its loveliness, in all its brand newness of pattern, in all its practical utility — **for little more than a ten dollar bill!**

Millions of homes are justly proud of their Congoleum floors. Heretofore they have paid a great deal more to obtain them. Homes that own Congoleum floors no longer know the back-breaking, heart-breaking drudgery of scrubbing floors.

All this for ten dollars and eighty cents, spread over a year's time. Ten dollars and eighty cents on approval —ON A YEAR'S CREDIT.

Shop around and make comparisons. Go wherever Congoleum is sold—and Congoleum is sold everywhere.

Bear in mind that our price includes two beautiful companion Rugs—Genuine Gold Seal Art Rugs. Our price is a CREDIT price—you pay little by little.

Simply pin a dollar bill to the coupon, write your name and address, and mail at once.

Ask for FREE Catalog

It shows thousands of bargains. It brings credit without asking. Everything from cellar to garret always sent on free trial for a month.

Beds—Bedding—Carpets—Rugs—Dishes—Cooking Utensils—Curtains—Furniture—Lamps. Also Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry. All sorts of odds and ends for the home. Your request on a postcard is enough.

PIN A DOLLAR TO COUPON BELOW.

GOLD SEAL CONGOLEUM GUARANTEE
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK
REMOVE SEAL WITH DAMP CLOTH

Waterproof—No Seams—Lies Flat—Never Curls Up—No Scrubbing

Spiegel May, Stern Co.

1117 West 55th Street, Chicago

No orders filled in cities of 100,000 population or more.

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.
1117 West 35th Street, Chicago

I enclose **$1** for **9 ft. x 12 ft. Congoleum rug and two extra companion Congoleum rugs each 18 inches x 36 inches —Offer No. M4C2521**—all on 30 days' free trial. If I return them, you are to refund my dollar, also all transportation costs. Otherwise I will pay **$1.00** monthly, until special price of **$10.80** is paid.

Name .....

Street or R. F. D. or Box No. .....

Post Office ..... *State* .....

Shipping Point .....

If You Wish a Free Copy of Our Big Catalog, Put a Cross (X) In This Square ☐

DANDRUFF?

It speaks for itself—

UNLIKE halitosis, you don't need a best friend to tell you that you have loose dandruff. You can find out for yourself in case you haven't already looked to see.

Here's a dare! Some day when you have on a dark coat or cloak (the ladies aren't exempt), just brush your hair thoroughly for a few minutes. If you produce that tell-tale shower, it is time to do something about it. Be entirely frank with yourself. Do you know of many things more revolting than signs of loose dandruff? By one glance every other charm may be offset. It is simply disgusting.

But we have good news for you. Listerine and loose dandruff simply do not get along together. You can prove that so easily for yourself. It is very likely that there is a bottle of Listerine on your bath room shelf right now. Just douse it on full strength and rub it in vigorously. Do this for three or four days in succession, and watch the result. You will have one more proof that this company does not make false claims for its products.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.*

P.S.—It's nice to know that Listerine is not greasy and will not discolor hair or clothes.

LISTERINE

—and dandruff simply do not get along together