ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

AUGUST 11

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Every Minute Counts!

A Top-Speed Novel

by Edgar Franklin

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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 197 SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 1928 NUMBER 1

Richard ceased breathing for a little space

Every Minute Counts

Watchful watching brought Richard Melton action aplenty —but of a sort far more hectic than he had anticipated

By ***EDGAR FRANKLIN***

Author of "Now We're Rich," "Paid In Advance," etc.

CHAPTER I.

NERVES.

"OH, hello, Hankins!" Richard said, with no really wild enthusiasm. "Waiting for me?" He closed behind him the door which, in the trimmest little gold letters, advised all who might pass down that particular corridor of that particular office building that "Richard Melton, Architect," held forth within.

Momentarily he glanced about his drafting room, which was also his outer office and his waiting room; in all the world, it seemed to Richard, there could be no more deserted-looking drafting room than this one. Then

briskly his attention returned to Mr. Hankins, six feet of whom had arisen now, with a rather apologetic smile at the top.

"Well, yes, Mr. Melton," this latter confessed. "I thought I'd drop in for a minute and see if you didn't want to put me back on the pay roll and let me hold down one of those stools for you again?"

Richard laughed, pleasantly as ever, although this time with the tiniest hint of annoyance.

"So far as wanting to put you back on the pay roll's concerned, I do," he grinned. "Believe me, Hankins, it hurts me more than it does you to see those boards with nobody working over 'em."

"You said something about—maybe this week—"

"Yes, I know I did. I thought—maybe this week—"

The caller sighed. Young Mr. Melton frowned preoccupiedly, which was unusual. The caller cleared his throat.

"Well—er—I'd a darned sight rather work for you than for any one else in town," he submitted with a faint smile. "I mean, I'd rather wait awhile longer and get back my old job here than—"

Mr. Melton all but whirled upon him.

"Hell, Hankins," he snarled, "I'd rather have you here—you understand that. You and Burch and Peterson, all of you. But why in—" And here he caught himself and had sufficient good grace to smile quite shamefacedly. "Good Lord, Hankins! Don't pull that hungry-pup expression on me! It isn't necessary.

"You know perfectly well that I'll put all three of you back to work just as soon as I can. And you, at least, know exactly how I'm situated here, because I told you when—er—I had to let you out for awhile, three weeks ago."

Hankins nodded rather wearily.

"You're still waiting for that big Combined Products Company factory job, Mr. Melton?"

"Of course I'm waiting for it. Building a two-million-dollar factory's a job worth waiting for, isn't it? And I'm going to get it, what's more. I'll tell you confidentially, Hankins, for your own comfort, that I have assurance from the inside—from John Seymour himself, the acting president of Combined Products—that my tentative sketches have all been approved. How does that sound?"

"Good!"

"And all I have to do now is to wait till they've finished their infernal reorganization and installed their new president and—"

"Oh, who is he, by the way?" Hankins asked.

"Huh? I dunno who he is," Mr. Melton replied impatiently. "It has not been announced publicly yet, I believe. So far as I'm concerned, he's nothing but a signature at the bottom of a couple of contracts; Seymour will have full charge of all the construction work.

"Keep this under your hat, Hankins, but I think we can consider it as certain that when they've finished reorganizing we'll start work on their new plant."

This, of course, was farther than he usually went when talking to an employee, past, present, or prospective, but Hankins was an exception. Still, Hankins did not cheer aloud; he gazed across the room and said rather thinly:

"Ah—when d'you suppose that 'll *be*, Mr. Melton?"

"In about a month. Maybe in less than a month. I don't know. Five minutes after I've closed the thing I'll phone you, and we'll go to work next day. Can I say any more to you than that?"

He grinned cheerily at Hankins, as that person replaced the not brand-new hat on his gray thatch and grinned back. Richard liked Hankins, and was mighty sorry for him; the man was

fifty, and essentially a failure, waiting around like this for a job.

Hankins liked Richard, too, and was also mighty sorry for him; Hankins, a matter of ten years gone, had reached the familiar condition of stone-brokeness through waiting around for a contract very similar to this impending one of Richard's.

"No, I guess not, Mr. Melton," said he, and gripped Richard's extended hand. "Thanks, anyway."

"Yes—for nothing at all," Richard sighed. "I'm sorrier than sixty, Hankins."

And so the door closed after the tall, gray-haired person and his shabby hat and his blasted hopes; and Richard spent a rather remarkable fifteen seconds all alone in his drafting room, gritting his teeth and snarling inaudibly to himself.

Following this he squared his shoulders, resumed his normal expression and thus walked on into his private office beyond.

One of the prettiest girls in America smiled up at him from her desk in the corner. The name of this girl was Anne Crosby, and she was Richard's secretary.

"Hello, darling," this young person cried brightly.

"'Lo, honey," said Richard, and, apparently conquering an impulse, walked on to his own desk and dropped into his chair.

"Anybody been in—besides Hankins, I mean?"

"Not a soul, dear."

"Anybody call up?"

"No, my love."

"Nobody at all, dear?" Richard demanded, and his brow puckered with a petulant incredulity which sat oddly enough upon his distinctly pleasing countenance.

"Nobody at all, my king," Anne smiled serenely, and bunched neatly the several papers over which she had been working.

These terms of endearment may seem to you decidedly out of place in an obviously business conversation conducted in a business office between employer and employee. They were quite all right, however, as you shall see presently.

Richard sighed and shook his head. Also, he permitted himself one tiny shiver and gave vent to a small *br-rrr!* which caused Anne to glance sharply at him and to ask:

"What's the matter, Dicky?"

"Got the jumps!" said her employer.

"Oh, don't have them, my precious," his secretary advised. "It's silly."

Richard did not scowl as he stared at her; it would have been well-nigh impossible for any one, under any circumstances, to scowl while staring at Anne.

Yet he certainly did not smile.

"Well, it may be silly, but I can't help having 'em," he stated with undue heat and energy. "I never was built to sit around and wait for things like this, kid. I was made for *action!*"

"But—"

"Oh, yes, I was! I'm full of steam, thank fortune, and I'm happy only when I'm working it off on something useful and profitable and making the minutes count for something.

"Why, my Lord," Mr. Melton cried wildly and threw up his hands, "when I've sat around this office for just one more week, looking dignified, listening for the telephone, jumping every time the letter carrier stops, doing absolutely nothing—well, I tell you, one more week of it and a couple of soothing guys in white uniforms are coming through that door with a strait-jacket, Anne, and cart me off to—"

"Rot!"

"It isn't. I—I swear, I'm beginning to feel funny in the head these days! In fact," said Mr. Melton, and leaned across his desk suddenly and offered for her consideration a broad and possibly rather foolish grin, "I feel so downright jumpy and peculiar right

now that I'm afraid you'll have to come over here and sit on my lap for awhile and calm me. You might slip the catch on that door; we don't want to start a scandal in the building."

Anne failed to rise and run to him. She failed even to smile; in fact, her clear eyes narrowed severely as they looked straight at Mr. Melton.

"See here, young man," said she, "we're engaged—yes. We've been engaged for nearly three months now. But when we became engaged we made one cast-iron rule—"

"You made it," Richard sharply corrected.

"You agreed to it. And that rule was that there should be no spooning of any description during business hours."

"Do you call these *business* hours?" Mr. Melton demanded bitterly.

"And as I've told you before, if you break that rule just once, I shall go back to calling you Mr. Melton until five o'clock every day. Don't be absurd, Dicky."

Mr. Melton shrugged and stared out of the window.

"Am I?" he grunted.

"Of course you are. Dick!"

"What?"

"That suburban development Mr. Bristol stopped in to talk over last week—the one with the funny little houses, all different."

"What about it?"

"Why don't you look into that?"

"What for?"

"Why, to get your mind off this darned old Combined Products factory for awhile and—"

"Well, that's *exactly* why I don't look into it!" cried Richard, and waved his hands again in sudden exasperation. "I don't dare get my mind off that factory—I don't dare tangle my head up with a lot of fussy little sun porches and breakfast nooks and dormer windows.

"I've got my head so full of that factory— Why, see here, Anne, I don't believe you realize, even now, what an enormous thing that factory is, and what it means to us.

"It's the biggest job of its kind floating around just now; fifty people are after it, and *I'm* going to get it. And when I do, kid, and put it over as I can, right there's where I stop being a hustling young architect and turn into an important, established one."

"But—"

"Yes, sir!" cried Mr. Melton, and there was in his eye a fanatic gleam. "That Combined Products factory is going to put me squarely on my feet as a high-priced man.

"That Combined Products factory is going to buy you and me the dandiest little home in the country—without touching a cent of what I've laid aside. That factory is going to start you and me off in life with a flourish such as—"

"Dicky!"

Mr. Melton put on the brakes.

"All right. I won't rant any more, Anne. But I count an awful lot on building that plant, and that's why I don't dare muddle up my so-called brain with suburban cottages.

"I'm mighty interested in whatever I happen to be doing at the moment, you know; if I'm to put this thing over with a loud bang I have to wait on tiptoes and be ready to leap at it the second they say the word. I know me, you know! I trust you'll pardon this dissertation on me?"

His grin was rather strained and almost wan. Anne nodded silently. She was coming to know this high-keyed fiancé-employer of hers almost as well as she loved him; briefly she considered suggesting a call at his doctor's office that evening. Bromides—something of that sort, perhaps?

However, she discarded the notion almost immediately. Richard was of the type which seeks medical attention only when a leg or two and a few ribs have been detached from the rest of the structure.

For a little space Anne pretended interest in her papers, presently murmuring:

"Why were you so late getting back from luncheon, Dicky?"

"Eh? Oh, I had lunch with Bill Reeves, honey. *You* wouldn't go with me."

"Not oftener than once a week, according to agreement," Anne dimpled. "It really doesn't look so well, you know. Did you stay in the restaurant till they ordered you out? It is after three."'

"Oh, no. We—just talked," Richard muttered.

Anne nodded. "How's Bill?"

"Oh, fine, of course—Bill's always fine; always has been since he was a little child," Richard chuckled. "Prosperous, self-satisfied old fathead!"

"You owe Bill a wonderful debt of gratitude, I think," Anne submitted demurely. "If I'd never gone into his employment agency looking for a job, I'd never have been sent here to you."

"I know it. I'll say I'm grateful to him," Mr. Melton grinned, widely and fondly, and then ceased his grinning. "Say, isn't it the limit, though, Anne—a fellow like Bill starting an employment agency? The Interurban Employment Bureau!"

"It's making him rich, isn't it?"

"I'm inclined to think it is, but—why, Bill might just as well have been a doctor or a lawyer or a broker. He's got brains enough and the family has plenty of money. His mother had her heart set on making him a great surgeon—and he started an employment agency in a two-by-four office!" Richard sniffed audibly.

Anne frowned a little. By the grace of a kind Heaven, they seemed to be edging away from that Combined Products factory!

"I don't see why you sneer about it that way," Anne said, with just the proper argumentative note. "Bill outgrew the two-by-four office several years ago, didn't he? He has nearly half the floor, around the corner. He must have eighteen or twenty people working for him, at least."

"Eighteen, I believe," Richard said, without great interest. "May be more than that. I dunno."

"And they've all been on the jump, whenever I've been in there, Dick. That means that they're doing business. Just how did Bill get the idea of starting an agency in the first place?"

Tilting back, Mr. Melton clasped his hands behind his head and considered the sky.

"Give it up, Anne," he said absently. "Crazy, I guess. Bill was always queer as a boy."

"I'm speaking seriously."

"I'm not," Richard chuckled, and drifted farther away.

Another interval, Anne thought of asking whether Mr. Reeves's great inspiration might not have been born in the hunt for a job on his own account. She glanced at Richard and sighed and held her peace. Trying to lead him into abstract discussion was quite useless, you see; Richard was now pursing his lips and squinting at nothing, as represented by the limitless sky.

"Funny," he mused, "but out where that dog-goned west wing 'll have to be built there seems to be nothing but gravel for a mile down. I'll have to get down to bedrock for my foundations on that side, if I go all the way to China, Anne."

"Well—" Anne said sadly.

"They're figuring on putting any quantity of heavy machinery into the second and third floors on that side. Can't make out why Seymour's so obstinate about it, either.

"If he'd let me shift the whole works five hundred feet to the north—of course they'd have to tear down the old wooden foundry to do that, but they don't use it anyway—I could save I don't know how much money for 'em and make a better job all around.

"I saw the specifications for the machinery day before yesterday; they plan on putting about a billion tons load to the square inch in the upper floors on that side. More or less, to be sure. Well—"

His voice trailed away. Richard was speaking, it may be explained, of the proposed new factory of the Combined Products Company.

Anne Crosby's eye grew slightly wild.

She had heard a lot about that proposed factory, first and last! Devoted as she was to Richard and to his business, when—or, of course, if—he did get the job, Anne would leap at it with a whole-souled enthusiasm equal to his own. But in the meantime if she heard much more about the proposed new factory of the Combined Products Company she'd—"

"Ha!" Anne breathed suddenly, softly, joyfully, as the unoiled hinge of their outer door squeaked loudly. "Some one's coming! Maybe it's Mr. Bristol and—"

"Well, if it is, I'm too busy to see him!" Richard hissed swiftly. "I haven't any head for his infernal cottages. Anne! Go out and tell him—"

"Anne doesn't have to," submitted Mr. William Reeves, as he entered the inner room all uninvited. "He'll come in and be told right here. What is it?"

"Oh!" said Richard, and grinned faintly. "You, is it?"

"It is indeed I," admitted Mr. Reeves, and tossed aside his hat, and, taking to the armchair, beamed upon them in characteristic kindly fashion.

He was a smooth-shaved, thoughtful-appearing individual of Richard's own age, although he seemed more mature. He was rather heavily built, with a broad face, intelligent eyes, a high forehead, and a mass of hair.

He wore horn-rimmed glasses, too; and a stranger, looking at them side by side, must have picked William for the architect and Richard for the brisk business man.

His kindly beam grew puzzled as it wandered from Richard to Anne.

"Not fighting, I trust?"

"Oh, dear no," said Miss Crosby. "We're saving that until we're married, of course."

"I think you're quite right. No use using up all the bloom of the honeymoon before it gets here. Still, there seems to be something tense in the air!"

Richard grunted. Anne glanced at him.

"Well, Dick was just reflecting out loud about the new factory of the Combined—"

"Oh, I see. I understand," Reeves said hastily. "He's just spent two hours and a half telling me about that factory, Anne."

"Well? If you didn't want to hear any more about it, why did you walk a whole block to come in here?" the architect demanded.

Mr. Reeves sighed.

"Mainly, my san, because—you don't realize it, I suppose, but I'll bet from her expression that Anne does!—I think you're going slightly batty on this Combined Products business and—"

"Bunk!" snapped Richard. "Just because you're too dumb to grasp the magnitude of the thing, do *I* have to turn into an oyster, too?"

"—and I have brought the means of saving you from the asylum!" Mr. Reeves concluded amiably.

"Really, Bill?" Anne cried, with an exaggerated eagerness that was not quite all feigned. "Do you suppose it's possible to save him at this advanced stage?"

"Oh, unquestionably," said the visitor, and studied Richard comfortably through the large spectacles. "My dear boy, the only thing wrong with you is that you're overwrought!"

"As a matter of fact, I'm all of that," the architect agreed unsmilingly. "I'm as nervous as a cat, Bill! I'm pulled up tight as a fiddle-string. Y'see, this means so much to me that—"

"Yes, you explained all that," Reeves interrupted. "In your condition, you need diversion—that's really all. Good enough! I have brought some with me!"

"Aha? What kind?" Richard sighed.

Mr. Reeves extracted a stiff blue card from his pocket and studied it. Now he glanced up and smiled.

"A job, of course," said he.

CHAPTER II.

OPPORTUNITY.

"WELL, for the love of Mike!" Richard Melton shouted disgustedly.

"Eh? I—"

"Listen! If there's one thing I *don't* want, it's a job that'll fog up the million and one details of this Commined Products plant that I'm carrying around in my head. You can't get it, but such is the fact, Bill. So while I'm much obliged for the chance to build a church or a chicken coop or something for you or for some friend of yours, I—don't—want—it!"

He sneered; he sat back with a jerk and scowled. Mr. Reeves, who had been observing his unfortunate friend for two hours or more a little earlier in the day, only nodded patiently.

"Nevertheless, when the seizure is over, I'd like to tell you about this," he said.

"But—"

"This is a job which has no connection whatever with architecture, Dick."

"Why didn't you say that before?"

"Why didn't you let me?" asked Reeves, and again considered the blue card. "Whether you're interested or not, this is a funny one! Dick, once upon a time, when you were poor and educating yourself, you were known as the best stenographer in eight or ten counties, I believe."

"Well?"

"Are you still, in this later and more prosperous day?"

"What do you mean—fast? Yes, of course. I use it all the time, Bill; never make notes in longhand, for that matter. Only what in blazes—"

"Wait! Hear me out, old egg. Richard, when I got back to the office after luncheon, my secretary had left for the day, but she had filled out this slip and plunked it down on my desk where I couldn't fail to see it when I returned.

"It is evident that Santa Claus still lives and is engaged in active business: here's somebody who wants to pay one hundred dollars a week for the best hestenographer obtainable!"

"What of it?" the architect said rather blankly. "I don't want the job. I don't need it."

"So far as money is concerned, no. So far as change and diversion are concerned, maybe you do, Richard. Hear the rest of it, anyhow. For one thing, this job, according to the data here, lasts only a month—possibly less than a month, in which case they're willing to pay for the full month.

"For another thing, it's in the country, where things are a lot more restful than here in New York. Large private estate at Firwold—you know Firwold?"

"In the upper part of Westchester?"

"Yep. Beauty spot where almost anybody with a million dollars can buy a cozy little place. Nice thick woods and dirt roads and so on; I drove through there a week ago Sunday."

"I know, Bill," said Richard Melton, and faint interest did kindle in his harried eyes. "Be a peach of a place to go for a little rest, but— Oh."

"And there are a couple more angles to the matter," pursued Mr. Reeves, gazing at his card. "Somebody must have seen us leaving my office together, Dick; they must have been taken by your chaste, manly beauty, and clear, fearless eyes.

"Be that as it may, here's a notation to the effect that the man who went out with me about twelve-thirty is ex-

actly the type desired for this position. I don't know why, but Miss Abbott has underscored the 'exactly' here."

He gazed at Richard. Richard grinned.

"Well, to tell you the cold truth, Bill, I wouldn't object a darned bit to taking somebody's fool dictation for a couple of weeks, just to give the old head a change of diet. And I'd like to get out of the racket of this town, too. Only—no, I guess not. Wouldn't be much sense in my taking on a thing like this."

Anne, who had been leaning forward with one small line between her brows, sat back again. Mr. Reeves smiled, rather mysteriously.

"There is still one point we haven't touched," said he. "Are you not curious about the individual who's offering a job like this?"

"Not very."

"Well, it's Bragg!"

"Eh? What Bragg?"

"Colonel Samson Bragg, Richard!"

Mr. Melton's eyes opened amazedly.

"The—the multimillionaire?"

"The same capitalistic bird, Dick!"

"Well, that *is* a funny one!" the architect mused, and very plainly his kindling interest burst into a warm little blaze as he leaned on his desk and considered his friend. "Hasn't he a string of high-class stenos on tap, without going to an agency for another one?"

"Apparently, he has not. Or it may be, my lad, that he knows the Interurban Employment Bureau to be capable of furnishing better, more capable, more reliable—oh, well, I mustn't boast. Well, there you are, anyway.

"It just struck me that maybe you'd get a lot of fun out of a thing like this—a lot of laughs just when you need them most. I don't know a thing about the colonel's establishment, but he got very rich sort of suddenly about twenty years ago, and I can imagine most of it.

"He probably has gold furniture and butlers and things with diamond buttons on 'em, and all the rest. It ought to be good and—"

"Bill!"

"Eh?"

"Bragg sold out all his railroad interests six months ago, didn't he?"

"There was considerable comment about it in the papers, I believe."

"And somebody said—why, yes, it was Wiggins, of Carter & Wiggins, Bill!—that the old bird was going back into manufacturing on a big scale," Mr. Melton continued, with growing animation.

Also, his eyes sparkled until they might almost have been considered to glitter! His color rose; he drummed out a quick little tune with his finger nails and stared on at his old friend. Abrutly, he smiled.

"By golly, William!" he cried enthusiastically. "This Bragg might not be a bad man to know!"

"I thought so, too."

"Because about the time I get this Combined Products job off my hands, his plans should have matured; I've heard that he never rushes anything, but anything he does go into is bound to be *big!* It's just possible that he may need somebody to build a few million dollars' worth of factory for him!"

"But, Dick—" Anne began.

"And if—just supposing, of course—I happened to be solid with the old boy, I'd stand a mighty good chance of building them!" the energetic architect went on, with another of his quick, nervous grins. "Hum—I dunno."

"Well, Dick—" Anne essayed again..

"Yes, I do know, too!" Mr. Melton cried, and brought down his fist with a sudden bang. "This whole thing looks like—well, sort of like the hand of Providence, Bill! I've got a hunch about it! I'm going to take it!"

Bill Reeves nodded.

"Well, I don't know about the hand of Providence, and I pin no faith to hunches, kid," said he, "but I'll be glad

to see you out of this office for awhile and—"

"Well, I don't know anything about the hand of Providence or about Dick's getting out of the office," Miss Crosby put in flatly, "but I do know that he's not going to take this job!"

"Huh?" cried Mr. Melton, in astonishment, for this was really the first time that he had heard Anne speak in just that tone of authority.

"You're a bright pair, I must say!" the girl continued, with much warmth. "Dick's been fussing and fuming until he's not quite responsible, perhaps, but that doesn't apply to *you*, Bill. Why on earth do you want to ruin him?"

"What's that?" cried Mr. Reeves.

"It amounts to that, doesn't it? Dick's established in his profession; people regard him as a solid business man. What will they say when they hear he's gone to take a job pounding somebody's typewriter?"

Mr. Reeves looked slightly startled. Richard, who had ever been painfully careless of the world's opinion, asked quite crisply:

"Well? What will they say?"

"They'll say you're broke and down and out!"

"Well, I'm not, and I can prove it," Richard smiled. "What then?"

"All the same, there's something in that idea of Anne's," Bill Reeves conceded. "Of course, you're not a big enough man to have the whole city go mad with excitement about your taking a job like this, but at that it might possibly do some harm. However—why not go up there under some other name?"

"I'm willing," Richard laughed.

"Call yourself—call yourself Arthur Vane," Reeves suggested, brightly. "That's a name I've always been stuck on, Dick. That was the name of the hero of a story I read when I was a kid and I always thought he—"

Something in Anne's faint, acid smile gave him pause.

"And when you have gone up there as—as Arthur Vane," she said, "and made yourself quite solid with Colonel Bragg—when he regards you almost as a son, I suppose!—you'll snatch off your false whiskers and reveal yourself as Richard Melton, the architect? Is that the plan?"

"Well—"

"And then, I suppose, he will fold you to his bosom—never asking why you came under an assumed name, never asking why you had to go out and take a job!—and he'll just accept you as the world's greatest architect and give you fifty million dollars' worth of work on the spot!" Anne concluded gustily and with an undisguised sneer. "I think it's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard!"

Bill Reeves rubbed his chin rather agitatedly.

"I guess Anne doesn't like the idea!" he reflected aloud.

"Well, you're dead right about that, Bill!" Anne said forcefully. "I do *not!*"

Richard himself, however, was smiling in a fashion curiously unperturbed.

He was an individual given to unbounded faith in his own snap judgments; luckily or otherwise, in nine cases out of ten, nothing had ever happened to shake this faith.

And so, when once Richard had determined upon a course, he held to that course with an inflexibility worthy of a Napoleon; and when profits came his way he reaped them, smiling calmly; and when, infrequently, only consequences were his reward, he accepted them with a smile just as calm.

His smile now grew almost amused.

"Honey," said he, "you're exaggerating everything, of course. I'm not anxious to commit business suicide and—"

"Then why do it?"

"—and there is no chance of anything of the sort here. I'm not important enough to have a stunt like this make any excitement. You can tell people I'm out of town. As for going

under another name, that's almost an unnecessary precaution, but I think I'll take it nevertheless. And as for explaining things to Bragg at the proper time—I have a pretty good tongue, haven't I?"

"Not good enough for that!"

"Nonsense! What's more, the colonel's one of the few big men who'd be likely to laugh over a thing like this. He's the most genial soul in the world; full of dickens, I've always heard—go fifty miles out of his way for a joke! Oh, that part's all right. You can leave that to me."

Reeves's smile was still rather timorous.

"Well—shall I tell him you'll be up?"

"Of course."

"They want a man to-night, if possible, according to the memo on this card, Dick."

"Well?" Dick laughed. "I can pack a grip and ride thirty-five miles between now and night, can't I?"

Anne grew slightly paler.

"Dick, you're not *really* going to do this?"

"I am!"

The girl glanced from her *fiancé* to his friend.

"Is there—something or other here that I don't understand?" she asked, with characteristic directness. "Something that I'm not to know?"

"What on earth does that mean?" Reeves asked blankly.

"Just what it says! Is there?"

"Not—not so far as I know," said William. "You know just as much about it as I do. Just as much as Dick does."

"I hope so," said Anne.

There was an uncomfortable little pause. Mr. Reeves reached for his hat and rose.

"Well, I'll call up, then, and say that you'll report for duty this evening," he said. "Only—er—Dick."

"Yes?"

"If you—ah—well, if you should happen to change your mind about this," William concluded, with the briefest glance in Anne's direction, "you'll let me know right away?

"I'm not going to change my mind," young Mr. Melton responded, with a quiet smile.

Once more, Reeves glanced toward Anne and bowed his farewell, somewhat jerkily; there was something peculiarly tight and unfriendly about those pretty lips of Anne's! He gazed at Richard, too, for a final solicitous moment; and then he sighed, lightly and contentedly, as a man sighs who knows that he has done the right thing for a high-keyed friend. He waved a hand at Richard and departed.

"Good old skate, isn't he?" the latter gentleman grinned at his beloved, as the door closed.

"Is he?" Anne asked, and there was an actual clink in her voice. "That all depends on the qualifications which go to make up one's idea of a good old skate, Dick. Personally, when he suggests a thing like this, I think he's turned idiot!"

"But—"

Anne faced him, squarely and with determination.

"Dicky, you can't possibly do this absurd thing; you simply can't afford to do it!"

"Oh, it probably seems a bit unusual to you," Richard said cheerfully. "But—and this is on the dead level, Anne! —if I sit around this office any longer—"

"Of course!" Miss Crosby said readily. "Everything considered, I think myself that it would do you a world of good to get out for a few days. Run up to some quiet spot in New England."

"What for?"

"Trout fishing," Anne smiled. "The season's still open, isn't it?"

"It may be; I don't know," Richard replied, without a trace of interest. "I'm not strong on fishing."

"Well, then, why not go down to

Washington for a week and look at museums and things?"

"When I've already looked at them?"

Anne's smile grew slightly exasperated.

"Go somewhere else, then. But, whatever you do, don't go up and take this silly job!"

"Why not?"

"Because *I* have a hunch that you shouldn't!"

Some ten seconds, Mr. Melton considered her with adoring toleration. Then, plainly mindful of the rule against office love-making, he stepped over and merely perched upon her desk.

"Listen here, sweetheart," he said. "You don't understand a dynamic character like mine! When I'm sixty or seventy, I'll go fishing aplenty, I guess, and you can sit on the bank with our grandchildren and keep count of the fish. But just now I have to keep in motion! Whether it's in the right direction or the wrong direction, I have to keep moving and accomplishing something!"

"But—"

"It's a short life, kid, and every minute counts!" Richard pursued. "And I like to make every minute count for something, too, and if I go up there I'll be four hundred dollars better off than if I sit here."

"Even so—"

"Oh, I know four hundred dollars isn't a fortune," Richard said, with the quick, nervous little grin that had become part of him lately, "even if it is four hundred dollars more than I'll make sitting around here and—Lord! I wish that Combined Products job was ready to break now!"

"Lord! *So do I!*" Anne said fervently.

"However, it wasn't the money that decided me, when Bill was telling about it; it was getting next to Bragg, honey! That 'll count for a lot, whether you know it or not. I have a feeling in my bones that somehow—"

"That you can go into a man's house under an assumed name and—"

"Drat the assumed name stuff!" Richard snapped, quite ferociously. "That's negligible, I tell you. Going up there under my own name wouldn't be, of course, if the wrong person happened to hear about it. But when I want to reveal myself and explain matters to Bragg—why, Bill might easily enough have made a mistake in the name of the man he was sending, mightn't he? Bill'd back me up in a thing like that."

Anne only nodded.

"Excuse me, dear," Richard said, and flushed a little. "I didn't mean to bark at you."

"You're not yourself, Dicky—not quite." Anne smiled faintly and patted his hand.

"I will be, when I've taken myself out of this infernal atmosphere of strain and suspense."

Anne failed to offer any further comment.

"So I guess I'd better get uptown now and pack my bags," Mr. Melton concluded.

Still, Anne said nothing. There are, as science has so firmly established, more ways of killing a cat than by using chloroform or an ax. The attempt to sway by pure reason a young man whose brain was plainly in no condition to digest logic seemed to have failed rather completely.

At the moment Mr. Melton looked less like a sound, rising young architect than like a red-faced, sulky little boy; unless something drastic were done he would go his willful way to the wilds of Westchester—and it was preposterous!

Mentally, Anne shook her pretty head. Her poor little Dicky, quite submerged, in his beastly old factory, had utterly lost his perspective and—well, *was* there something queer about all this? Try as she might to push back the unworthy thought, it still persisted; not very ominously or with great sig-

nificance, to be sure, but it was there nevertheless.

Anne trusted her Richard in a befittingly implicit way. Bill Reeves was well enough, too, although he was not a type of whom Anne ever could become very fond. And when two men get together, one of them all fevered and distraught over a job to which he has pinned too much importance, the other given to ideas so original as Bill's—

Richard was moving slowly toward the door. Miss Crosby quickened. Splendidly sane as she might be, sanity was paying no dividends that afternoon—and Anne was still a remarkably beautiful girl with eyes that were no less than astonishing.

These, very suddenly, she turned upon young Mr. Melton and, responding to this variety of force with the most gratifying readiness, Mr. Melton stopped short.

Also, he glowed his adoration.

"The only thing I hate about it is leaving you!" he muttered.

The eyes continued work upon him, through long lashes. Anne all but pouted.

"I should think," she said very softly, "that you'd rather be here with me than be anywhere else!"

"Well, so I would, kid," Richard cried gustily, and returned to her side. "If I wasn't so darned much on edge that I've reached the point where I snap, even at *you*—"

The eyes dropped.

"All the same," Anne broke in, "if you really loved me, you'd—just stay here, Dicky. I—I don't believe you do!"

"Oh, honey!" Richard cried and, rules or no rules, seized both her hands. "How can you say a thing like that? How can you say that when you know I love you a billion times better than I love my life! Anne, darling Anne! Don't talk that way! Don't you know you're the only girl I ever loved, ever could love or ever—"

"Am I?" Anne demanded, training the eyes upon him again.

Now, as will be readily understood, the whole purpose of this little question was to draw more heated protestations from Richard; it was all but a mathematical certainty that Richard would forget all else and clasp her to him; and, once she was in his arms and possibly with her own arms about Richard's neck, there was just about the same certainty that Anne would be able to dissuade her beloved from a return to the stenographic life.

And yet—demonstrating that there is after all no such thing as a mathematical certainty—the question had a rather different effect upon Mr. Melton. Lips still parted, the eyes which rested upon Anne grew startled; there were other manifestations quite apparent, too.

"Well—sure—yes, of course—" Richard said oddly.

"What? What makes you so red?" Anne asked, as she sat up and looked directly at him.

"Well—nothing, of course. Just the—I guess it was the—maybe it was the way you said that—something—" Richard laughed, uneasily, incoherently.

"Do you mean, Dick, that I'm *not* the only girl you ever loved?" Anne's clear voice asked.

"Why—didn't I just say—well, see here!" Mr. Melton cried, and very visibly braced himself. "There isn't anything to lie about here. It is all too—too nonsensical, you know, and—er—"

"Then surely there *was* somebody else?"

Richard laughed loudly. It was a strange sound, that laugh. Intended, probably, as a care-free burst of mirth, it had more the effect of a banshee's cry that he uttered in a midnight graveyard.

"Why—yes, if it comes down to that," said he, with an equally ghastly attempt at ease, "there—there was—

y' know, once upon a time—there was a—a girl named Gwen!"

CHAPTER III.

CONFESSION.

ANNE CROSBY was now sitting bolt upright.

Mr. Melton, sent thither by purest intuition, selected the chair at the far side of the room and sat down suddenly, avoiding her eye. Again he laughed.

"I wish you wouldn't make that horrid gurgling noise!" Anne said.

"I—was just laughing. You know—laughing when I thought about Gwen."

"Oh? She was funny?"

Strangely, Richard sobered and shuddered!

"No! You couldn't have called her funny!" he muttered. "No, the funny part was—ah—*me!*"

"I don't doubt it, Dick," Anne said, with waxing interest. "Well?"

"Well?" Richard echoed jauntily.

"Tell me about her!"

"Tell you about Gwen?" Mr. Melton echoed, and astonishment and childlike innocence mingled in his voice. "Bosh! Nothing to tell you—or tell any one else, honey. Absolutely nothing, I assure you. Well, if I'm going to get up there before midnight I suppose I'd better run along now and—"

"*Dick!*" cried Anne, and it seemed to Richard that never before had she spoken his name in just that tone; it floated through his rather agitated mind, too, that he could endure it if she never used the same tone again.

Just once, be it said, Richard glanced at the charming and characterful young woman; then, with odd suddenness, he collapsed very much after the fashion of a pricked balloon.

"Well—Lord!" he murmured rather weakly. "No use trying to hide anything from you, is there, kid?"

"If there is something in connection with this—what was her name? Gwen! —of yours that you're really reluctant to tell, I don't care to hear it, of course."

"Hey?" Mr. Melton's eyes opened in genuine horror. "If you're going to put it that way—say! No, on my honor, there isn't! Nothing like that, Anne. This was—was just a fool thing all around."

"Well?"

"Well, I'll have to begin at the beginning, I suppose," Richard said resignedly. "Lemme see. Well, I met this pippin at a dance one night, Anne, just about the time I started up in business for myself and—"

"Oh! She *is* a pippin, then?"

"I don't know what she is now, but at that time—it must be nearly three years ago—she was one of the prettiest women I'd ever seen. She wasn't anywhere near as pretty as you, honey, but—"

"Please! That's rather *too* cheap!" Anne said icily.

"Huh? What's too cheap?" Mr. Melton flared, and instantly controlled himself. "All right, then. Let's just say that she was pretty and—"

"What did she look like?"

"Oh—she was sort of tall and rather skinny and mighty graceful; she had sort of slick dark brown hair and a sort of pale skin, Anne, and she had a pair of eyes—phew!"

"They were beautiful, of course?"

"Looking at 'em didn't cause any real suffering," Richard reflected. "There was something about them—I don't know. I can't describe it, Anne. But they could get her absolutely anything she wanted, those eyes could!

"Here! Don't look outraged and don't misunderstand this lady," Richard laughed almost naturally. "She was as nice and as straight as could be. Matter of fact, she was a block of solid ice and—"

"I was thinking about her eyes, not her temperature. Apparently they got her *you!*"

Richard sighed.

"I'm trying to be honest with you about this, honey," he said. "Coming right down to cases, I suppose they did—in a way. I took one look at her at that dance and went kind of silly. If I hadn't been able to take her home without any argument or opposition, I suppose I'd have licked every man present—um.

"Dance was out in Jersey and she lived away uptown here. She didn't want to ride in a taxi, so I hired a limousine. Ride cost me twenty-six dollars, I remember," Mr. Melton mused.

"It isn't very gallant, remembering that, is it?"

"You're a hard woman to please," Richard smiled sadly. "However, don't think too harshly of me. You'll understand in a few minutes why that first cash item is anchored in my mind. Because it *was* the first, you see, and only the first. I—er—called her up next morning. She was going shopping that day—um!"

"Well?"

"Eh? I went along, shopping—that's all. We seemed to buy a lot of expensive little things she needed."

"And you, I take it, paid for them?" Anne inquired.

"Oh, yes. I paid for 'em."

"Ugh!" said Anne.

Mr. Melton sat back, and his smile grew weary.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking, but may this building fall on me if it was one of those 'ugh' cases, Anne! I give you my word once more, it wasn't. There wasn't the faintest suggestion of an 'ugh' anywhere along the line.

"Gwen was more than respectable; paying for these trifles seemed, at the time, just a graceful little courtesy such as any one might have been glad to render. That's what's always struck me so darned queer about Gwen, thinking it over—that it *should* have seemed so natural. Those infernal eyes—"

"We've heard enough about the eyes. Let's get on to the heart of the romance!"

"Romance? There wasn't any—"

"You were in love with her, weren't you?" Anne asked incisively.

"Well, if you're going to put it like that—well, yes, I suppose I thought I was. Only, honey, I never knew—"

"And she was madly in love with you, of course?" Anne asked.

Richard's eyes grew bewildered.

"I never could quite pin her down to it," he said. "There was another funny thing, wasn't it? I was—oh, bosh! I was wild about Gwen for a little while. No getting away from that, or—"

"You're not really telling me anything, are you?" Miss Crosby said.

"Well, do you want to hear the whole fool thing? All right! We shopped that day and we had luncheon—and we shopped some more and had dinner—and then we went to a show and had some supper afterward."

"And then another limousine?"

"We couldn't find one; we had to take a taxi that night. And then the next day, we shopped some more. She—ah—wanted a dog."

"And you paid for it?"

"Yep. Cunning little devil he was, too," Richard muttered. "He should have been; he cost two hundred dollars!"

"Kind Heaven above!" Anne breathed. "And *you* let a wretched gold-digger like that—"

"Oh, Gwen wasn't a gold-digger, honey," Mr. Melton broke in, hurriedly. "Gwen dug platinum exclusively—and she wanted chemically pure platinum at that. Say! Must I go through this whole affair, day by day?"

"How long did it last?"

"About three weeks, all told."

"And were the days all the same?" Anne asked, and had her fiancé been in more observing mood he must have noted the peculiar twitching at the corners of her sweet mouth and the subdued sparkle in her eyes.

"They were as much alike as so many peas in a pod," Richard said earnestly. "Gwen wanted something, and we went and got it—and she really seemed to enjoy everything, too. Trinkets—dogs—wonderful meals—everything."

"And then one day—" Anne suggested dryly.

"One morning," Mr. Melton corrected. "I—er—woke up and—I don't know just how to explain this, Anne; it was so confoundedly queer! —but my head felt clear. Clearer than it had felt for days!

"I got up and began to take account of stock, too. You see, I'd had about four thousand dollars when I met Gwen. When I'd finished adding and subtracting, I found that I was broke!"

Anne smiled wickedly.

"And so you went to her, confident that your great love would suffice—without any loose change?"

"No, there's another funny thing," honest Richard sighed. "I didn't have any illusions on that score, either. Of course, I suppose I hoped, when I went up that afternoon, that she'd fall on my neck and say it was all right. But I wasn't a bit surprised when she didn't.

"She—er—called off all bets, then and there, and from that day to this I haven't seen her or heard of her!"

Anne dared face him no longer with those sparkling eyes; she frowned at her desk.

"Well, that's as pretty a tale of imbecility as I've ever been forced to hear!" she commented.

"You weren't forced to hear this one," Richard said sadly. "Shows what an ass a man can make out of himself, doesn't it? And still, d'you know, I think that experience taught me a lot.

"Why, somehow or other, when I realized that it was all off and that all I had to do was to start life over again without throwing around any more money or jumping every time she beckoned—why, Anne, I remember whistling all the way downtown in the subway!"

"To keep up your spirits?"

"No! Give you my word, Anne, just pure joy! Well, there you have the story of my past, honey—brrrr!"

"What makes you so white?" Anne asked quickly.

"I—guess I always turn pale when I think about Gwen," Mr. Melton muttered. "I know I always feel pale when I get to thinking about her. Maybe I'm no lion, but it's the cold truth that Gwen is the only human being who ever could throw a real scare into me!"

"A scare? How?"

Richard shook his puzzled head.

"How? I don't know. That's just it. Sort of instinctive terror, it seemed like. May have been the cold, determined way she went about getting anything she needed, Anne.

"Not that she made any commotion about it; she didn't; she just started after what she wanted and—why, you felt as if there'd be just as much use trying to push back a cyclone as trying to stop her!"

Anne sneered frankly.

"Remarkable that she hasn't become a national figure before this, isn't it?"

"Say, honey, if she wanted to be one, she'd be one, believe me!" Richard assured her with a strangely awed, breathless effect. "I don't know what it was or how she put it over; but that woman—"

"Oh, let's drop the ridiculous creature," the future Mrs. Melton said quite disgustedly. "She's the commonest kind of type, of course; there are millions of her, and only because there are enough fool males to make millions of her possible!"

"That's what *you* think," Richard said wisely. "But I assure you, Anne, that this lady—well, perhaps we had better drop her. Will you forgive me?"

Anne's smile flashed at him.

"I suppose I have no choice about it."

"I'd like to kiss you for that?" Richard suggested.

"Not here!"

"All right," sighed the head of the office, and arose. "Honey, you can say that I've gone up-State on some business, if any one should ask for me. That'll be the truth."

"What?"

"And, of course, if Seymour should write or call up, or if this Combined Products thing should show any other signs of breaking unexpectedly, phone me right away and I'll be down on the next train, and Bragg and his job can go to blazes! I guess that's all."

Miss Crosby sighed.

"Sit down, Dicky."

"I'm too jumpy to sit down," Richard said irritably. "I get all fussed whenever I begin to think what a clown I made of myself over Gwen."

"You're going to make more of a clown of yourself if you take that job!"

Nerves, after all, are nerves, and Richard's were really in bad shape that day; nor had his exhumation of his black, dead past done anything to soothe them. Hence:

"Why? Why am I?" he rasped out, abruptly and astonishingly. "What d'you want me to do, anyway? Sit around here till I've bitten off all my finger nails and taken to shrieking?

"You're a woman, Anne! You don't understand what a job like this Combined Products factory means to a man—means to me! It means so much that—that I'm getting kind of loony for fear something'll happen to take it away from me!

"*It means everything,* I tell you!" Richard shouted. "If I could hop at it now, I'd be all right! If I sit around here, watching day after day count for absolutely nothing, figuring how many things can happen to make me lose out, I'll be a gibbering idiot before I do get it! Is that what you want?" he concluded spitefully.

"No, dear, that isn't what I want," Anne said quietly.

"Well, then? What's all the row about?"

"The row? Why—"

"Do you think I'm trying to—to pull something underhand here?"

Anne's eyes opened.

"What could there be under—" she began, rather blankly.

"That's what *I* want to know!" cried the overwrought architect. "That's how you act, Anne!"

The eyes grew suddenly soft and understanding; obviously, there was a point beyond which one did not oppose Richard in his present painful state.

"No, Dicky, that's not how I'm acting," Anne said gently. "Darling, go ahead and be the colonel's secretary if you like. Perhaps the change really will do you a lot of good. I just thought that it was the least bit beneath your dignity—that's all."

"Dignity!" Richard snorted, although with less violence. "The cemeteries are full of people who starved to death or went crazy waiting around for something that matched up with their dignity! Gosh, kid! I don't mean to yell, but—"

Wise little Anne moved quickly in his disturbed direction and laid her steady hands upon his shoulders and smiled up at her Richard.

"It's all right," she murmured. "Go and work off some of your energy on the colonel and, one way or another, we'll keep it a secret, so that it can't hurt you. Now I—I think we'll suspend the rules, and you'd better kiss me good-by and run along!" And a full minute later she contrived: "You'll come down to see me once in awhile?"

Mr. Melton's own smile was almost calm again.

"Down for week-ends, anyhow, Anne. He'll hardly be working Sundays. For that matter, maybe I'll be able to come home every night; I'll see how things look before I suggest it. And at the worst of it I'll have something to think about beside that confounded Combined—"

"Yes!" Anne said. "Yes!" And she kissed him again, in an odd, hurried fashion.

She was, to be sure, a wonderfully self-controlled little thing, rarely given to emotional outbursts of any kind. Yet, somewhere deep, deep within Anne, Nature had secreted several perfectly good shrieks; and she sensed, this rather trying day, that when the Combined Products Company had been mentioned just once more, all these shrieks would emerge as one wild, amazing shriek, with a suddenness and a volume that might claim even distracted Richard's undivided attention!

However, he had gone his slightly peculiar way now, uptown to his rather expensive two rooms and bath and his packing. Anne Crosby returned to her desk, breathing quite rapidly; presently she breathed less rapidly and took to studying her covered typewriter with a thoughtful frown.

She was human, and her brain was unusually active. In simple truth, the charming young woman considered her Richard the one perfect thing so far produced by a world much given to botches and misfits and generally undesirable men.

Of course, with much genuine amusement, there had been a small shock in listening to this Gwen confession; silly, she assumed, yet she really had fancied herself the only girl in his life and—oh, well.

And she knew him for a temperamental soul, too, which, his artistic leanings considered, was natural enough. But he had never been temperamental in any such way as this!

On occasion, his rage, which was rather quick and rather warm, had been known to blaze out rather thrillingly; he had done several little, foolish tricks in a business way, and for reasons which no hard-headed business man ever could have sanctioned.

These things, however, were trivial and not at all like this afternoon's astonishing performance. Aye, the fact remained that never before had Richard, even in his more excited moments, contemplated anything like this idea of abandoning his offices at an hour's notice and racing away to be somebody's absurd secretary!

To say the least, it was extremely odd. The longer Anne pondered the matter, the more odd it seemed. Nor could anything have been more unlike Dick than that savage, flaring burst of self-defense on the score of possible secret and unworthy motives. Anne, surely, had accused him of nothing of the kind; until he himself had suggested it, no such thought had even entered Anne's pretty head.

Well, then? Why not face it squarely? Of just what was she trying to suspect her Richard?

Suddenly, angrily, Anne flushed, all alone in her office. She was trying to suspect him of nothing at all! Dicky, poor kid, had set such great store by this beastly factory-building job, which was to make him professionally and establish both of them, for that matter, in happy, solid prosperity, that he had gone just a little bit mad!

Having faced it squarely and reached this sound conclusion, Anne sensed that possibly Bill Reeves had done a rather fine and wise thing in pointing the way to temporary escape, and that Dicky had done an equally wise one in following the path. As for Anne, if she wished to be ashamed of herself, this was a good time. Anne flushed again.

She was still in contrite mood, some hours later at home, when her small brother summoned her to the family telephone.

"Anne?" said a beloved, although a queerly breathless, voice, as she answered.

"You, Dick?"

"Of—course," the voice puffed.

Anne's brows contracted; she drew nearer to the instrument.

"What's the matter, darling?" she asked quickly. "Your voice sounds so —so queer!"

"Does it? I dunno. Nothing—"

"You're up there now?"

"At—at Bragg's?" the voice asked, and seemed astonished. "Hardly, honey. I'm phoning from the station, you know. I had to pack and get some dinner and all that." Just here she caught a deep inhalation; it was as if Richard were bracing himself for something. "I couldn't leave without calling you up just once more, you know."

"Yes, Dick," Anne said very softly.

"Because there's something I want to tell you," the voice pursued, and now it seemed to hold a laugh.

"Yes?"

"It's important. You'll have to listen carefully, so as not to miss a word of this," Mr. Melton continued. And then there came a sudden, sharp break, and now a sharper cry of: "What? Well—*holy smoke!*"

"What is it, Dick?" Anne cried.

"She—she's going away without me!" Richard gasped out—and gasped no further syllable.

Even though Anne, eyes round, lips parted, waited for a minute or more, only the single loud, final click came to her ears.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ANCESTRAL HOME.

TWENTY seconds ago the outrageous clock hanging over the news-stand had first caught Richard's eye, abruptly banishing that wide and vacuous smile he always seemed to acquire when telephoning to Anne. Now, as he slapped the receiver back to its hook and snatched up his grip and lunged pell-mell out of the booth, he favored it with a second hot and amazed glare.

If that wretched clock was right—and clocks that are allowed to live around big railway terminals have a habit of being painfully accurate—then Richard's watch must be slow by some eight or nine minutes.

Yes, and away over there by the train gate, which, prudently enough, he had located before beginning his telephoning, a hard-faced person in uniform was beckoning impatiently to three ladies who loped frantically in his direction. He was doing this with his left hand; his right was even now upon the handle of the gate and he was beginning to close the thing.

These points having been assimilated by his nimble brain, Richard was already traveling across the wide intervening space quite after the fashion of a maddened kangaroo.

He had no spare wind for this wild dash, either. The subway train had dallied maddeningly; from it Richard had raced furiously to his telephone booth, that he might squeeze in the last possible minute of conversation with Anne; and now—the uniformed person, having herded through the three ladies, was continuing to close his gate.

"Too late!" he called to Richard.

"Is it? Watch me!" Richard cried brightly, and gasped his way through the remaining four-inch crack and hurtled downstairs, at that other uniformed figure just closing the last door of the train.

But he had made it! He dropped into a seat and mopped his brow, dimly aware that several gentlemen had glanced at him over their papers. He had cut off Anne rather abruptly, though, hadn't he? The one priceless girl in the world was inclined to be a bit particular about such things; he'd have to telephone in the morning and explain. Dear Anne!

Few thrills go with an early evening ride to a spot like Firwold. The train rattles on, and stops, and a few suburbanites fold their papers, gather their packages and descend, and the train rattles on again and presently stops

again, and the same thing is repeated. After each stop the train is a little emptier.

Eventually Richard found that he had a day coach to himself. Firwold was farther out than he had thought, and—oh, this was Firwold, eh? He snatched up his bag and hurried into the night, and the train rattled on.

Well, it was a gay-looking spot at this hour, with one or two houses visible beyond the unlighted platform. The taxis were up that way, but nearer at hand stood a long black limousine, and from it a chauffeur in dark livery approached with:

"Mr. Vane?"

"Er—yes," Richard admitted.

"Sent to meet you," the chauffeur muttered. "This way, please."

Richard smiled tartly as he followed. The colonel might be a cheery soul, but he didn't hire cheery servants. This one sighed as he closed the door, sighed as he started his motor; and the car rolled away through impenetrable blackness, and Richard gazed from the window and himself sighed.

It was wonderful how one could reap benefit from a complete change of scene; a week of this country and he could visualize himself as speeding back to the dear old office, dancing and singing, just at the prospect of waiting there for his Combined Products award.

Lord! What was this? Was there anything lonelier and more remote than the highway they had been traveling? There was, apparently, since they had passed between high stone gateposts and were rolling up a long, smooth drive, with black trees on either side, and stopping at last.

Mr. Melton, peering out, caught his breath; this must be the house! It was of stone; it seemed, at a rough guess, to be about the size of Buckingham Palace; and there was no funny new-rich atmosphere about it either. This mansion was old as the hills and much gloomier!

"If you please, Mr. Vane?" suggested the chauffeur at the door.

The huge door of the house itself was opening now. A rather aged man stood there, a fattish, white-skinned person with heavy jowls and a bald head.

"Well, *you're* not—" escaped Richard.

"I'm the butler, sir; the name is Haggin," the other said coldly.

Mr. Melton, entering, looked about. The place was no less than a baronial castle. A cottage might have been built in this lower hallway without obstructing traffic; there were high doors, heavily draped and with dark rooms beyond; there was a giant fireplace and a few pieces of heavy, bare furniture and rugs one might assume to be priceless.

But over all brooded shadowy gloom—there was just one thickly shaded light up at this end, and another down near the fireplace.

"It's some house!" breathed Richard.

"The home of the Braggs for eighty years, sir!" said Haggin.

He indicated a tall chair and moved away with Richard's bag, to the rear of the great space and up the wide stairway, vanishing at last in upper dusk. Alone, Richard sought to grin and found it difficult; the gloom fairly pressed down on one!

Well, what next? He must have been sitting here half an hour, despite the eight minutes indicated by his watch. He rose and walked about, making no sound on the thick rugs.

There were paintings, and it was too dark to examine them; there was furniture that might have been interesting in a better light. Very likely, if they found him prowling around like this, they'd suspect him of hunting the silver—but anything was better than waiting to take root in that chair.

Aha! Over here at least was a partially illuminated room. Mr. Melton, on the point of entering, stopped short.

The room was not unoccupied, after all!

It seemed to be the library; there were books about the walls, and heavy leather furniture, and in the center a huge flat-topped desk with a green-shaded lamp above. And behind this, intent on documents, sat a gray-haired man of strong jaw-line, with big hands clasped before him, beyond any reasonable doubt Colonel Samson Bragg himself.

Mr. Melton thought swiftly. The butler would return presently and usher him in, which would have been well enough for a person not so keen about impressing Colonel Bragg. But for Richard Melton, how infinitely better to demonstrate at the very beginning that he was the kind to race headlong at a job and not at all the type which waits to be led to it by a butler.

He would walk in and introduce himself snappily. He would show that, however little they meant to the butler, every minute counted when Richard was selling his services. At about the tenth word of his speech he would produce notebook and pencil and draw up a chair, visibly, even thrillingly, ready for work.

It was, to Richard's way of thinking, a mighty good idea, and, having conceived it, he twitched his coat collar a little straighter, felt of his necktie, and marched through the doorway.

Three long, strong strides, and his view of the colonel was much better—so much better that Richard hesitated instinctively before the fourth stride. Distinct astonishment surged through Richard; this gentleman might be, as they said, the most genial soul in the world, but his geniality was without visible external signs.

Colonel Bragg, in fact, looked like a man in whose veins runs vitriol rather than ordinary blood. His mouth, turned down at the corners, was harsh and sour; his eyes, as he glanced just once at Richard and then went on reading, glowered pure hate.

However, you never can tell. With a slight effort Richard produced his best bland smile.

"Good evening, colonel!" he said brightly.

Mr. Bragg merely grunted.

"I'm the new secretary," Richard said. "Sent up by the—ah—Interurban Employment Bureau, you know."

This time the colonel did not even grunt. Mr. Melton ceased his smiling and drew another breath.

"The butler left me there in the hall, you know. Not by your orders, I take it, because you know and I know what time is worth, sir, and when you're paying for it I want to give you the full value of every minute," Mr. Melton pursued, and brought forth his notebook and his pencil and looked about for a chair that might be carried to the side of the desk. "I take it, sir, that—"

Here Richard paused. For all of ten seconds the colonel glared viciously at him and then resumed his reading with a snarl of:

"What in hell's all that to *me?*"

Mr. Melton's own lips tightened. For an instant he was upon the verge of replying in the same gay vein, but he caught himself and forced the smile back into place.

"Apparently there is some misunderstanding here, sir," he said, with an easy and beautiful suavity. "I am —er—Mr. Vane, sent up here by the—"

"You said that before," the colonel snapped; and abruptly his strong hand jerked the desk-light about, so that its rays bathed Richard from head to foot. Back there in the darkness the colonel's eyes glowed with a wild animal effect as they examined Richard, also from head to foot. "Hah!" rasped this merry soul. "Handsome devil, aren't you?"

"What?"

"Married?"

"Er—no."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight next birthday, sir; but—"

"Aha? I thought as much!" Mr. Bragg commented, in a wheeze this time, and the light was twitched about to rest upon his papers again, and the colonel's eyes went back to them, while his heavy nails hammered out a rhythm on the polished desk. Audibly—this is, of course, a mere detail—the colonel's teeth ground together.

Mr. Melton's eyes narrowed quite truculently. Here was a rough diamond, eh? An eccentric individual who was rich enough to indulge his eccentricities, and so on?

Well, as a matter of purely personal inclination Richard was strongly moved to tell the dear colonel precisely what he thought of him, in language which could not possibly be misconstrued, and then—either with or without throwing the notebook at his ridiculous head—to walk out.

But he had come to this mausoleum to ingratiate himself with Colonel Bragg; and, by the mighty, if the old fool thought he could be scared off by a few barks—

"My dear colonel," Richard began, and each word dripped perfumed oils, "I fear that—"

"Damn you!" cried Colonel Bragg; and as he looked up again Mr. Melton realized that those former glares had been mere affectionate smiles in comparison. "Don't you see I'm trying to read this?"

"Well, I—" began the visitor, and subsided and squinted toward the door, for Haggin was over there and motioning quite frantically.

Richard stared hard. Was the man having a seizure of some kind, that he waved his arms so strangely? No, apparently he was beckoning.

Mr. Melton glanced once more at the colonel, who had resumed his reading. Then, since his presence seemed so much more necessary out there than in here, he stepped across—and Haggin caught his arm and led him steadily onward, away and away from the library.

"God bless my soul, sir!" Haggin breathed.

"I trust that may happen," Richard answered. "Where did he get the grouch, Haggin?"

"You—you shouldn't have gone in there, Mr. Vane!"

"I've been suspecting something of the kind for a minute or more," Richard said impatiently. "What's the matter with him, anyway? I thought he was a jolly old bird!"

Haggin sighed heavily.

"He was, sir," he whispered. "I've been thirty years in this house, and I must say a merrier gentleman I've never seen in all my life than the colonel until—"

"Until what?"

"Until he married, Mr. Vane," the butler murmured brokenly.

"And getting married did all that to him?"

"It did indeed, sir," the butler assured Mr. Melton.

Now he wagged his bald head and sighed again.

Richard laughed gently and considered him, thereafter feeling in his pocket.

"Well, offhand, I'd say he'd better have stayed single," said he. "However, I imagine something's upset him to-night; no man could be like that all the time and live. See, Haggin! A five-spot. Yours!"

"I thank you very much, sir," said the butler.

"You're welcome," the genial Richard grinned. "Listen! I like to be friends with everybody, and especially with any one I'm working for. I want to get on the right side of the colonel, Haggin—see? What are his weak spots and his hobbies?"

The butler considered gravely and sorrowfully.

"Upon my soul, I don't think he has any left, Mr. Vane. He used to ride quite a bit, but he doesn't any more.

He used to golf a bit, too, but not since he married. It—it seems like the heart has been taken out of him somehow. It's very sad."

"It sure is," Richard laughed. "He must have picked a winner and—"

"Exactly, sir," said Haggin, and shook himself together and glanced up the stairway rather nervously. "But we mustn't stand here talking, Mr. Vane. I've been sent to take you to your new employer, you know."

"What?"

"If you please, sir. I've wasted some time now."

"Well—wait," the somewhat puzzled visitor said. "Isn't that Colonel Bragg in there?"

"To be sure, sir, but it's not the colonel that engaged you, Mr. Vane. Now, if you'll just step upstairs—"

"Well, who the devil did engage me, if he didn't?"

"Why, Mrs. Bragg, sir!"

"As—as what? As a social secretary?" Richard gasped hotly.

"Why, yes, sir. So I take it."

Mr. Melton just managed to catch his rising voice.

"Well, I'll be—" he began, and controlled himself still further. Briefly, too, he glared at the inoffensive Haggin; then Richard shrugged.

"Well, that's the limit!" he commented more calmly. "Go get my bag, Haggin. You took it upstairs with you."

"Eh—what for, sir?" the butler asked, and his eyes opened.

"Because I'm going to get out of this, of course," Mr. Melton snapped. "I'm no tame household cat, to be sitting around making up invitation lists for a woman. Mistake, of course—you'll have to explain it for me, Haggin. What's the next train for the city, by the way?"

This query Haggin ignored entirely. He was scratching the hair just behind his left ear now and gazing at Richard with curious firmness.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "but Mrs. Bragg sent me down for you, Mr. Vane, and it 'd be as much as my job is worth to go back without you. If you wouldn't mind explaining the error yourself, sir?"

"As much as your job is worth?" Richard echoed, and his teeth bared in a rather wicked, contemptuous smile. "She's like that, is she?"

"Very much like that, Mr. Vane. So, if you please, sir—"

"All right. I'll go and explain to her myself," Mr. Melton grinned, and suddenly started for the stairs of his own accord. "May do the old dame some good to hear a frank opinion about getting a man out here under false pretenses and so on. Where is she?"

The butler halted him for a moment.

"I wouldn't go too far, sir. I wouldn't be too frank."

"Leave that to me, Haggin," Richard said cheerily. "And while the explanation's going on, you cart my bag downstairs and go out and get me a taxi, will you? Be about five minutes, I fancy."

He trudged upward behind the silent butler. Some stairs these were, too! Wide enough for a Pullman car to run up and down without scratching the walls.

Also, Richard noted, some corridor up here! There were heavy, closed doors in the dusk—and little black passages running off here and there—and what seemed to be a window heavily draped as was everything else in this depressing establishment, at the far end.

"Next to the last door on this right side, sir," said Haggin in a hushed voice. "That 'll be your room, Mr. Vane."

"My room? I'm not going to have any room here," Richard laughed.

"In case you should change your mind, sir, that 'll be your room," the butler sighed. "Now, over this way, please, sir."

He crossed the corridor and knocked gently at a door; now he was opening it and standing back for Richard to enter.

"Mr. Vane if you please, madam," said Haggin.

Then, Richard having passed, he closed the door very gently; and a small sneer curled Richard's lips as he prepared to voice, in courteous but razor-edged words, the sentiments that came to his mind.

He squared his shoulders and looked about for the woman who was to be blasted.

The same thick shades were on the lamps, but at least it was a bit lighter in this room. In that big chair over there—yes, there she was, just putting aside a book.

Mr. Melton smiled again, and then stopped, exactly as if he had encountered a steel cable stretched across his path.

And his mouth opened and his eyes came very near to popping visibly. Astonishing as it may seem, Richard even ceased breathing for a little space, and his arms and his legs and all the rest of him grew rigid.

"Why—Gwen!" he choked, just audibly. "G—*Gwen!*"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Smashing Through

ON May 1, President Coolidge pressed a key in Washington and, across the continent where the jagged Cascades have defied mankind with barriers almost insurmountable for transportation, there was a mighty roar. This came from explosives that tore through the last section of rock, making a hole through the Cascades from Scenic to Berne.

Since December 14, 1925, the work has been going on. One thousand five hundred men, aided by the latest equipment, have been toiling away at the giant task, and yet there is much to do before the ten-million-dollar engineering feat is accomplished. Only four and a half miles of the bore have been lined with concrete as yet.

The excavation will be complete by November of this year, but there are tracks to be laid, and the electrifying to do. The first train is expected to move through the tunnel about May 1, 1929.

The Cascades have long been a hindrance to transportation from East to West. The Great Northern Railway has already done what was considered impossible by surmounting the barrier, but the cost was tremendous. A climb of one thousand three hundred and twenty-five feet was necessary as well, as the building of six tunnels and six miles of snow sheds.

The upkeep of such a system has been so great that it was decided to eliminate most of it by a single tunnel. The tunnel will cost ten million dollars, but Ralph Budd, president of the road, believes that this can be paid for by the cost of keeping snow sheds in repair alone. The east-to-west climb is being reduced to six hundred and thirty-four feet, which is practically half that of the present road.

The railroad is electrifying both slopes of the Cascades, and building a four-million-dollar cut-off just east of the tunnel that will save sixteen miles. Mileage counts up in this work of spanning the continent, and it pays in the long run to eliminate all of it that is possible. *Guy Radcr.*

Please Stand By

The trouble was that Douglas Raymond's friends liked him too well —but that can be trouble enough!

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Heartbreak Trail," "Drums of Peace," etc.

Novelette—Complete

"TURN off that horrible jazz, Adolph, and get WXL. It's thirty-three on the dial, you know," said Miss Maria Bascom, proprietor and hostess of Wistaria Lodge. "I've had nothing but jazz all the afternoon—songs and ukuleles and organs and orchestras, all the time. Seems as if I'd go distracted! Something ought to be done about it."

"Suppose you try snapping off the switch," suggested Henry Caddock, dean of the boarding house, who sat at the foot of the table, opposite Miss Bascom. "That's what I do when I come into the house in the afternoon and there's no one around, and Adolph has left the thing running. You've no idea how peaceful and quiet it makes the house, and it saves electricity."

"I had an idea that Adolph kept it running most of the time," said Miss Bascom in a low tone, as the butler busied himself with the radio cabinet in the parlor. "Adolph is very fond of music."

"Music?" queried Hubert Quirk, on the right of the table.

"If it isn't music, what is it?" challenged Mrs. Susan Tredmore, on the left of the hostess. "Some very distinguished authorities claim, you know, that jazz is the logical expression of American life—of the tremendous, throbbing, spontaneous action and spirit of the people."

"Sure! I guess that's it," agreed Horace Sheldon, across the table. "That's the way life and business look to me, all right. It's something fierce, believe me!"

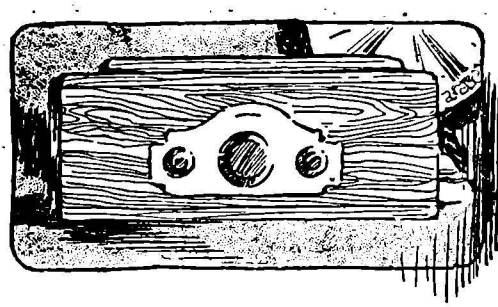
"Oh, you take a very cynical view of it, Mr. Sheldon," said Mrs. Tredmore.

"Who wouldn't?" murmured the laconic Hubert Quirk.

"And what is your view of such things, Dr. Hillary?" persisted the lady.

The college professor smiled benignly, and delicately touched his lips with his napkin.

"I'm inclined to believe that all these things will adjust themselves. A casual



survey of history is—er—moderately reassuring—to those who do not expect too much."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that, Dr. Hillary!" declared the lady, vastly gratified.

"Indeed, yes! Such an opinion from a professor stimulates one's faith in the eternal verities, doesn't it?" seconded the newest boarder, Miss Sylvia Stark, who had come to Port Cardinal to teach mathematics in the high school.

"Mm—Monday night," mused the hostess, "and—er—the Orpheus Gleemen are on at eight o'clock, aren't they, Mr. Raymond?"

"Yes, Miss Bascom, eight o'clock," answered Douglas Raymond, the robust barytone of the quartet to which she referred. "Rather nice program to-night, too."

"'Rather Nice!" exclaimed Ralph Atwood, from the other end of the table. "That's it exactly, Doug. Looks like the radio audience everywhere is made up of the inmates of old ladies' and old men's homes. Sentimental stuff! Milk toast and weak tea!

"Gosh! I never knew that all the people were so easy to entertain—if they are! Radio! Huh! I don't mind hearing baseball scores and the stock market, but I'd shut the thing off right there and let it go at that. What's the big barytone solo feature to-night? 'My Mother Was a Lady,' or 'Asleep in the Deep'?"

"One good thing about radio, Ralph, you *can* shut it off," said the barytone a little self-consciously.

"Can you, though?" challenged the other. "I haven't noticed that. Perhaps so—if you're a hermit in a cave twenty miles from nowhere."

"Sorry you have such a hard time, Mr. Atwood," said Miss Bascom with mild sarcasm. "You remember we put it to a vote when the set was installed, and you all agreed that if just one boarder wanted to listen in, the others must raise no objections; that is, up to eleven o'clock.

"And I notice that you all sit up together frequently until midnight when there's something good."

Rice pudding was served, and some second and third cups of coffee; then the boarders began rising and drifting toward the parlor.

"Now that tune!" said Henry Caddock peevishly, cocking his ear toward the loud speaker on top of the bookcase: "I was fussing with the dial last night and I found five stations all playing that tune at once; you could

not get away from it. Next week it 'll be another tune, but they have to run just one or two favorites to death."

"Ready, Mr. Raymond?" called Dora Perkins, standing at the foot of the stairs in the hall.

"Suré, I'm coming," answered the barytone, hurrying down the stairs. "We've got plenty of timé. Good-by, Kitty. See you when I get home."

"Oh, good-by," said little Kitty Granby, a stenographer in the First National Bank, affecting an air of easy indifference, and meeting the sweet smile of Dora Perkins through the hall door with one carefully calculated to be just as sweet and just as feline.

"You know WXL is our own station, right here in Port Cardinal, Miss Stark," the hostess explained to the new boarder. "And we're fortunate in having two of the regular staff artists here in our little family. Miss Perkins plays piano solos and accompaniments, and Mr. Raymond is the barytone in the famous Orpheus Gleemen—the wonderful male quartet. They sing three times a week, and Sundays."

"Which is four times too many," put in Ralph Atwood impudently. "They are *famous* in Port Cardinal, Miss Stark, and *wonderful* in the same town. To the big radio audiences out on the air, they're one of the things that fill in; folks can listen to 'em when they're too lazy to get up and shut off the switch.

"Takes all kinds to make a program, I guess. Every radio station ought to be limited to about three hours a day; we might get something good once in awhile."

The men lighted up pipes, cigars, and cigarettes, and gallantly waited for the women to dispose themselves about the radio end of the parlor in chairs.

It was Miss Stark's first evening at Wistaria Lodge, and she grew suddenly a little more self-conscious, then fidgetty, and finally produced a little tortoise-shell cigarette case.

"Are there—ah—any objections, Miss Bascom?" she inquired of the hostess.

"N-n-n-no! Miss Stark, we're quite modernistic here—though decently conservative. We have emerged from the Victorian age."

She produced a cigarette for herself, obviously to put the stranger at ease.

Ottilie Eldom, buyer in a department store, casually brought forth a paper of cigarettes from the handbag in her lap.

"I don't know much about Victorian ages or any other kind," she said in her habitual, half-sullen, half-droll manner, "but I've been smoking fags for ten years; so don't get fussed on my account, Miss Stark."

"You started smoking as a mere child, dear!" exclaimed Etta Upham, the beauty specialist.

"Thanks, awfully, old bean!" returned Miss Eldom. "Yes, it was when my mother was passing me off as sixteen—about the time that horseless buggies were coming in. You remember!"

"No, I don't remember!" snapped Etta, flushing. "Thank the Lord I'm no older than I am!"

"You should be thankful for that, dear," agreed Ottilie.

"How about the movie, Kitty?" Ralph Atwood asked the little stenographer. "It's rotten, as usual, but we'll escape the radio."

"Thanks very much, but I think I'll stay in to-night."

"How about coming with me, Kitty?" broke in Hubert Quirk. "The show 'll be just as rotten, but you look well walking with me; we've got style."

"No, thank you."

"Wise kid!" murmured Felix McMasters, the irrepressible. "You knew I was going to ask you, Kitty! You get the show, ice cream, and a taxi home. There's a new line that runs the mile limit for thirty-five cents. Get on your coat an' hat."

"No, thank you," said Kitty, and her eyes snapped a little, and her little sensitive chin seemed to quiver slight-

ly. "I said I thought I'd stay in tonight."

"Yeh! The Orpheus Gleemen are on the air!" jeered Ralph.

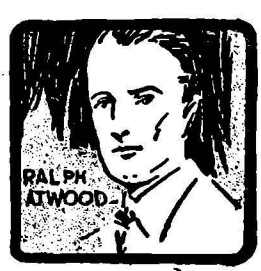
"And what if they are?" challenged Kitty angrily.

"I'm not taking any blame either way," said Ralph. "They're on the air, and I don't know any way of taking 'em off. But it's too bad to think any one has to sit here and listen. Dora giving Doug the glad eye as he comes downstairs, and sparking with 'im all the way to the studio—it's a two-mile walk, isn't it? And all the way home again, too!

"Any one would think you'd show some independence, Kit, and have a little fun yourself. You don't get a thing, sitting home and moping over a guy like Doug. I never knew any o' these male nightingales that weren't crazy about themselves—an' you fool flappers play right up to 'em and make 'em a blame sight worse!"

Kitty got up in a rage and flounced across the room, taking a seat by the middle-aged Horace Sheldon, proprietor of a down town cigar store. Mr. Sheldon patted her small left hand with paternal solicitude, and when he quietly made some effort to retain his hold on the hand, she jerked it away and seemed perilously close to tears of mortification and anger.

"There! There they are!" exclaimed Miss Bascom, hushing the company with upraised forefinger.



II.

"You will be entertained," the announcer at station WXL was saying, "by the justly popular male quartet, the Orpheus Gleemen, singing exclusively for station WXL and affiliated stations. As their first number on this evening's program, our distinguished vocalists will render their own arrangement of the ever-popular ballad 'Mandalay,' Miss Dora Perkins at the piano."

"Listen to the dear boys!" growled Ralph Atwood. "You know how it runs—'Where there ain't no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirst.' And they're all front-row Christian Endeavorers and white-ribboners. They think ginger ale is a low-down wicked stuff, 'cause bad men mix highballs with it."

"Charming!" observed Miss Stark, at the end of the quartet's first number.

"Not bad—not at all bad," agreed Dr. Hillary.

The announcer said that Mr. Douglas Raymond would sing a group of songs, and the hostess clapped her hands softly.

Strong, resonant tones poured from the loud speaker:

"From the desert I come to thee,
On my Arab shod with fire—"

"Now just imagine Doug Raymond hitting it in high across the desert on *anything* shod with fire!" jeered Ralph. "Why, he'd beat the Prince o' Wales to a flop if he tried to ride a sawhorse. These big romantic yells always give me a pain."

"Sh—please, Mr. Atwood," implored the hostess.

Douglas Raymond sang his second song, "It was a Lover and his Lass."

"There!" declared Ralph, after keeping quiet through two verses, "I'll say that the boy's hit his stride; that's about the kind of stuff for him—Philadelphia cream cheese, with strawberry jam on the side. And did you hear little Dora stub her toe on the piano? She can't keep her eyes on the music or the keyboard when Doug is singing love songs."

"Lucky they got chaperones an' things in the studio!" chuckled Felix McMasters, grinning at Kitty Granby.

"These frightful teases are trying to bother you, Kitty," said Miss Bascom. "Don't you mind them at all, dear."

"I didn't hear what they said," lied Kitty bravely.

"Two charming songs, charmingly rendered!" declared Mrs. Tredmore, giving the light-minded youths a glance of lofty disdain.

"Oh, quite!" agreed the new boarder effusively. "You may tell your friend Mr. Raymond, dear Miss Granby, that I got a definite—er—a really authentic spiritual message from his work. Lovely voice!—and real feeling. He has temperament. He should go far. You needn't hesitate to tell him so, Miss Granby."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Stark," said Kitty, blushing vividly, "but Mr. Raymond is—er—why, just a—just one of my friends—here in the boarding house; that's all."

"Dear child!" purred Miss Stark, who obviously had reached thirty, "you are so sweetly naïve! I hope you and this agreeable young man with the splendid voice may always remain—oh, very good friends!—and that you may both attain your hearts' desires. There! You see, I'm in quite a romantic mood as a result of all this perfectly inspiring music. Oh, the radio is priceless! How did we ever live without it!"

"Hope you got all that, Ottilie," mumbled Ralph to Miss Eldom. "Did you get an *aw-thentic* click out of Doug's howls? Me—I'm all lit up on the romantic stuff. Let's go out on the porch and hold hands. And to think Doug Raymond gets real money for that stuff!"

"Too bad *you* can't get real money for making a fool of yourself, Ralph," said Ottilie. "You'd have more cash than Henry Ford!"

"Click!" gasped Ralph, slapping his jaw. "That registered all right! And to think I offered to kiss you once, out in the wistaria arbor."

"Don't mention it; I've been trying to forget and forgive. I was disillusioned in love years ago, when you were in kindergarten, young man; and I'm no cradle-snatcher."

"Reckon I'll say good night, Miss Bascom," murmured Henry Caddock. "Got some writing to do upstairs, and I've got about all the romance I can stand for one evening, I guess."

Horace Sheldon, next in line of seniority, yawned and decided to stroll down town and supervise the closing of his cigar store for the night.

Lively dance music followed the Orpheus Gleemen's hour, and the younger boarders rolled up the rugs and spent a half hour in scraping floor wax from the polished boards while Miss Bascom presided and tried to look pleasant and unconcerned.

Kitty Granby refused to dance. She occupied a little warm and stuffy room, top floor rear, and hesitated to go there at once, but she retired moodily to a corner with a magazine and ignored the others.

She was tired, and her nerves were tired. Just as she was thinking that sleep might not come readily to her that night, she nodded over the magazine, and when she sat up with a start, wide awake again, Douglas Raymond was standing in the doorway of the parlor, and the voice of Dora Perkins sounded from the stairs. All the other boarders had gone, and she regretted bitterly that the solitude of the parlor made retreat more difficult.

"Going to the studio in the morning, Mr. Raymond?" Dora was inquiring.

"No, I don't have to go at all tomorrow," said Douglas.

"I do. I have to go and rehearse some accompaniments with that fiddler. About ten o'clock. You wouldn't be walking out that way, I suppose?"

The young man glanced at the shrinking Kitty at the end of the now

dimly lighted parlor, and Kitty perceived that his color deepened.

"I—I'd like to—mighty well, Miss Perkins," he said, "but—I have to—"

"Oh, you don't have to make excuses!" said Dora quickly with a dry little laugh. "Of course, if you weren't going anyway! It does seem like an awful walk when you're alone, though. And you're such good company, Mr. Raymond. I never gave a thought to the walk either way tonight. Shows what congenial companionship will do for any one."

"Mighty glad to have had your company, Miss Perkins," said Douglas in a rather husky voice. "Well—good night, Miss Perkins."

"Good night, Mr. Raymond. If you just happened to change your mind in the morning, I'll be leaving about quarter to ten, I guess. Good night."

"Aren't you sitting up pretty late, Kitty?" the young man asked, walking slowly the length of the parlor.

"Not so very. I'm going up now, though."

"That so? I was hoping you might want to sit awhile. Did you hear the program?"

"Yes, we heard it, of course. It was very good."

"Thanks."

"I'm pretty tired now, Doug. I guess I'll say good night."

"What's the matter, Kitty?"

"Matter? Nothing the matter with me, I'm sure."

"Maybe there is with me, then?"

"Oh, don't be foolish, Doug! I'm terribly tired. Please don't keep me here talking—about nothing. I'm tired—I'm just good and sick and tired of everything—of this darned old boarding house and this darned old town, and all the horrid, miserable, low-down, good-for-nothing cake-eaters and lounge-lizards round here, and the radio and the movies and the bank—and—and everything that I have to see and hear every gol-darn day of my life.

"There, now I've said it—and I'm not saying anything about you—and I don't care anything about you, and I never did, and never wanted to, and I wouldn't cry if I never saw your face again. *Good* night!"

She darted toward the door like an agile kitten, but the dumfounded Douglas literally blundered into her way, checking her flight. He reached out clumsily to take her hand, but she raised the hand and smartly slapped his face.

"Don't you dare touch me!" she cried furiously. "And you get out of my way and let me go. I don't find you such *good company,* Mr. Raymond; I haven't noticed so much *congenial companionship* between us!"

"Aw, gee!" muttered Douglas, staring blankly. "Say!—oh, gosh! I don't know what's the matter, Kitty, unless—gosh!"

In utter bewilderment he began vaguely to fear the outcome of the sudden tempest, to wonder what was to follow it. After the extraordinary, ungovernable fury, tears and hysterics seemed logical enough, and he dreaded that development no less than any other that he could conjure up in his disordered mind.

There was still a surprise in store for him, however. The tempest cleared, like summer wind and lightning, and was followed by a dead calm—without sunshine.

Kitty sat down abruptly on the nearest chair and stared at him, dry-eyed, with a certain disturbing apathy.

"I'm sorry," she said evenly. "I'm terribly sorry I made such a fool of myself, and such a scene. I suppose some of them upstairs heard it. I suppose *she* heard it."

"But can't you tell me, Kitty?" he implored miserably. "Gosh!"

"Nothing to tell, Douglas. It's my nerves, I suppose. I guess I ought to get away from here—everything is so hateful to me."

"I didn't know that—er—that I was"

"Oh, I don't suppose it's your fault," she sighed. "But we—we could never get along, Douglas. I've been thinking things over a good deal. I thought I liked you pretty well; you know that, of course; but I'm afraid it was just because you're such a good-natured, kind sort of a boy. There surely isn't anything bad about you, but—"

"You'd better go right on," he said grimly. "I might as well know everything right now."

"We ought not to let things go any further, Douglas, because we might regret it all our lives. I'm a little bit afraid you've never grown up, and that you never will grow up. Seems to me you're satisfied just to sing a song and have people say that it was fine. I'm terribly afraid you haven't any ambition, Douglas."

"Haven't any ambition?" he gasped. "Ambition! No ambition? Why, Kitty Granby, now I know well enough you're out o' your head. There's not any feller round here with more ambition than I've got."

"That's saying a whole lot, isn't it?" she observed with crushing irony. "I'm glad you find yourself superior in some way to Ralph Atwood, and that conceited Hubert Quirk, and that idiotic McMasters boy.

"But you don't begin to understand, Douglas. You think the little bits of unimportant things are great big things. You're terribly pleased because you can sing for the radio three times a week and in the church exercises Sundays; you think it's a great honor and a big success, and you're willing to stop right there."

"But, Kitty, the manager out at the electric plant says we surely have made a hit. He told me himself that we'd be getting offers from the big vaudeville people, and—and only to-night, he said he dropped into the studio to hear me sing, 'cause he'd got the idea that I had just the kind of a voice for radio speaking and announcing. He said there might be a chance for me to be a regular announcer. That's the truth!"

"Not really!" she sighed, crushing him again. "I suppose you think you'd be written up in the magazines. Young man started with nothing but a barytone voice, and got to be a real radio announcer, all on his merits without any pull or influence or anything.

"You'd get almost enough money as a radio announcer to support a wife—the way you've hoped to do—but, of course, the wife would have to work, too, to keep up household expenses."

"Huh! That's it! You'd better go 'n' marry a millionaire right off. I didn't know."

"And you don't know now—not anything, Douglas Raymond! I'm not a mercenary girl, but if I ever get married I'll choose a man who has some pride and some reasonable ideas. You speak of being a radio announcer as you'd speak of being president of a railroad or something."

"You needn't think it's such a bum job! Some of 'em get mighty big pay, and they're famous, and sign contracts like move stars."

"How many? Some baseball players get mighty big pay and sign big contracts, but how many? Why don't you start in being a Babe Ruth, seeing you know as much about baseball as you do the radio business?

"Oh, Douglas, I'm afraid you haven't got what people call a sense of values. You don't see things as other men do. If you were a bell hop over at the hotel, your ambition would be to get to be the captain of the bell hops—never the manager or owner of the hotel."

"Well," he said sullenly, "I can't start right in being an Edison or a Marconi, can I?"

"No, you're not the type to do anything like that," she said witheringly. "You do start things, but never finish them; you're too easily led off the track by all the things you see around you.

"You started as a pretty fair singer, and if you really wanted to do that sort of thing you ought to have worked with all your might to be a Caruso or a Chaliapin; but here you sit down in Port Cardinal—twenty-three years old—and are tickled to death to sing every other night for the radio—a lot of silly songs, and you have no further plans, *Mister* Raymond—except to be a radio announcer!"

"Gee! I never heard you carry on like this before!" he groaned. "How do you know what's going on inside my head, Kitty? You must admit I never go around boasting of what I can do. But I've got some mighty big ideas in my old bean.

"This radio stuff is all new to me, but I'm keen about it. No reason why a man shouldn't dig right in, if he likes it, and get to be the head of a big corporation or something."

"I know!" she said skeptically. "But your keen enthusiasm won't last long, Doug. Next time you get to talking of your plans, you'll want to manage the biggest jazz band in America, or be the biggest chicken farmer in the country, or learn to fly and go out after Lindy's record. Oh, it makes me sick to say these things to you, but I'm not the only one that can see it."

"Is that so? Been talking me over at the breakfast table with the wise one, eh?"

"That's like me, isn't it?" she demanded sharply. "I didn't have to talk with any one. I've been tortured by this whole miserable lot of frumps and jackasses, the whole evening. The old women and the old maids think you're all right, but the others never speak of you with respect, Doug. They're either patronizing or insulting.

"Making fun of your singing—casting slurs on you from all directions—talking about you as they wouldn't dare talk about the average young man; they don't seem to have any fear that you'll resent it, or do what most men would do if they were insulted."

"Is that so!" growled Douglas, bristling. "Well, I might surprise you and the rest of 'em. I'll walk upstairs right now and give Mr. Ralph Atwood a sock in the eye that'll shake 'im loose from his dollar-an'-a-half necktie. By—golly!"

"Oh, why don't you swear, if you feel like it? You might let out one good honest *damn* at least, and I'd have more respect for you, Doug Raymond!"

"Why, Kitty Granby!" he gasped. "My good grief! You do just about hate me, don't you? Say, is that the way folks feel about me? Do they think I'm just a poor piece o' cheese, just because I sing for a living and don't act like a hard-boiled pug around the house? I've tried to be decent to people, but I guess it don't pay, at that! Hell!"

"That's pretty good," she remarked with a bored smile, "but it was rather forced. Don't swear on my account. And I don't think Miss Perkins would like it, either. She thinks very well of you, I'm sure, just as you are. When two persons meet who are thoroughly congenial, they should cultivate each other's society."

"Hah! So, Kitty Granby! It *is* because you—it's just because I—because Miss Perkins said—well, about walking—and on account o' my being polite to—Miss Perkins only meant to say that—"

"What," she demanded acidly, "are you trying to say?"

"You're jealous!" he announced heavily.

"You lie!" she flared back at him, and a sob choked her. "I couldn't be—jealous of anything I despised, could I? You and Miss Perkins are made for each other! She's a brainless baby doll. She's a thousand times prettier than I am—thank God!

"I wouldn't be seen out with her big black googly eyes, and her vanishing-cream complexion and cherry lips. I'm glad I've got little eyes and a big

mouth, and a pug nose, and mouse-colored hair. And I'm glad I can't play the piano or sing. Maybe I've got brains, though, if I haven't anything else."

"Oh, Kitty, please calm down and let's talk this thing over," he said despairingly.

"I don't care to talk anything over with a man that's conceited enough to think I'm jealous of an overgrown schoolboy like him, and a brainless china doll that opens and shuts its eyes. There!

"I don't intend to run away from this house just because you're here, Mr. Raymond, but I'll thank you not to speak to me again. We are not on speaking terms hereafter, and I'd like you to understand that perfectly."

"All right! Good night, Miss Granby! If you're that kind of a—a woman, it's a good thing I found it out in time. That's all I got to say!"

III.

KITTY darted past him as the bird flits, apparently without regard to angles and turns. She was a small person, extraordinarily quick and agile, and she seemed to make the flight from the middle of the parlor to the first landing of the staircase in three bounds.

Three more might have taken her to the door of her room on the third floor, but unfortunately there was an obstacle on the landing; a shadowy figure rose with a little frightened cry directly in her path, and there was a sickening crash, two screams, and then two distinct thuds as of small, hard fists landing on something soft.

"Glad—you listened—cat!" panted and gurgled Kitty, as she delivered the blows, and then she swiftly completed her flight without further halt or interruption.

That did not close the episode, however. Doors opened, and startled voices challenged the darkness.

Ottilie Eldom slipped from her room, second floor front, swiftly, like a rather substantial wraith and pounced on the huddled figure on the landing.

"Shut up, hussy!" she hissed softly in Miss Dora Perkins's ear, and gave her an admonitory cuff, effectively shutting off a wail of anguish.

"Oh, what—what is it?" cried Miss Bascom from her doorway.

"Hey! What's wrong down there?" rumbled Horace Sheldon from another quarter.

"All right, now!" called back Ottilie Eldom in a cheerful tone. "But who let this cat in anyhow? I nearly broke my neck, getting up the stairs."

"Hm! Sounded like two cats fighting, when I woke up," growled Mr. Sheldon.

"Thanks for the pretty compliment, kind sir," returned Ottilie. "Hope you lie awake till morning, just for that.

"It's all right, folks!" she added. "You can all go back to bed; but don't let any more cats into this house hereafter."

"You're a cat yourself!" Miss Perkins breathed sibilantly.

"And I scratch. Look out!" returned Ottilie, pushing her roughly aside and mounting the steps to her room.

Miss Perkins, white-faced, with black eyes as large as saucers, descended in her bewilderment to the hall. She stood there, wavering uncertainly, a subtly appealing picture in her pink dressing robe of soft and clinging substance, her little feet tucked into tiny satin slippers. Then:

"Oh, Douglas! You?" she gasped, and swayed alarmingly, catching at the newel post.

"Why—Miss—why, Dora!"

"Oh, I'm scared to death!" she murmured, stealing fearfully, all atremble, into the parlor. "I—I heard voices; I thought there was some trouble. I—it was so foolish—but I started to come down, and—and she—who was it? She struck me! And hurt me, too! Oh, Douglas!"

"Oh, come now, Dora, don't cry!" he mumbled wretchedly.

"Oh, Douglas!" she sobbed, and melted into his protecting arms.

Then the *Witch of Endor*—impersonated ably by Miss Ottile Eldom in tousled hair, face flushed with anger, draped in a rumpled bathrobe of dull crimson, appeared again out of the darkness.

"You poor fool!" she muttered savagely.

"Who? Me?" gasped Douglas.

"You!" said Ottile, scathingly, "and any other man, for that matter. Get upstairs, both o' you, before I slap you."

IV.

FOUR restrained and well-bred gossips lingered at table, after the other boarders had strayed to porch and parlor, and toyed with their little cups of coffee and their cigarettes.

"But I am—frankly—no end astonished," confessed Miss Sylvia Stark, baring her immaculate soul to the chosen few. "One shouldn't have illusions at—at thirty, I suppose, but I was so enchanted, Miss Bascom, when I joined your little family, to find such good fellowship, such obvious accord. It was quite Utopian—really!

"And now, so soon, to find these lovely young persons all fallen out—eating with downcast eyes, darting black looks about the table generally, and sighing like furnaces—as Shakespeare would say."

"It's too awfully bad!" murmured the hostess. "We have trials—yes, trials, from time to time. But we *were* such a happy family! Kitty is the sweetest child. If I were—er—married, you know, and had a daughter, I should want her to be like Kitty.

"And Douglas Raymond—oh, quite adorable! A little immature, a little impractical and visionary, but such a good and wholesome lad. I suppose it was inevitable that a discordant note should sound; the little idyll could not be prolonged forever. Miss Perkins is charming, in her way, but—oh, such a different type, you know."

"I had a feeling," said Mrs. Tredmore, "when Miss Perkins came here, about a month ago, that—oh, you know! a sort of intuition—that another element had entered. Well, I sensed something inimical to our peace and harmony."

Dr. Hillary reflectively polished his glasses, half smiling to himself over his musings.

"A little cosmos!" he murmured gently. "Wherever two or more persons are gathered together there you have a little world, with all the elements and factors of existence functioning in an area circumscribed. Laboratory specimens, one might say, but displaying to the student and observer all the phenomena of nature and the universe."

"Fascinating!" breathed Miss Stark.

"The history of man is reënacted," continued the professor. "Eternal Eve, eternal Adam—and the eternal Lilith!"

"Lilith!" sighed Mrs. Tredmore contentedly. "Isn't it strange that the name flitted through my thoughts

the first time that I met Miss Perkins here? Oh, pray, don't misinterpret my meaning!"

"I comprehend your meaning—perfectly, Mrs. Tredmore," said Miss Stark. "Miss Perkins is really quite a charming person—and intelligent, and talented—an artist who has obviously enjoyed success of a sort; but—her lovely eyes—a little hard? The beautiful mouth—a little sensuous? Her quite too perfect hands—the long and tapering fingers of the artist—are they not—er—"

"May we say, the least thought predatory?" ventured the professor.

"The word was on my lips!" exclaimed Miss Bascom with glowing satisfaction. "And yet, I tell you, I'm quite fond of Miss Perkins. She can be very sweet and winsome; there's something very likable about the girl."

"Say, folks!" called Ralph Atwood from the parlor door, "don't let me bust up your committee meeting, but the Orpheus Gleemen are on the air—or will be in a minute. It's nothing for me to get excited about, but Miss Bascom's pretty keen about 'em."

"Let us go in," said the hostess. "We've had such a charming chat, haven't we? It's these little intimate, congenial moments with really understanding persons that make the life of the professional hostess endurable, I can assure you."

"And it is hostesses like you, dear Miss Bascom," said Miss Stark, "that free life in a boarding house from its traditional terrors. Wistaria Lodge is more like a little club for intellectual persons!"

"That's sweet and gracious of you, Miss Stark!" declared Miss Bascom.

Henry Caddock sat in a little haze of pipe smoke with the evening paper. Kitty Granby occupied the window seat, running over the leaves of a book and affecting an air of quiet abstraction. Most of the other regulars were grouped about the front room, reading or chatting.

The loud speaker suddenly took the floor.

"This is WXL, Port Cardinal. Again our home-town boys are greeting the radio neighbors. The Orpheus Gleemen present as their first number of the program the immortal Richard Wagner's 'Pilgrims' Chorus,' from that beautiful masterpiece of operatic composition, 'Tannhäuser.' The talented young artist, Miss Dora Perkins, will preside at the piano, giving her usual aid and inspiration to her fellow artists."

"Beautiful-but-dumb Dora's getting a boost!" chuckled Ralph Atwood, grinning at Kitty Granby. "She's been googly-goo-ing the announcer, and she can do that little thing, believe me!"

"Has any one got the new number of this magazine?" inquired Kitty, ostentatiously lifting a periodical from the reading table. "I'm reading a continued story in it."

"Oh, listen to the music, kid!" chuckled Ralph cruelly. "It might be fair, in spite of the weather."

"I think they sing quite admirably," observed Miss Stark, at the end of the number. "And Miss Perkins's accompaniment was really strong and quite authoritative, I should say."

"Dora packs a punch!" declared Ralph. "And when she puts her heart into it, get ready to duck!"

"Hm—such quaint and original expressions!" murmured Miss Stark.

"Mr. Atwood keeps us abreast of the times, with respect to the vernacular," said Dr. Hillary with quiet sarcasm.

The first tenor of the Gleemen sang an operatic aria, and then joined the second bass in a dramatic duet from another music drama.

"How about our star boarder, Miss Bascom?" Ralph inquired. "He's taking a back seat to-night. A whole hour's program without a solo from the boy wonder! That's a wallop at Wistaria Lodge, and I'll write to the manager of WXL about it."

The quartet sang two more numbers; then—

"The Orpheus Gleemen's hour will conclude," said the announcer, "with what we hope will prove a pleasing noevlty to our audience. Miss Dora Perkins, our artist-accompanist, already famous as a virtuoso, will render the incomparable 'Liebestraum' of the Hungarian genius, Franz Liszt, as a piano solo, while the Orpheus Gleemen will sing a vocal accompaniment with words especially adapted to the number. We present Miss Perkins."

"Wow!" cried Ralph. "Has Dora got that announcer by the nose? Or would it be the manager? She's leading 'em around on a leash and they're jumping through hoops for 'er! Get that? The quartet is accompanying the piano! The tail is wagging Fido!"

"She played it admirably, really!" remarked Mrs. Tredmore at the end of the solo. "We should be very proud of our artists."

"This concludes the hour of the Orpheus Gleemen," said the announcer, "and we hope you have enjoyed it, ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience. Our friends, the Gleemen, are always delighted and encouraged by your letters, and I'm sure that Miss Perkins—Miss Dora Perkins, remember!—would be highly gratified if you would express your opinions of her work.

"We cannot hear your applause, you know, and the mail brings us the only assurance of your approval. If you desire to write to Miss Perkins personally, you may address your letters to her, in care of Station WXL, Port Cardinal, and I'm sure she will be pleased and gratified."

"Who is that guy?" growled Ralph. "That's a different voice; 'tisn't the regular announcer."

"Please stand by for your station announcement," the voice went on. "You are listening to the program of Station WXL, Port Cardinal, owned and operated by the Port Cardinal Electrical Power and Equipment Corporation.

"This is my first broadcast as your announcer, dear friends, and I'll admit that I'm a bit nervous this evening, but I shall strive to do better and aim to give you service and satisfaction. This is Douglas Raymond speaking. Thank you for your attention. We now continue the program from New York City."

"Heck!" grunted Ralph, quite flabbergasted.

"Delightful!" purred Miss Bascom. "And he did so well, didn't he? But how extraordinary that none of us suspected it! It didn't sound like his voice, and it wasn't his usual manner of speaking, was it?"

"He was high-hatting the radio audience, that's why," Hubert Quirk informed her.

"The pulpit or platform orator," explained Dr. Hillary, "has his special diction and manner for the public, often rather sharply differentiated from his everyday speech and manner. I think that Mr. Raymond did remarkably well, for a young man, and without much experience of the sort."

"Hey, Kitty! Kitty Granby! Come out o' that book," called Ralph insistently. "Mean to say you didn't hear anything? It was Doug Raymond announcing. He's the radio announcer at WXL now. Get that?"

Kitty laid down her magazine and raised her head, with a little bored expression. She glanced superciliously at Ralph, and met the stares of the others without flinching.

"I heard it all," she said calmly. "I recognized Mr. Raymond's voice the first time he spoke."

"My eye! Oh, well, she *would*, I reckon!" exclaimed Ralph. "But say, folks! Has that kid fallen hard for dazzling Dora? I'm here to broadcast to the world he has! Or she's got her lily fingers twisted into his curly hair and is holding his nose right up to the microphone.

"Hereafter it'll be the Dora Perkins hour, with the Orpheus kids on the side. It's Broadway or Hollywood for darling Dora, or bust!—bust somebody else!"

V.

WXL's hour for signing off was 11 P. M., and when Douglas left the studio he found Dora Perkins waiting for him in a little reception room near the entrance to the building.

"Why, you're still here, Dora!" he exclaimed.

"Did you think I wouldn't wait?" she asked almost indignantly.

"Well, I'll phone for a taxi. It's getting so late."

"But I'd rather walk, with you, Douglas," she protested. "I want to congratulate you on your triumph. You were absolutely magnificent! You won't stay here in Port Cardinal long, after a few big people have listened to you on the air."

She took his hands in hers and pressed them gently.

"In honor of your début as an announcer, and your huge success, you may claim one kiss—just one."

He was boyishly embarrassed. Almost he drew away from her, but natural gallantry saved the situation, and he kissed her heartily.

She leaned toward him.

"Are you bashful, Douglas, or—or what? Some men would snatch an extra one."

He laughed then, and clasped her in a bear hug, and he held her with an arm about her shoulders and kissed her till she struggled and broke away.

"So you *can* be a cave man!" she gasped. "And I—rather like it, Douglas, when—when it's you!"

They started for home, and she slipped her arm inside his and let her long fingers glide into his hand.

"What fun we had to-night, you and I!" she exclaimed gayly. "The other fellows—they're all right, but they don't count. You must get out of the quartet very soon and let them get another barytone. Announcing will take all your time, and there's a certain dignity to maintain, you know."

"Why, you're a regular little manager, Dora!" he exclaimed.

"I'll be your manager, Douglas, and you'll be mine," she said. "Is it a bargain?"

"I guess—er—it's going to be a regular partnership," he said awkwardly.

"Oh, Douglas, you're a sweet kid!" she cried. "You may stop, for that, and steal another one."

He did so, and after the interlude they went on.

"If you think my piano playing was a great hit to-night," she said presently, "we might put on a little stunt next week. I'll plan a little recital program, and it might be announced in the papers.

"The quartet will sing an opening number, then I'll give the recital—six or eight numbers, and the quartet will come in with a closing selection. That will make the boys feel that they're not ignored or left out. What do you think?"

"That would be great!" he agreed.

"Of course you'd say so, but it's up to you, Douglas. I don't think you'll need to ask the manager about it. Just explain it to the boys. Tell them you want to get a little more variety into the program."

"I guess that'll be all right."

"Are you happy, Douglas?"

"Gosh, yes, Dora! Don't I act so?"

"Oh, I do so want you to be happy!" she declared. "I can see such big

things opening up for you. You really needed encouragement and some kind of guidance.

"I do honestly think that little Kitty Granby is a cute little thing, but —a stenographer, Douglas! You're an artist, with an artist's soul. If there's anything an artist simply has to have, it's sympathy and understanding. Don't you realize it? And she couldn't give it to you; she couldn't understand.

"That was just a little boy and girl affair, wasn't it? And I hope you'll never have any regrets. I'm so perfectly happy when I'm with you, and I believe that we'll go on and on, to bigger and greater things. We'll look back on poor old Port Cardinal as a short chapter in our book, and little Kitty will—"

"If you don't really mind, Dora," he said uneasily, "I'd rather not talk about Kitty Granby. I reckon it was a boy and girl affair, but we might as well let bygones be bygones."

"Why, of course, my dear!" she cried. "You're not hurt? You're not angry with me, are you?"

"'Course not! You understand, Dora. I guess you understand me better than any one else ever did."

"That's *too* sweet of you, dear! You'll have me crying in a minute—you're such a darling baby boy—for a great big burly fellow that could crush me with one big, strong hand. I guess the biggest, bravest, strongest men are always the most gentle and simple ones."

"Simple?"

"Oh, you know, I mean plain and honest and sincere. You're just like an open book, dear, and you make me love you more and more every minute I'm with you.

"Oh, Douglas!" she exclaimed suddenly, and stopped, withdrawing her arm from his. "You horrid thing, you let me go on in my impulsive way, making a perfect little fool of myself, and you have never once said that you loved me.

"I feel disgraced—humiliated. I'm the most unsophisticated, innocent thing that ever lived, I guess. But you *did* kiss me, and that means of course—"

"Yes, of course," he said.

"But can't you say anything more than 'of course'? You'd better not take *me* too much for granted, little boy, just because you always get everything you want. I'm not one of those girls that give themselves away lightly. I never allowed any man to make love to me before."

"Great Scott, Dora!" he cried anxiously, "I thought you must know how I felt about it. Gee! I should say I do love you. I don't see how any man could see you and help loving you."

"Now he's my dear, sweet boy!" she cried, and threw her arms about his neck.

They were drawing near Wistaria Lodge, and as they stood for an instant, recklessly oblivious to the world, the rays from an electric street lamp fell upon them.

Douglas, more instinctively discreet, drew the girl into the shadow of a great elm tree and, thus sheltered, demonstrated the depth and quality of his affection.

Kitty Granby and Ottilie Eldom came walking toward the lodge, after a stroll in the cool evening air. Confused voices and smothered giggles arrested their attention as they approached the tree, and Ottilie caught the younger girl's arm and drew her toward the curb.

"Oh, darling, you're strangling me —you're smothering me!" cried Dora shrilly.

She broke the ardent swain's embrace and freed herself, but lurched across the sidewalk and bumped violently into Ottile Eldom; and the stern and unemotional Ottilie promptly returned her to her lover's arms with a swing of her strong right arm.

Dora uttered a little cry of fright,

but quickly controlled herself and shrank again into the shadow.

"Oh, Douglas, those women will think we're perfectly awful," she said aloud.

"It's too bad," muttered Ottilie, quite as audibly, as she hurried Kitty along, "that Port Cardinal hasn't got an efficient street cleaning department; there's always too blamed much rubbish kicking around."

Kitty went on, walking rapidly, and passed the boarding house.

"You want to go in, Ottilie?" she asked. "I thought we might take another turn around the block."

"Go as far as you like," said the other. "And—don't you care, kid."

"Who's caring? Think I'd care about anything as disgraceful as that?"

"Rotten!" muttered Ottilie fiercely. "We won't talk about it—but I never did think that fellow was that sort of a pig. I wouldn't have thought that you—"

"And you needn't!" snapped Kitty. "I hope you don't think I'm the sort to let a fellow make a fool of himself or me! Anyhow, I guess there's a good deal about that man that I didn't know about."

"There's a good deal about all men that you don't know about, kid. I'm not boasting—it's nothing to boast about, Lord knows!—but I've turned down a dozen of 'em in my time, and the big assembling plant hasn't put the man together yet that I'd swap my job for."

The house was quiet when the two girls went in. Ottilie went to her room, and Kitty stepped into the parlor to get a library book that she had left on the table.

She started nervously as some one moved near the bay window.

"I beg your pardon," apologized Douglas Raymond, springing up from a chair and shuffling his feet clumsily.

Kitty averted her head sharply and hurried to the reading table.

"Say—er—Miss Granby!" he blurted out huskily. "It's all—everything's all over, I know, but would it be all right if we were just friends, you know? Living here in the same house, it would be—"

She faced him, head up, smartly defiant.

"It would *not* be all right," she replied. "Your speaking to me now is an insult. I don't hate you at all, because I wouldn't stoop to feel any such strong emotion toward you. I don't hate snakes, or rats, or mosquitoes, but I don't want them near me.

"Now," she added, with firm finality, "this is a public boarding house, and the parlor and dining room are open for the comfort and convenience of guests. I intend to use them, as I always have done, but if you speak to me, or look at me again, I shall request Miss Bascom to guard me in some way against such annoyance."

She turned, then, and marched out of the room with military smartness and precision.

Douglas slumped into his chair again, sighed, and looked idly out the window into the darkness of the street.

Dr. Hillary and Henry Caddock came in from a late game of billiards at the Cardinal Valley Club down town.

"Smoke another cigar before you go up, professor?" asked Caddock, stepping just inside the parlor door. "When I'm up as late as this, I don't care when I go to bed."

"Thanks, no; cigars are a little heavy for me after the first one. And, as for its being late, I shall write a little on the new chapter of my book before I turn in."

"Hello!" said Caddock, catching sight of the dejected figure in the chair. "Oh, it's Raymond. Hm—heard you on the air to-night, Raymond. Pretty good! Is the position permanent, may I ask? If so, I congratulate you, I'm sure."

"Thanks, Mr. Caddock," said Douglas, getting up. "I guess it is permanent from what they said. The

old announcer is leaving town in a day or two; he's going to have a job out West. I'm glad if you thought I did well."

"Sure! You're all right, Raymond. Well, I guess I *will* turn in, if you're going upstairs, professor."

"Did you—er—pardon me, Dr. Hillary, did you happen to hear me announcing at WXL this evening? If you did, I'd be mighty glad of your candid opinion."

The doctor stepped in over the threshold and peered at the young man a little quizzically. Caddock went upstairs.

"Tell me," said the doctor, ignoring the question for the moment, "is this position of announcer at WXL a—a very important one? I mean, professionally, or as a matter of prestige, or even financially. Is the attainment of such a post regarded in the light of a personal triumph?"

Douglas found himself riding in a dead calm, the wind gone from his sails.

"Why, I don't know, doctor, as to that—exactly. I felt pretty proud, I'll admit, when the manager of the plant told me I could try it out. He said I did well, too, after we signed off, so I guess it's just about as good as permanent. The pay isn't so very much, but it might lead to something bigger."

"Life is so short," said the doctor crisply, "that it's rather perilous to devote oneself to aims that are contingent on something that *might* happen."

The young man's shoulders sagged a little lower.

"But if a feller keeps trying to do his best," he said desperately, "isn't there a pretty fair chance for him in most any line? I've heard you say you had quite a struggle yourself, sir, getting an education and climbing up to the top. You're a scholar and scientist, and it seems as though real intellectual men are a good deal like artists—they sort o' have the artistic temperament, as it were."

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped the doctor. "My own work and study have always been devoted exclusively to the exact sciences, and pure science has absolutely nothing to do with the artistic temperament, thank God!"

"But may I inquire if you did *your* best this evening, Raymond?"

"I certainly tried to, doctor."

"Then I'd give up that sort of work, my young friend, if I were you. I understand that there are many radio broadcasting stations in this country, and I suppose each one has one or more announcers.

"Well, sir, I have heard the names of a few such men who have attained some degree of success and fame. I fancy that their 'best' was of a somewhat higher order than yours.

"This evening, in the course of an hour, you grossly mispronounced such illustrious and familiar names as those of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, although you profess to be a musician and should be well informed about the great composers. You pronounced Tannhäuser so that it sounded to us like Tan-howser. Inexcusable!

"Young man, a radio announcer has no right to mispronounce a single word! He stands—in some degree—in the position of an educator, and is responsible to his public."

"But, doctor!" groaned Douglas, "I'm not a college man, you know. I certainly didn't know I got those names wrong."

"In Heaven's name!" cried the exasperated professor, "does a man have to go to college to learn how to look for a word in the dictionary? It should be part of every announcer's job, sir, to inform himself in detail—to a reasonable extent—upon every fact that he has to communicate to his audience, and verify every doubtful word or name by reference to a pronouncing dictionary. Then we might have no more announcements of *Vur-dye's Trovatorr* or *Mass-cag-ny's Cava-layria Rusty-cana.*"

"That would mean," sighed Douglas, gloomily reflective, "that a man would have to put in most of the day studying encyclopedias and library books, to do his work according to your ideas in the evening."

"Well, that's about the size of it," agreed the doctor cheerfully. "On the same principle I put in a week of constant study and research in order to lecture intelligently on a certain subject for one hour. But of course, you never would be expected to work as hard as that, Raymond; so you needn't be utterly despondent about it."

"Well, I'm much obliged for the jolts, doctor. I asked for your opinion, and I got it. I shall think of it a good deal, too. The people here in the house have always been pretty nice to me, and maybe I've been fed too many compliments.

"Right now I don't seem to be quite so popular, and—well, I'm sorry there had to be any trouble. I don't claim to be entirely in the right, and I wouldn't say that—er—that Miss Granby was altogether wrong. I—"

"Young man," said the professor, "I am not prepared, at midnight or any other time, to go into your personal problems or your personal psychology. I was never cut out to be a keeper in a menagerie."

VI.

"THIS is WXL, at Port Cardinal," said Douglas Raymond to the air, "owned and operated by the Port Cardinal Electrical Power and Equipment Corporation. We are broadcasting on a frequency of seven hundred and eighty kilocycles by authority of the Federal Board of Radio Commissioners. Please stand by!

"Good evening, radio neighbors!" he went on a moment later. "This is Douglas Raymond announcing. We are taking and giving great pleasure this evening in presenting an hour of chamber music by the Montezuma quartet.

"Now, friends and neighbors, I don't believe you really care a brass farthing who sponsors the Montezuma quartet, and the important thing is to jump right into the mighty fine music they're going to give us; but I think it's pretty decent of the Montezuma Art Fabric Company to organize this ensemble and pay for its time on the air and all the other incidental expenses, to say nothing of the salaries of such distinguished artists, just so that we music lovers can have sixty minutes of pure enjoyment.

"Like all great public benefactors, the Montezuma Art Fabric Company is very modest and self-effacing, and I'm sure they'd like to have their good deeds carefully hidden like a light under a bushel, but I'm going to drag them right out in the light of day for a moment and give them full credit.

"And I'm going to tell you, too—whether they like it or not—that the reason they can spend so much money for art and entertainment, is that they own and operate those big mills that are turning out rugs and tapestries, drapery and upholstery materials, and various decorative fabrics, after wonderful old Spanish, Mexican, and ancient Aztec designs. If you want to see the art and craftmanship of people whose taste in music is so exquisite, just ask your dealer to show you the Montezuma fabrics.

"And now! The quartet will render 'Une Nuit à Lisbonne,' that fascinating barcarolle by the French genius, Charles Camille Saint-Saëns."

Among the vast radio audience sat Dr. Hillary, with Mrs. Tredmore, Miss Stark, and Miss Bascom, in the Wistaria Lodge parlor.

"Extraordinary!" murmured the professor softly, while giving attentive ear to the first strains of the music. "I dare say that's the first time I ever heard a very nearly perfect pronunciation of Saint-Saëns's name over the radio."

"It's a name," whispered Miss Stark, "that I'd rather write than speak; in matters linguistic, I'm an arrant coward."

"Mr. Raymond pronounced other names and words with great authority and precision, I noticed," said Mrs. Tredmore. "And did you mark his delivery and enunciation?"

"Perhaps that accounts for the veritable library of dictionaries and books of reference in his room," said Miss Bascom. "He must have spent all his savings. There are works on elocution and public speaking, foreign lexicons, and all manner of strange little handbooks and things."

"Quite commendable, really!" breathed the professor, then raised a hand to turn his ear toward the loud speaker, thus tactfully indicating that he wished to give his entire attention to the music.

In the broadcasting studio of the Port Cardinal Electrical Power and Equipment Corporation, the radio manager, sitting by the control board, whispered hoarsely to Douglas.

"Say, Raymond, where'd you get that line o' ballyhoo?" he inquired.

"Was it pretty bad? I took a big chance on rewriting the stuff that the Montezuma people sent in. Their talk sounded like a pretty poor newspaper advertisement—awful old wise-cracks! I've been reading up a bit on salesmanship and advertising, and a big strong point is that you musn't bore the public.

"I think people must get tired of hearing the usual stuff about the sponsors of these hours, and only a few of the big features have specially prepared talk, or a special comedy man for their private announcer. I ought to have consulted you, Mr. Magnus, but you weren't around when we got here."

"Hm—well, the Montezuma folks can break their contract on a piece of impudence like that, Raymond—but I must say it sounded pretty good, at that. It's a toss-up whether their advertising manager will be mad or tickled to death."

"If you can read my writing," whispered Douglas, with an apologetic glance at the string quartet around the "mike," "you might give these few notes I've made the once over and tell me whether to take another chance."

"Huh! You must be working after hours!"

"I worked all night on this stuff," said the new announcer.

"I suppose your intentions are good!" exclaimed Magnus dryly, "but we're not spending money enough on this station, Raymond, to boost any man's pay a thousand or so a week. This is a shoestring proposition with us.

"But go as far as you like. Big broadcasters have special writers to dope out a line of patter for everything, but we couldn't do that. Keep it up, if nobody kicks, and—you might get fifty cents more a week after the board of directors has a meeting."

The somewhat disheartening conversation ended when Douglas rose to announce the next number of the quartet, and the manager went out.

He was back again near the end of the hour, looking anxious.

"The New York station's canceled the next hour," he said. "They've cut out the comedy for some important political meeting, but we don't want that up here. What have we got for such an emergency? We've got to get prepared for these jams!"

Dora Perkins had just slipped into the room.

"Oh, let Douglas sing some songs, and I'll play one or two numbers, Mr. Magnus!" she proposed gleefully.

"Douglas? Who's that? Oh, yes,

you mean Raymond here. Maybe we'll have to. I can't sing or speak a piece myself."

"Let him announce 'Signor Raimondo,' and let it go at that. He's got a lot of music here that he's used with the Orpheus boys."

"I can't announce myself," objected Douglas. "I'd have to hand myself a lot of bouquets, and I'd get so fussed that I couldn't sing."

"I'll announce you!" proposed Dora joyfully.

"Huh!" grunted the manager.

"Oh, Mr. Magnus, don't you like that?" she demanded, pouting a little and inclining her head to one side.

"Huh! We'll get a reputation for pulling a lot o' queer stunts over here."

"Oh, Mr. Magnus, couldn't I do the announcing—just once—if I'll be very, very careful and discreet—please, Mr. Magnus!"

She turned her radiant black orbs on the man, pursed her lips as though they were puckering for a good hearty cry, and he fidgeted and grew red.

"Aw, have it your own way, this time," he said grudgingly.

Douglas dismissed the Montezuma quartet with some subtle compliments for their sponsors, and then it was Dora's turn.

"Evenin', all you folks out there!" she chirruped, affecting a slight Southern drawl and accent. "This is Dora speaking. Dora Perkins—and I'm just as shy and simple as my name. I'm the little girl that plays the piano for you, you know! The great big announcer, Mr. Raymond, has been called out of the studio, and I'm just going to have a lot of fun while he's away. You won't tell on me, will you?

"You see, folks, somebody's got to announce the next feature, and I guess I'm pretty brave to stand up all alone before such a great big audience, don't you?"

"Cut it! Cut it!" wheezed Magnus. "We don't want no dog-gone monologue, Miss Perkins."

Apparently Dora did not hear him.

"And now we're going to hear a vur-ry distinguished musician and vocalist," she breezed on, "none other than the great Signor Raimondo; and I know you're all musicians, so you must know all about him. I'm too little and shy to tell you all about how handsome he is, with his curly hair and *great* broad shoulders, and *great* big chest like a bass drum, but you just listen and you'll hear his *great* big barytone voice in a minute.

"He's going to favor us with 'O Sole Mio,' right from spaghetti land, and *I'm* goin' to play for 'im. That's some honor for a little girl, don't you think. This is little Dora speaking—Dora Perkins!

"And oh—oh—oh! I 'most forgot! This is Station WXL, Port Cardinal, owned and operated by the Port Cardinal Electrical Power and Equipment Corporation—broadcasting on a frequency of seven hundred and eighty k-k-kilo—kilocycles. There! I'm all out o' breaf. Wouldn't it 'a' been perf'ly awful if I'd forgot that?"

"That 'll be all from you, for awhile, sister!" muttered Magnus. "You're a bird, an' no mistake! But the next time you get out of your cage let me know ahead o' time."

Over at Wistaria Lodge on the other side of the town a hush had fallen on the company assembled in the parlor.

It was broken by Ralph Atwood.

"Ugh—air! Air! Gimme air!" he gasped, affecting to crawl weakly toward a window. "And cut the switch, folks, quick! She might cut loose again. I'm going out—out into God's great outdoors."

"Hold on! I'm with you, Ralph," said Ottilie Eldom, making for the door. "If drooling Dora pipes up again, I won't be able to go to business to-morrow. My Lord, what are the Federal Radio Commissioners for?"

Mrs. Tredmore raised her eyebrows in disapproval. Miss Stark shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm sorry that we have these demonstrations now and then," whispered Miss Bascom apologetically, "but it's evident that Miss Perkins is not at all popular here now."

"I think she *was*—excessively silly," murmured Miss Stark.

"It's odd!" said Dr. Hillary, "but a number of equally irresponsible persons have made their fortunes—in very large figures indeed—by behaving just as idiotically as that before audiences."

Signor Raimondo was singing the Italian street song.

"I'll bet money I know that voice!" declared Hubert Quirk. "They're passing a ringer on us over at the works."

"Raimondo is certainly very suggestive of Raymond," said the professor.

"Really? I wonder!" breathed Mrs. Tredmore.

"How about it, Kitty?" asked Quirk. "Is that the boy wonder's voice?"

"I beg your pardon," said Kitty coldly; "I wasn't listening at all. I'd like to read, if you don't mind."

"Righto!" Quirk returned. "I can take a hint without a sock in the eye any time."

At the studio the manager leaned over the piano, on which Dora was playing the accompaniment to Douglas's song with the mechanical ease of an expert familiar with popular music.

"He'll do the announcing for the next song himself," he whispered, jerking his head toward Douglas, whose back was toward them.

"Pl-ee-ease!" crooned Dora, and flashed dangerous fireworks from the black eyes.

"No—nothing doin'!"

With her eyes twinkling back and forth, from the music on the rack to the surly face of the manager, she made an impudent, but bewitching, little grimace at him; then the full red lips were pursed up suddenly into a rosebud, suggesting this time not so much the approach of tears as an invitation to partake of sweets.

Magnus grinned, with the half contemptuous indifference of a seasoned man of mature years.

Being within easy reach, he extended an arm over the end of the piano and playfully twiddled his fingers under chin.

"Some little vamp!" he whispered.

She raised her eyebrows reprovingly.

The song ended, and Douglas turned to the pile of music beside him.

"Wonderful! Douglas," said Dora. "There ought to be a radio grand opera company organized around you, dear boy."

Then:

"Pl-ee-ease, Mr. Magnus!" she implored again. "Mayn't I—just once more?"

"Aw, go ahead!" he snarled. "I may get fired for it, but—aw, go on!"

So Dora announced all the numbers for that hour, and as she found many ways to vary and elaborate the patter, it was necessary for the singer to perform but five times.

The evening's program terminated with a broadcast of organ music from New York, and Dora waited for Douglas to sign off at eleven o'clock. She had been sitting in the reception room downstairs, but returned to the studio as the engineer was closing up the control board and setting things to rights.

"I'll put all this music away in the storeroom," said Douglas, and stepped out with the departing engineer.

The manager came back into the room.

"Well, you had your way, kid," he said, grinning.

"Awfully sweet of you, Mr. Magnus," returned Dora. "Awful sweet for such a cross ole bear!"

"Bears like honey," said Magnus.

She laughed softly, but glanced at him with a timid air.

"And could I talk to the folks—once in a great while—just now and then?" she whispered.

"Say, girly, you sure have got a way with you!" he muttered, and came over to her, reaching for her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Magnus!" she gasped.

"Oh, you kid!" he replied, and caught her round the waist.

"*Mister* Magnus! Oh, you mustn't! I—oh, you're a married man, Mr. Magnus!"

"So's your old man!" chuckled the manager, and squeezed her tightly as he set his lips on hers.

"Oh-o-o — Mr. Magnus!" she breathed, and grew limp, apparently about to faint.

There were steps in the hall outside, and Magnus let her go.

She hurriedly smoothed her crumpled frock and gave a little jab at her hat to set it straight.

"Oh, there you are, Douglas!" she exclaimed with a sigh of relief as the young announcer reappeared. "I was just complaining to Mr. Magnus that I was so tired of waiting for you. But I don't like to take that long walk in the dark alone at this time of night."

"You might 'a' gone home earlier," said Magnus.

"I guess I'm awfully timid, Mr. Magnus," she explained soberly. "I never like to be out alone after dark, even in Port Cardinal."

"Huh! Well, after this you'd better ring for a taxi," he suggested practically.

VII.

DOUGLAS RAYMOND, who was habitually a late riser, came down to the breakfast table of the early birds one morning, and there were polite expressions of astonishment at seeing him.

"Say, you look as though you'd slept in a chair, with all your clothes on!" exclaimed Ralph Atwood. "I don't mean to be personal, of course, but you have that fresh and breezy appearance."

"I sat in a chair all night, but I didn't sleep," Douglas said with a dull and glassy stare at the other man.

"My boy, what a spell of conscience!" cried Ralph. "I get that way, but never for all night. I can foot up all the columns of my evil deeds and strike a trial balance in about half an hour; and I always sleep better for it, at that."

Douglas was not moved to mirth.

"I was working," he explained soberly. "I'm going to ask Miss Bascom if she's got some back room or a corner in the basement where I can run a typewriter without keeping all the people awake."

"Ha, ha! You're off on another tack, eh?"

"No, not exactly. I'm a slow writer, and I'm just trying to make up all the continuity for the programs at the studio."

"Continuity! That's movie stuff, not radio!" declared Ralph, who was informed on all subjects.

"It's radio now," said Douglas. "From the time the announcer says 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,' right to the end of the program, he reads all his stuff off a script. And some of 'em have a new script for every program.

"Our studio doesn't have a continuity writer, like the big ones, so I'm trying to work it up myself. But—gosh! It begins to look as though I'd have to find some way of cutting out rest and sleep altogether."

A fresh surprise was afforded the boarders when Dora came tripping into the room, but she was bright and well rested.

"What's hit the house?" inquired Ralph. "Everybody getting wide awake and ambitious!"

"I'm getting to be a busy little person," said Dora winsomely. "I have a lot of writing to do now. Letters! I think every letter that is written to an artist, or any one in public life, should be answered carefully and conscientiously."

"Mash notes?" suggested Ralph.

"Indeed, no! No mash notes, Mr. Atwood. Applause! Very honest and sincere applause. Ever since the first night I tried announcing at the studio, the letters have been coming by the basketful. A—a couple of hundred people, I guess, have written to ask who the little Southern lady was. Isn't it rich?"

Douglas looked at her appealingly, moving restlessly in his chair.

"I'm getting poor Douglas positively worried," she went on. "Quite a lot of people have written in that they'd much prefer a woman for an announcer all the time. Lots of them wanted an autographed photograph, and some suggested that my picture should be sent to the Sunday papers so they would know how I looked."

"What fine weather we aren't having, isn't it?" said Ottile Eldom to Etta Upham.

Horace Sheldon, the cigar-store owner, stared at Dora with his frank appreciation of good looks.

"Hollywood 'll get you if you don't watch out, Miss Perkins," he said. "Better not start broadcasting any pictures of yourself, m' dear. Ziegfeld's scouts are on the lookout for the good ones all the time, and we—we need you here!"

"Oh, Mr. Sheldon!" Dora cried, and her face became suffused with sunrise blushes.

Douglas coughed violently as he came downstairs to start for the studio one evening, and halted, leaning on the newel post till he recovered from the paroxysm.

"Great Scott, man! You ought not to go out," protested Dr. Hillary, stepping out into the hall. "You've had this cold a week or more, I've noticed."

He touched the young man's forehead.

"Ha! I thought so; you're burning up with fever. I advise you to phone your studio that you can't come. Go to bed and send for a doctor at once."

Douglas laughed deprecatingly.

"I'm all right," he insisted. "Too much midnight-oil stuff. I've got to lay off working all night and not sleeping in the daytime, I guess. I went to a doctor and he said that I was trying to do too much and I'd have to quit. But sometimes you can't quit when things have got to be done."

He looked anxiously up the stairs, and when Dora came tripping lightly and airily from her room presently, he betrayed a slight impatience.

"We're going to be late, Dora," he said.

"Then why wait for me?" she demanded sharply. "Nobody asked you to! Too bad you couldn't phone for a taxi."

Dr. Hillary turned away with a shrug, and returned to the parlor.

"Those two might as well be married!" chuckled Henry Caddock. "They've started in on the married-life stuff a little prematurely, haven't they?"

"There's a certain type of woman," mused Hillary, "that seems to hold a certain type of man by a system of judicious bullying. I believe they relieve the strain at the danger point by reverting to excessive tenderness to establish the balance. I suppose Miss Perkins is—er—temperamental, as it's called."

"What that certain type of woman needs, professor," spoke up Ralph Atwood, "is a first-class, strong-arm wife beater. Say! I'd like the job of being married to that cutie for a day or two; she wouldn't have any trouble getting a divorce, and I'd stand for six months in the workhouse—if it wasn't in Delaware."

"Raymond's in really bad shape," said Hillary. "He might slip into pneumonia in a moment with that cold and his run-down condition. He has just about exhausted his vitality. Quite often a big, robust chap like that goes all to pieces suddenly; he's likely to collapse while he's fighting to keep on his feet."

Some of the boarders were out, but the remaining ones sat about the parlor and listened with obvious anxiety for the broadcasting of the local station.

Douglas was at the microphone when WXL came on the air, and his voice seemed to lack nothing of its usual strength, though there was a perceptible huskiness, and he coughed sharply from time to time.

"The Homeland Singers—your favorite mixed quartet—will entertain you for an hour," he announced after the usual forms had been disposed of. "This evening these admirable artists will build their program upon the theme of home and family.

"That comes pretty near the heart, friends, and it's not easily associated with anything commercial; yet I'm going to take a chance on mentioning that the hour is provided for you through the gracious courtesy of the Homeland Architects and Builders, Incorporated.

"That's about all I need to say. If you want to find out more about such generous friends of the radio audience, the Homeland Architects and Builders will be happy to send you some interesting and informative literature.

"And I would like to add that some commercial and industrial houses of today are not in business solely for purpose of piling up dividends for their stockholders. These friends of ours actually make it possible for young and impecunious people to start life with a real home of the sort that they ought to have. One of their slogans is this: 'You find the right girl—we'll find the right home for her.'

"Now the Homeland quartet will sing some very appropriate songs on the theme they have chosen. And you'll notice that their taste does not run to the sort of thing that's nothing but sugar and sentimentality. They're going to sing a special arrangement of one of Mrs. Browning's 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'—love! Tenderness!"

He was interrupted by an attack of coughing.

"The tenderness," he went on hoarsely, "that is not expressed in mere words or gestures, but that deeper, purer understanding that is the real radio of the realm of the spirit."

"Heck! He'll have me sniveling in a minute!" muttered Ottilie Eldom. "An old maid has feelings."

"Please give the Homeland Singers your undivided attention, friends," the announcer implored. "The message is a rare and precious one—as rare and precious as the spirit of the theme. Life needs so much of that spirit to—to make it endurable—that—"

"Poor fellow's coughing again," said Hillary.

"I—I present the Homeland Singers!" finished the announcer somewhat abruptly.

"I'm blamed if I know whether he was coughing or not!" exclaimed Ralph Atwood with uncommon gravity. "Seemed like he was all worked up with his own line of hokum—almost ready to have a good old cry.

"Hello!" he challenged. "What's the matter with Kitty?"

There was no response. Kitty Granby had risen and walked rapidly to the bay window, and as she stood with her back to the company there was a suspicious little movement of her shoulders that indicated some difficulty in breathing.

"Shut up! You poor fool!" whispered Henry Caddock, giving Ralph an ugly look.

"I must say that Raymond is acquiring a style!" exclaimed the pro-

fessor. "He has the faculty for absolute detachment—sinking himself in his part like an actor. That might be a mature man of considerable experience in the world, instead of the rather diffident chap we meet at the dinner table."

"Might it not be, doctor," murmured Miss Stark, "that the *real* man is speaking into the microphone? It's so difficult for us all to penetrate the masks that our friends and associates wear in public!"

"Why, that's an interesting postulate, I grant you," answered the professor.

VIII.

In the studio, Douglas found it necessary to sit down while he was not at the microphone, and the heat in his head seemed to increase. He dozed fitfully, nodding, then waking with a nervous start and springing up.

"Gee! You ought to go along home," said young Felix McMasters, the new engineer at the control board. "Why don't you let Miss Perkins take the mike for the rest of the time, Raymond?"

"I offered to," spoke up Dora petulantly. "But he thinks he owns that mike; he's afraid I'll do something to it, I guess."

"I'm all in, Felix," muttered Douglas. "If I get to sleep here, please shake me up when it's time to talk."

The evening wore on, and the last hour was given to the relaying of a program from the principal station of the network.

Douglas fell into a doze that came near to stupor. Felix slumped down in his seat at the board and wished that the hour would pass more quickly.

Dora came into the room and went over to Douglas.

"Sorry you feel so punk, old boy," she said softly, and ran her long fingers through his hair.

"Don't!" he said gruffly, starting up.

"Oh, Douggie," she protested, "don't be so mean! Have I been cross and nasty? Come, let's make up, Douggie!"

The manager came in suddenly.

"Huh! Am I supposed to knock before entering?" he demanded harshly. "What is this anyhow? Is this studio run for the purpose of petting parties all the time, or what?"

Douglas came wide awake and turned on the man.

"Seems to me you're butting in a good deal lately, Magnus!" he cried.

"Look here!" growled the manager. "I want to know where I get off. Has any one been playing me for a sucker? *You*—bright eyes! What sort of a line have you been handing me?"

The demon of mischief that lurked always behind the twinkling little eyes of Felix McMasters became suddenly dominant. With an uncontrollable impulse the young engineer switched on the studio microphone.

The party of boarders in the Wistaria Lodge parlor heard a jumble of confused sounds. Evidently the static forces were getting into action to destroy the perfect harmony of the last hour.

Then voices came sharply over the air:

"Oh, Mr. Magnus!"

"See here, you two! I'm not afraid of this man's town—I don't belong here anyhow. Talk don't hurt me! Now, I'm going to have a show-down. Come across, Dora Dumpling! Take your choice—him or me! Make it snappy! Do you want a puppy to play with, or a real man like me—like you said you did?"

"Cut that, Magnus!"

"Get out o' my way, Raymond! You're fired anyhow! Dora's the WXL announcer from now on—if she's playing straight with me."

In the parlor Miss Stark leaped up with a shrill scream.

"Oh! I heard—I plainly heard a blow!" she cried.

"Yeh. Somebody socked somebody in the beezer!" yelled Ralph Atwood enthusiastically.

"I—I think I'm going to faint," gasped Miss Stark.

A rattle, a series of clicks, and sweet harmonious music poured again from the loud speaker.

Miss Bascom got up and turned the switch.

"Really," she said, "I'm too nervous to hear any more. I'm all upset."

"Come on, Caddock; let's take a little walk," suggested Dr. Hillary casually.

"With you, professor," agreed Caddock, and the two hurried out with more than their wonted briskness.

"Where's the kid?" asked Ralph curiously, looking around the room.

"Kitty? I think she ran up to her room," said Ottilie. "I guess she was scared, too."

The front door banged again.

"Who was that?" demanded Miss Bascom nervously.

"I don't know," said Ralph. "Somebody went out to mail a letter, I reckon."

Hillary and Caddock took a walk only to the street corner, and there they hailed a taxi. They went directly to the WXL studio, and Hillary sprang out of the cab and ran into the building and up the stairs, closely followed by his friend.

"Gee—gosh! I'm glad you fellers have come!" cried Felix McMasters. "He's too heavy for me to carry downstairs. He's a mighty sick guy, I believe."

"Was there a fight here, McMasters?" asked Hillary, bending quickly over the unconscious form of Douglas Raymond on the floor.

"You can tell the cock-eyed world there was!" exulted Felix. "But this guy's sick; he isn't hurt. That feller Magnus was the hurt one! Old Doug here, he handed him a couple o' fadeaways, and put out his lamps with a single man's-size wallop. Dainty Dora, she got a taxi and took Magnus home in it. Why? Guess 'twas because he'd just promised her a job."

"Well, well, let's get this boy home, Caddock," said the professor.

The three lifted the sick man carefully and bore him out and down the stairs to the waiting cab. He resisted them for a moment, mumbling incoherently, but lapsed into his former stupor.

As they reached the cab and the chauffeur sprang out to open the door, a small, childish figure ran swiftly toward them out of the darkness.

"Douglas!" cried Kitty Granby piteously. "Oh, Douglas, what have they done to you?"

It was a week later when the attending physician said that Douglas was apparently out of danger. The fever was abated, and the patient rather suddenly became rational again.

He found, as he looked about his room with surprised glances, that some one was sitting beside the bed, lightly holding his hand.

"Why—why—hello, Kitty!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Hello, Douglas," she said.

"Gosh, you're a regular saint—to come here—to me," he murmured. "I wish I could tell you, Kitty—I wish—"

"I think you've told me—just about everything, Douglas," she said, "while you've been so ill here. I think I understand, anyway."

"I don't suppose there's much chance for me," he groaned. "I'd like to be forgiven, if you could do that for me!"

"I have done it, Douglas. I guess

I've suffered just as much as you have. And let's not worry. I didn't know you meant so much to me, Douglas. I don't care whether you make a lot of money or not. It really doesn't matter to me. I'll—"

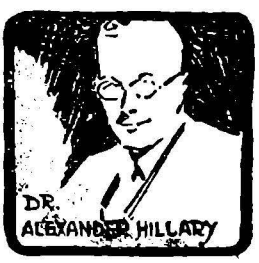
"Say, I guess we don't have to worry," he said with sudden bright spirit. "I remember now, there was a letter that day. And I answered it—I mailed the answer on my way to the studio — and I didn't tell — anybody about it, either.

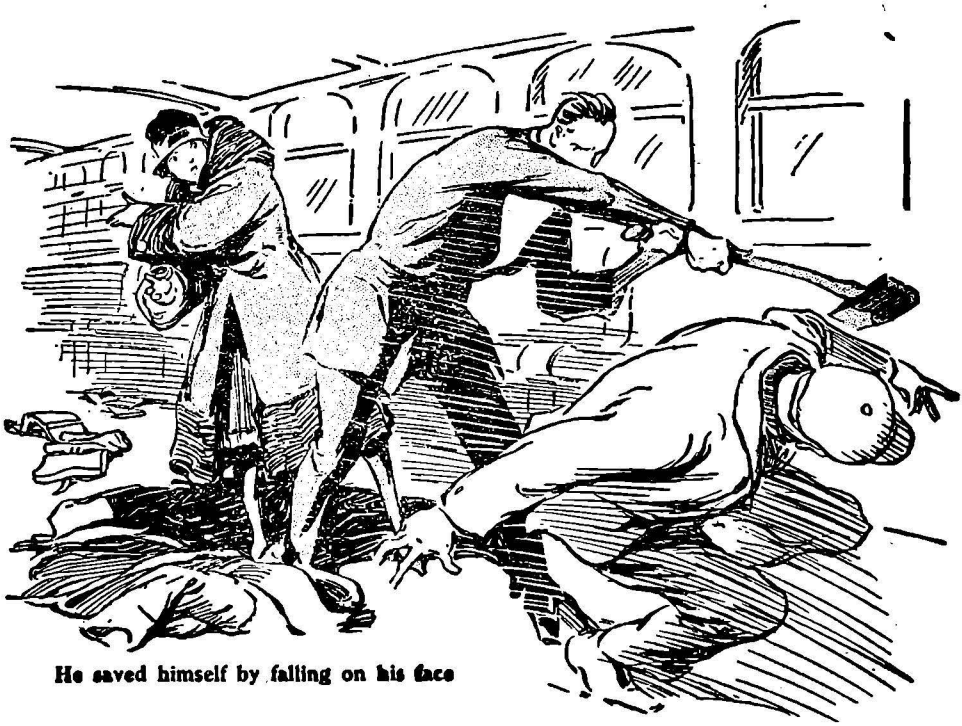
"The Eastern Coast Broadcasting Company offered me three thousand a year—to start with—to come and be a continuity writer and editor, and a special announcer for them. I accepted it right off. It's to begin next month, Kitty."

"Oh, Douglas!" she cried happily. "But that doesn't make any difference with me!"

"It 'll come in handy," he said practically. "I can't figure it out, but they said they had been listening to my stuff on the air, and liked it."

THE END





He saved himself by falling on his face

The Long Lost Ferryboat

Just an unromantic ferryboat paddling across a fog-blanketed harbor is a strange setting for hectic adventures.

By FRED MacISAAC

IN Boston harbor there is a large island which the Puritan settlers called Noddle's because a person of that name was in the farming business there, but now it is a thickly settled suburb and officially known as East Boston.

Something like a hundred thousand people reside there, mostly in poverty, but there remain a few attractive residential sections. Anyway, you have your choice of visiting the place by crossing the ferry, or shooting under the harbor by trolley car through what Bostonians proudly inform you was the first harbor tunnel dug in America.

Harold Greenough had a dinner engagement in East Boston on a dank, dark February evening when the celebrated east wind was blowing, which, as he observed when he left his office in a huge candy factory on Atlantic Avenue, had driven in a heavy fog from the sea.

As it was a long walk to State Street where he could get a tunnel car, and the North Ferry was close at hand, after a second's hesitation, he decided upon water transportation.

Although his coat collar was turned up and his hat pulled down over his forehead enough of his face was visible to indicate that he was a pleasant-looking youth of twenty-six or seven

years, and by his stride and the set of his shoulders he was not a weakling.

He paid the sum of one red cent, passed through the turnstile, and walked down the ferry drop to the waiting boat. He was the last passenger; behind him the iron gates dropped with a clang.

At once he realized that the fog was thicker than he had supposed, for he distinguished only dimly, as he walked toward the warm cabin, the outline of trucks and wagons.

The fog, in fact, was so dense that the boat captain up in the pilot house was becoming nervous. For an hour or two he had been crossing with difficulty, and now that night had come to reënforce the fog he was not too confident of finding his berth upon the East Boston shore, although the harbor is not more than a third of a mile wide at this point, and he could hear quite plainly the boom of the bell upon the ferry-house across the stream.

While it would not seem to require great skill to steer a course by a bell, fog has a way of deceiving as regards the location of sound, and Captain Watson, although he had a license as a boat captain, was a political appointee.

As he grasped the spokes of the wheel he was still hot from an encounter with the superintendent, whom he had advised to suspend service until the fog lifted, and who had instructed him to take his boat out or resign. So he rang the bell to the engine-room and pulled out of the slip.

Greenough ensconced himself in a corner of the passenger cabin and opened his newspaper with the expectation of reading the sporting news before the boat reached the other side. He glanced at his fellow passengers, who numbered only a dozen, for the tunnel was getting most of the business nowadays.

There was an old Italian woman with a huge bundle, several drunken longshoremen, two long-bearded Russian Jews, two tough youths who smoked cigarettes in defiance of the "No Smoking" sign over their heads, and a young woman in the opposite corner who wore a fur coat, a pot hat, and buried her face in her coat collar.

Greenough read the sporting news, the editorial page, chuckled at the comics, and was well into the news sections before he realized it was about time that they had reached the other side.

"I suppose the fog is delaying us," he said to himself, then returned to his newspaper. A couple of minutes later there came a crash and a jar which caused his head to bang against the wall, and made the big chandelier clang and rattle. With one accord all in the cabin rushed for the forward deck.

From the brightly lighted cabin to the darkness of the foggy night was such a contrast that Greenough could not use his eyes for a moment, but he saw then that there was a huge black object looming up on the starboard side from which the ferryboat was backing away like a cat from a savage dog.

The foreign element was jabbering noisily and in fright as a deck hand passed along to calm their fears.

"We just grazed against a big schooner," he said. "In this fog you can't tell where you're going."

"Aren't we almost at East Boston?" asked a clear, sweet voice from a position about a foot behind Greenough.

"Yes, marm," replied the deck hand. "We ought to be there now."

One of the tough youths leaned around Greenough to see who had spoken, but he could not get a good look at her, so he contented himself with sneering:

"Bet she wishes she was in an automobile."

The girl edged more closely to Greenough.

"Hadn't you better return to the cabin?" he asked in a low tone. "It's warm and comfortable and quite safe."

She nodded, still he could not see her face. "Thank you, I shall."

II.

He held the door open for her, which act of gallantry drew a rude laugh from the young men behind him, but he affected to ignore them. As the girl passed in she said softly:

"Won't you come in, too?"

"Why, yes, thank you," he replied. She returned directly to her corner while he felt privileged to follow, and close inspection of her back revealed that she was slim and graceful. She seated herself and, as he hesitated, looked up brightly.

"Er, I don't like to presume," he said.

"Please sit down," she pleaded, and he saw that her face was piquant and pretty, but her eyes were frightened. It was a thin, dark face with a delicate profile, a dainty chin, and lips that were almost like a cupid's bow, although there was no lip pencil to shape them so, and her eyes were wide and brown.

It was a sweet, appealing face of the type that young men admire upon magazine covers, but are rarely fortunate enough to meet elsewhere.

He seated himself with great promptness.

"I've been frightened to death for a quarter of an hour," she confessed. "These people are so unpleasant, and those boys are ruffians. When you came in I decided to appeal to you if one of them came near me."

There is nothing so flattering as to be selected by a pretty girl as a potential life saver, and if Greenough had been a cat he would have purred.

"I'm glad I don't look as bad as you seem to think the others do," he stammered. "I certainly am anxious to be of service to you."

"Oh, I suppose they are harmless enough," she laughed. "I'm not alarmed now. Only, why are we half an hour crossing half a mile of water?"

"I should say, offhand, because the captain doesn't know his business, but I'm glad he doesn't, because if we made a routine passage I shouldn't be privileged to talk with you. I'm grateful to him, as a matter of fact."

"Really?" she smiled. "Perhaps you won't be so grateful if he runs into something and sinks the boat."

Greenough smiled back. "If it enabled me to be of real service to you I might welcome the opportunity."

"Thank you very much. I am willing to take your service on faith."

Before he could reply, the deck hand, now carrying a lantern, walked through the cabin.

"Aren't we nearly there?" the girl asked anxiously.

"I don't know, miss," said the man, stopping in front of her. "Fact is I don't know where we are, and the old man don't either. We've sailed far enough to make the pier a dozen times."

"Where are we going?" demanded Greenough.

"Round in a circle, I guess. We nearly rammed the Cunard wharf once, and that was the nearest we came to the slip. We've been up alongside one of the vessels at the Charlestown Navy Yard, and we've slid by about every craft at anchor in the upper harbor. Seems like we'll get to the slip pretty soon 'cause we've found everything else."

With an uneasy grin he continued on his way, while the pair sat in silence for a few moments thinking over the information. Even Greenough was not entirely without anxiety now.

"I wish I had taken the tunnel," she said nervously. "I never travel by ferry, and I don't know why I selected a night like this for a voyage."

"Fate," he replied. "Isn't it strange that while we are sailing around in a fog, a hundred feet below us people are riding on dry land through a brightly lighted passage impervious to

wind and sea and mist. Though, of course, we are perfectly safe here."

"I'm not so sure," she replied. "In my opinion that sailor was scared."

"Let's call things by their right names," he laughed. "A ferryboat deck hand is not a sailor nor apt to be a hero. Now, I am not frightened."

"But then you are a hero, I suppose."

"I didn't mean that, but I can't imagine danger on a ferryboat crossing Boston harbor. I'm not annoyed by the delay though I am due at a dinner party. I don't know when I've had such a pleasant experience."

"Meaning me?" She arched her pretty eyebrows.

"Young lady, you guessed it the first time."

"Thank you. Just the same I hope you don't think I am in the habit of chatting with strangers."

"Nor are you in the habit of getting lost with a ferryboat. This is an exceptional occasion."

"I think we had better be outside on deck in case anything should happen. It's strange none of the other passengers have returned."

"Personally I prefer this nice warm cabin without their company; but if you want to go exploring, let's."

A chill blast met them as they opened the door, but they braved it and passed outside and saw no diminution in the denseness of the fog. From the direction of the forward gate came the sound of voices proving that the passengers were clustered there.

They made out the shape of a huge truck near by, but the pilot house from which the captain was misdirecting the boat was invisible.

From the fog came vague and muffled sounds, the mournful hooting of horns, the far-away toll of a bell.

"I can understand how our skipper got lost," Greenough said. "I should hate to navigate under these conditions."

She shivered. "Wouldn't it be terrible if we ran into one of the big vessels at anchor in the stream."

"Oh, no. We are moving very slowly, and the guard rail around our hull would prevent serious damage."

"I am very hungry and my people must be about through dinner. I wish there were a dining saloon on board."

"No such luck, though there may be a few full dinner pails among the deck hands. Do you mind if I smoke a cigarette?"

"No, not if you'll give me one."

"I beg your pardon for not suggesting it. To tell the truth, one never knows if a girl will be flattered or offended if a fellow offers her a cigarette."

"I don't smoke much," she admitted. "But to-night it's something to do, and perhaps my nerves need steadying."

"It's funny we can't see any lights," he mused. "There should be vessels near enough for that. Look here, you won't be frightened, but I think I ought to get out a couple of life preservers. This captain doesn't know where he is going, and Lord knows where we shall bring up. It's just an unnecessary precaution like life insurance, or making a will."

"You're not going to leave me alone?"

"No, indeed. You are going to help me find them."

III.

FORGETTING the cabin regulations against smoking they returned to the cabin and began a search for the life belts, which they found under the long bench that ran the length of the big room.

The cork jackets were piled upon one another and packed so tightly they were hard to pull out, but it was not until she held one in her hands that she realized fully their significance.

"Oh!" she wailed. "I don't want to go into that water; it's so cold and black, and—"

"And wet," he finished for her. "Don't be alarmed, you won't go into the water; but these might as well be handy as wedged in there."

They were so occupied that they had not observed that the door had opened, but now they heard a jeering laugh.

"For the love of Mike, look at the poor sap raiding the life preservers," exclaimed one of the young ruffians previously noticed. "Harold, you're a wise guy, but this ain't no ocean liner. Don't worry, baby doll; and don't let the goof you're with scare you. Bill and me won't let the ship sink."

He reached under the seat and jerked out half a dozen belts.

"There's a couple of Russians out there scared to death," he chuckled, "and me and my pal is going to save their lives by selling them life preservers. Say, Bill."

"Yah?" inquired Bill, who stood with his hands in his pockets watching his friend work.

"What's the idea of selling only two of these? Let's go into business. We'll make Harold Lloyd, here, pay for his cunning little life belts, too."

Greenough, who had been writhing under this badinage, yet who did not wish to get into an altercation with the fellows couldn't keep his temper any longer.

"Say," he roared. "If you address another word to this lady or myself I'll—I'll—well, don't you do it," he finished rather lamely.

"That settles you, Harold," replied the seller of life belts grimly. "I was only fooling before, but now you cough up. Them two life belts cost you ten bucks. That so, Bill?"

"That's right, Tommy," agreed his companion with a wide, toothy smile.

"You'll have to collect your pay by force," Greenough declared, wild with anger.

"Harold Lloyd ain't got the price," jeered Thomas. "You picked a piker, lady, and now you got to pay for him. Let's see, s'pose you pay in kisses, that's fair. A little kiss for Bill and a soul kiss for me."

"You two hoboes get out of here," ordered Greenough.

The pair glanced around; an empty cabin, the boat's crew busy on deck, a pretty girl, and a young man who had made her acquaintance, as they knew, since boarding the ferry.

They were the type who would fight for love of it, for a plate of beans or a cigar, and they had gone so far now they couldn't back down with the girl regarding them scornfully.

The two men closed in; evidently there was nothing sporting about them, and Greenough would have to take them both on at once.

"Don't you fight them," exclaimed the young woman. "They're not worth it."

"It looks as though I would have to," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "Watch your chance and run out on deck."

"Head off the frail, Bill," warned Tommy. "I'll settle this bimbo."

Greenough threw off his coat and flung it behind him. He crouched and waited for the rush. Although he was not a boxer he had some knowledge of the art of self-defense, and he had powerful arms and shoulders.

Tommy came in on his toes, light as a cat, he feinted with his right, then jabbed with his left and caught Greenough with much force between the eyes. Greenough swung with his right and missed, then Tommy caught him with his right as he was off balance and floored him.

"Sock him, Tommy," yelled his friend. The girl made a rush toward the forward door, but stopped when Bill opened his arms wide and headed her off.

Greenough was on his feet in an instant, caught another jab on his cheek, but this time got home with a wallop which landed on the point of the chin and should have knocked Tommy out, but didn't.

"Get into this, Bill," called Tommy. "He ain't so soft."

Still keeping an eye on the girl, Bill edged in ready to crash his fist against the side of Greenough's head at the first opportunity.

"Oh, you're unfair!" cried the girl, whose eyes were blazing, and who was wringing her hands in agony at her impotence. Her eyes roved, and suddenly she began to back toward a certain spot on the wall. Tommy delivered at that instant a crashing right which sent Greenough flying.

It was Bill's chance, and he plunged in with both fists swinging, but he missed Greenough because that youth had tripped over his own overcoat on the floor and fell backward. As he picked himself up the two antagonists were rushing, and suddenly he found the girl at his side.

"Here," she exclaimed. "Take this."

"This" was a service ax which had been hanging in a case on the wall, the same sort of deadly weapon which old Richard Cœur de Lion was wont to use to crush the steel helmets of the Saracens.

Maddened by pain, infuriated at the injustice of two against one, Greenough grasped the ax handle eagerly and swung the weapon around his head.

The two assailants were coming so fast they had trouble arresting their progress, and the steel hissed through the air so close to Tommy's head that he only saved himself by falling flat on his face.

The caveman rushed at Bill, who saw in his eye that he meant business, and who sprinted at top speed for the door. Tommy was on his hands and knees when Greenough turned on him.

"Hey," he squealed. "Enough. I'm through. For Pete's sake don't swing that thing."

But Greenough had run amuck, and the ax was descending. It sank an inch deep into the floor where Tommy had been, but that warrior was halfway to the door now, whimpering with fright.

"My Lord," gasped the youth. "I almost killed him." The reaction left him so weak he sank limply upon the seat. "I believe I must have been crazy for a minute," he sighed apologetically. "To think I went after an unarmed man with an ax."

But the girl had no remorse. "Unarmed man! Two yeggmen against one boy," she exclaimed. "I almost wish you had hit him."

"What must you think of me?" he pleaded.

"Think of you?" she repeated. "I think you're wonderful. And who gave you the ax I'd like to know."

IV.

He gazed at her, and a slow smile crossed his face. She smiled back, then both began to laugh.

"I don't think they will sell any life preservers to-night," he said. "Just the same, it isn't my fault I'm not a murderer. You aren't afraid of me, I hope."

"I should say not. I would have been ashamed of you if you had been afraid to swing that ax. I want you to understand that I have a temper myself."

"You certainly saved me from a terrible beating."

"I think you would have beaten them both."

Greenough laughed. "I had the chance of a jack rabbit with a couple of bulldogs. I'm no pugilist."

"I think you are splendid," she assured him, laying her little hand on his arm for emphasis. He took the hand and pressed it gratefully. For a moment she did not withdraw it, and when she did she was blushing.

"I don't even know your name," she said. "And I am sure that you don't know mine."

"Harold Greenough," he informed her. "My card."

She giggled as she took it. "Your name is Harold," she declared. "That's what they were calling you."

"I didn't choose it. I had a rich uncle Harold, and mother named me after him. He left all his money to charity."

"Cecilia Fitzgerald, at your service," she smiled. "Now we are properly introduced, let's see if we have any mutual friends. First put that ax back in the rack. I'm sure you won't have to use it again."

Obediently he lifted the barbarous weapon and set it back in its holster on the wall, then seated himself beside her upon the long bench.

"Isn't it curious," he began, "that two people can live all their lives in a small area, people who would be congenial, who appeal to each other, at least you do appeal to me—and meet only by accident? Perhaps we might never have met if it hadn't been for this fog."

What she might have replied he never learned, for there came a terrific crash, and both were hurled from their bench and landed in a heap on the floor, her fall broken by dropping upon his legs. At the same instant the electric lights went out, leaving them in terrifying darkness.

"Good Lord, are you hurt?" he demanded.

"No-o; but what happened? I'm sure we are sinking."

"Where are those life preservers?" he muttered, feeling with his hands for the bench where they had been sitting, and upon which he had placed the life belts.

"Please, Harold, get me out of here, this minute. Oh, I don't want to drown," she wailed. Her voice guided him to her, his arms went reassuringly around her, and suddenly he went mad and kissed her.

Cecilia did not resist, she clung to him piteously. Then the boat, which had careened, righted itself and almost toppled them over.

"Come," he cried. With his arm about her waist he ran her to the forward door, which, when he opened it, admitted shrieks and cries from the terrified passengers bunched outside, frightened whinnies from horses, and angry shouts from truck drivers.

But ahead of them were many lights, and Harold laughed loudly from sheer relief.

"It's all right, darling," he declared. "The idiot of a captain blundered into the East Boston slip by sheer luck and rammed the side piling. The shock put out the lights, but there is the ferry house and we're safe."

The boat was crawling in, and already the wharf hands were causing the mooring chains to rattle. Cecilia, her courage restored, remembered what had happened in the cabin. Primly she removed the protecting arm which still encircled her waist.

"I'm sure I don't know what you must think of me," she said starchily. "I was so terrified I forgot myself, just as a drowning man clings to a straw, you know."

"Oh," he ejaculated, "so that's all you think of me!"

"But I don't really know you, Mr. Greenough."

"Awhile back you called me Harold."

"But I was almost out of my mind."

"I see," he said glumly. They stood side by side in the dark until the gates clanged, auto engines roared, and the tramp of passengers running up the gangways notified them that they might go ashore.

"What a relief to be safe ashore!" she exclaimed with a shy side glance, to see how he was taking her new mood. "I'll never, never, never set foot on a ferryboat again."

"I'm glad we were together in the fog," he asserted as they moved up the drop. "I wish we were still aboard. I don't want our party to end."

"You may come to see me some time," she invited. "You are really

very nice, and I don't know what I should have done without you. I must take a taxi now. I'm very late."

They had emerged into the street. Greenough shot a glance around and suddenly guffawed.

"What's the matter?" she queried. "Is that the way you treat my invitation. Are you laughing at me?"

"Good Lord, no," he gasped. "Look! Gaze around! My dear girl, we are not in East Boston. We are back where we started from. The idiot got turned completely around and stumbled into the slip from which we sailed an hour ago.

"Oh," she wailed. "Whatever shall I do? I can't possibly go aboard that boat again."

"I call this luck," he exclaimed. "Blow East Boston. Miss Fitzgerald, telephone your family what happened. Tell them you will come home by tunnel later, and let us go to dinner together."

She hesitated, smiled, and was lost. "I shouldn't. But I do feel as if I had known you such a long time. And I am hungry, Mr. Greenough."

"Please call me Harold."

"Not yet," she replied. "I haven't known you long enough."

"How long have you got to know me?"

"Well, maybe, after we have dined, in an hour or two. Perhaps then."

"It's a promise," he cried. "Hey, taxi! Hotel Touraine."

THE END

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Smallest Electric Motor in the World

THE smallest electric motor in the world was made, and is owned by Emanuel Kahm, an electrician and watchmaker of Friend, Nebraska, who spent his spare time for the last three years cutting out its parts and putting them together.

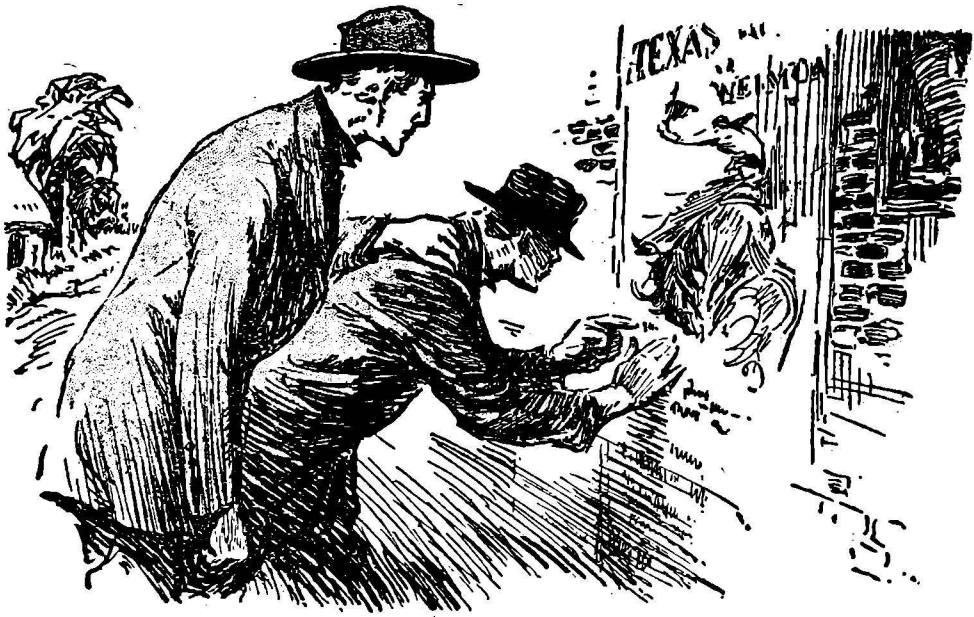
The machinery run by the motor and the motor itself are mounted on a block of wood that is two and a half inches long and an inch and a half wide. The belt is made up of strands from No. 60 cotton thread, and it makes four hundred revolutions per minute.

The tiny motor has fifty-eight parts made of gold, silver, copper, brass, and iron, and is on the conventional lines of standard motors. It is held together by nineteen screws, the smallest of which has two hundred and sixty threads, and the largest two hundred and twenty threads.

Many of the parts, especially eight-fiber washers and the binding posts, are so small that they cannot be seen by the naked eye, and Kahm used a jeweler's glass in making and assembling the parts. The motor is half as high as a ten-cent piece, and it weighs one hundred grains, or about one-quarter of an ounce.

It took five feet of wire to wind the armature, and three feet for each electric field, making a total of eleven feet. A test of the motor showed that it can run for a considerable time without overheating. The inventor estimates that the labor involved in making this tiny motor would be worth one hundred and fifty dollars, not counting the materials.

Franklin S. Reynolds.



Lance read aloud the lettering on the poster

Hawaiian Heels

In California Lance Houston owned a palace, but in Honolulu his chief concern was finding his next meal

By RICHARD BARRY

Author of "The Long Arm of the Big Gun," "Worth Millions," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IF you were present when a murder occurred, what would you do?

Lance Houston had to face that question with startling suddenness one morning, around four o'clock, in the Cross-Eyed Duck speakeasy.

Lance happened to be a cowboy movie star, with no bad habits, who had a friend named Slum Ritey who was an extra waiter in the Cross-Eyed Duck café. They had come together from the Lazy Y ranch in Wyoming to seek their fortunes in Hollywood, and Lance had prospered quickly, while Slum had remained with his foot still on the lowest rung of life's ladder.

As a bit of kindness to Slum, that night Lance called up one of his former leading ladies and dressed himself up in flashy clothes and went to occupy Slum's table in the Cross-Eyed Duck to lend Ritey some prestige and make his job solid with the management. Of course Lance took his revolver and wore it in his hip pocket.

A jealous and drunken wife at a near-by table happened to get hold of it and shoot her husband and another woman with it.

Joe Bloom, Lance Houston's personal manager, was in the drinking place at the time; and with the help of Slum Ritey he hustled Lance up to a little room at the top of the house. There the three men sat and worried, and Joe planned.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 4

For this shooting incident, though Houston was really blameless, could be expected to hurt his motion picture reputation, and probably end his highly-paid career as a star.

Joe Bloom decided that the best thing Lance could do was to skip out to the South Seas, while Joe would stay behind and placate the district attorney, and tell the curious public that Houston was away "on location" making a motion picture in the Arabian desert.

Slum Ritey got the three of them out through a secret exit of the speakeasy which led to a garage. There they found a fast car, which Joe appropriated, and used to get Lance's clothes, and to take him to the first boat sailing from San Pedro harbor.

Since there was no ship going to the South Seas, he put Lance on the Calawaii, sailing at eight o'clock in the morning for Hawaii, with Houston to be known as "Jefferson Q. Denver," president of the Sure Tire Rubber Company, out for an annual tour of inspection of his rubber plantations in the South Seas.

At the last minute, Lance managed to take Slum along as his secretary.

And Joe Bloom, three hours later, was in conference with the general manager of the West Coast Studios of the Noted Stars. Before them lay the first editions of the afternoon newspapers. Among the headlines that appeared in them were some that read, "Film Actor Wanted in Hollywood Murder," "Lance Houston's Gun Kills Two," "Police Hunting Lance Houston," and "Houston Present, but Not Guilty, Say Noted Star Officials."

CHAPTER V (*Continued*).

AT THE LAST SECOND.

THE general manager, Mr. Hazenwein, was in no amiable mood. "You certainly pulled a boner, that time, Joe," he complained. "Why didn't you talk with me first?"

The nervous little man shrugged his shoulders. "No time to talk to anybody. I had to think quick and act quicker."

"You acted quick, that's clear," observed the sententious Mr. Hazenwein, "but there's no sign of your thinking."

Joe shrugged his shoulders and rather lamely countered, "I think it a smart move, myself."

Mr. Hazenwein exploded. "A smart move—for our second best box office pull and the sixth ranking star in the industry to run out like a pickpocket from a cheap murder in a low dive.

"What good will it do for us to say that he's innocent? What good will it do for to have him proved innocent? He looks as guilty as hell this minute. We'll never be able to wipe it off him.

"It's two to one the old man will cancel his contract before the week is out. Wait until he hears from the women's clubs in the Middle West. Wait until you get the returns from the Exhibitors' Exchange."

"But—" Joe could get no further.

Mr. Hazenwein intercepted. "If he had stayed here and faced the music like a man, we could probably have fixed it so he wouldn't have been locked up at all, and the worst of it would be over to-day; but now this stupid play of yours has kicked the bucket. I thought Lance had some sense. How did you get him to fall for it?"

"He'll do anything I say," Bloom asserted defiantly. "Besides, I think you're wrong. There's no chance of Lance being implicated in this murder. Too many witnesses to prove what happened."

"That isn't going to stop the district attorney from chasing him, as if he was the only one implicated. Don't you know the primary is only ten days off, and that he's up for reëlection?

"It isn't going to do him any good to pester a poor drunken, crazy widow of a half-time cameraman. That won't get him anywhere. But it sure will make him a big boy with the gallery if

he goes out boldly and chases down the great Lance Houston, unawed by wealth, undeterred by influence, in the interests of the people prosecuting the ends of justice.

"Bah!" Mr. Hazenwein seemed thoroughly disgusted as he added in a lame voice, "Chasing Lance Houston will be duck soup for the district attorney."

"But think of the publicity," Joe Bloom stoutly maintained. "If Lance had stayed and faced the music, it wouldn't have lasted but two or three days. Now, we can string it out over weeks. It ought to be worth several million dollars. Look how Aimee McPherson cashed in on a deal just like this."

"Yes," sourly replied Mr. Hazenwein, "and see where chasing publicity landed Earl Carroll."

"Nothing like that," Bloom protested.

"I warn you," Mr. Hazenwein concluded, "the old man will wash his hands of this. Just for taking this on the run, Lance will lose his contract, and if the Noted Stars break with him, he's done. No other company in the industry will dare take him up after what has happened."

Unaware of the trend of events in Hollywood, Jefferson Q. Denver ate a very hearty luncheon at the captain's table on the Calawaii that noon. He was accompanied by a shy, and rather awkward little man, whom he introduced as his secretary, Mr. Ritey. The captain, charmed by Jeff Denver's vigorous and wholesome personality, asked, "Is this a business trip, Mr. Denver?"

"Kinda," Lance responded. "I'm goin' rubberin' in the vicinity of the South Seas."

He added quickly, "That's my business, cap. I'm president of the Sure Tire Rubber Company." He looked to his secretary for corroboration. "Eh, Slum?" he asked.

Mr. Ritey gravely nodded his head in affirmation.

CHAPTER VI.

HUNTING "JACK."

TWO weeks later a pair of woebegone cowboys stood in an upper front room of the Moana Hotel and looked out drearily on the Hawaiian landscape. The rain was falling in torrents. Even the scarlet hybiscus flowers, which were proof against almost anything, drooped. Against the gray of the heavens, the vivid green of the foliage stood out boldly.

"I can't make out why there's no word from Joe," said Lance Houston, who was wearing the nearest to commonplace clothes he possessed, a snappy pepper-and-salt suit.

"Must be dead," Slum responded.

"I cabled him seven times, every day straight, now, for a week. How does he expect us to go into the South Sea business unless we got passage money? If he doesn't come through by to-morrow, reckon we'll have to ship somewhere as the crew."

"We ain't exactly sailors, Lance," Slum objected. "Remember you had to stay in bed half the time with seasickness coming here."

"You had nothing on me, Slum. Seems like I never went on deck but there you was hangin' over the rail feedin' the fishes."

"Funny," Slum grunted. "You'd think that after the way I rid Fanny, my old trick mule, all through the rodeos from Yakima down to Albuquerque, I never would get seasick, nohow."

Lance changed the subject back to the one uppermost in his mind. "I would not have thought Joe Bloom would run out on me this way. Sendin' me out here across the Pacific Ocean with only ninety-four dollars in my pants. I'm certainly in some squeeze

here, registered at this eighteen-dollar-a-day joint as Jefferson Q. Denver with board overdue, and not a nickel to pay it."

Slum suggested dryly. "Guess you'll have to hock one of your rubber plantations, Jeff."

"I suppose so," Lance responded, "or put up some of my Sure Tire stock. Better go downstairs and offer some of it to the clerk for our board bill."

A knock at the door startled them. Lance called in a loud, actorlike tone, "Answer, Mr. Ritey, and see who it is."

Slum opened to confront a Chinese bellboy in a flowing lavender housejacket who bowed low in a politeness that seemed rather sinister, as he held out a silver plate on which reposed a neatly folded document. As Slum took this, the Oriental brought up with his other hand a book with an attached pencil. He offered it, salaaming as he said, "Receipt, plees."

Slum wrote in the book the initials, J. Q. D. The Chinese withdrew bowing.

Lance tore open the missive. Frowning, he read:

> The management of the Moana Hotel regretfully informs Mr. Denver that its rules unalterably require payments from guests not later than the end of each week. Unless this rule is complied with, it will be necessary to ask for your room at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon.
>
> For your information it may be added that more extended credit may be established through the submission of recognized identifications, and if this is contemplated we request that you communicate at once with our credit department on the mezzanine floor.

Lance dropped the paper disgustedly.

"What's it say?" asked Slum.

"Read it."

Slum picked up the crumpled letter and affected to look at it. "I can't read no foreign languages," he said. "This here must be Hiwayan."

"It's American."

Slum regarded his old bunky reproachfully. "You know my governess only brought me up to read French. What's it say, Lance?"

"It says, pay up or get out in twenty-four hours."

"Why," exclaimed Slum, "that sounds like Mrs. McGinnis's boarding house in Prairie Hole."

"The same thing," Lance assented. "Only the rate's different. We're payin' eighteen dollars a piece a day here." He took out his pncil and began to figure.

After a few minutes of labored computation he looked up to his secretary and announced, "We're just two hundred and fifty-two dollars behind the board. What are you going to do about it, Slum? If you're worth your oats as a secretary you gotta find that dough for me before to-morrow at three o'clock."

Slum yawned. "Sure, mebbe I can stick up somebody." He looked insinuatingly at the huge elk's tooth, mounted in gold, on whose top reposed a two-karat diamond, which was dangling from Lance's watch chain.

Lance read the glance correctly. He took out the watch, an octagonal thin affair of platinum. "I get you, Slum. Reckon we'll have to ramble out on a hunt for Uncle Ike. Mebbe he'll spot us a week's board and keep this Christmas present from the boys on the Noted Stars lot, so's to forget what we owe him."

"It's a tough break," Slum stoutly contended, "but mebbe you'll hear from Mr. Bloom by to-morrow."

"And mebbe not," Lance replied. "If he didn't answer none of my wires the last week, what's goin' to make him come across now?"

"Mebbe the sheriff's hot after you and they're watchin' him so he dassent make a move toward ye for fear they'll find out where ye are."

"Dunno," Lance calmly commented. "I sure was a dumb-bell when I start-

ed to put on this fugitive-from-justice act. Come along; let's mosey and locate Uncle Ike. If he hasn't a hangout in Honolulu, it 'll be the first town I knew his three balls to miss."

When the two emerged from the pillared entrance to the Moana, the skies were breaking. The rain had ceased. It had been a tropic storm, fierce in intensity for an hour and now to be followed by a period of sweltering sunshine. As they walked out into the streets it seemed as if every tree and shrub had come suddenly to life with color.

Accustomed as they were to the brilliance of California flowers, still they could not be oblivious to the superior lavishness of these; for here was a natural constant tropical rainfall that raised the vegetation to the supreme height of luxuriance.

Ponciana, Bougainvillæa, hybiscus, oleander, bronzed bananas, mango, guava, date palm, crimson roses, yellow leis, splashed everywhere in yards, along sidewalks, down the center of the boulevard.

And the colors were as prodigal. Sapphire blue in the sky, emerald green in the lawns, these were the frames. In the picture were yellows, reds, blues. royal purples, and crushed soft orange.

"This would be a tough place to sell flowers," Slum commented, as they walked along.

"Ought to make a good set for a love scene," Lance offered.

"It's got that place in San Diego skinned. Remember," Slum queried, "where they shot you and Lorraine Call up against the balcony of lilies?"

"Those weren't lilies," Lance protested, "you color-blind mule skinner. They was roses. Lorraine had violets in her hair."

"They was purty, all right," Slum persisted. "Purty as lilies."

They reached the business section and wandered on through the newly-built quarter until they reached the street adjoining the waterfront. Here Lance found the object of his quest. Three gilded balls suspended over a sign reading:

I. COVEN
See Your Uncle First

While Lance was transacting his business with Uncle Ike, Slum examined the near-by shop windows. When Lance came out with the front of his waistcoat vacant where the elk's tooth had lain so splendidly, he found Slum puzzling over a poster which was pasted on the adjoining wall. In the middle was a picture of a cowboy on a bucking broncho.

Slum could read a picture, even if he had to guess at the titles. "What's this, Lance?" he asked. "Looks like an ad for the Purple Twilight."

Lance read aloud the lettering on the poster, which said:

ANNUAL RACES WITH TEXAS RODEO
At Weimea, May 10th, 2 P. M.

Ten-thousand-dollar purse for the Kamehameha stake. Twenty-five hundred dollars in cash prizes for the rodeo events. American cowboys and cowgirls imported from the States. Trick and fancy riding. Broncho busting. Bull-dogging.

The greatest aggregation of wild riders ever assembled in Hawaii, including American cowboys, Mexican vaqueros, and Hawaiian paniolas. Admission one, two, three, and five dollars.

Slum looked up at his taller buddy, puckering his lips and his eyes, while a fatuous grin spread over his lower face. Lance looked down comprehendingly and winked. The same thought had seized them both simultaneously.

"'Tain't no use," drawled Lance, "tryin' to put a pair of cow-punchers from the Lazy Y out of business."

"Same here," said Slum. "Now if I only had Fanny, reckon I'd show them Hiwayans what a trick mule could do. Still, mebbe I can pick up a donk, or a jack that 'll get me by."

Lance became serious for a moment.

"What 'll happen to Jefferson Q. Denver and his rubber plantations?" he mused.

"Same thing that 'll happen to Lance Houston and his Hollywood murder."

"As a secretary, Mr. Ritey, you're beginning to earn your keep." For the first time in a week the wholesome boyish grin began to reappear on the face of Lance Houston. Already he was beginning to scent the dust of the rodeo.

His life mission, his one superior achievement, was horsemanship. Out of the rodeo he had ascended to the stellar heights of the movies. Here in a far land, feeling stupidly abandoned and remote, he began again to see the light leading him out of the tunnel of his self-imposed exile.

The voice of Slum restored him for a moment to reality. "Did your uncle come across?" he asked.

"For enough," Lance replied, "to let us get our bags out of the Moana. After that I reckon there'll be about twenty-seven dollars between us and swimmin' back to Hollywood."

"Forget it!" Slum chuckled. "Don't this here ad say they's twenty-five hundred dollars in prizes in the rodeo?"

"Sure does."

"Ye ain't goin' to let nobody have none of that dough," Slum stoutly asserted.

Lance smiled broadly. "Reckon I'll put up an argument."

He started off briskly as he called over his shoulder to Slum, "Rein in, cowboy, and hug my crupper. We're goin' to crash the entry of this here Hiwayan rodeo."

CHAPTER VII.

LOOKING FOR WORK.

IN that part of Honolulu which was the fashionable business center in the days of Queen Liliuokalani there still stands the old Maui Hotel, a frame structure of the Chester A. Arthur period, with the frame-pillared portico stretching across a *lanai* that reaches generously for the street. The Maui has had no paint for twenty years. Its gray, weather-beaten boards are rotting in places.

The new Hawaii, with its cement and stucco and colored tiles, with its fresh paint and dashing architecture, has swept on, leaving the Maui as a reminder of the prosaic middle distance of the Islands.

It is not picturesque like a native hut, not smart and prosperous like a post-war structure, but eloquent of the sturdy Americanism of the previous generation which foresaw the potentiality of the Islands when the United States was sleeping in dreams of empire, before the Spanish War had waked it up.

The Maui has very large rooms, ten-foot ceilings, old-fashioned fourposter beds, and closets as big as bedrooms in a present-day bungalow. In the rear are still standing the stables and the huge carriage-house, for in the days of its glory the Maui maintained its own carriages and horses sufficient to take its guests on sightseeing tours.

Behind the stables is a horse corral covering half an acre, still just as it was forty years ago. Only the fence is repaired and is sturdy and serviceable.

The Maui has remained intact for two reasons. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the trend of business drifted in the opposite direction, over the car tracks and up the hill.

But the other reason which kept it from disintegrating completely and being abandoned entirely to the warehouses and native warrens which have elsewhere preëmpted the neighborhood, could be found in its ownership, for the Maui has always belonged to some member of the Hollins family.

The first Lester H. Hollins came to Hawaii in the late seventies. He prospected and developed sugar lands, lumber mills, and ranches. His son, who

died in 1906, was one of the audacious, influential little group of Americans who established the temporary Hawaiian republic and elected Sanford B. Dole its president and who later successfully engineered the annexation to the United States.

In all the Islands his acreage was the largest. His cattle ranged a thousand hills. His vision encompassed an empire, and to place the flagpole of that empire properly, he built in what was then the very center of things, the Maui Hotel.

On his deathbed Lester H. Hollins, II, said to his son and heir: "Never lower the Hollins flag. Keep 'er at the masthead of the Maui and remember that your grandad found Hawaii first. *Aloha ka ko.*"

That was the royal greeting of the last King Kamehameha, *aloha ka ko, love to all.* It was adopted by the first Hollins. It had been the slogan of the second Hollins, and it became engrained in the speech and feeling of his son, *aloha ka ko, love to all.*

He felt like a patriarch and he acted like one, with prodigal hospitality, living royally off the cream of the lands, fertile and rich, and easily tilled. Between him and the natives there was no enmity, for he cared for them all and none ever went empty-handed from his gate.

The present ruler of the clan, Lester H. Hollins, III, inherited from his sire and his grandsire, along with the lands and their vast potential wealth, an instinct for prodigal living.

In this blooded horses and horse-racing formed the central part. Poker, beautiful women, wines and plaintive Hawaiian melodies, most musical of all songs of the earth, had their part in fashioning his easy-going nature, but a love of thoroughbred horseflesh dominated all the rest.

In three generations, the soft languor of the Hawaiian climate had interpenetrated the rugged strength of the original Hollins character.

Hawaii is a land in which there are no venomous snakes and no poisonous plants. In that gracious climate snakes lose their venom, herbs their sting, and men their hatred. Also, the fires of ambition and the pride of dominance calm down.

Thus it was that Lester H. Hollins III had never pulled down the Hollins house flag from the staff of the old Maui Hotel. Each year he was left further on the leeshore of progress. With every boat there came in new blood, fresh money from the States.

Each season there poured in from the Oriental shores of the Pacific energetic yellow faces, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Malay, to mingle with the old stock, to multiply the problems of the land. Cheap labor it was for a time, yet out of the riffraff here and there crept a far-reaching, designing yellow hand. From behind the slant-eyed faces there peered out now and then a crafty, unfathomable Oriental brain.

Over and over again Lester H. Hollins III had said, half heartedly to his friends: "I must give up the Maui Hotel. I must get up in the swim in the new Honolulu."

But he never did. It was too easy down there in the Maui, where the oleanders grew out of the sidewalks and the crimson young lahua trees nodded over the fence rails of the horse corral in the rear.

On the right entrance to the Maui, and a few steps off the lania, the room which had once been used for a barber shop had been transformed into an office with an old mahogany rolltop desk, and several spacious horsehair easy chairs. Its walls were covered with racing prints. On the door was printed:

Waimea Racing Association
Lester H. Hollins, President

On the bole of one of the oleander trees in the sidewalk was tacked a poster announcing the coming races

and rodeo at Weimea. It was the same poster that Lance and Slum had seen next door to the pawnshop. It was on every convenient dead wall in Honolulu.

On this morning in early May two men sat in the office of the Weimea Racing Association. One at the roll-top desk was a splendid figure of a man in his grizzled sixties with flowing iron-gray mustaches, but with signs of easy living on his countenance: pouches under his eyes, a treble chin, florid cheeks, and in his eyes a merry if a slightly watery twinkle.

The other, facing him, was a compact, slender, hard-faced individual, in his forties, with a face that looked like tanned leather, and with wrinkles about his mouth and eyes that spoke of years resisting alkali dust. This was Pete Swallow, the manager of the rodeo outfit.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Hollins," said Pete, "we're going to give you a show this year like you never had in these Islands before. I don't believe they could pull off anything better in Laramie. 'Ceptin' it's bigger, Madison Square Garden will have nothin' on Weimea."

"Now, Pete," said Mr. Hollins, "that might be all right to tell the newsboys when they come down here to interview you, but between you and me, this outfit of yours is just a third-rate tank-town traveling rodeo. You know that if you tried to play Saugus, the Los Angeles papers would laugh you out of the sawdust."

"Played Azusa last year," stoutly persisted Pete, "and they hollered their heads off."

"This same outfit?" asked Mr. Hollins.

"Well, yes," lamely replied Pete, "mostly. "O' course, we ain't got Mable Gillilan. She's pullin' down too much jack for us, and we ain't got Mike Stewart. Since he got the golf cup at Laramie he's flyin' pretty high."

"How about that funny fellow that used to slide round on the back of a mule? Our Kanakas would rather see him than a flying horse."

Pete subsided at this and scratched his head.

"That was Ike Williams," Pete lamented. "Too bad about Ike. He got hit on the coco by a stanchion the day we pulled freight from Modesto. There never was so good a rodeo clown. But I'm breakin' one of our boys in. I think he'll get away with it for your Kanakas all right."

"Too bad that stanchion lit on him," said Mr. Hollins. "He was certainly as good as all the rest of the show put together, except maybe Mike Stewart."

While this talk was going on inside the Maui, a lean figure in a pepper-and-salt suit, and a squatter one in nondescript clothes, were wandering along under the oleander trees on the sidewalk outside, "rubbering for a rubber business," as the shorter one put it.

The tall one deciphered the nearly obliterated sign, "Maui Hotel," over the lintel. "Looks like a last year's bird-nest," he said, "but maybe this is it. Come on."

A moment later Lance Houston, with Slum Ritey close on his heels, was knocking at the door of the Weimea Racing Association.

"Come in!" boomed a deep bass voice.

Lance entered and faced the jovial and benign figure of Lester H. Hollins III and the witty shrewdness of Pete Swallow, rodeo impresario.

At first glance, Mr. Hollins must have thought they were paniolas—cowboys—from the interior, slicked up in store clothes for a visit to the big town, for there is an indescribable atmosphere which every horseman wears, and which is distinguishable at a glance to another horseman.

So Hollins fell naturally into the native tongue, which he thought probably his visitors would understand.

"*Pahea?*" he asked—what is it?

Lance looked down questioningly at Slum, and Slum looked up in bewilderment at Lance.

"Go ahead, Slum," Houston said, "talk to him. I reckon you savvy French. Leastways you been blowin' about it. Now here's your chance."

At this rejoinder, which was made open and aboveboard, for all to hear, Mr. Hollins rose ponderously and came forward with his huge bulk. "Well, boys," he said, holding out his hand, "when did you get in from the States?"

"Last boat," said Lance, shaking hands. "We're lookin' for the hombre that runs this here rodeo."

"Good," replied Mr. Hollins. "You've come to the right place. *Aloha ka ko.*"

Lance glanced at Slum quickly, and under his breath remarked: "When you write to your governess, Slum, ask her what that means."

Mr. Hollins seemed to grin all over. He roared joyously. Something told him that here was a pair after his own heart. The horseman in him longed for cowboys and their vernacular. All too few of the old American breed came to far Hawaii.

"Here's your man," he said, gesturing toward Pete. "Mr. Swallow, shake hands with—what did you say your name was?"

Lance stuck his tongue in his cheek, studied his toes, awkwardly thrust his hands in his pockets and said: "My name is Hype Smith, and this here is a buddy of mine, Paris Moriarity. I reckon you heard of Paris, all right. He's the champeen mule-back duster of Yakima."

Pete Swallow was studying the two suspiciously as he shook their hands. Already he was figuring how he was going to get out of this situation. If these men turned out to be riders that he could use, old man Hollins was going to insist that they work in the rodeo, and that was going to swell his pay-sheet. He would have to see a way round that or, if they were hired, to get Hollins to foot the bill.

"No," grumbled Pete, "can't say as I have heard of Paris. But there's a quick way to find out what he can do. I've got one of the balkiest mules in the Panhandle right out here now in this corral. Want to come out, Mr. Moriarty, and take a whirl at 'er?"

"You bet," said Slum. This was one of the most promising things that had happened to him since he had been compelled to sling beer in the Cross-Eyed Duck, back in far-off Hollywood.

Pete Swallow led the way along the creaking, wide corridors of the Maui under the festooned *plumaria* that almost concealed the exit, past the yawning carriage house, and into the stables. At his heels trotted Slum, and Lance brought up the rear, striving to hold back courteously to keep pace with the slow, heavy walk of the ponderous Mr. Hollins. Pete indicated a mule tied to a rack. "There she is," he said. "That's 'Flying Kate.'"

Slum went up and touched the mule deftly under her hind quarter, gouging in his finger nail and pinching her flesh. She kicked viciously, but missed him by a good twelve inches.

"The flyin' part of that name is for the heels, I reckon," said Lance.

Meanwhile Slum was expeditiously untying the mule's head-rope. She bit at his hand. He got her across the nostrils with his left and caught her underlip in his right.

He held firmly and twisted a trifle, at the same time talking to her gently: "Now, Kate, you be a good little gal, and you and me'll get along O. K. I want you to kick, bite and squeal. The more ballyhoo, the merrier, but Heaven help you if you ever land on me. Get that!"

He gave her mouth just the necessary wrench to adequately notify Kate that her proper master had arrived. She looked up at him out of beady, sullen eyes, and relaxed at once. He let go. "All set," he said. "All that

Kate and me need now is a preacher to tie the knot. Come along, Katie. Pass out into this here corral and show the folks how you can cut up pretty."

As Slum reached the open air he leaped to the bare back of the mule, which arched as he came down. She bucked and tossed, but he held tightly, and then she deliberately rolled on her side.

He deftly leaped from under, grabbed one of her front feet and one of her hind feet, rolled her on to her back and jumped on her chest. She lay docile. "Atta girl, Katie," cried Slum. "C'm'n le's play the devil's tattoo."

The mule got to her feet. Slum released her halter, and she sarted slowly toward the stable. He seized her by the tail, planted his feet on the ground and let her pull him. She had gone only a few steps when she threw her weight on to her forefeet, and lashed out at him from behind with a double kick.

Slum had nicely calculated the distance, and merely leaned back the necessary few inches to avoid receiving her hoofs in his face. To an uninitiated lookeron it would have seemed a miraculous escape.

"*Aloha ka ko,*" boomed Hollins. "By the memory of Liliuokalani, this is a great find, Mr. Swallow. This looks like the best trick mule rider that ever touched these shores."

"Not bad," Pete admitted.

"Hire him," said Mr. Hollins.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Dunno about that," he protested. "Pay-sheet's colored up now. You know that steward tacked an extra passage for all my help. The contract figures 'em only half what I had to dig up."

Mr. Hollins waved this objection aside with a royal hand. "That's all right, Mr. Swallow," he asserted, "we've got to have this man at the Waimea Rodeo if I pay him myself. Come 'ere, you," he called to Slum. "What'll you take for a half hour on the track at Weimea with Flying Kate there for a partner?"

Slum was grinning all over. The actor vanity in him was uppermost.

"You name it, sir," he responded.

Mr. Hollins turned to Lance. "Now, how is it with you, my boy?" he asked. "Have you got anything to stake up against your friend here?"

Pete Swallow felt that this was the time to declare himself entirely. He stepped forward. "Mr. Hollins," he said, "you know the terms of my contract with the Weimea Racing Association. You're to have charge of the races. I'm to have charge of the rodeo.

"Now you know I've got a regular show and we're traveling on a circuit. I've got my people all under long-term contract, and the program is fixed up weeks and months in advance. I can't take in any ringers.

"As it is, I'm not making any money out of this. The trip to Hawaii is going to take something out of my pocket. Even if it didn't, my riders wouldn't stand for me putting over any outsider on 'em. You ought to know how that is. It's too short notice."

Mr. Hollins pulled meditatively at his mustache. He seemed grieved. "Well, if I pay Moriarty here, out of my own pocket, I should think you might find an open place for him on your program without offending any of your other acts. You just told me yourself that you had lost your trick mule rider."

"Oh, that's all right," said Pete, secretly elated that the question of payment had been so easily decided. "I don't mind him. He'll tickle up the show, but I don't want this long one here. I got plenty of straight riders."

The owner of the Maui turned to Lance. "Sorry, Mr. Smith," he said; "we can use your friend, but I'm afraid that otherwise the acts for the rodeo are all booked."

With that Mr. Hollins turned to go back into the hotel.

A musical voice sounded through the boards of the near-by fence, causing them all to turn round and gaze in its direction. *"Ai papa wikiwiki!"* (Yes, papa, quickly), came the call.

Then, following the voice across the rail, leaped a figure in white breeches, yellow puttees, and blue coat. A blue-and-white cap sat rakishly on jaunty, yellow curls. A pretty laughing face with merry, gray-green eyes, crimson mouth, flaxen tendrils blowing about the neck, surmounted a boy in figure, slim and svelte; but a girl, no doubt about that.

The look on the face of Lester H. Hollins and the sweep of his chest as he turned to greet the newcomer were paternal, loverlike, and royal, all in one. He embraced and kissed her warmly. "Did you see that mule work, Rova?" he asked.

"Of course. Wasn't it bully? They will love it at Weimea. But I want to see the other one. Him." She pointed toward Lance impudently.

"So do I," replied Mr. Hollins. "Friends"—he stopped the three men with a single word, and included them with one introduction—"I want you to meet my daughter, Miss Rova."

Rova refused to have the introduction to the three lumped in one. She bowed gravely to Pete. "I know Mr. Swallow," she said. Then she went forward and took Slum by the hand. "I'm awful glad to know you," she said. "When that mule kicked at you, I almost fainted. I thought she had you, sure, and at the same second I realized you planned the whole thing. Gee, I want you to show me how to do that. Will you?"

"Sure, miss," Slum grunted, embarrassed.

Then she turned to Lance and looked at him shyly. "Can't you ride, Mr. ——?" she asked.

"Reckon I might try, if you asked me." Lance Houston stood alert, at ease, on his two feet, looking down at her. Her head came no more than to his breast bone. She was of the type of leading lady the directors always chose for him. "About as big as a half pint of cider" he called their size.

His attitude toward these leading ladies, as he had been trained to show it in the pictures, was that of the traditional cowboy, abashed, tongue-tied, awkward.

As a matter of fact, he was accustomed to coming in contact with them so often in the studio, as the applications for the position were legion, that he felt toward girls of this general aspect much as he felt in the presence of a horse. He wanted to study them shrewdly and estimate their points, not offensively, but with poised discretion.

So in this spirit he now looked at Rova Hollins, slowly, calmly, and with a sense of mastery and independence which was hardly in keeping with that of his supposed character, an unknown cowboy out of work, in a strange land.

Rova was accustomed to conquest, obeisance, flattery, and complete dominion over all male creatures. She turned from him in exasperation and stamped her foot.

"Oh, you *haole!*" (foreigner) she exclaimed.

A flush mounted her face as its counterpart came to the cheeks of Lance Houston, for although he did not understand the meaning of the word, he felt there was some affront in it. "Make this man ride, father. I want to see if he has the nerve."

Lance winced as if he had been struck.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO WILLS CLASH.

IN this first minute of the meeting between Rova Hollins and Lance Houston their entire drama was epitomized. Two imperious wills met, clashed and struggled. Rova was quicker to feel the challenge, quicker to leap to the attack.

She knew but two ways to deal with men. If they bowed the knee to her, she was gracious. If they met her eye to eye and disputed her empire, she lashed out at them like a wild thing.

Slum Ritey, who knew his Lance Houston as a navigator his compass, glanced at the legs of Hollywood's Pet. They were trembling like the legs of a colt under the lash.

"Don't let 'er get your goat," he whispered. "Show 'er the triple flop."

Meanwhile, Lester H. Hollins III looked at his daughter reprovingly. Looks, however, was as far as it went. There was only the mildest reproof in his words.

"Why, Rova," he replied, "it might not be fair to Mr. Smith to ask him to perform when there's no chance of offering him any employment."

"Never mind the job," Lance drawled. "If you got a hoss fast enough, reckon I might edify the gal. That is, if she's got good eyesight."

It was now Rova's turn to blush, for Lance had made this reply without looking at her, still further increasing the original indignity he had unwittingly offered her, though this was not unconscious as had been his earlier manner.

"He! He!" chuckled Slum. "Ye gotta look quick when this hombre is workin' a hoss. Flyin' Kate and me'll do for the skinny-ootulums, but if you get this bald eagle goin' right smart it 'll take a radio to catch him."

Hollins turned to the stable and called out: "Mahai."

A Kanaka stableboy appeared.

"Did Lightning *kaukau?*" (eat), Hollins asked.

"*Ai*, master."

"Then saddle her and bring her out."

The Kanaka boy returned to the stable.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Hollins," said Lance, "and that's the horse you would like me to ride, I'd rather saddle 'er myself."

"By all means."

Lance disappeared into the stable, following the Kanaka. While he was gone Hollins turned to Rova and walked aside with her out of earshot of the others, placing an arm around her. She cuddled up against him.

"*Keiki-wahine,*" (flower of my heart), he reproved softly, "what possessed you to ruffle the *haole?*" (stranger). "He looks like a fair-to-middling *paniola*" (cowboy).

"Why, papa," she dissembled, "you know I love all *paniolas*. What did I do?"

He pinched her cheek. "You little minx," he admonished, "it was clear enough you offended him. He blushed way down the back of his neck."

Rova waltzed airily away. "Sorry," she cried saucily. "I'll bet he can't ride. He's too cocksure."

"Perhaps not," agreed Hollins. "However, we will soon see. Why, here he comes. By the shades of Pala! Look! Lightning is running away."

A flying centaur, man and horse molded in one, live as mercury, leaping as electricity, came through the stable door and once around the yard. A wild "whoopee!" shrieked from the throat of the rider as he threw himself neck to neck on the horse, elevating his body straight up into the air, feet rigidly high.

It was an extremely narrow space in which to maneuver such a run. Four or five times around Lightning sped with Lance Houston tumbling back and forth from neck to withers, from saddle to rump. He rode backward, frontward, and sidewise, on his head, on two feet, and on one foot. Every time he went round he glanced over the gateway and down the alley. The gate was five feet six inches high.

Finally the rider vaulted from the saddle to the ground and slapped Lightning on the rump as she dashed by. The horse made the turn again, the same turn she had been making, and charged down past the rider. It

was eloquent of her obedience to a stranger that she came as if trained.

From a standing start Lance leaped easily into the saddle, dug his heels under her belly and urged her toward the gate. She lifted herself over and sailed down into the alley, running lightly, safely on the other side. With another wild "whoopee!" horse and rider dashed up the alley.

Pete Swallow rushed to the gate, opened it, and looked out. He saw horse and rider disappear round the nearest corner. He came back ruefully. "Looks like that cowboy just vamosed with your prize racer, Mr. Hollins," he asserted.

Hollins was beaming in capital high spirits. "He'll be back directly. Lightning needs a run. That's a very small yard, Mr. Swallow, for stunts like that. Tell me, honestly now, have you got a rider in your outfit that can touch this fellow Hype Smith?"

Pete shrugged his shoulders and looked away as he sighed. "Just regulation stunts. That's all I see."

"Very well," replied Mr. Hollins, "have you got a man that can do that in a two-hundred-foot corral?"

"Mebbe I have. Mebbe I haven't. But we don't hold a rodeo in a corral."

"And I bet you," Mr. Hollins continued, "that if you get this *paniola* into the rodeo, he'll pull down every first that is offered. Mind you, the Weimea Association appoints the judges."

Pete Swallow studied the stable-yard. "If he wants to enter without any guarantee and pull down only what the judges award, that might do," he grudgingly admitted, "though my boys don't stand to make any velvet out of this junket 'ceptin' the prize money."

A "whoopee" sounded out of the alley and in another second Lightning leaped back over the fence. Lance reined her to her haunches in the exact center of the yard, dismounted, and handed the reins to the Kanaka.

He turned to Slum, ignoring the others. "She's a dead ringer for Silverheels," he said. "Makes me sorta homesick. I hope Ito is seein' Silverheels is gettin' her oats like she's accustomed to at Houstonia."

Slum winked and whispered: "Ssh! You don't want none of these people to get wise."

Hollins turned to his daughter.

"Well, Rova," he beamed, "satisfied?"

She held a short riding crop in her gloved hands. With this she was beating a nervous little tattoo against her puttee. Her glances had never once left Houston, and he had not once looked at her. There was a dangerous, alert gleam in her eyes. "No, papa," she said.

"What!" roared Hollins. "You never saw anybody get into a saddle and out of it like that before, not from a standing start, in a corral."

"That's what I mean," said Rova. "I'm not satisfied that Mr. Smith is just the man he appears to be."

"What do you mean?" said her father. "He's sure one crackerjack *paniola.*"

"I'm not sure his name is Smith."

Hollins laughed. "A rose by any other name. You judge a *paniola* by his jumps and the way he uses his knees. Name him anything you like. Here, Mr. Smith," he called.

Lance came forward slowly, with that grave restraint that comes inevitably to a horseman on the ground after he has just manipulated a hazardous feat. "Yes, sir," he replied scantly.

"Would you like to enter in the contests at the Weimea rodeo?"

"Don't mind if I do."

"Good. Then you're booked. See me in my office in the morning and get your number. That is, if you care to enter without guarantee."

Lance grinned. "Guarantee of what? That I won't break my neck?"

"I mean you'll have to go in as an outsider. The regular riders in Mr.

Swallow's outfit all have guarantees. I'm afraid we can't offer you that."

"Reckon they might need 'em."

Pete Swallow stepped forward. "Hey, what's that?" he asked.

"Nothin', Mr. Swallow," Lance replied. "I was just tellin' the president here as how I never thought much of insurance nohow. Bein' a single man, free, white, and over twenty-one, I'm just naturally accustomed to takin' my own chances, where I find 'em. That's all."

"Very well," Swallow grunted. "If you think you got a chance against my men, and Mr. Hollins wants you, I guess you can try for one or two of those prizes."

"Thanks," said "Mr. Smith." "Don't mind if I do."

Lance turned to Hollins. "Wonder if me and my buddy could put up at this hotel until the rodeo?" he asked.

"Certainly; go in and speak to the clerk at the desk."

"C'm'n, Slum." Houston started back the way they had entered.

While all this was going on, Rova had been walking nervously about the corral, listening alertly to every word that was said, glancing now and then toward Houston, striving to appear unconcerned, and the ratta-tat-tat of the riding-crop on her puttees indicated that at least her nerves were extremely active.

When the conversation was over, Hollins and Swallow went into the stable to look at Lightning. Lance, followed by Slum, started toward the outer gate. Rova intercepted them. "Excuse me, Mr.—Mr.—Smith," she said.

"Sure, miss."

"May I speak to you alone?"

Lance looked toward Slum appealingly. For some unexplained reason he felt uneasy in the presence of this slight femininity. "There's nothin' secret between me and my buddy," he insisted.

She lowered the lashes over her eyes. She seemed the essence of youth and innocence. Then she looked up ingenuously and imploringly. "But this is something private, something—very—private. Please."

"Go on, Slum," said Lance. "Wait for me in the lobby."

Slum moved on, and when he felt that he was beyond the line of vision of the girl, he broke into a wide, silent grin, and made a gesture of poking his thumb into the ribs of Houston.

Rova faced the cowboy alone and looked up at him defiantly.

"Sorry," said he, "that I couldn't ride good enough to suit ye."

She laughed in his face. "It was the most wonderful riding I ever saw in my life," she said, "and I was brought up with cowboys. I adore them."

This sudden reversal in her attitude took him aback so that he had nothing to say except a short, "Thank you."

"But what difference does it make to you to have me say that? Me, Rova Hollins, just a tiny one of many millions?"

He began now to feel the menace in this slight girl. "I don't know what you mean," he lamely protested.

"I mean that who am I to criticize the riding of Lance Houston?" Her eyes met his clearly intelligent, direct.

He forced a grin. "You don't think I'm anywhere near as good as him?"

She looked hastily about and was satisfied that no one could hear her. Then she came very close to him and looked up into his face. "You *are* Lance Houston!" she exclaimed. "I saw your picture, Purple Twilight, last week at the Rapihala Theater. I've seen you before, on the screen, I mean. Everything you ever did.

"I saw that first picture you did for the Vitafilm, two years ago, the one where you doubled as a Mexican vaquero. There's only one man in the world can stand on his head on a horse and lift his feet up just that way and be just that graceful about it. You

can't fool me. I know you *are* Lance Houston."

"Supposin' I am."

"Then I want to apologize for speaking rudely."

He chuckled. He felt that once again he was in command of the situation, or nearly so. "Oh," he said, "you don't want to be rude to Lance Houston, but you'd play ducks and drakes with a homesick cow-puncher looking for a handout."

She winced at this, but she came back quickly. "I deserve that, but I spoke that way to you because you seemed to be so—so—oh, so darned superior and satisfied with yourself. I just felt I'd like to take a little bit of the conceit out of you—but I'm humbled right down to the ground. Wasn't it a terribly nervy thing for me to try to do?"

He heard little silvery bells in her voice.

"You must forgive me," she went on. "You must know that I was really trying to befriend even a strange cow-puncher. I love *paniolas*. That's what we call cowboys in Hawaii. They're the best men we have.

"But at that time I hadn't the wildest idea you were Lance Houston. Now, I can understand why you were justified in not being bowled over by a little nobody like Rova Hollins. Why, I suppose every girl in the States is just mad about you. I suppose you could have your pick of any one of them."

"Sounds good," said "Mr. Smith," "but I reckon you're off on the wrong foot, Miss Hollins."

"Oh!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Please don't pretend with me any longer, Mr. Houston. Don't you see that you've got to take me in with you?"

He smiled. "What kind of a hold-up is this?"

"Why, don't you suppose I've read the papers? Don't you suppose that I know you're a fugitive from justice and that there is a reward out for you?"

"A reward!"

"Of course. But you needn't be alarmed. You're safe with me. I wouldn't earn money that way."

Lance was eager to learn the news, and yet he felt he must move cautiously. He still endeavored to keep up his incognito. "I don't know what you mean, Miss Hollins."

"Oh, yes, you do. But there's one thing you need not explain to me. I know you're not guilty of that murder. I don't believe you'd shoot a woman."

"No?" drawled Lance. "Then you sure got me rated pretty high."

"Well," Rova insisted, "you wouldn't shoot her in the back."

Lance could no longer contain himself. He laughed outright.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW HE PLAYED SAFE.

DESPITE Rova's apparent certainty, Lance steadfastly refused to admit his identity. "Dunno whether that's an insult, or a compliment, Miss Hollins," he said.

"An insult to recognize Lance Houston?"

"No, but it's a kinda an insult to call a cowboy an actor."

"How *could* it be?" Rova demanded.

"Just the same it is, out in Wyoming where I come from, round Prairie Hole. Why, actors paint their faces and doll up, Miss Hollins, like girls—well, excuse that. I don't mean like nice girls." Lance floundered and stopped, especially as he detected for the first time that Rova's cheeks were made up perhaps just the least little bit.

"Oh," she rattled on, "I think being an actor is just wonderful, and the only thing more wonderful is to be a cowboy. What could be more wonderful than being both, especially Lance Houston, the best of them all?"

For a moment Lance was tempted

to confide in this winsome tropical maid. She was just as pretty as Lorraine Call and a great deal more wholesome and natural, but the obvious consequences of such a confidence were too apparent. If she knew for a fact that he was Lance Houston she might become implicated in the difficulty in which he had found himself.

Moreover, she would be obliged either to enlist her father in his aid, or to conceal her knowledge from her father and to aid him in secret. Either contingency displeased him. He felt he could not stoop to either. No, he was playing a lone hand, and he would play it through to the finish with what slight assistance he could have from Slum.

"It's funny," he continued, "you should think I look like Lance Houston. Other people have said the same. Fact is, I got a job for him once on a trick ride that he couldn't do himself. He's not so much any more.

"He might have been good enough when he was a real cowboy, but it's a soft life them picture people lead, and I reckon it's put him on the Fritz. As for me, Hype Smith, I don't get his dough; so I don't wear his boots. Thank you just the same, Miss Hollins, and I'll take it as a compliment and not as an insult."

He tipped his hat awkwardly and started away.

"Wait." She laid a detaining finger on his arm. "I do wish you would confide in me. It would set me up so and make me feel so terribly proud to think I could know all about it and help you out. But if you can't do that, I want you to know that you can come to me at any time. Will you?"

Lance felt disarmed and at her mercy, and yet his only concern was that he might in some way implicate her. Already he felt toward her as did all the *paniolas* on her father's ranch, that she must be protected, that she must be indulged in every whim.

She felt him wavering, and she added what had always been the unfair final touch. She went to him and placed both her hands on his arms, almost embracing him, as she appealed in half spoiled childish way. "Please, trust me, Lance. You'll find I'm just as much a cowboy as you are. Wait till you go out to Weimea. I'll show you how to ride."

"Gee," said Lance, "I'd sure like to know how."

"Oh, don't be sarcastic." She stamped her foot.

"I'm thinkin'," he replied, "of what an unlucky coot Lance Houston is, not to be able to take up your proposition."

"Oh!" she sighed.

"But I'll just tell him the next time I see him what he's missed. Good day, Miss Hollins." He raised his hat and bowed slowly and gracefully in his most elongated manner, from the hips. A Houston fan would know that bow. It made her heart beat a little faster as she watched him walk away, her glance following him admiringly.

Lance settled for their eighteen-dollar-a-day quarters at the palatial hotel and moved to the Maui that afternoon. With Slum he was assigned to a room in the rear of the old hostelry. It was on the second floor and looked out on the stables.

His money was so low that he felt obliged to take one of the less expensive rooms, for they would have to stay there three days before moving on to the scene of the rodeo at Weimea, and it had been agreed that his expenses should be paid only for the trip itself.

As he rejoined his buddy after his private talk in the corral, Slum said, "Can't say as I blame you, Lance. She's got that Lorraine Call skinned four ways from the ace."

"What are you bustin' into now, Slum?"

"This here admiration party you worked up with the child queen of the horse corral."

"She's sure sassy, Slum, and she's got my number."

"He! He!" Slum chuckled. "I seen you fall. It's an awful tumble a cow-puncher takes when a skirt catches him fer fair."

"Not that way, Slum—I mean she knows about the Cross-Eyed Duck and —and—everything."

Mr. Ritey rose, instantly alarmed. "She knows you're Lance Houston?"

Lance nodded.

"She knows about the murder?"

Again Lance nodded, too full of thoughts for words.

"Then we'll have to beat it," Slum mourned. "What a shame! That would be nice, easy pickin' for you and me, that rodeo."

Lance found his tongue. "No," he said, "we're entered in that rodeo and we're goin' to ride. We ain't never laid down yet on the show-off. Besides, I'm not afraid of Miss Hollins. She's as big-hearted as her daddy and as thoroughbred a filly as that Lightnin' hoss I rid. 'Tain't her I'm afraid of. I'm only afraid that if she spotted me after one look, others will. That's all."

"Mebbe she's smarter'n anybody else," Slum offered.

"Sure is," Lance assented, "but if I get out there in front of a grand stand at a rodeo and do my stuff, I'm afraid somebody is likely to spot me. 'Cause she knew about the papers havin' it, and a reward bein' out."

"Reward!" exclaimed Slum. "How much?"

"Dunno, but it's cash money, I reckon."

"Holy snakes," said Slum, "an' me wonderin' how to meet the board bill."

"There's your gravy," Lance replied. "All you got to do is send out and get your palm crossed with the blood money."

"Mebbe I'll wait till to-morrow fer that," said Slum, yawning. "What 'll we do to-night?"

"Sit tight in this broken-down old-timer and wait. Since Miss Hollins picked me out by my true and rightful description, I'm a little leary of showing these handsome features around."

"Nobody guessed who you was when you was Jefferson Q. Denver," Slum insisted.

"I was free and easy then," Lance explained, "but since Joe fell down on the cable and since Miss Hollins seen who I was, somehow I don't feel like Jeff."

They sat disconsolately in their room through the tropical twilight. They left long enough to get a meager meal a few blocks away and then came back. Slum with an old pipe and Lance with a pack of cigarettes beguiled the hours until bedtime, while they looked out into the darkening shadows of the old corral, downhearted, silent, lugubrious.

While Lance looked down into the dark corral the darkness seemed to fade away. There came to his mind one of those effects of the imagination beloved by the picture director, the well known "flash back." A halo came into the darkness. In it he saw the figure of a lanky cowboy and in front of him with her little hands on his arms, looking up appealingly into his countenance, that saucy wisp of a girl, the humming bird on the hybiscus flower, the wild rose on its thorny stem, the fruit of the paw paw swung on the bole of the tree, a ripe, yellow guava clinging to a green branch, a rosette dangling in the mane of a galloping mare.

These thoughts, these visions flitted through the mind of the musing cowboy. He was dominated by the nomenclature of the moving pictures, whose life he had lived intensively for three years. A sub-title he had seen came back to him. It was a scrap of conversation in a costumed romance.

"How big is a man's heart?"
"Just big enough to be held in the two cupped hands of a girl."

He had forgotten the story of which this was a minor flash. Queer how

those two trifling lines persisted through the memory of the melodramatic scenes which the director had so fondly cherished. At the time he had seen them Lance had not been impressed by them. Then they seemed to be a kind of far-fetched comedy—mush—the sort of useless frosting they had to put on pictures to make them sell.

Yet this "frosting" was the only thing he remembered of that picture. He had forgotten its title, its actors, its story, even its scene. Why did that line come back to him now so poignantly? This certainly puzzled him. "Just big enough to be held in the two cupped hands of a girl."

He denied to himself that he had any interest in her. That was part of his ingrained custom. Girls had not interested him. He had permitted directors to cast them with him and to tell him how to act toward them, but he had always thought of them as unnecessary frosting, like the romantic sub-titles.

Yet, she had called him "Lance." He wondered if girls were like that in Hawaii, quick to call men by their first names.

Lance Houston was not quite twenty-six years old. Too young to enter the World War, he had been breaking colts on the Lazy Y when the troops went to France. He had started for a training camp the month the armistice was signed, and went back to the Lazy Y just after they were through with the round-up.

Cowboys were being laid off, not taken on. It was then that he and Slum had drifted to Prairie Hole and to Laramie, down to Denver, into the Panhandle. The next spring they entered the rodeo at Houston. Lance took the silver cup in the broncho busting contest.

The two went from one rodeo to another, across Texas, back into Oklahoma and up into Colorado, all that spring and summer.

They went back to the Lazy Y before the fall round-up, but in the spring the fever of the arena got them. Again they were off. So, year after year, winning cups, blowing in prize money, they went from rodeo to ranch, from ranch to rodeo, until one day up in Oregon, a picture director saw them and coaxed them down to Hollywood.

From that moment on the startling rise to stardom of Lance Houston had been one of the romantic epics of the screen: stunt man, trick rider, double for a leading actor who could act, but could not ride.

Then came the meeting with Joe Bloom, the double-barreled contract, the quick ascent into the heavens of money, fame, adulation, luxury, a life removed from that of ordinary mortals, remote from every-day living as that of a king upon his throne.

Then followed that quicker twist of fate, that unforeseen accident, that fatuous stupidity in the Cross-Eyed Duck.

Was the career lost? Was it gone forever? Getting it, as it came to him, lush, sudden, luxurious, golden, he had taken it lightly. He thought it meant little to him. Often he had pretended that he longed to be back in the old life on the Lazy Y.

But now, as he sat there in the deepening dusk of the Hawaiian night, looking out into the deserted corral of the old Maui, the glamour of the lost paradise was more alluring to him than had been the reality itself. Poignantly, he longed if it could be possible to embrace it all again.

Mingled with his longing there was a pain in his heart such as he had never known, a pain curiously growing from the touch of the tiny hand of Rova Hollins on his arm, the saucy look of her large gray-green eyes which seemed at once saucy and at the same time wistful.

What was there about this girl any different from the scores, almost hundreds of others with whom he had come

in casual contact those last few splendid years? Was it just the size of the minx? Or did the directors really know something about psychology, or whatever it was they were always prating about, the mating of types, and so on?

Was it just because Rova Hollins happened to be his "type" and happened to come along at this time and place, that he was fraught with melancholy and trembling, almost as if he were in a fever at the mere thought of her.

With an effort of the will he tried to direct his mind to something more practical. It was not like Lance Houston to moon over a pretty girl; better use his brain for thinking and not cloud it up with nonsense now, when he needed it more than ever.

Joe Bloom had declared that his was the brain for the two of them, and Lance had not disputed this. It seemed wise to play his part. Anyway he was getting sixty per cent. "Was" was good. He *was* getting about sixty per cent of thirty-five hundred dollars a week.

"Now," he commiserated silently, "I'm horning in for a chance to bust a bronc at a third-rate rodeo so as to escape being a bum. Reckon it's about time to show Joe Bloom I got a think-tank of my own."

"Slum," he mumbled, in the darkness.

The only response was heavy breathing. Lance went to the bed and leaned over his buddy. Ritey was asleep.

"All right," he murmured half to himself, "I'll take a chance and go and look for a paper. Ought to be one somewhere."

He tiptoed out of the room and found his way down to the lobby of the Maui, which was lighted with acetylene lamps. He asked the clerk if there were any newspapers from the States, and a litter in the corner by the writing-desk was pointed out to him.

In a moment he had found a copy of the Los Angeles *Evening Leader*, dated the week before. Across the front page was a seven-column head:

REWARD FOR CAPTURE OF LANCE HOUSTON

The article below read:

After a conference with District Attorney Keeler this afternoon, Sheriff J. M. Wise of Los Angeles County offered a reward of five hundred dollars for information leading to the arrest of Lance Houston, moving picture star, whose last known address was at his own palatial estate, Houstonia, in Beverly Hills.

Houston is wanted as a material witness by the district attorney, who has devoted all the resources of his office to clear up the mystery of the double murder eight days ago in the Cross-Eyed Duck Café, near Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood which resulted in the death of Mr. Theodore John, camera man, and Miss Una Humbin, scenarist, and for which four are being held.

The mystery of the connection of the celebrated cowboy star with this double killing is still baffling all who have investigated this remarkable case.

There appears no doubt that a revolver belonging to Lance Houston fired the fatal shots. At first there appeared no doubt that the trigger had been pulled by Mrs. Theodore John, and as yet no satisfactory evidence has been introduced to controvert this theory. How did Mrs. John get that gun?

She declares she does not know where it came from, nor how she secured it. As the principal suspect, her testimony is naturally under suspicion.

The others are unable to explain to the satisfaction of the district attorney how the gun came into the hands of Mrs. John. Did she take it from Houston's pocket, or did he place it in her hands? If he did place it in her hands, what motive could have prompted him to thus become her accomplice?

These are some of the questions that the district attorney believes it is worth offering five hundred dollars of the money of the people of Los Angeles County to have answered by the one man who can satisfactorily answer them. The fact that Houston has disappeared lends a certain amount of force to the theory that in some way he is implicated.

The officials of the Noted Stars,

with whom Houston had a three-year contract at ten thousand a week, and who is their biggest drawing-card at the box office, assert that they are making every effort to coöperate with the district attorney.

They declare an implicit confidence in Houston, and assert that his name will be cleared when the time arrives.

Mr. Hazenwein, the production manager, said this afternoon, "Houston was to go to Algeria for the production of our next super-spectacle. The plans were all made, and he was to sail from Galveston for Marseilles.

"While we have not been informed of his whereabouts, it seems to us more than likely that he packed and left for Galveston, but, naturally, without any knowledge of the desire of the district attorney to question him.

"I am sure that when he learns of this, he will return of his own free will and that his accidental relation to the unfortunate incident will be thoroughly explained, and that the public will then know officially from the authorities, what all of us here in the Noted Stars know about Lance Houston, that he is merely a lovable boy, without any trace of vice or venom."

Efforts were made to locate Mr. Joseph Bloom, the personal manager of Mr. Houston. He disappeared from his residence and his accustomed haunts the day following the murder. Mr. Hazenwein of the Noted Stars said he could give no information as to the whereabouts of Mr. Bloom.

The proprietor of the Cross-Eyed Duck says that Mr. Bloom was in the café at the time of the murder.

The police department is making efforts to locate him in the check-up that is being made of all persons who were present.

Lance laid this paper down and started back through the dark corridor. Silently in his own mind he addressed his manager, "I see now what ye done, Joe, and why ye didn't get to me with some dough. Ye had to lay low yourself."

While thinking thus, he came to the only lighted spot in the long corridor. It was through a transom partly opened above a broad door. He could hear voices. One name caused him to stop instantly and listen intently.

"Rova will come in with us," said the voice, "as soon as we get her clean of the old man and away from those stupid *paniolas*."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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One Thing Never Changes

IN every line of activity observers trace a certain amount of progress. But in a world of movement the circus is one institution that has stood still. The small boy to-day sees very much the same show that delighted his grandfather.

The particular reasons for this is that the circus, as an amusement, reached its height in the seventies, when such great showmen as Barnum and Bailey, John Robinson, Ben Wallace, and W. C. Coup were in their prime and in active competition. All the great circus men died and newcomers merely followed in their footsteps. Too, it must be remembered that performers are trained from childhood in families that date back three and four generations under the big top. It takes years to break in a bareback rider, acrobat or queen on the high wire. So the lover of tradition can see much the same show that delighted folks in P. T. Barnum's time.

Nowadays the circus seldom has to fight its way out of town, but you can still see the small boy carrying water for the elephant; and if you don't look out the smooth-fingered sharp-shooter at the red wagon will short change you as he sells tickets. Also the freaks so colorfully pictured on the banners outside of the kid show cannot be found inside the tent. The ballyhoo man is still an unblushing liar!

John Wilstach.

For Want of a Coat

Seasons make little difference in jail; but when one enters in light summer apparel and faces an exit in bleak winter weather—well, it's no wonder Mark Rowe was worried

By LAURANCE M. HARE

"I'll play you for a consideration"

MARK ROWE was in jail, but that didn't bother him much. What really worried him was the lateness of the season. He was usually headed south with the birds at about this time. But he still had a week to go before his sixty-day sentence for vagrancy was served to everybody's satisfaction.

It was already the middle of October, and the prisoners of the Blount County jail had exchanged their denim coats and pants for heavy woolen uniforms, which were not too warm for October inasmuch as underwear was not included in their equipment.

Mark did not suffer from the cold as he finished out his time digging potatoes on the prison farm. But he did suffer whenever he contemplated the future, which was a constant occupation.

He knew that somewhere within the walls of the prison there was a heavy paper sack to which was attached a tag adorned with his own cognomen, that the sole contents of that sack were an inadequate pair of oxfords, a pair of tan cotton pants, and a blue cotton shirt; and that by no manipulation of magic would he be able to produce from it, on the fateful morning of his release, anything more conducive to physical comfort than just what he had put into it nearly two months before.

He also knew that in a safe in the office of the prison there was a heavy sealed envelope, also bearing his name, which was blatantly unburdened by cash assets or anything that could be converted into cash or traded for clothes.

His wardrobe did not even contain a vest, to say nothing of a coat or such an insignificant article as a summer union suit.

And that wasn't the worst of it. Granting that he could resist the temperatures of late autumn, a fellow couldn't go parading around town in a shirt and a pair of cotton pants without being asked a lot of foolish questions he couldn't answer without another trip to the court house.

And while a term in jail was a good enough means of diversion once in awhile, too much was pretty apt to be a whole lot more than enough. And anyway, Mark wanted to go South. He didn't want to shovel snow all winter, even if the county did provide him with clothes and food.

So Mark started thinking. It was all he ever used his head for, because that member was absolutely valueless as an ornament. He thought long and earnestly—in his cell at night as he lay on his back on the narrow iron bunk listening to the medley of song and comment, derisive and ribald, issuing from his fellows in misery; while he worked and while he ate.

The week wore on, and the day before his departure arrived with no solution of his predicament. At noon he was sent in from the farm, along with several other men, to shave, get his hair cut, and take a bath in preparation for his release in the morning.

The wash room contained, besides the shower baths in one end and a couple of decrepit barber chairs in the other, a dozen or more long benches, and it was here the prisoners congregated after breakfast in the morning while they were waiting to be taken to work, and after work at night while they were waiting for supper. It was also here that the half dozen men who were going out with Mark spent their last long afternoon in jail.

It was made longer for Mark in view of what he had to look forward to. He sat on one of the benches along the wall with his elbows on his knees and his chin propped in his hands. He brooded and watched idly a man he knew only as Rugose who was pacing restlessly back and forth across the room with long, slow strides and an intent expression.

The pacing made him nervous, but he watched the man with more or less fascination, first because Rugose was a rather distinguished figure even in prison clothes and secondly because he couldn't understand the fellow's nervousness and evident worry, for he was a whole lot better off than Mark.

They had both been sentenced at the same time, but they had been assigned to separate gangs and Mark didn't know Rugose very well. However, he did remember that Rugose had worn very good clothes and that he had carried a really good leather traveling bag, which Mark considered an enviable outfit; and he gave himself over to envy.

On an empty bench in front of Mark there lay a battered checkerboard on which was scattered a set of crudely made checkers. Rugose eventually approached the bench, straddled it, and sat down before the board. Mark noticed, more or less absently, that the subject of his envy was about his size, though he was older and his face was somewhat wrinkled.

Rugose began arranging the checkers in order. Another man, who stood watching him, straddled the bench on the opposite side of the board and sat down facing him. They played five games and all of them went to Rugose.

If his opponent had been as fast as he, those five games would have been the fastest Mark had ever seen played. Mark was a checker player. He hadn't attempted to play here in jail because he hadn't known there were any good players around, and he hated to play with duds. But here was an opponent worthy of him.

Nevertheless he made no move to challenge Rugose until every other man in the room had been irrevocably beaten. Mark only sat and watched the playing closely, especially Rugose's, and thought.

The idea he had been worrying over for a week was coming to him, and he saw a faint glimmer of hope in the distance.

II.

"HELL!" said Rugose eventually. "Ain't there anybody around here that can play a game of checkers? How about you?" he asked suddenly of Mark. "I ain't beat you yet. Come on an' let's get it over with."

"I'll play you," said Mark, "for a consideration."

"Whatta you mean 'consideration'?"

"I mean," Mark explained, "that when I leave this hole to-morrow mornin', I'll be wearin' just a pair of pants an' a shirt unless my luck changes, an' I feel like this was my lucky day. I'll play you for your clothes."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Rugose. "Listen at the birdie cheep. Rally 'round here, boys; this is gonna be good."

He turned his attention to Mark, who had straddled the bench and was waiting patiently for him to choose his men.

"Not insinuatin' nothin'," he said sarcastically, "but just in case I *should* happen to beat you, whatta I get out of it?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in a naïve gesture.

"A good time," said he, "and experience."

"Ho, ho, ho!" Rugose roared again. "This is gettin' better every minute. Come on, you black boys," he addressed the checkers, "let's get this wise cracker outa the way. Whatta you want to play for first, kid?"

"I'll take your suit first," Mark decided. "That's what I need most. All right?"

"Suits me," Rugose grinned. "All I want of you is to put some pep in this game. I don't like these funeral marches. How about it?"

"I'll try not to keep you waitin'."

Mark played checkers by the book. His perfection was the result of practice. He had taken on all comers from Seattle to the Gulf. He was a good poker player, too, and he could roll the dice to make them read his language, but checkers was his game. He had been brought up on them.

It was four minutes later by the clock that Mr. Rugose was the most surprised individual in the county. He looked at the checkerboard without a black man on it, then he scratched his head and looked at Mark.

"Lad," he said earnestly, "where've you been all this time? Here I been itchin' to find a good checker player ever since I been here, an' I find you on the last day.

"Hummm," he ruminated, "I gotta do better'n this. Gimme them red men an' we'll try again. Whatta you gonna take away from me this time?"

"Oh, I guess I'll try your hat," Mark decided.

They played three games without a halt, and at the end of twenty minutes Mark was the nominal possessor of all the contents of Rugose's paper sack, and Rugose was worried. He cursed, spat, took a chew of plug tobacco, and scratched his head.

"Hell," he said, "this can't go on forever! Luck's bound to change some time. Listen! You come in with me, didn't you, kid?"

Mark nodded.

"Remember that black bag I brought with me?" Rugose inquired.

Again Mark nodded.

"All right. I'll bet you that against your winnings. Shoot the pile. Come, on, let's go."

They went, but it was a slower game. Rugose was growing cautious and studying his moves, and it was a half hour before Mark also owned the bag. He straightened up, grinned, looked at Rugose, and stretched.

"Don't take it so hard, Rugose," he advised. "I ain't no piker. I'll give

you my clothes to-morrow so you won't have to leave here in a barrel."

"Piker hell!" Rugose exploded. "You ain't quittin', are you?"

Mark threw out his hands and shrugged his shoulders in a gesture that was half naïve, half passive.

"Well," he asked, "have you got any more excess baggage you want to get rid of?"

"No. But listen, kid." Rugose looked cautiously all about the room. There were no screws in sight. He leaned closer to Mark and lowered his voice. "I got eighty bucks in the office that says you can't keep your winnin's. You're the first guy I ever seen that I couldn't break even with. I'll bet you ten bucks against the bag."

"Shoot," said Mark.

It is against the law of averages that Mark should not lose a game once in awhile. But that only made the session more interesting, and when supper time came and they had to stop playing, Mark had divested his opponent of all his earthly possessions, at least all that were in the custody of the prison. Rugose was a bad loser, and he was sore.

He got the notion that Mark had used a system, and he started hounding the boy to tell him.

"You play by the book, don't you?" Mark inquired.

Rugose said that he did.

"Well, that's all there is to it, Mark explained, "except practice."

"Aw, lay offa that," Rugose advised. "I been at this racket too long, see, an' I never seen a guy before that played checkers like you. Come on, kid, don't be a piker."

"Who's a piker?" Mark demanded. "You know as much about checkers as I do; all you need is practice, that's the only system I know of. There ain't no system to checkers."

The prisoners were lined up for supper before Rugose could say anything more, but he gave Mark a dirty look, and there was a hard expression in his eyes. He didn't get a chance to ask any more questions that night because Mark maneuvered to get someone between them in the line-up, and the prisoners were marched directly to their cells immediately after supper.

III.

Rugose's resentment had all night in which to smolder, and Mark expected trouble in the morning. But during the hour or so after breakfast that they had to wait to be released Rugose's attitude changed. He became conciliatory and more or less suave.

Mark thought at first that it was because he didn't want to create any disturbance and so take a chance on having to stay, but he soon discovered his mistake.

When the bags of clothing were passed out, they stood side by side according to their agreement. Mark saw to that, and it took considerable seeing. But the rest of their plan fell through.

Instead of bumping into each other and dropping their bags and then picking up the wrong one as they had previously arranged, Rugose grabbed his own bag and hung on to it, and there was nothing Mark could do. A screw stood watching and they had to hurry. But Rugose saw the expression on Mark's face, and he explained:

"We can't do it here, kid. Wait'll we get outside. That screw's loaded for bear this mornin'."

Mark knew the same thing would happen when they got their envelopes, and he didn't even try taking Rugose's. However, he camped on the man's trail, and when they were outside the gates and on the sidewalk he said:

"Now gimme that money and we'll go some place where we can change clothes."

"Haw, haw, haw!" said Rugose. "Smart boy, ain't you? You don't get nothin' till you show me how to play checkers."

"So that's your game!" exclaimed

Mark with a sudden burst of comprehension. He threw out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. There had been a frost the night before and the morning was cold, and he was acutely aware of the inadequacy of his clothes.

"All right," he agreed.

"Now you're talkin', lad," said Rugose heartily. They arrived at a street intersection and he stopped.

"We'll wait here for a car," he said, "an' go down town an' get a room."

Mark said nothing. He was thinking. He didn't trust Rugose, and he was aware that he was letting himself in for a lot of trouble. But he had nothing to lose, and he had rubbed elbows with all sorts of men. He prided himself on his courage and his willingness to try anything once. He might get the breaks and he might not. He'd just have to trust to his luck.

"What I mean," Rugose warned when they were seated in the trolley car, "is that you gotta show me how to play checkers. An' don't try any tricks either. Here," he said in the same breath, "I got a sweater in this bag. You can wear it if you're cold."

He opened the bag and produced a close-knit coatlike sweater.

"Thanks," said Mark as he slipped it on. "Generous as hell, ain't you?"

"Oh, I ain't such a bad guy," said Rugose, "when you don't try double crossin' me."

"Yeah," said Mark. "I would talk about double crossin' if I was you."

"Aw, quit your sobbin'," said Rugose. "I'm givin' you an even break, kid. You ain't got nothin' to beef about after winnin' everything I got."

"Yeah," Mark repeated. "But winnin' an' havin' is two different things. How do I know I'll ever get what I won?"

"An' how do I know you'll show me how to play checkers?" Rugose countered. "I guess you don't know me. I never play nothin' without gettin' somethin' out of it. I suppose you think that salve you fed me yesterday about my gettin' a good time an' experience if I beat you got by with me.

"I doped it out this way. I figgered if you wasn't no good I could kinda pass the time away with you same as I did with them other bums. An' then when I seen what kind of a player you was, why, I just made up my mind I'd have you show me how to play."

"But I've told you half a dozen times," Mark stormed, "that it was only a matter of practice. I ain't got no system."

"Suit yourself," said Rugose. "Either you spill your secret or you don't get these clothes."

Mark subsided into a sullen silence, and they rode through the business district and out into the other side of town. It was a strange section to Mark. Just, in fact, as the whole town was strange. But he knew instantly what kind of section it was—just the kind in which he would expect to find a man like Rugose.

It was, first of all and preëminently, a low-grade foreign section, a place of ramshackle and decrepit buildings where prohibition had changed the old saloons on every corner to speakeasies.

It was at one of these corners that they left the street car, and into one of these speakeasies that they went. Rugose was acquainted here. He spoke on familiar terms with the proprietor. He paid for a room, was given a key together with some mail, and led Mark up a flight of dark, narrow stairs to a room at the rear of the second floor. He shoved his traveling bag under the iron bed and locked the door.

"Now," he said, turning to Mark, "let's have the low-down on this checker business."

"Listen, you lunatic," said Mark with finality, "I've told you for the twenty-fifth time everything I know about checkers. The only way you can ever learn to play as good as I do is to practice. This is a damned good place to do it. Just get out your checker-

board and sit down at that table and go to it.

"And now, Rugose," he said threateningly, "I'll give you just ten seconds to fork over that money and the bag and start gettin' outa those clothes. If you don't, you're delegated for a good trimmin'.

"I didn't dare tackle you on the street because I'm leavin' this neck of the woods without another look inside that jail if possible, but I don't have to worry about bein' disturbed here, an' that's the only reason I've come with you."

He counted up to ten, slowly and distinctly, but Rugose made hardly a move from his seat on the bed. When he had finished counting, Mark moved forward with his fists up and ready for business. But he didn't move far. He was still about four feet from Rugose when he became aware of a nasty-looking little automatic pointed straight at his midriff.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Rugose without taking his eyes off Mark. "Wise guy, ain't you? Stick up your mitts an' turn around. I'm through monkeyin' with you."

Mark lifted his hands high above his head and turned with his back to Rugose. He was afraid to do it, but he was more afraid not to. The next thing he knew, he didn't know anything. Friend Rugose had walloped him over the head with a blackjack and quietly stolen away, bag, baggage, and money.

IV.

THE first thing that penetrated his consciousness when he awoke was that his head felt as big as a wash tub and that it was one great big pain. He couldn't make up his mind for a minute just what had happened; so he opened his eyes to see where he was.

But that didn't do him much good because he was lying almost face down, and he couldn't see much of anything but a bare floor. That was hardly satisfactory; then he tried to sit up and eventually succeeded at it.

When the room, as a result of this effort, ceased revolving about him and became stationary, he turned his head cautiously from one side to the other and as it began to clear, he recognized first the iron bed and then the rickety table.

He finally remembered Rugose's ordering him to put up his hands and turn around.

He was sitting on the bed with his head in his hands some minutes later when there was an abrupt knock on the door. He nearly fainted, and wondered what more could happen to him before he got out of town. He stared dully at the door, wondering what to do, when the knock was repeated. Still he made no move, and presently the door was pushed open and a burly individual in a derby came inside.

"Ha!" said the visitor triumphantly. "Mr. Rugose, I believe. Where the hell 've you been keepin' yourself?"

Mark was scared. He stared apprehensively at the man with an expression of pain and misery.

"Say, mister," he said, "you got me wrong. I ain't Rugose an' I ain't done nothin'."

"Listen," said the stranger patiently, "you can't fool me, see? I been lookin' for you for two months an' the chief wants to see you. If I don't deliver you, I lose my job, see, an' it's a good job.

"You answer the description the chief give me—black hair an' eyes, five feet ten in height, weight about a hundred an' seventy, everything except age, an' they might of been mistaken about that—you're in the room the bird downstairs told me I'd find you in, an' if you ain't Rugose what the hell are you doin' in this room?"

"I—I—" Mark began; and then he choked and swallowed and didn't know what to say.

"If you ain't Rugose," the burly man repeated, "who are you?"

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