


ARGOSY

SEPT.
1

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢
IN CANADA
15¢



Sea Marauders

*A Present-Day Pirate
Novelette*

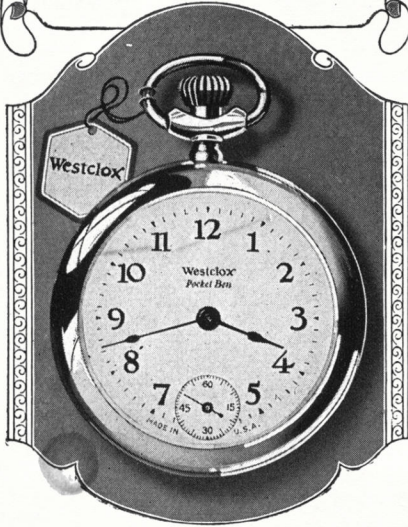
by Fred MacIsaac

Other Features by

Robert Terry Shannon
George M. Johnson
Thomas Thursday
Edgar Franklin
Loring Brent

PAUL
STAHR

Real Value
\$1.50



Pocket Ben

THERE'S more good time-keeping service, more real value in Pocket Ben than you'd ever expect in a \$1.50 watch.

Pocket Ben is both sturdy and thoroughly reliable, and mighty good looking, too. It's the kind of a time-piece that you can carry with pride and confidence.

*Built by the makers of
Big Ben and other Westclox.
Sold everywhere*

WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois



New Westclox Auto Clock

Attractive, convenient,
reliable. Fits any car.
Quickly attached on dash
or above wind-shield

\$2.50

On your feet- In a good Paying Business

We start you in the shoe and hosiery business. Inexperienced workers earn \$5000 yearly with our Direct-to-Wearer plan. Just show Tanners Famous Line of Footwear.

We tell how and where to sell. Perfect fit through Patented System. Collect your pay daily. We furnish \$40.00 Sample Outfit of actual shoes and hosiery. 72 styles. Send for free book "Getting Ahead" and full particulars. No obligation.

TANNERS SHOE MFG. CO.
5009 South C Street, Boston, Mass.

Electricity

Learn in Los Angeles. Thoroughly practical course prepares young men, 18 and over, for technical and executive positions. Unlimited opportunities in California for continuous advancement. 32 instructors. Unexcelled equipment. 23rd successful year. 17,000 active graduates. Highest Type Training. Recognized by Electrical Industry. Nominal Entrance Requirements. Employment Service during and after training. California spending \$100,000,000 in electrical development. Large, illustrated catalog sent Free, Postpaid.

101-G

NATIONAL ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
4004 S. Figueroa, Los Angeles

Make
\$12.00
A DAY
by
Showing
PIONEER
Tailoring

Double Your Income

Even part time men make \$5 an hour selling famous PIONEER made to measure all-wool union-made suits at \$23.50 and \$33.50. Liberal cash commissions paid daily in advance. Customer satisfaction brings 90% repeat orders. Generous bonus besides. We train the inexperienced. Greatest values ever offered. Finest outfit ever assembled—extra large cloth samples—furnished FREE reliable men with willingness to work for success. Write TODAY.

Pioneer Tailoring Co.
Congress and Throop
Dept. W1003. Chicago



Foreign Work!



Like to Travel—Does Romantic, Wealthy South America call you? Unusual opportunities for young men. American employers. Fare and expenses furnished.

BIG PAY. Write for Free List.

SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU
14600 Alma Avenue Detroit, Michigan

YOU SHOULD READ— MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

The Finest Fiction Available
at Any Price.

Twenty-five cents a copy. At all news-stands.

**Give Your Ambitions
Free Play!**

**Tie Up With the
Most Successful
Company in the Field**

Make Big Money-Start at Once!

With The Carlton Line

**No Capital
Required
No Experience
Necessary**

No Experience Necessary—No Investment Required—
Every minute, right from the start, is to be profitable to you. Part time or full time. . . Day time or night time. . . An opportunity wherein your success is only dependent upon your "Willingness to Try!"



Charles McKay, New York, one of Carlton's many Big Money Earners! . . . His success, at the rate of more than \$100 a week, every week, is also your opportunity. Mail the coupon at once!



ILLUSTRATED above . . . The famous Carlton Sample Outfit—the book that is making this entire country a playground of Big Money Earning for Carlton Representatives . . . the records of 1927 certainly prove it!

Between its two covers . . . the nationally known Carlton Custom-Quality Line of Men's Dress, Work and Sport Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Pajamas—the easiest to sell Men's Wear Line in America . . . and again the records of 1927 to prove it!

Year Round Business -Ever Active Market

Through you, we go direct to the vast American market of 35 million responsive prospects—ever new . . . never exhaustible! . . .

All you have to do is show the sample book, quote the low prices and take order after order without effort.

Carlton defrays full transportation charges, collects balances due and guarantees customer satisfaction.

If you prefer, begin by devoting spare time . . . your earnings will soon justify full time to Carlton's big-money-earning proposition.

Carlton actually puts you in business for yourself—gives your ambitions full play, and makes every minute of your association profitable.

Biggest Commissions Bonuses in Addition

You are paid daily—in cash. Each sale carries biggest commissions. Simplicity of plan makes Carlton proposition easy for you to grasp—and easy for you to start right out and show surprising results.

Carlton's Bonus Plan is the most successful earnings booster in the direct selling field—payable regularly and repeatedly, in units from \$25.00 to \$300.00. Explanation of Bonus Plan as well as details on Carlton's 40% Profit Sharing Plan furnished with outfit.

Profit Sharing is paid to Carlton representatives in addition to all other sources of Carlton incomes.

Complete Outfit FREE

Put it in Your Pocket and Put \$100 a Week in with it.

Upon receipt by us of special coupon to the right, you will be promptly furnished with complete sample outfit—the most elaborate selling kit in the field, containing hundreds of beautifully mounted, large sized swatches of the actual merchandise. Order books, supplies and valuable selling helps included with outfit.

There is no time like "at once" when an opportunity such as this one presents itself to you. Fill in and mail the coupon—your outfit will go forward by return post—prepaid. In less than a week, you will shake hands thankfully with the hand that wrote the coupon.

OUTFIT FREE

I'll supply complete selling equipment—and accept your ambition as my "receipt in full"

C. E. Mandel
Pres.

**carlton
MILLS**
114 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK - N.Y.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

C. E. MANDEL, Pres.
Carlton Mills, Inc.
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Dept. 99-12

Dear Mr. Mandel:
Send me the Free Carlton Outfit by return mail -- prepaid. I am ready to put The Carlton Line and your Big Money Earning guarantee to a test!

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....

Start your success at once-Sparetime or full time

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
 LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2 111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TETHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
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TITLE REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE
 COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

3 Drafting Lessons

Actually Free!



* Mail the Coupon

to prove you can learn at Home, in spare time!

American School

Guarantee of Position and Increased Pay

To _____

1. WE GUARANTEE to find you a satisfactory position within 60 days after you finish our complete course of home training in Drafting.

And, further,

2. WE GUARANTEE that said position will pay you a salary of at least \$5.00 more than you are earning today, provided your present salary is less than \$40 per week.

OR FAILING TO DO SO, we guarantee to refund to you immediately the entire amount that you have paid for this training.

O. C. Miller
Director
Extension Work

Home-training backed with an agreement to get you a DRAFTING JOB at a 50% RAISE—or money refunded

Here is a word-for-word copy of the Contract which we have made with 30,000 men in the past three years. I shall be glad to make the same agreement, backed by our entire resources of \$2,000,000.00—with YOU.

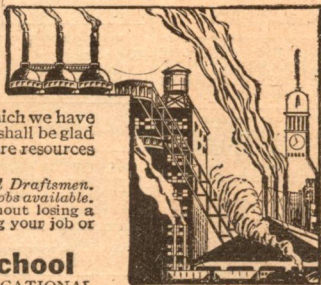
This agreement proves our training does make *real Draftsmen*. It proves that after you finish, *there are well-paid jobs available*. And you can prepare yourself without losing a day's pay or time, without quitting your job or leaving home!



O. C. MILLER
Director
Extension
Work

The American School

Chartered 30 years ago as an EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION, and, like the best resident schools and colleges, conducted NOT FOR PROFIT. We offer complete, thorough, up-to-date instruction—prepared by 200 leading Engineers, Executives and Educators. A unique instruction, built to meet the specifications of well-paid jobs as laid down by employers themselves—yet simplified for ready understanding by men with only common schooling.



Come Into Drafting!

The ability to read blueprints and draw plans is the entering wedge to success in all building and manufacturing lines. Learn Drafting and you'll be "sitting pretty." It's INTERESTING work and Draftsmen are a wonderful bunch of fellows. You're bound to enjoy the good natured atmosphere of a Drafting office and the contact it gives you with important activities and BIG MEN.

O. C. MILLER, Director, Extension Work ★
The American School, Dept. D-64
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

I am interested to get particulars of your Job and Raise Guarantee. Also send 3 Drafting Lessons without cost or obligation.

Name _____

Address _____

Age _____ Occupation _____

The American School

Dept. D-64, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine }
Argosy-Allstory Weekly }
Detective Fiction W'kly }
Minimum space 4 lines. } **Combination Line Rate \$3.00 Less 2% cash discount**

Oct. 6th Classified Forms Close Sept. 8th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AMERICA'S GREATEST TAILORING LINE FREE—150 LARGE SAMPLES—All Wool—Tailored to Order—Union Made—Sensational Low Price. Big commissions paid daily. Cash bonus besides. Exclusive territory to producers. Hustlers making \$100 a week and up. Get outfit at once. Address Dept. 661, GOODWEAR, 844 Adams, Chicago.

AGENTS \$20 A DAY TAKING ORDERS FOR NEW LINE GUARANTEED HOSIERY. 126 styles, colors. Finest silks you ever saw. Commissions paid daily. New Ford Car to active agents. **SILK HOSIE FREE FOR YOUR OWN USE.** Write for samples. **WILKNIT HOSIERY CO.,** Dept. 3199, Greenfield, Ohio.

SELL BEAUTIFUL "STYLE TAILORED" SHIRTS, pajamas, lumber jackets, and neckties direct to wearer at factory prices. Many beginners earn \$50 first week in spare time. \$100 weekly full time easy. Selling Outfit Free. **HOWARD SHIRTS,** 1213 Vanburcn, Factory 22, Chicago.

Wonderful "Whisper-It" Mouthpiece For Telephones; gives secrecy in conversation. Every telephone user a prospect. Retail \$1.00. Liberal profits. Write for full selling proposition. **Colytt Laboratories,** Dept. M, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

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

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

Don't Sell For Others. Employ Agents Yourself. Make your own products. Toilet Articles, Household Specialties, etc. 500% profit. Valuable booklet free. **NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC LABORATORIES,** 1961W Broad, Richmond, Va.

\$10 TO \$20 DAILY EASILY EARNED SELLING SHOES FOR THE LARGEST DIRECT TO WEARER CONCERN IN THE WORLD AT SAVING OF \$2 TO \$3 PAIR; SOME GOOD PROTECTED TERRITORY STILL OPEN. **DOUBLEWEAR SHOE CO.,** MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. **MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY,** 236 WEST 5TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 209, NEW YORK.

SONG POEM WRITERS—GET IN TOUCH WITH ME IMMEDIATELY FOR A BONA FIDE PROPOSITION. DON'T HESITATE, BUT WRITE TODAY TO RAY HIBBELE, D3, 2104 NO. KEYSTONE AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.

CAMERA AND PHOTO SUPPLIES

MAKE MONEY IN PHOTOGRAPHY. LEARN QUICKLY AT HOME. SPARE OR FULL TIME. NEW PLAN. Nothing like it. Experience unnecessary. **AMERICAN SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY,** Dept. 145-B, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

INSTRUCTION

Muscle—Send for free information regarding our new course of Muscle Building—health building. Training for Boxers, Wrestlers, Strongmen. Also Navy System. Complete \$5.00. Bossingham-Reynolds' Schools, 1003-B Street, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

MICHIGAN FARMLANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. \$10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-1276, FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING, CHICAGO.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

MAKE \$45 TO \$100 WEEKLY—full or part time—and liberal bonus, selling BETTER QUALITY all-wool made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Save \$18.50 per suit. No experience necessary. Commissions paid in advance. We furnish handsome large swatch samples and complete instructions FREE. Write today! **W. Z. GIBSON, 500 Throop St., Dept. W-409, Chicago.**

\$50.00 Weekly. Men wanted to demonstrate and take 10 orders daily direct from motorists. Amazing Magnetic Trouble Light. Sticks anywhere! More orders, bigger pay. Write for demonstrator and particulars. **Magno Co.,** 6 Beacon St., Dept. 349, Boston, Mass

\$12.00 Daily Showing New Table Cloth. Looks like linen. Wash like oilcloth. No Laundering. You just take orders. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. Write at once for Free Sample. "BESCO," 4319-NW Irving Park, Chicago.

STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates rentals. Gives new life and pep. Big profits. Gallon free. **LIGHTNING CO.,** St. Paul, Minn.

GENUINE GABARDINE SUITINGS for only \$23.50! Sensational values! Nothing like them in any other line. Agents cleaning up 75 other powerful sellers. Quarter yard samples free to hustlers. Write for outfit at once. Address Dept. 524, **MADISON BROTHERS,** 133 South Peoria, Chicago.

ADD \$3000 To Your Income making collections and checking up sales of NEVERUN which prevents runs and triples the wear of silk hose. No canvassing. Write immediately for full information. **QUINCY CO.,** 839 Quincy Bldg., Chicago.

Sell Things Needed Daily in Every Home—Soap, toilet goods, remedies, food products. Lower prices. Higher profits. Better quality. Quick sales. No experience needed. Spare or full time satisfactory. **HO RO CO, 2702 Ho-Ro-Co Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.**

Big Pay Every Day, showing Nimrod's All-Year Sellers! Dress, Work, and Flannel Shirts, Overalls, Pants, Sweaters, Underwear, Pajamas, Leather Coats, Lumberjacks, Playsuits, etc. Experience unnecessary. Big Outfit FREE. **NIMROD CO.,** Dept. 55, 4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago.

LINIMENT

ABSORBINE, JR., antiseptic liniment, soothing and healing. Gives prompt relief from aches, pains, sore muscles, sprains and bruises. Guards against infection. All druggists, \$1.25. Write for free trial bottle. **W. F. YOUNG, INC.,** Springfield, Mass.

MISCELLANEOUS

START A CRISPETTE SHOP. Delightful Confections. Everybody likes them. Make a lot of money. Adams reports \$364 profits in two days. We start you. Write, **LONG EAKINS,** 1961 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

OPTICAL INSTRUMENTS

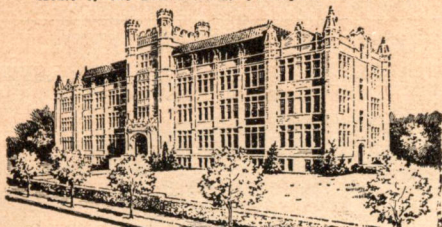
C-FAR FIELD GLASSES \$2. CONSISTS OF TWO RIMMED LENSES IN NEAT LEATHER CASE, SLIPS INTO VEST POCKET. WEIGHS ONLY 1 1-2 OUNCES. GIVES 6 DIAMETERS MAGNIFICATION. MONEY BACK IF NOT SATISFIED. SEND \$2 TODAY TO BUFFALO OPTICAL COMPANY, DEPT. MC-1, 574 MAIN ST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED

\$\$\$ FOR PHOTOPLAY PLOTS, STORIES ACCEPTED ANY FORM. Revised, criticised, copyrighted, marketed. Estab. 1917. Booklet free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP.,** 209 Western & Santa Monica Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.

Classified Advertising continued on page 5.

Home of the International Correspondence Schools



Go to High School at Home

You can secure a high school education right at home by studying the splendid new courses recently prepared by the International Correspondence Schools.

These courses are equivalent to the courses given in resident high schools. They have been specially arranged for men and women who wish to meet college entrance examinations, to qualify for a business position, or to make up the education they missed when forced to leave school too soon. A diploma is awarded at graduation.

Mail Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2238-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course I have checked below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School Course | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising |

Name.....

Address.....

PAYS BIG

Show Gibson tailoring and make \$100.00 a week and more. Real style, finest made-to-measure tailoring, all-wool fabrics. Remarkable values at \$23.50 and \$31.50. Sales come wonderfully easy and quick, even if you have no previous experience. **Your customer's satisfaction is always sure and repeat orders come fast for you.** Liberal commissions paid in advance. We handle deliveries, collections and give active co-operation in helping you build a big paying business. High grade sample outfit, with over 100 large wool samples, style book, supplies, etc., furnished you FREE. Don't delay—write for this handsome outfit that will put you in business for yourself.

W. Z. GIBSON, Inc.
500 Throop St.,
Dept. W-403 Chicago



SHOW \$23.50 Tailoring

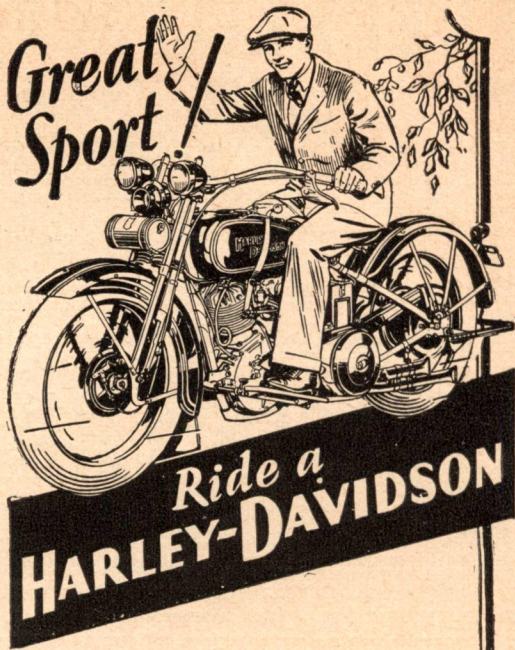
DO YOU WANT TO EARN A REAL SALARY

We assist you to a salaried position in Railway Traffic Inspection after 3 months' spare time home study. You start at a good salary, and advance rapidly. Some earn \$250 per month. Full particulars of this fascinating profession are explained in our free booklet. Send for it today.

Standard Business Training Institute
Div. 50 Buffalo, New York



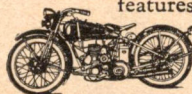
\$75-\$125 weekly Selling Christmas cards
Weekly Pay and Monthly Bonus Checks
Everyone buys Christmas Cards. Hertel Cards Sell on Sight. Simply show wonderful samples and take orders. No selling, experience required. Free booklet gives all facts. Write quick. Dept. 454, 318 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.
\$1000 Outfit FREE



MILES are just minutes of happiness when you're riding a Harley-Davidson. The surge of power under finger-tip control—rush of tonic air in your face—thrilling getaway that sweeps you around and beyond parades of cars—there's nothing like motorcycling!

Join the Jolly Riders! A Harley-Davidson is easy to buy—and costs almost nothing to run. In after-work hours, weekends and vacations you'll find it the best pal you ever had.

The 1929 models are out—with double headlights and many other dandy new features. Ask your dealer about them—and about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.



Mail the Coupon for our latest catalog.

The Single—famous "80 miles per gallon" solo mount, priced at only \$235 complete, f. o. b. factory.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. AF., Milwaukee, Wis

All models have front and rear brakes, and complete electric equipment. Twins from \$290 up, f. o. b.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.,
Dept. AF., Milwaukee, Wis.

Interested in Twin Single.
Send catalog and complete details.

Name.....
Street.....
City.....State.....

FRECKLE-FACE

Now is the Time to Get Rid of Those Ugly Spots

Here's a chance, Miss Freckleface, to try a remedy for freckles with the guarantee of a reliable concern that it will not cost you a penny unless it removes your freckles; while if it does give you a clear complexion the expense is trifling.

Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from any drug or department store and a few applications should show you how easy it is to rid yourself of the homely freckles and get a beautiful complexion. Rarely is more than one ounce needed for the worst cases.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as this strength is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove your freckles.



AGENTS **AMAZING DISCOVERY**
Abolishes Metal Polish

Experience unnecessary. Astonishing new cleaner for silver, copper, brass, nickel, etc. No liquid. No paste. Clean, dry, floss. Touch, and article shines like new, instantly. *Demonstrations amaze!* Everyone a sale. Sell Lightning Polishing CLOTHS and FLOSS to Housewives. Autoists, Stores, Offices, Factories buy large quantities of both. **SAMPLE FREE!** Sure, big, quick money getters. Exclusive territory. Double profit. Don't delay. Clinch your territory NOW! Write—

M. LIGHTNING CORP., 416 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago

Free Auto Book

on California

\$40 to \$100 weekly pay check is yours if you become an auto mechanic, electrician, etc. Learn by tested training methods at National, million dollar training headquarters for auto experts. We guarantee to qualify you. Earn while you learn. Big, 84-page book with 150 illustrations explains everything. Sent FREE—write to-day.

NATIONAL AUTOMOTIVE
Dept. 201-E, 4004 South Figueroa
Los Angeles, California

TRAVEL FOR UNCLE SAM

Be RAILWAY POSTAL CLERK, \$158-\$225 month; travel, see your country. Short hours, pleasant work, paid vacations, steady—no strikes. Experience unnecessary. For details, write Norton Inst., 1402 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

Learn to PAINT SIGNS and SHOW CARDS

We quickly teach you by mail or at school, in spare time. Enormous demand. Big future. Interesting work. Oldest and foremost school.

EARN \$50 TO \$200 WEEKLY

John Vassos, N. Y., gets \$25 for single show card. Crawford, B. C., writes: "Earned \$200 while taking course." Don't delay! No one for complete information, samples and guarantee.

DETROIT SCHOOL OF LETTERING
158 Stimson Ave, Est. 1899 DETROIT, MICH.



NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—EVERY DEAF PERSON KNOWS THAT



I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They stop head noises and ringing ears. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address



GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
38 Hoffman Bldg. Detroit, Mich.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP AND INSTRUCTION

MEN WANTING RAILWAY MAIL, POSTOFFICE CLERK AND MAIL CARRIER AND OUTDOOR POSITIONS; qualify immediately. Write for list. **BRADLEY INSTITUTE, 210-L Cooper Bldg., Denver, Colo.**

Work For "Uncle Sam." Steady jobs. \$105.00 to \$275.00 month. Men—women, 18 to 50. Paid vacations. Full particulars and sample coaching FREE. Write immediately. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. G-1, Rochester, N. Y.**

ESPERANTO, WORLD LANGUAGE, EASILY, QUICKLY LEARNED, DELIGHTFUL REVELATION. KNOW YOUR WORLD. THOUSANDS EVERY LAND WISH CORRESPOND. SEND STAMPED, ADDRESSED ENVELOPE FOR DETAILS. AMIKARO SCHOOL, BOX 223, CH STA., NEW YORK.

FOREST RANGER POSITIONS pay \$125—\$200 month; nice cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Get free list National Forests immediately. **RAYSON INST., Dept. A-14, Denver, Colo.**

HELP WANTED—MALE

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN (WHITE OR COLORED), Sleeping Car, Train Porters (colored), \$150—\$250 monthly. Experience unnecessary. **836 RAILWAY BUREAU, East St. Louis, Ill.**

MEN—INTERESTED OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT WORK ROMANTIC, WEALTHY SOUTH AMERICA WRITE FOR FREE LIST. GOOD PAY. SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU, 14,600 ALMA, DETROIT, MICH.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WOMEN, MEN—EARN \$35 WEEKLY addressing cards home, spare time; all year work. Experience unnecessary; no selling. Write **NATIONAL, 8413 Jamaica Avenue, Woodhaven, N. Y.**

I PAY WOMEN \$9 DAILY just to wear and show my beautiful New Free Lingerie "V" Chain. Prevents Shoulder Straps from slipping. **LINGERIE "V" CO., 16 Lake St., North Windham, Conn.**

HELP WANTED

WANTED—Men or Women—To take orders on Household Articles. From manufacturer direct. Salesmanagers to be selected on proven ability. Write immediately for particulars. **MORBRO RUG CO., East Riverton, N. J.**

MEN, GET FOREST RANGER JOB; \$125—\$200 MONTH AND HOME FURNISHED; HUNT, FISH, TRAP. For details, write **NORTON INST., 1497 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.**

TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. **NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812 Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.**

Tobacco Habit Cured or No Pay. Any form, cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chewing or snuff. Guaranteed. Harmless. Used by over 600,000 people. Full treatment sent on trial. Costs \$1.50 if it cures; nothing if it fails. **Superba Co., N14, Baltimore, Md.**

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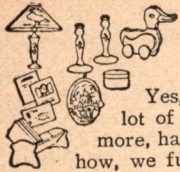
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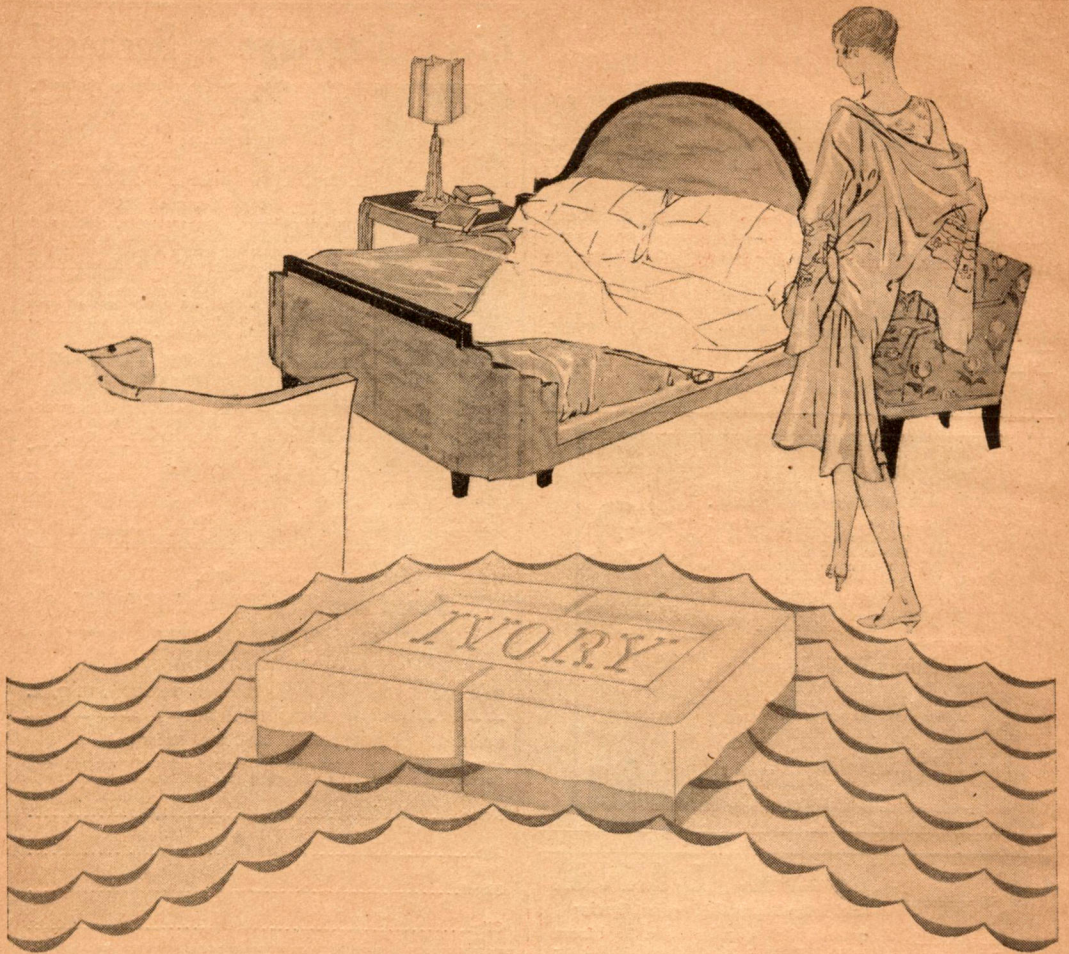
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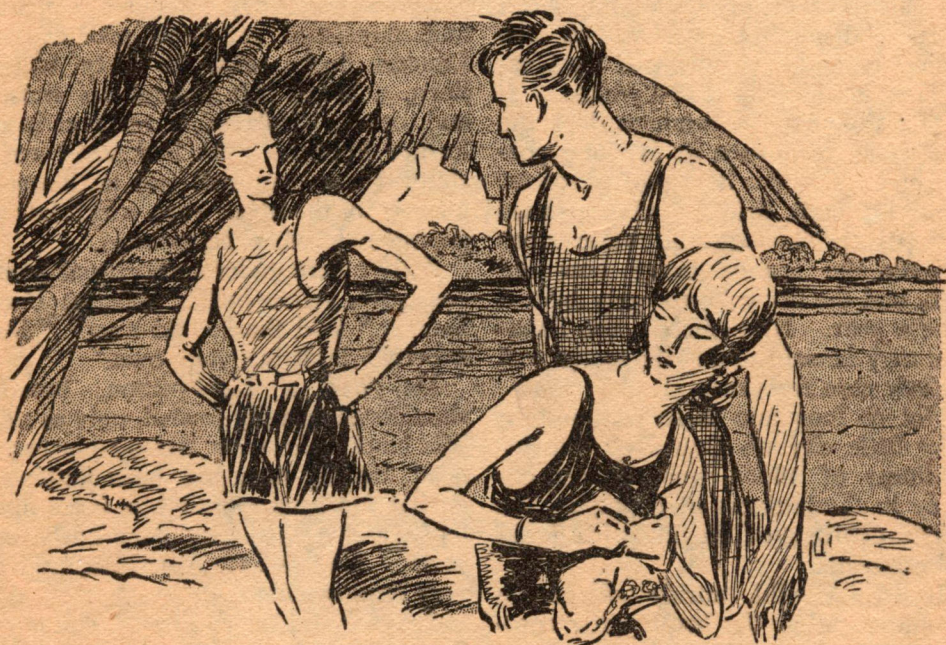
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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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"Did I hear my name?" came from behind them

Sea Marauders

A luxurious island paradise Peter Lovering created in the Bahamas—little suspecting the human birds of prey who would come flocking to it

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "Red Hot," "Those Lima Eyes," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

PIRATES.

FROM Little Abaco to Turk's Island in the Bahamas is something over a thousand miles. Between these two isles of the sea are innumerable islands ranging in size from

Andros, which is a hundred miles or so in length, to the tiny patches of earth with a few trees and a half acre or so of grass. Not even the Bahama government can say with certainty how many islands are included in the group, but the number is well over a thousand. Most of these islets are uninhabited,

a good number support a few families of negroes, several are headquarters for American bootleggers, and some are privately owned and used as winter residences by American and British nabobs.

And of course there is the island of New Providence, upon which is situated the town of Nassau, and there, in the winter time, throngs of American tourists disport themselves to the edification and enrichment of the Nassovians, black, yellow, and white.

The Colonial Government does the best it can to govern its farflung possessions. A police boat voyages about the archipelago, British gunboats steam impressively through the water lanes between the islands every now and then, and the tax collector gets around once a year. Nevertheless, the Bahamas may be said to be left pretty well to their own resources.

Not so long ago there was quite a busy little city on Gun Key, the inhabitants of which were almost entirely in the business of supplying the thirsty denizens of Florida with liquid refreshment.

It was a wild, unruly village, so tumultuous that the bootlegging companies finally established their own police, who reduced homicide to a reasonable degree, but its day of glory has passed.

In a saloon which faced the harbor on a very beautiful afternoon in January about a year ago three men sat in gloomy conference.

With glasses of Scotch and soda upon the table in front of them, they looked out upon the bay. Not so long ago it was a very busy port, with scores of schooners, tramp steamers, and fast motor launches at anchor or made fast to moorings.

Now it was almost deserted; a few motor craft, a couple of two-masted schooners, and several native fishing smacks, and a long, low, white steamer from the stern of which floated the

Stars and Stripes completed the marine picture.

One of the trio lifted his glass and made a gesture with it toward the cutter.

"Look at her," he said bitterly. "A bleeding Yankee revenue boat lying in a British harbor. What right has she here I want to know?"

He was a cockney, of course, a small, undernourished rat-faced product of London docks, clad in dirty white linen, a broad belt around his waist, and, openly displayed, a revolver in a leather holster. He had small red-rimmed blue eyes, and two teeth were gone from the upper row, which left a gaping hole when he grinned.

"She's here under authority of your cowardly, yellow-bellied Bahama Parliament," said the second man. "It's nobody's fault but your own."

He was a big person, broad-shouldered, heavily jowled, ugly as sin. His black hair grew low on his forehead, his big nose had been flattened on his face, his mouth was large and loose, and he had pendulous unshaved jowls. He was an American, and a very hard specimen.

"Aye," said the cockney, "you have the right of it. These blasted Nassovians got holy when they got rich. Imagine them giving Yankee rum chasers permission to come right into British waters and board and search British vessels.

"What would Lord Nelson say to that I'd like to know? Why doesn't the British Parliament put a stop to it? Where's our national pride?"

"Well," said the third man, "Great Britain owes America a lot of money and might be asked to pay in full; so she felt she had to be police to her principal creditor. As a result, a very beautiful business has gone completely to pot. Am I right?"

"Why rub it in?" asked the big American. "I can't load my boat under the nose of that cutter. If I leave the harbor she'll chase me and

make a search. The game is over, all right."

"Then perhaps you might be interested in a different game," said the third man. He was a different type from his two companions, a superior type, a casual observer might declare; but a study of his countenance should bring about another verdict.

He was dressed in well-fitting and spotless white drill. An expensive Panama hat lay on a chair beside him. His shirt was of silk, and on the ring finger of his left hand was a solitaire diamond which must have weighed two carats. He wore costly English shoes of white calfskin.

He spoke carefully precise English, with a very slight foreign accent, Spanish perhaps. He was dark, handsome in a bold predatory manner. Thoughtless girls might admire him; but his eyes were cruel, his mouth was pitiless, his chin brutal.

"Yeh?" said the American. "I wondered what brought you over from Nassau, Pedro. What's the game you think we might be interested in?"

Pedro Andromo smiled. His teeth were gleaming white and faultless.

"An old game in these waters," he said softly. "The oldest game of all: Piracy."

The cockney goggled at him. The American frowned. "Nix," he declared. "With these warships carrying airplanes? Not on your life. That game died with Captain Kidd."

"I don't mean old-fashioned piracy," he said. "With wireless on every steamer and yacht it would be stupid to try the old game of stopping ships and making the crew walk the plank, and it wouldn't be profitable any more. This is a modern game. I am letting you into it, Captain Gibbons, because you have a fast motor ship."

"I'm an honest bootlegger," replied the American. "I'm not mixing up in piracy, ancient or modern."

"Shut your face, cawn't ye?" pleaded the cockney. "Pedro here

ain't no fool. I want to know his gyne."

"Well, there ain't any harm in hearing it," admitted Gibbons.

"Good," smiled Pedro. "You have heard, of course, of Peter H. Lovering."

"Cawn't say I have," replied the cockney.

"The automobile man?" asked Gibbons.

"Yes. Mr. Lovering bought an island about three hundred miles west of New Providence about three years ago. He has been building a palace on it for two years, and about a week ago he arrived at Nassau on his yacht, with a dozen prominent society people. They sailed yesterday for Gascon Island."

"What did he want to go away down there for? Couldn't he have got an island near Nassau?" asked Gibbons.

"He wants to be far from civilization. He has made a perfect paradise of Gascon Island. He hasn't got a neighbor within fifty miles. He is out in the middle of the Atlantic, and monarch of all he surveys."

"Go on," commanded Gibbons.

"It's about a hundred miles from Gascon Island to the north shore of Cuba," continued Pedro. "Now there are half a dozen women in this party, and I saw them all at the New Colonial Hotel in Nassau, where they had a dinner party."

"Those women wore at least a quarter of a million dollars' worth of jewels. In their jewel caskets on the yacht there is undoubtedly another quarter of a million. I think it likely there would be forty or fifty thousand dollars in cash in that crowd."

"I get you," said Captain Gibbons.

"It's easy," urged Pedro. "Fifty miles from Bradon's Island, and there is only one white family there. Three hundred miles from the Nassau police. Alone in the Atlantic. Need I say more?"

"Not to me," said the cockney. "I'm for it. We clean 'em out and land in Cuba."

"Hold your horses," from Gibbons. "They have arms, of course. And the yacht crew will be there."

"No. She is going to land them and go back to New York for another bunch of guests who will succeed this crowd. I made inquiries in Nassau. Nobody there but Lovering and his guests."

"And a lot of servants."

"Native servants; they don't matter. Three or four valets, and half a dozen French maids."

"This fellow Lovering is no fool. He will have machine guns on that island."

"So shall we. And we'll land in the dead of night and take the place by surprise."

"Undoubtedly he has a wireless broadcasting station."

"We'll put it out of commission first thing."

"How about landing in Cuba?"

"I know a safe landing place on the north shore, miles from any government patrol. I can take you to a plantation where we can lie low for a year if need be. Would I suggest such a thing if it were not perfectly safe?"

"You'd look out for your own skin," said Captain Gibbons with a laugh. "How many men do we need?"

"Can you pick up a dozen you can trust?"

"I can't trust anybody. I can get a dozen tough eggs who would slit a throat as quick as they'd cut a steak, but I couldn't depend on them afterward."

"It is my idea," said the Spaniard softly, "that only we three succeed in reaching Cuba."

"Maroon them? They'd give us away. Nobody can be marooned for very long nowadays."

"I assure you we will find a way to dispose of them after they have served their purpose. I know you two of old.

We can trust one another, but not these gunmen."

"Well," sighed Gibbons, "I never went in for wholesale murder, but I never had a chance at half a million dollars before. Are any of these dames good-looking?"

"Three of them are beautiful. It's too bad," said Pedro. "We have to be certain that none of the Lovering party remain alive after our departure. They will have seen us."

"Killing women!" exclaimed Gibbons. "I don't like that."

"It's got to be done, Bill," said the cockney. "It's us or them."

"Watson, you have the makings of a good pirate," commended Pedro with an evil smile. "I am afraid the lovely ladies will have to die, but not before—er—"

"Well, I suppose, if we go in for this we got to do it right," consented Gibbons. "There are thirty or forty men on the beach here, and a lot of them are up against it."

"I can pick about ten who'll tackle a thing like this. And I'll be careful not to take anybody I like, since we're going to get rid of them afterward. When do you want to start?"

"Just as soon as you're ready. You can pick up a couple of machine guns?"

"Got one hidden in a house up the street. I know where there are more. Plenty of ammunition, too. You're sure these jewels ain't false?"

"Accept my assurance," said Pedro Andromo. "I have seen them. And these ladies are of great wealth."

"We're doing a favor to their heirs," grinned Gibbons. "I think we can get under way to-morrow night. I'll sail alone with you and Wattie, here, and pick up the crew on the other side of the island."

"The revenue cutter will stop me and search for booze before I get out of the harbor. I'd better send the machine guns across the island to come out in the boat with the crew."

"Very good. We'll tell the American rum chaser that we are going to Nassau for supplies," said Pedro.

CHAPTER II.

GASCON ISLAND.

WHEN the Spanish pirate told his companions that Peter H. Lovering had turned Gascon Island into a paradise he had not exaggerated in any respect.

It was a coral island, about six miles in circumference and about a mile wide in its thickest part. During the thousand or more years since the coral insects had reached the surface with their atoll the sea had deposited much earth upon it, and there was a hill at its widest part seventy-five feet high.

Upon the summit of this elevation he had built his house so that, from his windows, he might look down upon the lagoon, which was about two miles in circumference, and out upon the boundless ocean.

There was a natural growth of coconut and date palms upon the island, and Lovering had uprooted and transported from Cuba several score royal palms, which formed an avenue from his main entrance down a gentle slope to the lagoon.

The house was a long, two-story white structure, with red tiled roof, which was built like a Southern California villa, with very broad porches, front and back, and with a capacity for forty guests and their retinue.

There were gardens of great extent on either side of the house; a long one-story building for servants' quarters located a couple of hundred feet below the house on the ocean side; a great white-tiled swimming pool for those whose fear of savage fish would keep them out of the lagoon; tennis courts; a boathouse containing half a dozen small launches, row boats and outrigger canoes, and a farm where tropic fruit, melons and vegetables were

grown, which was about twenty acres in extent.

There were bridle paths cut through the jungle which covered a large part of the island, a dozen saddle horses in the stable, and a wireless house, where a broadcasting station was installed, so that Mr. Lovering might always be in touch with the New York market.

He had expended upon this remote coral island something over two million dollars during the past three years, and here he planned to spend three or four months each winter with a house full of guests. He arranged to use his yacht like a ferryboat, bringing down newcomers and taking home those who could remain no longer. He was as happy as a child with a new toy.

Lovering, unlike many multimillionaire Americans, was not self-made. He was a graduate of Harvard University, his father had been wealthy, and he inherited an excellent social position.

When he had taken over the bond business upon the death of Lovering senior, he had found it flourishing, and he had lifted it, until it was one of the three or four great banking houses of New York.

WHEN he arrived at Gascon Island he was sixty-four years old, a tall, thin, clean-shaved, pink-cheeked old young man, in perfect health, able to play a fair game of tennis and do eighteen holes of golf in three or four strokes above par. He was a widower with one daughter, and he was not sure he might not marry again.

Mildred Lovering was so beautiful it was hard to believe that she was the daughter of a multimillionaire. She was only five feet one inch in high heels, not much bigger than a big doll, and she resembled a doll in every respect except that there was the light of intelligence in her big blue eyes. She was twenty-four years old and was frequently mistaken for seventeen.

She was a horsewoman, an airplane pilot, a golfer of unusual skill, and a splendid swimmer. Her hair was reddish yellow, and she was letting it grow long. It had attained a length of seven or eight inches, and she complained that she couldn't do a thing with it.

Mr. and Mrs. Gaston Platt were in the party, rather a stupid pair in their fifties. Platt was fat and Mrs. Platt was stout. She had dyed her hair to approximate the color of Mildred's and the effect was incongruous.

Mrs. Weldon Balch, a widow, was the lady whose attractions made Lovering wonder if he were too old to remarry. She was about forty-five, but one of those modern miracles, a beautiful, slender, graceful, youthful-looking person, without a line or a wrinkle, teeming with energy, a sportswoman, an indefatigable golfer and tennis player and dancer.

Mildred Lovering told her father that Mrs. Balch had had her face lifted; if so the work was superbly accomplished. She was independently wealthy.

Among the guests was Franklin Forbes, who wanted to marry Mildred Lovering and who had made some impression on her. He was about thirty, striking in appearance without being handsome, athletic, and unusually successful for so young a man.

He had the approval of Mr. Lovering, for he was the sort of person who would not mishandle the Lovering fortune when it came to his wife; and he had a reputation for gallantry which ought to offend a good girl but more often attracts her.

Mr. and Mrs. Leo Higgins were a young couple, two years married, both born with silver spoons in their mouths. Mrs. Higgins was a school friend of Mildred's. She was pretty, but getting too plump. Her husband was amiable but vacuous. He was about twenty-seven years old.

Lovering's legal adviser, Henry Courtleigh, was among the guests, a

heavy, red-faced man of sixty odd, brilliant in his line, but already voted a bore by all except the Platts, who were the same sort.

Mrs. Laura Saunderson was the divorced wife of a wealthy Chicagoan. She had been a successful legitimate actress before her marriage, and was now about thirty-eight and looked her age. She drank too much.

Frank Raleigh and Mrs. Raleigh completed the party which landed on Gascon Island from the yacht Adventurer. He was a junior partner in Lovering's firm, forty-five and looked thirty-five. His wife was thirty-five and looked forty-five. She was too fat.

These and their manservants and their maid servants were settled in charming quarters in the gorgeous residence, and were hysterical in praise of the exquisite island and of the extreme luxury they found in mid-Atlantic.

ONE other person landed from the yacht. He was a tall, thin youth of twenty-seven, who had a slight stoop to his broad shoulders.

He was conducted to the wireless house, for he had been brought down to operate the radio apparatus. He also opened wide his pleasant brown eyes at the luxury of the quarters provided for him in the wireless house.

After several years of employment as an operator upon a second-rate transatlantic liner, he was overcome at the thoughtfulness of his new employer.

He immediately tested the plant and found everything in splendid shape. Lovering had built a big power house, installed the latest and most up-to-date machinery.

Steve Reardon, the operator, got in touch with Nassau, Miami and Havana without the slightest difficulty. In engaging him Lovering had informed him that he expected a complete daily market report and full news bulletins. He would also transact considerable business by radio.

The pay was excellent, a hundred dollars a week, but Reardon already regretted that he had taken the job. He had seen Mildred Lovering.

He was a sensible young man, and he realized that the daughter of one of the richest men in America was as far beyond his reach as the moon and the stars; and he knew that she was practically engaged to Franklin Forbes, for he heard plenty of gossip during the voyage.

But he was on deck one evening when the moon was bright, and Mildred Lovering had come out of the cabin in an evening gown of cloth of gold and stopped when she saw him leaning on the rail and talked with him for half an hour, and that finished him.

He was up early on his first day on the island, and sat on the comfortable porch of the wireless house to see Mildred shoot by on a beautiful gray mare in a beautiful gray riding habit followed by Forbes on a big roan.

There was an excellent view of the tennis courts upon which appeared, later in the morning, half a dozen white-clad figures among which Mildred with her red gold hair was conspicuous. He strolled over to the swimming pool about noon, and he saw her in a snug green one-piece bathing suit disporting herself like a mermaid in company with the other guests.

Reardon ranked among the upper servants of the Lovering household; he was aware of that, though his status had not been given to him in so many words.

He was privileged to use the swimming pool in the afternoon when the maids and valets were in it, but he had his pride. He would use the beach of the lagoon, a beach with sand as white and as fine as talcum powder, upon which rippled an emerald sea which turned to azure a few hundred feet out.

The lagoon was full of sharks whose triangular fins protruding from the water advertised their presence, but Reardon knew they would avoid the

shallow water, and the beach was a gentle slope.

It was going to be very dull for him on the island, since he could not associate with the guests, and would not play with the servants even though one or two of the French maids were very pretty. He told himself he would not mind the dullness; what would kill him would be to watch the progress of the courtship of Mildred Lovering by Franklin Forbes.

Forbes he had not liked from the moment he saw him board the yacht and before he knew that he was destined to marry the heiress. The fellow exuded superciliousness, so it seemed to him. He was arrogant, purse-proud, and overbearing, and he looked to Steve like a "chaser."

Undoubtedly he had a wide acquaintance among the advertised stage beauties of New York, and his court to Miss Lovering was an insult to a sweet, wholesome, and ingenuous little girl—in the opinion of one who was prejudiced like Mr. Reardon. However there was nothing he could do about it.

His work was light and easy, for there were no watches as there were on shipboard. He had to stand by while market reports were twittering through the air, and he was on call for messages from Mr. Lovering at any hour, but his time was mostly his own, and at night he could shut up shop.

The first afternoon the entire party, conducted by Mr. Lovering, came to inspect the wireless house. Mildred called him by name and asked him a number of questions, and her manner was that of one equal to another. The others ignored him or addressed him as they would have spoken to a footman. He kept his temper with difficulty while the Platts patronized him, but he liked Mrs. Balch and the old lawyer.

Upon the second morning, the green lagoon called to him before breakfast; he donned his bathing suit, and ran down the path to the beach where he threw himself on the warm sand.

The yacht had lifted anchor half an hour before, passed through the narrow passage in the reef, and was already hull-down on the skyline. She was on her way to fetch another dozen New York idlers who desired a sample of Robinson Crusoe de luxe. He wished he was on board of her.

Presently he rose and ran into the water. The temperature was about seventy-five, its feeling was delicious. He lay on his back and floated, the ocean covering his ears, and reveled in the voluptuousness of it.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREEN LAGOON.

ASPLASH near by caused him to lift his head, and he looked into the blue eyes of Mildred Lovering a dozen feet away.

"Hello!" she said with a devastating smile. "Great, isn't it?"

He was so astonished he couldn't answer for a moment, but he began to tread water, and he smiled back at the unexpected bather.

"Good morning, Miss Lovering," he said. "I didn't hear you until just now."

"I'm forbidden to bathe in the lagoon," she said rather breathlessly, for she had been swimming hard. "But I looked out my window and saw you going in; so I thought I would steal a swim. It isn't dangerous, is it?"

"Not if we keep fairly close to the shore. And I don't think the sharks here are the man-eating variety anyway."

"It's so much nicer than that old pool. I love surf bathing, but the coral rock on the ocean side makes it impossible. How do you like my island, Mr. Reardon?"

"It's a paradise," he sighed, "but—"

"Why a but? Is there a serpent in it?" she laughed.

"Probably not. If I were a guest

I suppose I would adore it but I am an employe—"

"Pshaw," she retorted. "You are as good as any of us. You dance, of course."

"Well—er—"

"Let's go up and lie on the sand," she proposed.

She swam shoreward, and he followed. With the nonchalance of the modern bathing girl she threw herself on the sand and kicked her legs in the air.

"We'll do this every morning," she declared. "It's marvelous."

"Won't your father—"

"What he doesn't know won't hurt him," she laughed. "Nobody will be up before nine o'clock. Our crowd stay up late and sleep most of the morning. I can't be bothered with sleep when life is so gorgeous. I'll tell you what, I'll make father invite you up to the house evenings. I'm sure you are a good dancer."

"Please, don't," he said. "You are very democratic, but I'm sure the others wouldn't care much for my presence. After all, I'm a sort of servant."

"Nonsense, you're a most romantic person—a wireless man. Father said he got you off an ocean liner. Were you ever in a shipwreck?"

"Once."

"And you sent out S. O. S. calls until the ship went down?"

He laughed and shook his head. "No indeed. The power gave out hours before she sank, and I pulled an oar in the first boat that left the ship."

"Wasn't it thrilling?"

"I am afraid I didn't appreciate that part of it. I was scared."

"I don't believe it," she retorted. "I'm sure you were a hero. Let's have one more plunge, and then I'll fly back. Give me your hand."

While he fiddled from head to foot at the touch of her little hand, he ran with her into the brilliant green water. She swam with a speedy crawl which

would have outdistanced him if he had not exerted himself.

"Turn in," he called. "You're getting into deep water."

"I'm not afraid of silly sharks," she retorted. "Not since you told me they are harmless."

"I can't vouch for it. And there might be such a thing as an octopus."

With a shriek she turned and headed for the shore. "I never thought of those awful things," she flung back at him.

She stood up in shallow water. "I'm shivering at the thought of them."

"I believe they lurk under rocks, and as there are no rocks here it's not likely they would be around. However, I think you had better keep in shallow water."

"Good morning and thanks for your companionship," she said. "How about to-morrow at seven?"

"I'll be here," he assured her, and then he watched her as she ran lightly up the slope to the residence.

Fully aware that this light-hearted companionship meant nothing to her and spelled wretchedness for him, he returned slowly to his quarters. The charm of her, the witchery of her, her beauty, her sweet friendliness!

For the first time in his life he envied those who had wealth. What did this fellow Forbes possess more than himself, except money? Well, he was better-looking, too. Steve hated him.

He met Mildred next morning at seven and spent a delicious hour. The following day she did not come and he sorrowed, but the third day she appeared again.

"I just overslept," she told him. "But last night I set an alarm clock. I wouldn't give up these mornings for anything."

SHORTLY after lunch — Steve lunched alone in the breakfast room of the big house—he was sitting before his key when Franklin Forbes came through the open door.

"Hello!" he said curtly. Forbes did not return the salutation, but helped himself to a chair.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "I happened to get up early this morning, and looking out my window saw you on the beach with Miss Lovering."

"Indeed."

"You apparently misunderstand your position here," continued Forbes in his most arrogant tone. "You have no business making use of the beach except when none of the household are using it."

"Yes?"

"Yes. You are a paid employee, a menial if you want it straight from the shoulder, and you ought to know enough to keep your place."

Reardon rose. His eyes glittered dangerously behind his glasses, and he was very pale.

"Now understand your place," he said. "This is my office. While I am employed here, I am in charge. You get to hell out."

Forbes was up and facing him.

"I shall leave when I get good and ready. I came here to give you a tip rather than going to Mr. Lovering. You choose to be insolent. You leave me no choice."

"In a couple of seconds I'm going to take a wallop at the place where you are standing," warned Reardon. "You tell Mr. Lovering anything you please, but you've said your say to me. Go or fight."

Forbes looked him over. "I happen to be a good boxer, and I think I could cut you to pieces," he replied scornfully. "However, I wouldn't soil my hands on a servant."

He stepped backward out upon the porch, then strode swiftly away.

REARDON followed him to the door and watched him depart.

Two angry red spots replaced the white in his cheeks. Then he shrugged his shoulders and went back to his key. Of course this had to happen. It was

inevitable that something would put a stop to the blissful mornings on the beach.

Forbes would not dare to tell tales on Miss Lovering, but he would inform her that he knew of her morning swims with the wireless man, and most likely she would stop coming. If she was in love with Forbes she would do what he asked. What did she care if Steve Reardon was deprived of his glimpses of heaven?

Later he saw them playing tennis. That night there was a dance at the big house, and Steve, putting his pride in his pocket, strolled up to the residence, went around on the back porch and looked through the open but screened window into the ballroom, in company of three or four servants. He saw Mildred dancing with Forbes. Evidently they were in accord.

A phonograph with a loud speaker was playing a fox trot from a recent Broadway show, and Mrs. Balch, at the grand piano was playing it in harmony with the machine with the result of an admirable orchestral effect. A valet swept a maid into the dance on the porch, and a girl touched Steve on the arm.

"You dance wiz me?" said Mrs. Balch's pretty Parisienne maid.

He shook his head. "I can't dance," he replied.

"Bah," she retorted. "You have ze swelled head."

Steve left her and returned to his quarters. Even there he could hear the music very plainly. He was shut out from elysium by a high wall of gold.

HE rose at six next morning, and at seven, in his bathing suit he lay on the sand with no expectation of his enterprise being rewarded. Then a patch of red appeared on the porch, a new bathing suit which contained the girl with the red gold hair.

She scampered down the avenue of

royal palms, and, in a moment, stood upon the snow-white beach against a background of dark green so beautiful that the heart of Steve Reardon hurt him.

"Did you think I wasn't coming?" she asked in her ear-enchancing soprano. "I was lazy this morning, but I forced myself to get up after awhile."

Steve was on his feet, of course, and in a bathing suit he looks sturdier than in ordinary clothes.

"You know I didn't really expect you any more," he said.

"Why? You know I love stealing down here like this."

"I had a visitor yesterday. Mr. Forbes called."

"Yes?" she said, unconcerned.

"To remind me that I was a menial," he said bitterly. "It seems he saw us yesterday morning."

"And what did you reply?" she asked gravely.

"I told him to get out or I'd be compelled to put him out."

"Good!" she cried. "Franklin had his nerve with him."

"Did I hear my name?" came from behind them. They swung round.

Franklin Forbes, arrayed in a life saver's bathing suit, white shirt, black trunks, and red belt, had joined them.

With a girl's appreciation of a situation, Mildred smiled maliciously.

"Imagine you being up so early," she said. "We are going in. Want to come?"

"Yes, indeed, but I have something for the wireless man to do. Please get the Nassau station immediately, and send to Thomas Lightman at the New Colonial the words: 'Proposition Declined.'"

Steve bowed, but his eyes were furious.

"Just now Mr. Reardon is going bathing with us," Mildred said blandly. "Later he will send your message."

Forbes signaled to her with his eyes. "It is urgent," he said aloud. "I am

sure Mr. Reardon wishes to carry out his instructions."

Steve turned to go, nothing else for it; but Mildred stopped him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Reardon. Franklin, permit me to remind you that our wireless man is employed by my father, not by his guests. He will take his instructions from father or myself.

"I think Mr. Lightman can wait half an hour to have his proposition declined, and in the meantime we are going swimming. If you like you may join us."

"Upon my word," exclaimed Forbes. "May I ask if your father approves of your comradeship with this—er—employee?"

Mildred drew her small self up with as much hauteur as a blond doll in a red bathing suit might achieve.

"If you like you may ask him," she said icily. "Come, Steve," She held out her hand and he accepted it, then they ran into the water. It was the first time she had used his first name, and he hadn't known she knew it. He was thrilled to ecstasy.

She dived and he followed; they came up laughing to see Forbes retreating toward the house.

He grinned. "In an hour I'll be fired," he observed.

"Do you care?"

"Not a whit. It was worth it to see you lay him out."

"You needn't worry about his telling father," she said as they swam side by side. "Franklin is really very nice, and he claims to be in love with me; so he will take very good care not to tattle. He may be nasty to you."

"I think I can lick him," he said.

She laughed. "I forbid you to fight. When I get Mr. Forbes in a corner I'll put him in a very meek mood."

"Just the same, I ought not to be meeting you like this. Your father certainly would object."

"If you are afraid of father," she taunted.

"I don't care anything for this job, but I'd hate to be put off the island, because then I wouldn't see you any more."

"I suppose father would be furious," she said. "Do you know you are the first man I ever was friends with who worked for his living? All my men inherited money and just spend it. Father says Franklin is a good business man, but I wonder how he would be if he hadn't started with a good-sized fortune. How much do you make?"

"A hundred dollars a week," he confessed.

"Goodness. That's nothing. Why don't you make more?"

"Because I don't know how."

She lifted her eyebrows, then frowned. "Nonsense. I am sure you have as much brains as Franklin. Why don't you make a fortune?"

"I will," he gritted. "I never had an incentive before."

With her face before him, her damp gold locks falling over her eyes, cleaving, both of them through the invigorating salt sea, it seemed a simple thing to do.

"Fine," she applauded. "Now I'm going in. I don't want to make Franklin too angry. See you to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

BLOOD AND A BOTTLE OF RUM.

BLACKBEARD and his ilk sailed the seas in a long, low brigantine, according to an old song. Captain Bill Gibbons sailed in a long, low grayish-brown power boat. She was seventy feet from stem to stern, seaworthy, built upon the lines of a fishing dory.

She was unattractive to look at, and the ordinary observer would assume that she was a slow, unwieldy craft, which was what Gibbons hoped he would assume. She contained a huge gasoline engine, which could drive her

through the water at twenty-two knots an hour, and enable her to show her heels to all but the fastest of the prohibition patrol boats of the Florida coast.

She had space in her hold for a couple of hundred cases of whisky, and quarters in the cabin for a crew of six. There were twelve men on her as she sped on her way from Gun Key to Gascon Island, and seven of them were compelled to sleep on deck or in the hold, which contained no cargo save some cases of ammunition, two Maxim machine guns, several reserve tanks of gasoline, and food supplies for a couple of weeks.

Captain Bill Gibbons had picked off the beach nine excessively savage man beasts, two of whom were brutal American negroes, three were Portuguese, four were bootleggers and hijackers, of whom one was English and three were Americans.

As they loafed on deck under the hot sun, most were naked, save for dirty white drill pants, all were bare-foot, and all unshaven. The Portuguese wore earrings, two of the Americans were bearded, and the largest of the negroes had had one eye gouged out.

The admission of Yankee patrol boats to Bahama waters had made beach combers out of bootleggers, and all these men were penniless and desperate when Bill took each one aside and whispered in his ears that in exchange for a few bullets he would earn several thousand dollars. As yet they had not been informed of their destination, and they were growing increasingly curious.

Captain Gibbons had provided two revolvers and plenty of ammunition for each of his crew. Rifles he had not been able to procure, but with his old Maxim rapid-fire guns he did not think he had need of rifles.

The three leaders of the expedition squatted on the deck aft of the cabin and discussed the plan of campaign.

"We approach the island late to-

morrow night," said the Spaniard. "It would be best to land on the outer rim, except that there is always a heavy sea running, and we might be wrecked on coral rock; so we shall have to slip into the lagoon.

"We'll have to poke along the reef until we find the opening, but I know it's big enough for Lovering's three-thousand-ton yacht to enter, so we won't have trouble. We'll land far up the beach and lie low until we are sure the whole outfit is asleep. Then we take the place."

"The first thing we got to do," said Bill Gibbons, "is to locate this wireless station, and that ought to be easy, for they have to have a wireless mast. We stick a knife into the operator, see. Then, if the gang at the house put up a fight we can wipe 'em out at our leisure, because they can't get away any SOS."

"The yacht will be back in three days from to-day," said Pedro. "We can surely clean up there and be away in twenty-four hours. By the time the yacht arrives we'll be in the interior of Cuba. You'll have to sink your boat, though."

"I'll sink her, don't worry, if I have my share of half a million in my fist. I can get another boat, if I ever need one. New York for mine, and the Great White Way."

"I sye," said Watson the cockney. "They'll be a big to-do about this when they find the dead people, and they'll want to know who did it. Now ain't they goin' to figure it out that a lot o' faces is missin' from Gun Key? They know Captain Gibbons started for Nassau in the Mamie Murther, and they'll ask why he didn't ever get there. They know I went with him. They're going to miss you, Pedro, from Nassau. It don't take no Sherlock Holmes to figger out that we're the bleeding pirates that tackled Gascon Island."

Pedro nodded. "Very likely. What of it? We are in hiding in Cuba. We lie low for a year, if necessary. We take

a boat for South America. Life in Rio de Janeiro is very pleasant, and Buenos Aires is sublime. We are rich. We shall not be troubled.

"By and by you, Watson, may go home from Buenos Aires to London as a rich Englishman who owns vast cattle plantations in Argentina. Bill can go back to New York in time. I prefer to live in Rio myself.

"And after all they do not know but that the Mamie Murther—what a wicked name!—was lost at sea. We must expect to take some slight chance for a great reward."

"Sure," said Bill Gibbons. "It's worth it. Do you suppose they keep any watch on Gascon Island?"

"It's possible, but I shall be surprised if we do not find them all wrapped in slumber. People do not believe in pirates any more."

"WHAT do you want, Jake?" demanded Gibbons.

A burly Yankee clad in B.V.D. and ragged white breeches had come around the cabin house. The man had a long nose which had been knocked crooked. He had thin lips and long yellow and black teeth, which were bared in a propitiating grin.

"Where in hell are we goin' and what we goin' to do?" he demanded. "The boys want to know."

"Might as well tell them," said the Spaniard.

Bill considered. "Might as well. Round 'em up, Jake." He followed the man forward, and Pedro and Wattie moved in his wake. The group on the forward deck stirred with interest. Gibbons's speech was rather worth while, everything considered.

"Boys," he began, "bootlegging is on the bum. There never was enough in it for the risk we run, was there?"

"You're right," agreed somebody.

"Sure I'm right. Now listen to somethin' worth while. We're goin' to Gascon Island—see? On this island is one of them multimillionaires that got

rich by grinding the poor man into the dust. He's got with him a gang of society people, just a lot of la-de-da boys and some women.

"I got information that, in good money and jewels, there is two or three hundred thousand dollars down there, and we're going to get it. It's a cinch. We've got machine guns and plenty of revolvers.

"They haven't got any guards, and I bet there isn't a man on the island could hit the side of a barn door with a cannon six feet away. We're all goin' to be rich men, and we don't take a chance at all. Now what I want to know is this: Are you with me?"

There was a murmur. Bill thought it was approval, but Jake faced him.

"And when we get the swag, what? We're pirates, that's what we are, and we'll get hanged. I'll go to jail if I have to, but I don't want to do nothing to get hanged—see? These people will get a look at us, and then we're cooked."

"Listen, Jake," Gibbons persuaded. "They ain't going to know who robbed them, because there ain't going to be anybody alive on that island after we leave there. We're going to run ashore in a safe place in Cuba and divide the stuff. It's a cinch, I tell you. Come on, boys, are you with me?"

"Say, boss," demanded the one-eyed negro, "how yo' goin' to divide this money? Dat's what I wants to know."

"Twelve even shares," replied Gibbons persuasively. "I figger it's, anyway, twenty thousand dollars to a man."

There was an interval of stunned silence. Twenty thousand dollars took a moment to digest. Then came a whoop of general satisfaction.

"Wait a minute," said the recalcitrant Jake. "You going to murder these people, women and all?"

"We got to. It's to be safe."

"Not on your life," he shouted. "I don't want to be hanged."

Gibbons frowned. Decision was hanging in the balance. With a lightning draw he produced a revolver and emptied its six chambers into the body of the man who didn't want to be hanged.

Jake fell, and Captain Gibbons put one big boot on his body while he handled the gun suggestively.

"Anybody else got objections?" he demanded.

"I's satisfied," said the one-eyed negro.

"How about the rest of you?"

"It's all right with us if we get twenty thousand apiece," said one of the Americans.

"You're all in this now," continued the master. "I can't give anybody a chance to get away. Jake, here, would have got the rest of us hung if we let him go, and I don't want anybody hung. You men are all broke, and your share will make you rich.

"This boat is going to Gascon, and we're going to raid that house, and that means that every one of you will get hung if you're caught. You knew it was business when you left Gun Key.

"I'd a lot rather take the jewels and the coin and leave these people live, but if we do they'll catch us sure as fate. We got to wipe 'em out, women and all; nobody left to tell the tale. And I got it all fixed to land us in Rio after we leave Cuba, where the gals are peaches and money talks."

"Bravo!" shouted an enthusiastic Portuguese.

"Hurray!" cried the Anglo-Saxon element.

"And now," said Gibbons, "we'll have some drinks."

He stooped, lifted the body of the martyred Jake, and tossed him over the side; then he strode back to the after-deck, followed by his lieutenants.

"I congratulate you," said Pedro. "Your gun play turned the tide. They will go through now all right."

The cockney grinned. "If five or

six of 'em will only get killed on the island it will save us a lot of trouble."

"Bah," growled Gibbons. "We'll get 'em all drunk after we leave and toss 'em overboard. Say, I hope none of these dames is very good-looking."

"It's a pity," sighed Pedro. "Lovering's daughter is the most beautiful little creature I ever saw in my life, a blonde."

"Yeah? We couldn't take her along with us to Cuba, I suppose?"

"Cut that," snarled Watson. "No women. These has got to be snuffed out, no matter how beautiful they are."

"He's right," agreed Pedro regretfully. "But it's a pity."

THEY approached Gascon Island about nine o'clock in the evening, and as the moon would not be up for five hours at least, they ran close in and circled cautiously. From the sea a double row of lights on an elevation were visible, and indicated that the household was active.

At the same time the wind rose, and the waves began to rise with it. They put out to sea, and were soon making heavy weather of it. There was no rain, and there were stars visible, but the gale was increasing in violence. After an hour and a half of buffeting Captain Gibbons held a conference.

"We show no lights and it's a pretty big island," he said. "I think it's safe to slip into the lagoon and get out of this."

"I'm afraid our engine may be heard," said Pedro.

"Well, we'll stick it out for another hour and then take a chance."

Shortly after midnight the motorship crept around the island to the point where the chart indicated a passage into the lagoon. The wind had gone down and the sea was subsiding, but it needed a skillful navigator—which Gibbons, with all his faults, certainly was—to venture close enough to the reef in the dark to locate the entrance.

The white line of the breakers was parted by black water at the passage, but they had to be dangerously close to the rocks to observe it.

For a moment it was touch and go with the pirates, but Gibbons worked the nose of his craft into the proper position, and in a few moments they floated on the placid water of the lagoon and immediately dropped anchor.

They were a mile and a half from the beach at the foot of the avenue leading to the house, and the motor had been running very slowly. It did not seem to the pirates that the chug of the engine could have been heard. There were lights in the windows of the second story of the house, and one by one these went out.

"Get the boat over and muffle the rowlocks," commanded Captain Gibbons. "Wattie, serve out the revolvers, and give the men plenty of ammunition. Pedro, take two or three men and get up that rotten old Maxim gun.

"One machine gun will be enough if we are going to take the place by surprise. You and you, stay on the ship, and keep a sharp lookout. The rest of you, into the boat."

He followed his crew into the rowboat, and they headed for a point ashore about a mile from the house, a point where a white line indicated a sand beach.

The pirates had arrived at Gascon Island.

CHAPTER V.

PHOSPHORESCENCE.

STEVE REARDON heard no more of the radio message which Forbes wished sent to Nassau, and concluded it was a ruse to get rid of him which his rival had invented upon the spur of the moment.

The day passed tranquilly; he saw no more of Mildred except at a distance. At seven he dined in the break-

fast room alone. Lovering's secretary was coming down on the yacht and would dine with him instead of with the guests, and the servants all ate in the service building.

At eight Mr. Lovering and his guests dined in the main salon, and usually lingered over their coffee and cordials until nine thirty. Afterward the young people danced, and the older ones played bridge; that was the routine which they had fallen into, and about midnight the guests began to retire.

Steve was privileged to help himself to books in the big library of Mr. Lovering and take them to his quarters. To-night he had carried back a volume of Burton's "Arabian Nights," a translation of which he had often heard and never before come across. He found it inexpressibly satisfying, and read until long after his usual bedtime.

The wind had been howling outside the island, but now it had died down, and about midnight he laid down his book and stepped out upon his porch to breathe the fragrant air before retiring.

The wireless house was at the right of the big house and about halfway down the slope, and from his porch he had an unobstructed view of the lagoon, which to-night was a black void.

The wind ceased completely for a moment, and then it seemed to him he heard a *puff, puff, puff* which resembled the noise of a gasoline motor. He listened intently, but did not hear it again, and he set it down as a trick of the imagination.

However, his imagination was now at work, and, for the first time, it occurred to him that Gascon Island was very remote from civilization and utterly unprotected.

Of course in this day and age there was no danger of any sort to be apprehended, and one was much safer in a dot-like island far out in the Atlantic than in an apartment in New York City, but, if there were sea marauders

of any sort, what a gorgeous prize lay unguarded here on Gascon!

Although he knew nothing of the value of jewels, the gems which the women at the big house were wearing at dinner and in the drawing-room must be worth an enormous sum. As far as he knew, Mr. Lovering did not even keep a night watchman on duty, and if there were any weapons he had not seen them.

The yacht, of course, would be a protection, but she was in New York. He had a revolver; he had always owned one during his seagoing days, and had brought it in his luggage as a matter of course.

HIS mind sharpened by these thoughts, his eyes were fixed upon the black lagoon, and he saw, all of a sudden, half a dozen flashes of phosphorescence away out on the bay. He watched. They appeared again in a different position.

A fish leaping out of the water would cause such a flash, but not several flashes. They might be made by oars. A pang of jealousy. Was Mildred out rowing with Forbes?

He saw the flashes again. If this was a boat there were at least three oars on each side. He listened for rowlocks, but heard nothing. They might be muffled. And then he remembered the fancied chugs of a gas engine.

That was nothing, but, combined with the phosphorescence which might be caused by oars, it was something. Suppose, just suppose, some beach-combers had heard of Lovering's house party and the wealth it possessed.

They might approach the island in a motor boat, shift to a small boat, and row ashore. It would be easy to take the house, and they could be aware of it.

Should he wake the house? He walked to the corner of the porch and glanced up. The last bedroom light had been extinguished. If he waked them up and alarmed them unneces-

sarily they would be furious, and, after all—no, there were the oar flashes again.

The boat was approaching the shore at the right. He darted into his chamber, opened his trunk, and drew out his gun, loaded it, and thrust a handful of cartridges into his trousers pocket.

Still doubtful of what he had seen and heard, he walked rapidly down to the beach and followed it toward the right. The white sand beach ended after a quarter of a mile, and trees and underbrush grew down to the water's edge.

He moved inland a few rods and struck a bridle path which Lovering had had cut to enable his guests to ride around the island to where the reef began. Knowing his road, he moved swiftly for some distance, then stopped in his tracks, for he saw a flash light play across the path some distance ahead of him.

A moment later he heard voices and the tramp of feet on the gravel. Men were coming down the path.

That their purpose was hostile was obvious by their method of landing, and they were going to come upon a sleeping household. Should he run back and alarm his employer? These fellows would be on his heels. As he hesitated he saw a dark form a little distance ahead of him, and he dived into the bushes.

The flash shone again and went out.

"It's a bridle path, by heck," said a harsh voice. "We can follow this right up to the house. Come on, boys."

A row of men passed him so near that he could have touched them by stretching out his hand. He counted. There were nine of them. Two were carrying heavy packages. One or two whose feet were bare swore at the contact of the sharp gravel with the soles of their feet. They had passed. In ten minutes, at the latest, they would be at the house.

He lifted his gun and fired six shots

into the air, then forced his way through the bushes to a position a score of yards away. He heard shouts, running. The men who had passed were coming back.

"A watchman," he heard somebody shout. "He must be around here somewhere. Anybody hit? Spread out and find him." Steve had taken refuge at the base of a huge cypress tree.

He immediately scrambled up the trunk, and did not stop until he was hidden by its leaves. He heard them fumbling around in the dark below. They did not dare show a flash light lest they draw a shot.

From his post he could see a light appear in a window of the big house, and then another. He had waked them up, but would they have sense enough to arm themselves. He dared not fire again, for they would locate him and send a score of bullets into the tree.

Bang, bang, bang.

Three shots. One of the marauders had fired at a shadow, but he immediately drew a return fire from two or three. A dozen shots had rung out.

"Cease firing," bellowed a man with a tremendous foghorn voice.

"Never mind this fellow. On to the house."

THE rustling around him ceased. He waited a moment, and then slid to the ground and cautiously began to move along the bridle path in the wake of the gang.

Surely, he thought, this fusillade would alarm the house, and Lovering was no fool. He would anticipate an attack of some sort, and attempt to defend himself. But would the guests fight?

He supposed Forbes would give a good account of himself, and probably the lawyer, but he doubted the others. If he could reach them! Unfortunately the pirates were between him and the house. He would try to take them from behind.

Five minutes passed as he crept along, ten minutes. Then there came an outbreak of firing. He was on the beach at the foot of the slope. Glory be! He saw a gun flash from a window on the first floor, and by the report he knew it to be a rifle.

"If they have nerve enough to rush, it will be over in a couple of minutes," he thought. Bending almost double, he moved up the slope. A gun flashed from another window, and a man ran across his path about fifty feet ahead. Steve fired, and the fellow dropped. One gone.

He heard women shrieking from the house. Those fool fat women! What good would yelling do? The storming party was strangely silent. His own shot they probably supposed had been fired by one of their own men. Most likely they had not seen their comrade fall.

He lay flat on the ground, like an old soldier. Again came the blinding flashes and reports of rifles from two windows, firing blindly, doing no good.

And then came a sound which struck terror to his heart. He knew now what had been the burden under which two of those who passed him had bent. They had been carrying the two parts of a heavy machine gun, and had set it up and were raking the front of the house. Lord, suppose they hit Mildred!

He crawled slowly toward the house. The machine gun was under cover somewhere at the left. He tried to locate it from its rattle and pur. The house was silent, and he supposed the defenders were lying flat on the floor. He hoped they were, for the machine gun bullets would riddle the wooden walls and plaster of the villa.

AMAN stood up and walked toward the house. Steve covered him, but the fellow was waving something, probably a white cloth, but he couldn't distinguish in the dark. The machine gun ceased to putter.

That bull voice roared again.

"I give you people five minutes to come out, or I won't leave one of you alive," he proclaimed. "We've got you surrounded, and machine guns trained on you. Surrender, and do it quick."

The door opened, and somebody came out of the house. Steve thought it was Mr. Lovering. His voice revealed him.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he demanded.

His voice was as steady as a rock, despite the terrifying experience of the last ten minutes.

The big man laughed roughly. "I'm Captain Kidd and we're pirates. We want your money and your jewelry, and we want 'em quick."

"You have killed one of my friends," replied Lovering, and this time his voice broke. "You'll swing for this, my friend."

"In one minute I'll open up with the machine guns and kill more of you," replied the *soi-disant* pirate. "Probably we'll kill some of the ladies. Do you surrender?"

"Have I your word that you will spare our lives?" demanded Lovering.

"Why, certainly. Your lives ain't no good to me," bellowed the big man.

"Then we surrender," said Lovering.

"Line up your people and march them out on the porch. Lay down your guns. Any funny business and I'll kill the last one of you."

"We shall do as you say. Please remember that there are five ladies in the party."

"Step on it," commanded the pirate leader.

Steve heard part of this colloquy, but not all, for he knew his duty. He would send out an S O S if it was the last act of his life.

He had retreated down the slope unnoticed, for all pirate eyes were on the parley, and he worked toward the wireless house. As he drew near, the lights

suddenly went on in his office, and through the window he saw two men. One of them had a wire cutter, and the other was working with a screw driver dismantling the apparatus. Too late!

SHOULD he give himself up with the others? He wanted to stand beside Mildred in this peril, but, disarmed, he could be of no service.

Perhaps the pirates would treat them fairly and content themselves with robbery, but it would be shortsighted from their standpoint, for the victims would have a chance to see them and later might identify them. He was armed and at large, and ought to be more useful this way.

He was in a position to pot the two men in the wireless office who had turned on the light fearlessly because the defenders had surrendered, but, if he shot them, their enraged comrades might revenge themselves upon the helpless prisoners.

He stole away and came in view again of the house. The porch light was on, and he saw Lovering and his guests lined up just outside the door. The women were in night clothes and robes, and that they were all there, he saw with thankfulness.

Forbes was standing beside Mildred and the lawyer, but Mr. Platt was not there. He must have been the man who was killed.

Four of the pirates were marshaling the prisoners. Two of them he knew to be in the wireless house, and two more were in the grounds. One, he hoped, was dead.

He had wasted six shots down on the bridle path, and fired another with effect. There were five cartridges in his gun, and twenty or thirty in his pocket. He ought to be able to give a good account of himself.

At that minute there came around the corner of the house a woebegone company. There were a dozen negro servants, most of them half naked, and six or eight white men and women who

were escorted by two of the pirates with flourishes of guns. They were driven upon the porch.

"Is everybody here?" demanded the big man we know was Captain Gibbons.

"Yes," said Lovering firmly.

"Which of you is the wireless man?" demanded the pirate captain.

No answer.

"Speak out," he shouted, waving his gun.

"He is not here. We haven't seen him," said Forbes.

"That's the bozo that fired the shots down on the beach," shouted Gibbons. "Spread out and get him. Shoot him if he shows fight."

Steve, lying on his stomach a hundred feet distant, decided it was time to depart. He crawled snakelike to the corner of the house and ran down the slope at the rear, stumbling over obstructions, but unpursued.

Behind Gibbons on the porch stood Wattie the cockney.

"We'll lock these up till morning," said the captain. "Go down and look at the cellar. See if it's a good place to put them."

Lovering, who had drawn his daughter to him, spoke out:

"What are your intentions?" he demanded. "What have we to expect?"

"Well," said Gibbons amiably, "I'm going to lock you all up and then go through the house. We'll collect all the junk the ladies has got, and help ourselves to your coin. How much money have you got in the house?"

"About ten thousand dollars in my safe."

"Where is the jewelry? In the safe?"

"No, the ladies have their gems in their rooms. We expected no robbers here."

"That's where you fooled yourselves. Sorry to scare you, ladies," he said with an attempt at good nature. Mildred eyed him scornfully, two of the women began to weep and Mrs.

Platt, whose husband lay dead within, suddenly had hysterics.

"Cellar's O. K.," reported Watson. "You ought to see the champagne down there."

Gibbons scowled at him. "Let it lay. Now you people march down cellar. Lovering, stay here. I want you to go round with us and show us where everything is."

"Pardon," said the Spaniard, "I suggest that all be locked in the cellar and we defer the collection of valuables until daylight. There is a man at large with a gun, and it's our business to run him down."

The captives exchanged glances of hope. Everything was not lost if a friend who was armed remained free.

"March," commanded Gibbons. "You, too, Lovering. I'll send for you when I want you."

Mr. Lovering and his guests obeyed their orders, and were conducted by Watson down the basement stairs into a wine cellar, which was without windows and about thirty feet square. It was lined on all sides by filled bottle racks. A single electric lamp gave dim illumination.

"Surely," pleaded the master of the house, "you will give us chairs for the ladies."

"Aw, let them sit on the floor."

"You're not going to pack the servants in this place with us?" protested Forbes.

Watson favored him with a surly grin. "Go on; they're as good as you."

The servants, black and white, were driven into the cellar with their employers, then Watson slammed the heavy door and locked it, and put the key into his pocket. Immediately there went up wails and groans from the women, mistresses as well as maids.

"MY friends," said Lovering with a break in his voice, "I cannot express my anguish at the situation in which you are placed by accepting my hospitality."

"It's entirely your fault," retorted Forbes. "It was insanity to provide no guards on this remote island. You did not even keep a watch."

"But who would believe that such a thing was possible?" groaned Lovering. "Mildred darling, are you terribly frightened?"

"No," she replied sharply. "Just disgusted at Franklin Forbes for making such a remark to you, dad, at this time."

"I'm sorry," Forbes said sulkily. "Naturally I hate to think that, through inexcusable carelessness, we are likely to have our throats cut."

"For Heaven's sake, don't say such a thing," whispered Lovering, greatly agitated. "These women are sufficiently terrified."

"I'm not," said Mildred. "Everything is going to be all right."

"Yes?" sneered Forbes. "I wish you'd tell me how."

She met his eyes squarely. "Because there was one real man on the island who was not caught napping—Steve Reardon. You heard them say he was at large with a gun. Well, he'll get us out of this."

"Evidently Reardon met them and tried to stop them," said Lovering. "It was the fight he put up which waked up the house. I'm glad to know they didn't kill him."

"Bah," retorted Forbes. "One man with a revolver against a score of scoundrels with machine guns! Our only hope is that they will be content with our property and let us live."

Mildred patted her father's arm. "Steve is a man, dad. He's been in shipwrecks and tough places. I'm betting on him."

"You seem to know him pretty well," said her father. "How does it happen you are friendly with my wire-less man?"

"If you really want to know," said Forbes, "she has been meeting him secretly every day since we've been here."

"Indeed," replied Lovering. In his situation this did not seem as important as it would have appeared at another time. "My dear Mrs. Balch, I suggest we all sit down and huddle together. We cannot stand here all night."

"Let's," said the charming widow. "And, Franklin, I'd advise you to shut up. You haven't played a heroic part in this adventure so far."

Mildred passed her arm about the elder woman and hugged her. Then the party of guests squatted on the cement floor, and the servants followed their example. For a long time they talked, having divided into small groups and obtained some comfort by leaning against one another. Finally some of them were able to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

HIDE AND SEEK.

STEVE REARDON had pretty thoroughly explored the island during his brief sojourn there, and knew its advantages and disadvantages. While it was fairly well wooded for a coral island, and contained several patches of jungle, it was not an ideal place to hide.

It was a mile wide at the east sector of the coral circle, but it narrowed rapidly until it degenerated into a sandspit at the far side near the entrance to the lagoon.

Under cover of darkness he could avoid pursuit, but in daylight it would be a simple matter for a line of men stretched across the island to drive him before them until he was forced out upon the uncovered sandspit where he would be an easy target. In a few hours the sun would rise, and the moon was already coming up and dissipating the protecting murk.

Reardon was an excellent revolver shot, but he had never fired at a human mark until to-night. If there was a possibility of the departure of the

pirates with what loot they discovered and without injuring Lovering and his guests it would be the part of wisdom for him to lie low in hope of avoiding capture; but he feared there was no such possibility.

The motto of ancient pirates was "Dead men tell no tales," and it was a policy likely to commend itself to these up-to-date followers of the marauders of the Spanish Main.

He had been close enough to inspect them and he knew them for savage brutes, probably the scum of the Bahama bootlegging industry, which had been badly damaged by the admission of American cruisers to Bahama waters.

If they withdrew from the island leaving the inhabitants alive, Steve would have that wireless repaired and war vessels on their trail in a few hours. There were lovely women in the band of prisoners, and these beasts might slay the men and carry off the women to a more horrible fate upon the vessel which lay at anchor somewhere in the dark lagoon.

What could he do? If he attacked them and killed some of them he might seal the fate of the prisoners, but were they not doomed anyway? Was not he their only hope?

What would Mildred think? She knew he had not been captured, for he wasn't among the prisoners. She had heard the pirate chief demanding if he were among them. Mildred would expect him to strike a blow for the rescue of herself, her father, and her friends.

HE had been moving swiftly toward the ocean side of the island while he considered the situation; now he stopped and began to retrace his steps.

He was at the moment in a patch of woods, and he continued until he came to the edge of the little forest. The moon was coming up, but its light was intermittent because there were many clouds in the sky. Trees here

and there and shrubs cast dark shadows.

He looked up the slope and saw the house, dimly outlined, a quarter of a mile distant, and observed that all lights were out. He wondered at this, for he supposed the pirates would be searching the house.

There was better generalship among the marauders than Steve supposed, which explained the darkness of the house at the moment. Captain Gibbons had disposed his men about the grounds with instructions to lie low and keep a sharp lookout for the wireless man, who was armed, and to take care not to expose themselves to a sharpshooter.

He lay on the grass a hundred feet from the front of the residence with Pedro and Watson, and talked with them in whispers.

"This feller can't hide on this island," he was saying, "but he might pick a few of us off if we started hunting for him in the dark. All we got to do is wait until daylight and we'll nab him easy; then we'll have nothing to worry about, and we can take our time going through the house. I hate this slaughter business. You're sure it's got to be done, Pedro? That blonde is a beaut."

"It is an unfortunate necessity," said the Spaniard gravely.

"Yah. But there must be thirty people, half of them women. How are we going to do it?"

"Gettin' soft-hearted in your old age," sneered Watson. "Lock 'em in the house and set fire to it. Pot anybody that runs out."

"No," said the Spaniard. "That's too horrible. I've got an idea—what was that?"

THAT" was a pistol shot which sounded as loud as the report of a cannon on the silent island, and it came from behind the house. It was followed by two answering shots, and then a fusillade.

"Come on," commanded Bill. "The boy is starting. Bend low and take cover. Don't let him get one of us." They began to circle cautiously around the house.

The shots woke up the poor victims in the cellar, and Mildred embraced her father hysterically. "It's Steve!" she cried. "Steve will fix them."

Steve had left the wood and, dodging from tree to bush and from bush to tree, had worked his way up the hill. The moon came out from behind a cloud unexpectedly and showed him to a man lying on his stomach who fired at him.

Steve dropped, untouched, and sent two bullets at the flash, then wriggled swiftly away from that vicinity as half a dozen shots came from different parts of the grounds directed toward his gun-flashes.

He continued his snakelike progress for a few minutes, stopped to replace the cartridges, and then the moon revealed to him a man running toward the spot from which the first shot had come.

Steve took careful aim, fired, and saw the fellow pitch forward. He knew this was a hit. Again he changed ground in time to avoid the volley from the hidden marksmen. He crawled under a bush just as the moon's light was cut off by a cloud.

"He's running down the hill," cried the foghorn voice already familiar to him. "Move down, but don't show yourselves. Drop when the moon comes out."

The moon reappeared, and Steve saw three figures thirty yards away who immediately dropped, but he fired once and heard a cry of pain from the man at whom he had aimed. Immediately, four or five bullets whistled overhead, and a leaf whose twig had been severed fell upon his neck.

He had to lie there, for it would have been suicide to run in the moonlight, and many bullets passed close to him.

It was dark again and, assuming they

would suppose him retreating down the hill, he ran toward the house and made fifty yards before the betraying light appeared. He lay now on the open lawn, but all eyes must have been fixed toward the woods, for no shot came his way.

They had searched the house and would not expect him to take refuge there, he thought. He would try to reach it. He continued to crawl upward during the intervals of darkness.

The men below were firing now and then at shadows. The back porch at last was only fifty feet away, one rush would bring him to it; and then a match flared, and he saw a black face illuminated as a negro lighted a cigarette.

The fellow was standing with his back against the wall of the porch and supposed he was quite safe, since the quarry was being driven to the woods. Steve raised his gun and lowered it. He could hit the man, but the shot would notify the others that he was near the house.

He began to circle the house slowly and with infinite pains, and presently worked around to the front of it. He heard voices not far away. Evidently some of the pirates had been left on guard here.

He changed his plan then and moved cautiously toward the wireless house. In the battle to come he would need more cartridges, and there were plenty in his trunk if they had not been removed.

He came in sight of the rear of his quarters and saw that the lights had been extinguished. Careful approach convinced him that the bungalow was untenanted, and he slipped up on the porch.

HE reached the door when the moon shone again, and he saw a bulky object at one corner of the porch against the house wall. This he proceeded to investigate, and he discovered to his astonishment the Maxim gun.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed silently. "With this gun I am a match for the lot of them." His exultation was short-lived, however, for an empty cartridge belt lay beside it, and there were no ammunition cases to be found. Without bullets the gun was useless.

It was an old gun, the type operated by a man who sits in a saddle. He inspected it as well as he could in the uncertain moonlight, then chuckled and unscrewed a gadget at the breech, which he thrust into his pocket.

"They'll have a lot of trouble firing this again," he thought, then he slipped into the house, felt his way to his chamber, found his trunk, plunged in his hands, and came up with a small box of cartridges. What should he do now? Try to hold the wireless house and frighten them with the Maxim? No, they must know that there was no ammunition for it.

He hooded and lighted a match long enough to look at his watch. It was a quarter of five. The sun would be up in little more than an hour. Much more time than that had elapsed since he had seen the betraying phosphorescence of the boat which had brought these criminals ashore.

Now if ever was his chance to get into the house and rescue the prisoners, though what a lot of unarmed and unnerved men and women could do to protect themselves if they were rescued he did not dare consider. His nerves were tingling; he had to have action or he would go crazy.

The porch was two feet above the ground, and a three-foot rail was built upon it. He reached it in safety, sprang upon it, started to swing over the rail, and struck the almost invisible wire mosquito screen which he had forgot. He landed on the ground with a thud, sprang up unhurt.

BANG! Bang! Bang! At right and left men were firing toward the noise. The moon was out. He could only drop on his stomach and

wait. A man came running from the left, plainly visible.

Steve fired point-blank at him and he fell without a sound. He leaped up and ran swiftly toward the left along the edge of the porch, aware of pursuers, and coming to the front steps ran up them and crouched behind the porch rail.

The pursuers, two of them, passed; but he was not in a position to fire on them. He cursed this contretemps which would bring the entire pack upon his heels. They would search the house and run him down.

He heard shouts from the back of the house; the rest of the gang were arriving. He ran down the steps and darted down the slope toward the wireless house, and then a searchlight from the water threw its white beam upon the beach and began to creep upward.

Steve swerved, put the wireless house between him and the searchlight, and in despair, lifted himself into the long hanging limbs of a tree of great size which grew behind the radio bungalow. He was up a tree again.

The searchlight played upon the front of the house and revealed three or four figures, one of which made frantic signals; and the light went out. Steve could have brought down one or two of those who had been bathed in its lights, but it would have betrayed his hiding place.

Alarmed by the shooting, the two men left on the pirate ship had pulled up the anchor and moved up the lagoon to take a position off the beach, and then tried to discover how things were going by means of the Mamie Murther's searchlight.

Steve, of course, had no means of knowing how many men were on the boat. He had killed or wounded three of the pirates, but there seemed to be plenty left.

From the tree to the house was a distance of fifty yards. Upon the lawn in front of the residence the pirate band seemed to be assembled. He heard

hoarse orders given, and then there was silence.

He saw a man walk down the path to the beach and shout to the boat, which had displayed no light since the searchlight had been extinguished. A few moments later, he heard oars, the grounding of a keel on the sand, and then the return of the boat to the ship.

There was a gray line in the east, daylight was going to catch him in the tree for he dared not descend now, since the ground below was infested with pirates.

Steve looked to his weapon. He would remain undiscovered as long as he could, and there was a possibility they might not expect to find him in a tree so close to the house; it would be natural for them to assume he had put as great a distance between himself and the house as possible.

The light came slowly but surely. There was an exquisite sunrise in the east, but Steve was not interested in it. Gradually the blackness of the lagoon changed to dark blue, and began to sparkle with rainbow colors.

Steve saw the ugly unpainted motor vessel lying off the beach at a distance of a couple of hundred yards; he could see her entire hull in the clear water.

All the pirates were assembled on the porch, and three of them entered the house. He counted eight men, including those who had gone inside. No one was visible on the motor craft, but the rowboat had returned and lay upon the white sand.

At least eight to one, and he was hidden in a tree! Anyway he had spiked their machine gun.

Time passed: an hour; presently the three who had entered the house emerged carrying a small basket, and the entire band clustered.

HE could hear voices, exclamations, but could not distinguish words.

In all probability they were admiring the treasure found in the house. He wondered where were Lovering and

his friends. Where was Mildred? It could not be possible that that sweet girl—he wouldn't even think of it.

Two men detached themselves from the group and walked toward the wireless house. They passed beneath the great tree, but did not look up. A moment later he heard shouts of anger, and both came from the wireless house and ran to the residence.

Peering through the leaves he watched an angry conference, and then the two men went down the slope to the beach, entered the rowboat, and rowed out to the motor ship. In about ten minutes the boat started back, and the two men got out, lifted out heavy objects, swung them on their backs, and came up the slope.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Steve to himself. "They've got another machine gun."

A big man detached himself from the group on the porch and came down to meet them. He met them under the big tree.

"Set it up right here," he commanded. Steve had a good look at the flat nose and brutal countenance of Captain Bill Gibbons.

The pirates fitted the two parts of the Maxim gun together, and, opening a case, drew out a belt of ammunition and inserted an end of it in the gun.

"That 'll do fine," said Gibbons. "Point it at the house." He walked back. Steve looked down. The machine gunners were stationed almost directly below him.

Two men on the porch now entered the house and in a few minutes there appeared in the doorway a group of men and women, in the front rank of whom he recognized the red-gold hair of Mildred Lovering, and the proud, slender figure of her father.

Captain Gibbons marshaled them and counted noses. There was some outcry from the women, probably the servants, then Gibbons gave an order, and the prisoners were led down upon the lawn, and the pirates began to push

them until they were lined up in front of the porch in a solid mass. A cold perspiration broke out upon the forehead of Steve Reardon.

"Oh, the devils from hell!" he muttered. "It can't be possible!"

It was possible. The pirates drew off, and moved in a body down the slope. The muzzle of the machine gun was pointed directly at the mob of prisoners. It was evident that the intention was to mow them down without mercy, to leave no living creature to tell the tale.

And when they had been massacred, the hunt for himself would begin. After they had disposed of him they would sail away with the loot of Gascon Island, and the world would never know who had attacked it, robbed it, and slain all its inhabitants.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MACHINE GUN.

AS these things made themselves plain to him, Steve, pale as death, was retreating along his limb to the trunk of the tree, and then he began to work himself out upon the lowest branch.

There were rustles of limbs and leaves, but the pair at the machine gun were intent only upon the spectacle before them. The prisoners were silent, for they had not yet comprehended the fate in store for them.

Gibbons and his followers were not so trustful of their machine gunners that they put themselves in range, but they were coming down from the left with the intention of ranging themselves behind it. And then Steve dropped from the limb, a distance of twelve feet, and landed between the two men at the gun with such force that he toppled over.

They recoiled in natural alarm and, lying on the ground, he shot them both. In a second he was up and in the saddle. He knew the theory of the gun,

but for a moment he could not get the hang of it, and Gibbons and his mob, with shouts of alarm, were charging, firing as they ran.

Steve had it. He swung the muzzle of the gun and grasped the crank. Fright and the fact that they were running caused all the bullets directed toward him to fly wild, and suddenly the Maxim began to rattle and roar.

Bill Gibbons was ten feet distant when a bullet caught him in the chest. Pedro, bringing up the rear, turned to fly, and was hit in the back. Before the belt was half empty all the pirates were lying on the ground still as death, or writhing in agony.

They had approached in a mass and it was impossible for the Maxim to miss them, for the rearmost of them was only thirty feet away. Before the battle had well begun it was over, and the victor rose unsteadily from his saddle.

It is one thing to fire at human targets a hundred yards distant, whom the gunner sees fall, but whose piteous expressions and dying groans are out of range of eye and ear, another to slaughter at the mouth of the gun.

HE glanced at the prisoners and for a moment feared he had fired into them also, for half a dozen women lay on the ground and others were on their knees. But a golden-haired girl was bounding down the slope, and in a few seconds Mildred hurled herself into his arms, her lips seeking his in an ecstasy of delight and hysteria.

"Steve, oh, Steve!" she cried. "I knew you would save us! I knew it!"

"Look out," he exclaimed, and threw her to the ground, and cast himself before her. Bill Gibbons, mortally wounded, had reared himself on one elbow, his face distorted with pain and hate, and fired one more shot. Steve had seen him and saved himself and Mildred by going to the ground. The shot passed over them. It was the last bullet of the battle.

Convinced of their deliverance from a danger they had only just comprehended, the other prisoners had rushed forward. Lovering was wringing Steve's hand and mumbling phrases of gratitude.

Mrs. Balch pushed Mildred away so that she could kiss him. Mrs. Platt was babbling incoherently. Franklin Forbes stood by, saying nothing, hating to think that he owed his life to this man.

LATER Steve found that the pirates had contented themselves with cutting wires and smashing the table instruments in the radio station; but there was a spare set of these and plenty of copper wire, so it would be only an hour's work to reopen communications with the world. He was in the midst of his labor when Mildred Lovering entered.

"I'll have everything repaired and a message off in no time," he assured her. She seated herself on his table.

"And then what?" she demanded.

He looked at her; she was smiling bewitchingly.

"Why, I don't know."

"Well," she said slowly, "it seems to me that if a man loved a girl and had just saved her from a horrible death, and her father, too, and all her friends, it might be considered the psychological moment."

"For what?"

"Really," she frowned, "you are obtuse—to ask her."

"You don't mean—are you—is it? How can I ask you, Mildred? I couldn't support you."

"That might be arranged," she said boldly.

"Your father wouldn't hear of it."

"I think he would— In fact, he has. I told him."

"Told him what?"

"Steve!" she reproached; but her eyes were dancing. "Told him we were in love. I knew you were, and I knew I was. And it was the psychological moment. Just now he thinks you are the greatest man in the world. To-morrow he will get back his old perspective, but it will be too late."

"Even so he wouldn't consent, Mildred," he said ruefully.

"That's all you know. He consented. He told me that you were the man in a thousand. He's mad about you, Steve—this morning."

"And it's all right? You love me and we're engaged?"

"Uh-huh!" she said with a demure glance.

He threw up his arms and laughed wildly. "I'm probably dreaming, but there's only one way to find out." Then he pounced upon her, lifted her bodily in his arms, and devoured her sweet little lips with kisses.

Finally he set her down. Mildred was breathless, but she muttered something.

"What did you say, darling?" he demanded.

"Encore," replied Mildred.

THE END



COMING!

COMING!

COMING!

A BRAND NEW WORLD

An absolutely "different" story, by RAY CUMMINGS, is slated for the opening pages of

THE SEPTEMBER 22nd ARGOSY-ALLSTORY



"Thanks, sister"

Trouble Ranch

Peter De Quincy was his name; P. D. Q. they called him—and before he had been in town half an hour Cactus Springs knew why the nickname had been bestowed on him

By **GEORGE M. JOHNSON**

Author of "Squatters' Rights," "Tickets to Paradise," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGER IN TOWN.

A LONG the wind-whipped, dusty trail leading into Cactus Springs traveled a solitary rider astride a wiry, lean little buckskin cayuse that put the miles behind him with a characteristic tireless jog.

Indubitably the rider was a chap you would have liked, possessing a free and easy jauntiness, a nonchalant, devil-may-care attitude born from the limitless self-confidence of youth.

Yet it was not the shallow, arrogant presumptuousness of a braggart that was reflected in his glance and posture; rather a serene assurance that good

luck, a quick eye, and a steady hand and a firm will would carry him through whatever emergencies he had to face.

One striking characteristic was largely concealed from view by the J. B. masterpiece which covered his head—a thatch of hair so furiously red that the observer instinctively thought of a conflagration.

Fun-loving acquaintances now and then approached, to make elaborate pretense of lighting their cigarettes at its glow; and once a cow-puncher—slightly inebriated—used a pail of water with disastrous results.

"Goshamighty!" mourned the culprit, after being forcefully squelched.

"I sure figured Pete was a-burning up. A guy should ought to use better judgment in picking the color of his scalp lock."

Such are the disadvantages of being blessed with red hair.

"Sure is dry," our rider remarked to his mount, for want of a more responsive listener. "I'm cultivating a thirst that'd reach from here to the Panhandle. Don't it ever rain in this country, I wonder?"

The jogging broncho cocked an ear back at the sound of his master's voice, but made no other reply; then both ears pricked forward as the trail rounded a projecting hogback, bringing the distant town into view. It was their first glimpse of the local metropolis—Cactus Springs.

A short time later found the traveler modestly arrived in town. His first thoughts centered about the comfort and needs of his faithful pony, after which he proceeded to seek refreshment for himself. A garishly painted building commanded his attention with its sign:

**THE RED FRONT
OPEN DAY AND NIGHT**

Toward this life-saving station the puncher steered a course.

The Red Front proved to be a typical frontier resort. A mahogany bar extending along the left side of a large room served as an oasis to the thirsty; card tables and sundry games of chance run by the house permitted those who so desired to try their luck at poker, roulette, monte and the like; the center of the room was left clear for dancing during the evening.

It was late afternoon when Pete ventured within the Red Front, a time of day when business ran slack. No more than two card games were in progress; even the bar, in charge of a single attendant, was without customers for the moment.

A light of recognition glowed in the traveler's eyes as he spotted the drink

mixer. Quickly he approached, hand extended.

"I'm a son-of-a-gun! Aleck Carmichael! Been a spell of moons since I saw you, Aleck!"

The bartender for his part showed equal delight at this unexpected encounter with an old acquaintance.

"P. D. Q. himself!" he ejaculated, pumping the other's hand up and down over the polished mahogany. "When did you blow into town?"

"Just now," he was informed. "How's everything?"

"Finer'n the hair on a frawg. You're looking great, Peter."

"What's this—a college reunion?" came a bantering interruption. The speaker had strolled over from one of the card tables, where he had watched the leisurely progress of a game.

"The boss," Aleck Carmichael explained in a whisper to his friend. Then aloud, "Mr. Varney, I'd like for you to shake hands with a good scout, Mr. De Quincy. Peter's the first part of his name, and folks that know the gent call him P. D. Q.—for damned sound reasons, which crop out when the occasion calls 'em."

Varney laughed as he acknowledged the introduction.

"I'd say you had a heavy responsibility living up to a name like that," was his comment. "How about it?"

Young Mr. De Quincy grinned, in no way abashed at the faint suggestion of mockery underlying the words.

"Responsibility's something that never worried me a whole lot," he affirmed. "Nor anything else, for that matter."

"You going to be hereabouts for any length of time?" Varney inquired, voicing merely a polite interest in the stranger's affairs.

"Hard to say definite," Peter De Quincy informed him.

"But at least I aim to stay long enough to flood the alkali out of my system."

"Have a little something on the

house?" Varney nodded meaningly at Carmichael. "That special bottle, Aleck. And pour yourself one."

Carmichael expertly filled three small glasses.

Varney tossed off his libation with a single gulp, accompanied by a swift throwing back of the head that gave an observer an excellent view of his Adam's apple. De Quincy drank more deliberately.

"That," he observed feelingly, "is the best glass of liquor I ever had."

"Not bad," was Varney's indifferent answer, and then with a "Pleased to have met you, De Quincy," he turned away.

"Been here long, Aleck?" Peter asked of his friend when they again had the bar to themselves.

"Something over a year. It's not a bad town—some ways. Others it ain't so good. Depends on how a party views things."

"What seems to be the main trouble?" De Quincy asked, interested.

"Too much of one man."

"Spofford, you mean?"

"Yeah. What'd you know about him?"

"Oh, I've heard of that hombre. He cleaned out a good friend of mine once."

"I bet he did. Cleaning folks out's his regular business. He'd clean the gold off an angel's harp if he got the chance. He won't, though. Golden harps and angels ain't liable to be common in the place he's headed for."

"Rates middling high in town, does he?" Peter queried, toying with his empty liquor glass.

"Folks stand for him because they've sort of got the habit, or else because they figure it can't be helped, I reckon. He's the king pin here and hereabouts. Got a son too, he has. Worse'n the old man, if anything, and that's saying a plenty."

"How worse?" De Quincy fumbled for his makings, deftly rolling himself a cigarette.

"He's got all the old gink's vices, not to mention a few more thrown in for good measure. Wine, women, and cards are his specialty, with the emphasis on women. Rotten all through, Spofford is, and dirt mean. Tap that young squirt with a drain tube and he'd run yellow juice."

"Nice pair, from what you say," Peter De Quincy observed dryly. "Him and his dad."

"Ain't it the truth, P. D. Q.? I hate to talk about 'em, it makes me so dawgoned mad."

"Then let's don't. How are the games in this joint? Would you advise a casual gent to risk his money here, with the idea of getting a taste of swift action?"

"While not wishing to run down the house," Aleck rejoined: "I'd state that the chap who counts on a killing is sure optimistic. If you yearn for a poker game to-night, Peter, drop around and I'll steer you into one where you'll have, any way, an even chance. Howsomever, it ain't run by the house. Savvy?" And he winked significantly.

"Much obliged, Aleck. Likely I'll be around. Where's a good place to eat?"

"Down the street a piece. Bill's they call it. You won't get poisoned there."

"All right, Aleck. See you later."

"Adios, P. D. Q. Be good!"

Young Mr. De Quincy fortified himself by a platter of ham and eggs, with baked beans on the side, at Bill's, where a talkative counter man volunteered additional facts about the town and its inhabitants, so that by the time he had finished eating the stranger felt he was beginning to get acquainted.

CACTUS SPRINGS seemed a thriving community, with evidence which hinted at a considerable floating population. It was an important shipping point for the product of several large ranches scat-

tered about the outlying country, while abundant mineral wealth in the mountains to the south provided another steady source of income. Practically all the pay roll of both mines and ranches eventually found its way into the town coffers.

Lights were blazing in the Red Front, where a three-piece orchestra—piano, guitar, and banjo—were blaring forth a peppy tune, when Peter De Quincy made his second appearance within its portals.

Short-skirted beauties were on the job, making themselves generally useful to the management and personally agreeable to its guests. One well understood duty of the girls was to see that their companions were not niggardly in patronage of the bar. Customers who failed to spend lavishly were not worth the bother of entertaining.

Peter stopped at the bar, where business was rushing, but he waited until Aleck was free before making known his wants.

"How's the special brand?" he queried in a low tone, and Carmichael, with an understanding grin, produced from under the bar that same black bottle whose contents Peter had already sampled.

"This is a special favor, P. D. Q.," he said. "Most folks ain't wise. Keep it dark, you better."

"I will, Aleck," Peter promised warmly, "thanking you for the chance."

"About that poker game," the bartender went on. "Guess I gave you a bum steer, far's to-night goes anyway. The party won't be on, looks as if. There's plenty of other nights coming, though."

"Don't say a word, Aleck. I ain't liable to die of ongwee if I don't get to play cards."

"Young Spofford's shooting a few hands," Aleck informed him. "Third table from the corner—on the left. The blond-haired cuss. Losing too,

like he generally does. I hope he chokes!"

De Quincy glanced across the room, curious to meet what sort of fellow it was who had gained such cordial dislike from Carmichael. Though the evening was no more than well started, young Spofford's flushed face already gave evidence of a drink or two too many. His features were regular, but showed lack of strength of character, which last was emphasized by a weak, receding chin.

The unmistakable ravages of fast living robbed him of any claim to good looks. For a man of this type young Mr. De Quincy felt nothing but contempt.

"Humph!" he grunted in an aside to the barkeep. "They's sure one thing the lad ain't learned—that poker and whisky don't mix. He ought to make a mighty good meal ticket for somebody, with his dad's bank roll to back him."

"They don't dast squeeze the spigot too hard," Carmichael said. "But at that I guess Frosty Freeman gets to the guy plenty heavy. Freeman's one smooth Jimmy; it's him dealing the pasteboards now."

To even a careless observer it was evident that John Marlborough Spofford, Jr., found the luck running strongly against him. He snapped out an oath as the pot went to an opponent, throwing his hand on the table in a petulant exhibition of temper.

"That card game crooked?" Peter asked.

"It's supposed to be straight—when Spofford horns in. But Frosty's clever, and he might pull a little something now and then, just to keep his fingers from getting stiff. But, shucks—you don't need to work crimped cards or a cold deck on Spofford. He beats himself, that guy!"

After a few minutes Peter left the bar, to wander more or less aimlessly about the room. One or two of the short-skirted sirens accosted him, but

Peter declined their advances with a grin.

He plunged a few dollars on Mr. Varney's roulette wheel, losing as he had expected, but P. D. Q. was a chap willing to pay for his entertainment.

Despite Pete's lofty indifference to feminine wiles, one girl in the room had early attracted his attention. She was younger and fresher and far prettier than any of the other girls, which, of itself, should have brought a host of men clamoring for her favor. But listlessness proved a damper.

She danced occasionally—when asked, but made no advances on her own account. Peter noticed that no man stayed long in her society, quickly bored at her utter unresponsiveness. Most of the time she sat alone at some unused table, face downcast, the picture of dejection, in striking contrast to the levity displayed by her companions.

Once Peter caught an exchange of glances between the girl and Varney, who was staring at her, a questioning scowl on his face. And the girl, frightened, forced herself to ask the nearest man to dance, only to be repulsed.

Peter found his interest increasing as he sensed some sort of mystery in the presence of one so wholly unsuited to the sordidness of her surroundings.

This provided sufficient incentive to keep him on the spot, curious as to what might develop from the situation. Of course it was possible that his imagination was working overtime, but Peter had a very definite hunch to the contrary.

"Something's liable to bust loose any minute," he told himself, "and I aim to be on the sidelines when it does."

Young Spofford, after a time, cashed in at the poker table, which rather surprised Peter, in the light of what Aleck Carmichael had said.

"Looks like the guy's got some

sense," he thought, "or he'd hang on till he was milked dry. But mebby they's something else on his mind."

THOUGH already carrying a skinful of liquor, Spofford made for the bar, where he absorbed an additional three fingers; then headed, a trifle unsteadily, for a certain portion of the dancing space. Light began to dawn on Mr. Peter De Quincy.

Spofford approached the girl Peter had been watching. She shrank from him, but, with a laugh, Spofford pulled her from the chair, one arm circling her slim waist. While they danced Peter could see her frightened glance darting this way and that.

"If that skunk tries anything rough," P. D. Q. thought grimly, "and nobody else takes a notion to bust up his game, I might take a hand myself."

Through narrowing eyes Peter surveyed the dance floor, his disgust at Spofford mounting swiftly.

The music ceased, and Spofford, clutching tightly his companion's arm, drew her toward a vacant table a little to one side; only two of all assembled in the place seemed to note their actions, Peter De Quincy and Varney. It was Varney's business, naturally, to see everything that went on in his establishment; Peter was also making it his business.

Spofford and the girl sat down at the table, where drinks were served them. He held a glass of raw whisky to her lips, and, apparently actuated by a wish to conciliate him, she swallowed a little of the fiery stuff, nearly strangled at the unaccustomed sting in her throat.

Spofford laughed tipsily at her distress, finishing off the drink himself. She started to rise, but he caught her shoulder, pulling her into his lap. She struggled against him—vainly.

Aleck Carmichael was not busy at the moment, and Peter swiftly crossed to the bar. What he wanted now was information.

"Who's the girl with Spofford?" he asked.

Aleck squinted through the smoke-laden air.

"She's a new one," he answered. "Been here only a few days. I dunno who she is or where she come from. Varney'd be able to tell you."

"She doesn't belong in a joint like this," Peter affirmed, his eyes on the table where Spofford held the girl an unwilling prisoner. "Varney stand for rough stuff like that?" he added.

Carmichael shrugged his shoulders.

"Varney'll stand for most anything Spofford pulls," he told Peter. "Why, it was the young squirt's dad put up the cash to get the place started. Varney still owes him money. It don't pay to get in Dutch with the Spofford tribe—in this town."

Some people derive pleasure from inflicting pain. Spofford began to pinch the girl and twist her arms, laughing at her futile efforts to break away. Peter De Quincy had seen enough; his tanned face glowed a dull red, and, like a human catapult, he left the bar.

The muscular fingers of one hand gripped Spofford by the collar, snapping him to his feet, while the other swept the helpless girl from his grasp.

"What the hell you butting in for?" Spofford growled thickly, in mingled surprise and resentment.

"I got only one sort of language for a skunk like you," Peter rejoined. "Here she comes, hombre!" And his fist crashed to Spofford's jaw.

The blow was irresistible, and like a pole-axed steer Spofford went down. For a moment he lay on the floor, glaring stupidly up at the man who had all but knocked him cold. Then with a savage exclamation he struggled to his feet, staring angrily at the curious throng that crowded about the scene of his Waterloo.

"Carl! Mex!" he cried shrilly. "What the hell are you two fellows waiting for? Get this guy!"

Instantly the bystanders melted away from Pete, anticipating gunplay; that is, all but two individuals.

Then it was that Peter De Quincy displayed the qualities which brought him the nickname. With a dazzling speed he acted, even before the attacking force was properly organized.

Through the atmosphere hurtled a chair, thrown with deadly accuracy, and one of young Mr. Spofford's aids, a swarthy man, passed out of the picture with a grunt of dismay.

Nor did his comrade, Carl Davis, fare better, for young De Quincy followed with equal speed the chair he had flung, driving his good right fist deep into the pit of the Davis stomach. He, in turn, grunted dismally—and subsided.

Spofford, weaving uncertainly on wabbling feet, observed the rout of his army. De Quincy's back was toward him, and Spofford pulled a short-barreled pistol from beneath his coat-tails, leveling it full on the unconscious Peter. At such point-blank range even his unsteady aim could not miss.

The girl who had been the cause of this commotion screamed sharply as she perceived this danger, flinging herself bodily across Spofford's arm. The gun exploded harmlessly, its bullet boring into the floor. Peter turned, noting the condition of affairs with a single swift glance.

"Thanks, sister," he said briefly; and tapped Spofford once more, whereupon the rash youth again went down, this time for the full count.

"Any other candidates?" Peter inquired blandly, glancing around with the air of one who is willing to accommodate. There were, it appeared, no others.

At a sudden signal from Varney the orchestra again swung briskly into life, and affairs in the dance hall were resumed where interrupted, while the defeated trio presently slipped unobtrusively away.

Aleck at the bar grinned delightedly.

"P. D. Q.!" he muttered. "I'll tell the world that lad's well named. He's put himself on the map in this burg and no mistake.

"Any gent that cherishes an ambition to get Peter has to snap out of bed mighty early in the morning—and he never even used his gun! Just wait till he does! This bunch ain't seen anything yet."

Aleck glanced curiously at his employer, to see how he had been impressed by the prowess of this wandering cow-puncher; but Varney's face, which bore its usual masklike expression, told nothing. One could gather, however, that Varney was not inclined to fight young Spofford's battles.

The girl whom Peter had rescued looked shyly at him; then drooped her eyes in embarrassment under his gaze.

"I want to thank you for what you did," she whispered.

"Don't say a word, sister," Peter replied. "It's sure a pleasure to handle riff-raff like that."

She shivered at recollection of what had just passed.

"You've made some dangerous enemies, I'm afraid. Mr. Spofford and those men of his will be coming back to kill you."

"They won't be back right soon," Peter laughed easily. "They'll be needing repairs, I wouldn't wonder." There was nothing at all boastful in Peter's tone; he was merely making a matter-of-fact statement.

Again the girl shuddered, swaying as from a sudden attack of weakness. A sharp stab of pity stirred in Pete's breast. She was so young, so forlorn, and so helpless.

"Sit down," he suggested in a kindly tone. "Tell me all about it. You don't belong in a joint like this one."

Her haggard face searched his questioning, seeming to find in Peter's smiling eyes an answer to the unspoken words.

"Gosh, she's just a kid," he thought.

The girl slumped into a chair, elbows

resting on the liquor-stained table, her face deathly pale save for blotches of rouge, unskillfully dabbed on.

"Well?" Peter prompted encouragingly.

Dully she raised her eyes, which Peter perceived were swimming with tears. Suddenly she spoke:

"Can you imagine what it would be for a girl to be stranded in a town like this one—without a cent of money and without a friend?"

"It wouldn't be very pleasant," Peter agreed. "How did it come about?"

"I was going home," she murmured, flushing wretchedly, "and they put me off the train at Cactus Springs because I didn't have a ticket or money to pay my fare any further.

"I—I was really trying to beat my way—I lost my purse containing my ticket and a little money—or else some one stole it. That didn't make much difference anyway—after it was gone.

"When they put me off here I was desperate. I went to a house, begging—and a woman who lived there told me this was the place where I belonged—and slammed the door in my face."

Peter swore under his breath.

"And I bet that damned old hen calls herself a respectable woman," he growled to himself. "You didn't come here just because she told you to, did you?" he asked aloud.

"No. I met a man on the street—it was Mr. Spofford—and he promised to see that I was taken care of. He brought me to Mr. Varney, who gave me a job, saying that there was nothing wrong about it. I just had to do something, so I took it. That was two days ago.

"Mr. Spofford won't let me alone, and when I complained to Mr. Varney he laughed and said I was a little fool not to know when I'd fallen into something soft. I'm afraid of Mr. Spofford." Her terrified eyes roved over the busy room, as if dreading to see the man whom she feared.

"It's all right," Peter said comfortingly. "You don't need to worry. Spofford's gone. What's your name?"

"Marie Avis."

"Where do you live?"

"Council Bluffs, Iowa."

"You've got friends in Council Bluffs, Marie?"

She nodded, adding: "My family lives there."

"That's where you want to go, isn't it?"

Again she nodded.

"Now I'll tell you what we'll do, Marie. I'll take you away from Varney's and get you a room at the hotel for to-night, and see that you have money enough to take you home."

"How could I ever repay you?" she asked.

Peter cheerfully reassured her. "The only pay I want is a promise that you'll stay home when you get there—you got some other clothes?"

"Yes. These don't belong to me."

"Go and make a change, then," Peter told her. "I'll wait for you."

Marie slipped away, and presently Peter found himself joined by the watchful Mr. Varney.

"Taking that girl off my hands, are you?" the proprietor inquired.

"Right!" was Peter's cold rejoinder. He had taken a cordial dislike to Mr. Varney. "I'm going to ship her back East to her folks—where she belongs."

"All jake as far as I'm concerned, son," was Varney's careless rejoinder. "She's panned out a total loss in my business and I'll be glad to get rid of her."

"But I'm giving you a tip, which you can take or leave as you please. A certain party's not exactly in love with you now, and this last deal isn't going to help matters a lot. Get what I'm driving at?"

"You'll be telling—this party—all the details later on, I expect," Peter inferred.

"I might—and I might not. What of it?"

"I'd be glad if you did. And you might just add that the gates of hell are a-yawning wide open for him; also that I'd be pleased and proud to issue him a one-way ticket." Peter De Quincy tapped his forty-five, tied down low on his right thigh. "All he's got to do is ask for it."

"Cocky, ain't you?" Varney said sneeringly.

"No," said Peter, "I'm not. I'm dealing out facts; that's all. The Spofford tribe haven't any Indian sign hung on me, whatever they've got on other folks."

"All right—if that's how you feel. It's not kicking me in the shins, one way or another." And Varney went on about his affairs.

MARIE appeared dressed for the street ten minutes later, and together she and her volunteer escort left the Red Front, the fresh night air providing a welcome relief from the smoky, whisky-scented atmosphere of Varney's.

"Why did you do this for me?" Marie demanded. Her gratitude was obvious, but behind it lay curiosity. Men of Peter's sort had been painfully rare in her experience.

"Two, three reasons, I guess," he responded. "I'll tell you one of 'em. How old are you, Marie?"

"Seventeen," she whispered.

"That's about how I figured it. I had a sister—once. She'd be seventeen, too, now, if she'd lived. And if my sister had got started the wrong way, I'd want any chap to do for her what I did for you to-night."

For a moment or two they walked on in silence.

"Don't get me wrong," Peter resumed. "I ain't setting up in business as a sky-pilot that's cherishing ambitions to reform the world. Most generally I 'tend to my own business, and let other folks 'tend to theirs. But I like to see every one get a square deal, and that's what you weren't getting."

Which is why I took a crack at that pole-cat Spofford."

At the Phoenix House, Cactus Spring's unpretentious hostelry, Peter held brief consultation with the night clerk. Then he rejoined Marie, who had waited off to one side.

"Things are all fixed for you," he told her. "They's an east train goes through early in the morning—six twenty. Might be I'd sleep over and not see you again, so I've left cash at the desk to take you through. You can get it when you check out. They's no more need to worry, Marie. Good-by and good luck!"

Tears stood in the girl's eyes as she seized Peter's hand in both hers.

"I'll work and earn the money to pay you back," she whispered. "Tell me your name—and where to send it."

The range rider shook his head, smiling.

"That's all right. Forget it, Marie. The pleasure of socking Spofford twice was all the pay I want.

"You *must* tell me!" she insisted.

But before Marie knew it, her cavalier was gone, spurs jingling musically as he slipped through the door. She started to follow swiftly; then, conscious that the curious gaze of the night clerk was fixed on her, abandoned the impulse.

CHAPTER II.

NOT QUITE A PHILANTHROPIST.

JOHN MARLBOROUGH SPOFFORD, SR., reached down into the lower drawer of his desk for a Havana, clipping and lighting the weed with the air of a man who is vastly pleased at the way his affairs are progressing. Spofford was what is termed a private banker.

Physically he was a well-preserved individual on the border line between late middle and early old age. His hair was plentifully shot with gray, perhaps less so in his whiskers.

A luxurious crop of side burns followed either cheek bone, curving upward at their lower extremities to mingle with his meticulously tended mustache.

His chin was smooth shaved, save for a tuft of hair, a goatee, which coyly nestled in the hollow beneath the nether lip. Eyebrows were aggressively bushy, and inclined to shoot upward, affording shelter to a pair of shrewd gray eyes that missed little worth seeing.

On the whole, Banker Spofford, despite a carefully cultivated air of benevolence, was a man easy to dislike if not distrust, for he was as cold, and case-hardened, and soulless a proposition as ever foreclosed on the sorely troubled widow of a formerly well-to-do rancher.

He was never satisfied, reaching clutching fingers out for more—and more—and more.

His reputation was that of the business man who is perhaps a little overzealous in looking out for himself, but Spofford's prosperity and continued success brought a grudging admiration rather than censure.

His shrewdness was largely responsible for this tolerant attitude, since he realized that one must make some concessions to public opinion if the wheels of progress are to turn smoothly. Therefore he cultivated an open-handed attitude of generosity in civic matters, giving abundantly and without question of his time as well as his money when he felt that such a lavish gesture was called for.

This liberality brought him no small influence in local matters, which financially and otherwise more than made up for Spofford's outlay; and he came to be an unseen power in the affairs of Cactus Springs, never seeking public office himself, but always exerting a sinister sway that gave him full control of the political machinery. What he said went.

Many a secret conference took place

in his private office, and more matters of public concern were settled there than in the rooms ostensibly devoted to such business.

Indeed, Spofford's headquarters had been designed with this in view. At the front, where one entered from the street, the establishment resembled any prosperous, small-town bank, with the usual gratings and substantial vault.

His sanctum sanctorum was in the extreme rear, connected with the main portion of the building by a hallway. A door opening on an alley afforded means whereby people might consult the banker without the necessity of advertising their presence unduly, and a fair majority of Spofford's callers preferred to come and go by this inconspicuous route.

AS Spofford puffed complacently at the cigar, a caller interrupted his musings, one Hollis Black, who entered unannounced by way of the rear alley.

Mr. Black lived by his wits, and made a fair living, too, though his skill in that direction fell far short of Spofford's attainment. His customary rôle was that of jackal to his majesty, the lion.

Black had a keen nose to ferret out fat pickings, and lacking the where-withal to make a killing himself, would report the findings to his master, receiving a commission on the gains by way of reward.

He was a dapper little man, well dressed in a flashy sort of way, with a leaning toward silk shirts and neck raiment of striking hue.

Spofford greeted his henchman cordially, since Black was not a chap who paid calls of a social nature only. Business usually prompted his visits.

"Hello, Hollis. Have a cigar? What's new?"

Mr. Black did not decline the proffered smoke, for the excellence of Spofford's cigars was generally known.

"What's new?" he repeated, deli-

cately snuffing the aroma of his Havana. "Well—several things."

"Let's have 'em!" Spofford said briskly.

"Cal Whitfield's wife died last week. Mebby you knew that, though."

"No, I hadn't heard it," Spofford admitted indifferently. "What was the trouble with her?"

"She took things hard—Cal's being sick last winter, and losing his ranch all at the same time. Then when he finally cashed in, it broke her up considerable; never did get over it, I guess."

Spofford glanced at him sharply.

"Why bother me with all this? It doesn't interest me in the least. I'm not to blame if people are too heedless to look after their own affairs. When Cal failed in his obligations I had a perfect right to take the ranch. He and his wife had friends enough scattered around the range country. Why didn't some of them step in and help the fellow out of his jam?"

"Guess they didn't know how bad things were by Cal," Hollis Black said. "Not in time, anyway. Some folks are proud, and don't like to beg. Cal Whitfield was that kind. Besides, he was a mighty sick man. I'm not blaming you at all, but a few of Cal's friends were pretty sore. They felt you ought to have been easy on the guy—sick and all."

"Let 'em be sore!" Spofford declared harshly. "Who cares? Business and sentiment don't mix. If people get into a financial mess they have to pay the price."

"That's the way I look at it, too," Black conceded readily. "But the Whitfield family is through, and I didn't come in here to talk about 'em. I've dug up some news a sight more to the point. A big reclamation project is going through up at Apache Gap."

Spofford accepted this information with an expressive uplifting of his bushy eyebrows.

"Interesting—if true," he observed.

"It is true," Black insisted. "The yarn I picked up is straight—right from the inside."

"Who's back of the proposition?" Spofford asked, apparently dropping for the moment any question as to the authenticity of Hollis Black's statement.

"A consolidation of wealthy cattlemen, with Dud Millbrook the main squeeze. And besides that, they've got Eastern capital lined up in the deal too."

"Been kept pretty quiet," Spofford murmured, "if the thing's as wide as that. I hadn't even heard a whisper."

"You bet they've kept it quiet," Black asserted. "That's what they wanted, and that's the way they still think it is. Not a one of 'em from Millbrook down has any notion the plot's leaked out. I got my facts from a party mighty close to Millbrook himself."

"How'd that come about?" Spofford wanted to know.

"I happened to get next to this lad—I know him mighty well—and something he let drop made me curious. Sounded as if he was fishing for a chance to grab a little gravy on the side. So I worked on him, without crowding the game too hard, and found what I was after."

Hollis Black paused, twisting complacently at the thin, waxed mustache he wore, far from displeased with himself.

"That being the case, Apache Gap's likely to be worth money," Spofford put in.

"Nothing else but! It's built to order as site for an irrigation project—a big storage basin available, and then the narrow gap where construction costs would be low. I figured you'd know what to make of the tip."

"You any idea what they'd be willing to pay for Apache Gap?" Spofford asked. "It's part of the Three Star Dot holdings."

"You didn't need to tell me that

last," Black chuckled. "I knew it well enough, and I know where you come in. But about the other—they're prepared to pay fifty thousand, though hoping to get the Gap for less."

Spofford's answer was a noncommittal grunt. One gathered, however, that if he had the selling of Apache Gap to a group of men who contemplated an irrigation project, the price would be over fifty thousand rather than less.

"One point I miss," he said, after a moment of reflection. "Why didn't this fellow you speak of handle the deal himself—that is, get hold of Apache Gap and then sell it to the men who back the proposition?"

"That's an easy one to answer. He wanted to bad enough, but didn't have the guts. Afraid of old Millbrook, I guess. Made me swear to keep his name out of it. He acted nervous as hell all the time we were powwowing over it."

"They're likely to suspect where the leak was," Spofford said, "when the time comes for 'em to pay for Apache Gap through the nose."

"What difference does that make, as long as he's spilled the beans? What happens to him isn't my sorrows—or yours. We cash in, and let him face the music."

"True enough," the banker mused; then: "What split does this party of yours expect?"

"Same as mine—the usual ten per cent on the net return."

"Twenty per cent's more than I usually pay," Spofford reminded him.

"Come on, chief," Black protested. "Be reasonable! Twenty's a small enough slice off what you'll make—close to fifty thousand. Don't begrudge the two of us a modest cut on the proceeds."

"I do all the real work," Spofford declared. "This unknown party sells you information, which in turn you sell to me. Mighty good pay for the effort expended. You put up no capital and take no risk at all."

"The other guy takes a lot of risk," was Black's rather grim response. "If old Dud Millbrook got wise to the fact that he had a traitor in camp he'd start fanning the warpath pronto. Millbrook's a hell raiser when he gets going."

Hollis Black glanced meaningly at Spofford as he uttered this. "And as far as that goes, you don't take any risk either—holding the cards you have. It's everything to gain and practically nothing to lose."

Spofford did not venture to deny this assertion.

"I'll strain a point," he said. "You can each have your ten per cent—after the deal's finished and I've turned the information into cold cash."

"That's fair enough. I guess he ain't expecting any cash in advance."

"Naturally you'll take care of his end—pay him off when the time comes for settlement."

"Sure; it ain't likely he'll want anybody else in the know. That hombre's crawling along on mighty thin ice, and and I've a hunch he's wise to the fact. Lucky you hold that Three Star Dot paper, eh, chief? You've got foresight enough to sink a battleship."

Spofford accepted the compliment with becoming modesty.

"I generally manage to look after my own interest," he replied. "The principal, too, eh, Hollis? Ha, ha!"

Black echoed his superior's laugh.

"I'll say you do! Think you'll have any trouble freezing Peggy Winsome out?"

"Tut, tut, Hollis!" Spofford protested, though there was more of a hint of amusement underneath the words. "That's a coarse way to phrase it."

"Everything I do will be open and aboveboard—as always. Though of course if people persist in playing into my hand I can't do less than take advantage of the opportunity." He discarded his cigar, selecting a fresh one from the box.

"In other words, chief," Hollis Black laughed, "you're like any sensible man—not in business for your health. I shouldn't call you a philanthropist."

"Ha, ha," Spofford chuckled, while his cold eyes twinkled at Hollis Black.

"I don't suppose the fact that you and Millbrook are on opposite sides of the fence makes you any less keen to tackle this game," Black hazarded.

Spofford swore under his breath, the amused twinkle gone from his eyes and his face suddenly savage. Black shrewdly watched him.

"There's nobody on earth I'd rather sink the hooks in than that damned rancher," he growled thickly. "He did me once—on that deal over toward French Creek, and just when I thought I had him. This ought to even things up. I'll start acting on your information right away, but probably do a little investigating on my own account in the meanwhile."

"Investigate all you want to," Black said carelessly. "I'm telling you facts that come straight from headquarters."

"See Carl Davis this morning?" Spofford put in, abruptly changing the subject.

"Yeah. I ran into Carl a little while ago over at Varney's place, putting down his first drink."

"Send him around here, will you?"

"Sure thing. Likely he ain't left Varney's yet." And Mr. Black departed as he entered—by the rear door.

SPOFFORD went to a substantial safe in one corner of the office, capable fingers turning the dial to the correct numbers. Certain of his private documents Spofford preferred to keep here, rather than in the main vault, where curious, prying clerks might have access to them.

He swung open the heavy door, and from a drawer he extracted a bundle of papers, picking out one and returning the others. Swinging shut the safe

door, though leaving it unlocked, Spofford returned to his desk, where he proceeded to peruse the paper, grunting with satisfaction as he read.

The document was a mortgage on the Three Star Dot ranch for the sum of six thousand dollars, carrying interest at ten per cent a year, and executed in the banker's favor some four years previous by one Frank Winsome. A certain provision gave Spofford obvious gratification:

If interest on this loan is not paid semiannually on the dates herein specified, namely August 1 and February 1 of each year, the principal sum becomes payable immediately.

If the mortgagor, or his heirs, fail to pay this sum, together with unpaid interest, within a period of thirty days after said payment falls due, the mortgagee may take at once whatever steps he sees fit to protect his investment.

Spofford thoughtfully tapped the desk with his fingers.

"A highly useful provision," he murmured. "A year from now I could foreclose—unless Miss Peggy manages to dig up six thousand dollars, an outcome so unlikely that it can be definitely ignored. But a year would be too late, for in the meanwhile she can sell Apache Gap and get out with a handsome profit.

"It's just possible that Miss Peggy may default on her next interest payment, which gives her only thirty short days to cash in on the opportunity. If luck holds I'll do the cashing in myself."

At this moment a step sounded in the alley outside. Spofford instantly crossed the room, and replaced the mortgage deed in his safe as a second visitor knocked at the door.

"Come in," Spofford called, as he shut the safe door and locked it by spinning the dial. He turned to greet Mr. Carl Davis.

Davis lacked considerable of being an attractive individual, wholly wanting the air of jaunty good nature that

had disguised in some degree the knavery of Hollis Black.

He was a surly, brutish man of thirty or thereabouts, bound to Spofford by reason of an affair dating back several years—a cold-blooded murder.

Subservience to the banker's will was the price Davis paid for immunity. He was clean-up man for Spofford, the chap who did the dirty work whenever it was required.

"You wanted to see me?" Davis now inquired.

"Yes," Spofford told him shortly. "I've got a little job that needs your expert attention."

"What is it?" Davis grunted.

"You're familiar with the Three Star Dot range?" Spofford asked, by way of answer.

"Sure. I know that whole country like a book. Ten years ago I punched steers one season for Frank Winsome."

"You know Peggy Winsome—and her young brother?"

"Yep. I can spot either of 'em at sight. What of it?"

"Some time between now and the first of the month one or both of those persons will be riding into town to pay me three hundred dollars."

Spofford rose from the chair where he had seated himself on the caller's arrival, and took a turn across the room, arms crossed back under his coat tails. Meditatively he puffed at the cigar.

"There are certain reasons," he resumed, pausing to brush a fleck of ash from his vest, "why it's not wholly convenient to receive that money; and the thought had occurred to me that the sum of three hundred dollars might do you more good than it would myself—or the present owners. You follow my drift?"

"I got you, Mr. Spofford," Davis replied, grinning evilly. "You want me to go out to the Three Star Dot and stage a little second-story stunt. Anything to oblige."

"That's not it at all," Spofford hastened to correct him. "You would not have a chance to crack that ranch, because Frank Winsome owned a mighty good safe in which he kept his valuables, one that his daughter probably still uses. And furthermore, even if such a robbery were feasible, it's not what I want.

"Your assignment is to keep the ranch covered during the next three or four days, doing nothing until Peggy or her brother, or the two of them, start for Cactus Springs to pay me the three hundred dollars due on the first. Judging from past experience, they won't come until the final day, and when they do start you are to get busy."

"Holdup stuff, eh?"

"Exactly—with a soft pedal on anything too rough. Think you could manage it without trouble?"

"Humph!" Davis said confidently. "A cinch! You thinking I'd get any opposition out of a girl and a kid? That's a hot one?"

"I wasn't looking at it from that slant," Spofford said smoothly. "Rather whether you could turn the trick without being spotted. This proposition must be handled with discretion."

"Oh, I got you now." He grinned impudently, glancing at his companion. "If I buried my face behind a crop of alfalfa and so on, it ain't likely either of them would know me. How's that?"

"It would answer, I should imagine." Spofford spoke with dignity, showing disapproval of his associate's levity. "But see that whatever you do goes through without any hitch. There is a good deal at stake."

"They won't be no hitches, if I get anything like an even break," Davis grumbled. "But in case things do go wrong—I'm expecting you to take care of me. I ain't yearning for any session in the hoosegow, and I ain't any too popular with Buck Morrison, either."

"Just when has the sheriff made trouble for any of my agents?" Spofford inquired.

"They's always a first time, and three hundred dollars ain't a whale of a fortune. If I'm going into the Jesse James business, I'd a sight rather it was made worth my while."

He paused significantly.

"H-m! I see. Well, suppose we double the ante—provided you're successful," Spofford said diplomatically, a proposal greeted by Davis with greater enthusiasm than he had hitherto displayed.

"Now you're talking," he asserted. "That gives me something to work for. I'll be as careful as a church. That six hundred will come in right handy. I been cramped lately as regards my pocketbook."

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

AT eleven o'clock on the morning which followed Peter De Quincy's sensational début at the Red Front, Banker Spofford glanced at his watch, scowling; then pressed a push button on the desk. In prompt answer to his summons a clerk appeared, eyeing his employer questioningly.

"Is my son at his desk yet?" Spofford demanded.

"No, sir; Mr. Spofford hasn't come in this morning."

The banker grunted; then: "Tell Mr. Spofford, as soon as he reaches the office, that I want to see him."

"Very good, sir. I'll deliver the message."

Noiselessly the clerk closed the door, returning to his own tasks at the front of the establishment.

"The old man's on the warpath this morning," he confided gleefully to an associate. "When J. M., Jr., blows in, I bet he gets a dose of what's what."

"I hope he does," was the vindictive answer. "Makes me sick to see how

that guy walks away with murder. He wouldn't last half a day in this office if he wasn't the boss's son."

"Cheese it!" the other ordered in a low whisper. "Here he is now."

"Pipe the lump on his jaw!" the first clerk muttered, prudently speaking through one side of his mouth. "What a wallop somebody handed him last night! Three ringing cheers for the fist behind the punch!"

Young Spofford had a private room of his own, where he made a rather feeble pretense of doing business for the firm, and toward this he headed, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

Before he could reach its shelter the message from his father was delivered.

"Say what he wanted?" young Spofford grunted sourly.

"No, sir," was the discreet response. "All he said was that he'd like to see you."

"All right," Spofford, Jr., grumbled; but instead of going immediately, he turned the key of his own office, disappearing from sight of the two clerks, who grinned and winked with malicious satisfaction at each other.

Spofford tossed an expensive four-gallon hat to the desk, and sprawled limply in a chair. His eyes were heavy and bloodshot, his hair disheveled, and he badly needed a shave.

"Boy, but I've got a peach of a head!" he muttered, passing nervous fingers through the hair that clustered damply above his temples. In tender solicitude he felt of the lump that disfigured his jaw.

"Damn that broncho forker! He'll sweat before I'm through with him! Wonder what the hell the governor wants now."

Young Spofford left his chair, pulling open a filing cabinet, from which he extracted a whisky flask. He drank copiously, and this restored in some slight degree his shattered morale.

"Might as well get the agony over with," he mused in no enthusiasm, and

without further postponement of the evil day passed on down the hallway to his father's office.

SPOFFORD, SR., looked up as his son entered, with a slow contemptuous glance that took in the younger man from head to heels.

"Harrumph!" was Banker Spofford's salutation.

"Morning, governor!" the youth responded, with an attempt at sunny cheerfulness that, strange to say, fell sadly flat.

"You're a fine-looking specimen!" Spofford, Sr., remarked witheringly. "A fine-looking specimen! What happened to your jaw? A mule kick you—or something?"

His son achieved a sheepish sort of grin.

"I bumped a door—in the dark," he explained.

"Yes, I've heard of doors that do things like that," the banker answered grimly. "Do you know who hit you, or were you too drunk to have even that much sense left?"

Young Spofford merely grunted by way of reply, unable to meet the stern gaze of his outraged parent.

"Put a filthy, ragged suit of clothes on you, rub a handful of cinders into your hair, smear your face with axle grease—and you'd be a dead ringer for some bum kicked off the brake rods of a freight train!

"How much longer do you think I'm going to stand for your damned nonsense—for this everlasting hell-raising you indulge in? Don't you ever expect to settle down and behave yourself?"

Banker Spofford selected a cigar, which he lighted with fingers that shook from the displeasure and indignation which mastered him.

"I know I've made a fool of myself," J. M., Jr., rejoined humbly, "but don't rub it in. I'm on the straight and narrow now."

"Harrumph!" Banker Spofford snorted.

"I mean it, governor! Fact!"

"And I suppose the business you staged last night—whatever deviltry it might have been—was a final party, eh?"

"That's it exactly. A final party. You see I'm going to get married." Young Spofford's bloodshot eyes were fixed shrewdly on his sire, to note the effect.

"Married!"

"Sure. Why not? A fellow's got to get married some time, ain't he?"

"Who you going to marry?" skeptically. "Some girl at Varney's?"

"Sa-ay! What do you take me for? I'm going to marry Peggy Winsome."

In the shock of this announcement Banker Spofford forgot to pull at his cigar.

"Mean to tell me Peggy Winsome's promised to marry you?" The tone employed by the elder was not precisely a compliment to his son.

"What's the matter with Peggy Winsome?" John Marlborough, Jr., registered righteous indignation, as one who hastens to the defense of a woman whose worth has been assailed.

"Nothing the matter with her. But you dodged the question. Has Peggy agreed to marry you?"

The issue was too definitely stated for young Spofford to temporize further.

"Well," he hedged, "she ain't quite come to the point of saying *yes* out and out, mebbe. But you know—" He winked meaningly at his father. "A fellow can size up a girl pretty well. Guess she thinks I'm a good lad to tie to. Peggy's no fool, and I reckon she can tell which side her bread's buttered on."

Banker Spofford made no immediate response, gazing reflectively at his son. This whole idea was startlingly new, and he was readjusting himself to grasp it.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Peggy's, John," he said approvingly.

The young man, assured that for

once in his life at least he had won parental favor, ignited a cigar with something of a flourish.

"Oh, I've been on Peggy's calling list for quite a spell," he proclaimed. "I'm no stranger at the Three Star Dot."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?" Spofford asked, already mapping out a plan of campaign whereby the new and unexpected development might be fitted to his immediate schemes.

"Didn't know how you'd take it, governor," J. M., Jr., responded frankly. "The Three Star Dot fortunes are down pretty close to zero. So—" He waved his cigar vaguely through the air. "But I'm mighty glad to find you approve of Peggy," he added virtuously. "She's a fine little girl. Fact! There's none finer."

"Encouraged you, has she?"

"Oh, yes—that's about what it amounts to."

"Sure that mortgage note I hold didn't have anything to do with the encouragement?" Banker Spofford inquired.

"Oh, she probably didn't forget that," young Spofford replied with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders. "But they's more to it. She'll take me for myself alone," he concluded, smugly complacent.

"Harrumph!" Spofford, Sr., grunted, glancing from under shaggy eyebrows at his heir. "I wouldn't be too positive about that. Perhaps you haven't studied yourself in a mirror this morning. If you value Peggy's good opinion you'd better not let her see you in this shape. You look like a wrecked ship. Now get out; I want to think."

GRATEFULLY young Spofford made his escape, congratulating himself on the trend affairs were promising to take. Instead of adjourning to his own office he headed for Varney's.

The fertile brain of John Marlbor-

ough Spofford, Sr., was already beginning to function.

The more he pondered on the possibility of having Peggy Winsome for a daughter-in-law, the more favorably Banker Spofford regarded it.

He had long been feeling no little concern as to the future of his son. Marriage was bound to have a steady influence on the hectic youth. The effect of such a marriage on the girl—tying her up with a moral bankrupt like his son—was a matter that Banker Spofford wholly disregarded.

Then there was Apache Gap, and Spofford's secret knowledge that it was soon to be very valuable.

If Peggy Winsome should marry John Spofford, then Apache Gap would come into the family, and the machinations he had in view to obtain it were quite unnecessary. Banker Spofford did not believe in useless labor.

Would Peggy marry John? The whole affair hinged on that and it loomed big as an uncertainty, with the odds—Banker Spofford frankly conceded this—against the would-be bridegroom.

Still, women were peculiar, he reflected, meditatively rubbing his chin.

"You can't figure out in advance how they'll jump, and if you do, chances are you've figured wrong."

Thus Spofford mused, hesitating over the policy it was best to follow; whether to call off Carl Davis—or let matters take their course as planned.

THREE days had passed since Hollis Black came to him with news of the irrigation project; three days since he had put Davis on espionage duty at the Three Star Dot ranch.

During that brief space of time the banker had not been idle. Certain private channels of investigation were open to him, and though his secret inquiries had brought to light less definite information than he might have wished, still Spofford had succeeded in uncovering some significant facts.

And these facts, without exception, hinted strongly at the truth of Hollis Black's story relative to the projected irrigation dam. It was a chance for a clean-up at the expense of his enemy, Dud Millbrook.

The next day—the first of the month—would find interest due on Frank Winsome's loan. So far nothing had been heard from Peggy as to payment, but Spofford felt sure that she had the money ready.

The banker's reflections reached this point, leaving him still undecided. Then, abruptly, a new slant on the matter clinched the issue.

"I'm a fool to hesitate," he grunted. "Sensible thing to do is play both ends against the middle. Whatever happens I can't lose. We'll let the thing ride."

SPOFFORD'S son, in the meanwhile, was consulting with Mr. Varney over at the Red Front.

"What became of the range rider that socked me last night, Sid?" he inquired.

"He pulled out a little while after you left," Mr. Varney responded.

"Any idea where he went? I'm gunning for that hombre."

Varney pleaded ignorance on that detail.

"What about Marie Avis? Tell the girl I'd like to see her, will you?"

"Marie ain't here any more," Varney told him. "That range rider took her away with him last night."

"Say, what business has he butting in between me and my girl?" Spofford wanted to know. "What did he do with her?"

"Claimed he was going to send her back East—to where her folks live. Mebbe he did at that. I dunno. It wasn't my funeral."

Spofford swore fluently.

"It's going to be somebody's funeral before I'm through. Talk with him, did you?"

Mr. Varney admitted it; and Spofford craved further details.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"Why, I warned him what he had in mind might make him unpopular with you," Varney conceded.

"What did he make of that?"

"It didn't scare him any. He intimidated pretty strong that the gates of hell were standing wide open, and that he had a one-way ticket for you any time you came after it."

"Is that so!" Spofford sneered.

"You heard what folks call that lad?" Varney asked.

"I'll bite. What is it?"

"His name's Peter De Quincy, the first letters of which spell P. D. Q. From what Aleck Carmichael tells me he's supposed to be a combination of dynamite and blue lightning. Mebbe you'd better let the guy alone."

"Let him alone after what he did to me!" Spofford growled. "Fat chance! See anything of Carl Davis this morning?"

"Carl ain't been around daytimes lately—only at night. He's got a job some place, I wouldn't wonder. Perhaps your dad might know where he goes. Ask him, why don't you?"

"When I want advice, Sid," Spofford remarked grumpily, "I'll come and ask for it."

"Suit yourself," retorted Varney.

YOUNG Spofford presently left the Red Front, wandering forth to the street. Lacking an opportunity to hold converse with Mr. Carl Davis, he proceeded to seek out Carl's companion of the evening before, Mex, the gentleman of swarthy complexion who had forcibly collided with a chair flung by Peter De Quincy. This man's full name was Mexican Charlie.

After some little time spent in search, Spofford located Mex in the back room of another saloon, and they soon had their heads together over a bottle.

Spofford began: "You know that broncho forker—the guy that slammed you last night?"

Mexican Charlie's lips curled back in a sneer which disclosed a double row of white teeth.

"Know heem!" he gritted, passing a hand over bruised ribs. "Has he not almost keeled me, weeth that chair!"

"Like to get even, wouldn't you?"

The Mexican's black eyes questioned Spofford suspiciously, dwelling on the conspicuous lump which disfigured his jaw. Spofford caught the glance, interpreting it correctly.

"Oh, I'm sore at him too; I don't deny that," he said hastily. "We're all in this together—you, and Carl, and me. We've got to get that guy."

"That means," Mexican Charlie observed indolently, with a characteristic shrug of his shoulders, "that Davis and I are to get heem. What does Carl say?"

"I haven't located Carl yet," Spofford admitted. "But he's all right. He'll agree to anything reasonable."

"He won't agree to get heemself shot up by thees red-headed gun-slinger—thees guy they call P. D. Q. Me—I am not so angry weeth heem, after all. He ees one good guy, to leave alone." Unconsciously Mexican Charlie echoed the sentiments Spofford had just heard from Mr. Varney, of the Red Front.

"The trouble with you is you're yellow, Mex," he grumbled. "Bluffed out of the game by a red-headed puncher."

Mexican Charlie passed off the insult with a sneer.

"Yellow!" He snapped his finger contemptuously. "You—call me yellow! That ees a good one, as you Americanos say. Yellow!" and Charlie laughed mirthlessly.

"You know I didn't meant it just that way," Spofford disclaimed uneasily. "But we've got to get rid of that red-head. He socked you, and he socked Carl; I got it worse—he socked me twice. On top of all that he stole a girl I want."

"Suppose Carl and I put thees P.

D. Q. where he never socks any one again. What ees that leetle job worth to the Señor Spofford?"

"You know I pay well, Mex. It would be worth a thousand dollars"—Spofford saw disapproval on the other's face, and hurriedly amended his offer by adding—"to each of you."

"Ah, that ees better. For two thousand dollars I theenk we weel do eet. First must I see Carl and talk weeth heem."

"Make it snappy, will you, Mex? I'll sleep easier when that fellow's planted."

"There ees no hurry. When dealing weeth thees red-heads one must be careful."

"Oh, all right, then," Spofford conceded unwillingly, giving in because he had no choice. "Take your time about it, if you say so, but make the job sure." And he left the saloon.

CHAPTER IV.

PEGGY.

POISED at the door of the Three Star Dot ranch kitchen stood a slim, lithe young girl who looked serenely forth upon her world, oblivious of the fact that the picture she made would have stirred any susceptible male to cordial and sincere approval.

Peggy Winsome was doubly blessed, not only with beauty of face and figure, but also with the priceless charm of a gracious personality.

Considered individually, Peggy's features might have fallen short of perfection. Take the young lady's nose, for example. It was a trifle retroussé, but that detail merely added a piquant expression to her already lovely face which was worth a bushel of perfect noses.

And just under its saucy tip perched the most kissable mouth you ever saw, flanked by an adorable dimple. The chin was delicately chiseled, though

firm, betokening strength of character. And her eyes—

They were of the blue color which mirrors the azure of a cloudless Western sky in the pellucid depths of a mountain lake. They bubbled infectiously, like two crystal-clear springs, when Peggy smiled; friendly eyes, too; at times sober, more often joyous, but always a true reflection of their owner's mood.

There was about Peggy a very appealing air of domesticity as she stood at her kitchen door this morning. Puffs of wind whirled in from the open range, whipping at her gay little gingham apron and mussing into charming disarray the crown of golden hair atop her head.

Her cheeks were flushed crimson from an encounter with a rebellious stove; bare arms—round, and tanned through exposure to the Western sun—were whitened by patches of flour, a portion of which had somehow been transferred to the tip of her retroussé nose. The whole effect was decidedly irresistible.

Peggy's lips curved in an affectionate smile as she watched a twelve-year-old boy, who, unaware she was looking at him, played for his own delectation the rôle of seasoned range rider. He was dressed like a true puncher, even to the man-sized six-gun slung at his belt, though a careful glance would have told you that the cylinder of this dangerous toy contained no shells.

A small bull calf regarded the embryonic puncher dubiously, tail stiff as a ramrod; then started off at an awkward gallop as the coils of a lariat spiraled swiftly toward him. But the calf delayed starting by the fraction of a second too long, and the noose settled full around its neck.

"Whee—yip!" came a shrill yell of triumph from the wielder of the lasso, and Peggy, in the doorway, applauded generously.

"That's fine, Newt! You're almost as good as a regular cow hand."

"I got the old dogy that time, all right," Newt observed complacently, pulling in his protesting captive like a fish at the end of a line. "Didn't do him any good to dodge, either. I aim to make this lariat talk, 'fore I'm through." He slackened the noose, and the little bull calf withdrew a few paces, shaking its head disgustedly.

Newt bent over to arrange the coils of rope for another cast, temporarily ignoring his playfellow.

"Look out, Newt! Behind you!" Peggy gasped, between amusement and consternation. She spoke too late. Biff! The calf's stocky little head made violent connections with the rear of Master Newt, and with a grunt the youthful top rider measured his full length on the ground.

Having achieved this small success the calf prudently beat a strategic retreat before reprisals could be in order, disappearing around the corner of a near-by shed.

Newt regained an upright position with a vast show of dignity, glancing suspiciously at his sister to see if she might be laughing. Peggy's face was suitably grave, though smiles lurked at the corners of her mouth, and the dimple was unusually conspicuous.

"Dawgoned shorthorn!" the boy muttered darkly. "Sneaking up on a fellow when he ain't looking. I'll learn him!"

"Dinner's on the table," Peggy suggested. "You'd better postpone the lesson till later."

"All right, sis. Guess I'm ready to clamp the nosebag on."

She looked him over critically.

"Beat the dust out of your clothes and wash up before coming in the house."

"Shucks, Peg! I'm blame near starved."

"A cowboy wouldn't go to a meal with his face and hands like yours," she said cuttingly. "Honest, Newt, you're a sight!"

"Of course he would. Why, on the

round-up they might not be water enough for a rider to scrub himself off. He'd go to chow any old way."

"Well, you're not on a round-up, and there's plenty of water."

"Aw, gee, Peg! Have a heart, can't you!" Newt mourned, having a typical boy's distaste for soap and water. But none the less he obeyed orders, and presently passed inspection with flying colors. Together they sat down at the kitchen table. It was easy to see that they were brother and sister.

"DON'T forget your table manners," Peggy said as Newt wolfishly attacked the food. "There's plenty of time. You haven't got to catch the caboose at the rear of a stock train."

"Gee, a fellow can't be expected to eat like a girl!" he mumbled, mouth full of miscellaneous plunder. "Chuck time ain't supposed to be a tea party." Yet in deference to her suggestion Newt curbed his efforts somewhat.

He might grumble and protest, chafing under the restraining influence of his sister, but at heart Newt fairly idolized her. She was a girl, to be sure, but that was no fault of Peggy's, and as a girl he rated her high. She had been a mother to him ever since Newt could remember, and, for the past four years, a father as well.

"Say, Peg," he spoke up engagingly after the first pangs of hunger had been allayed, "how about slipping me a fistful of .45's? I ain't shot that six-gun for days and days. First thing we know I'll be plumb forgetting how."

"Maybe. But I don't think there are many left. I nearly emptied the box for you last time. Remember?"

"Ought to buy some more," he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone, "next time we go to town. A cow ranch shouldn't ought to run short of .45's."

"Pistol shells cost a lot of money, Newt," she reminded him, "and they disappear awfully fast."

"You wouldn't want for me not to be able to shoot, though?" he observed. "Some day a fellow might start to roll a gun on me, and then I'd have to show speed or eat dirt. A cowboy's got to be handy with his iron."

"My goodness, Newt!" Peggy exclaimed, her blue eyes dancing in amusement. "You're not planning to make a gun-slinger of yourself, I hope."

"You're dawgoned right I am," he affirmed. "I wouldn't give two cents for a range rider that couldn't sling a mean .45. When we going to town, Peg?"

"To-morrow. Banker Spofford's day would be ruined if we didn't pay him that interest. Lucky we've got the three hundred."

"Gee, what a raft of .45's three hundred dollars would buy!" Newt mused mournfully. "How long we got to keep fattening the ante for that shorthorn, sis?"

"Don't worry about that, Newt," Peggy said stoutly, willing to avoid an unpleasant subject. "We'll go to town and you can have a box of .45's."

"You're a peach, sis!" was his grateful exclamation. "Then look a-here. Why can't I have what shells are left to shoot this afternoon? I'll wipe the dishes for you if you'll give 'em to me."

Thus appealed to, Peggy smiled, and promised to do what she could. As a result Newt indulged in target practice to the extent of two full rounds—under Peggy's supervision.

In spite of Newt's bitter protests to the contrary, his sister shrewdly maintained that a chap of twelve had not attained a ripe enough age to be trusted alone with loaded firearms. Newt felt that she was wholly wrong in this, but like a good sport he yielded to her whim.

When the shells were expended he shoved the empty gun back into its sheath, twisting his hips to settle the weight in place. The six-shooter had been Newt's father's, and toward it he

felt a genuine affection, wearing it proudly.

Newt kept the gun in perfect condition, and the inside of its barrel was as free from rust or corrosion as when it left the Colt factory years before.

Since pistol practice could no longer be indulged in, Newt got out his lasso and began trying various throws at the expense of the bull calf. Thus passed a pleasant and profitable afternoon, especially profitable, because he at last mastered one little trick of the rope that had hitherto eluded him.

NEXT morning found Newt and Peggy up betimes for their ride into Cactus Springs.

Newt had a vague idea that their financial situation was not all that might be desired, without grasping the full details. Dad, it seemed, had borrowed money to tide over a spell of bad times several years before, when drought and disease played havoc with his herds. Shortly afterward had happened the dreadful thing, recollection of which still hung over Newt like an ugly shadow.

One morning Frank Winsome mounted his horse out by the corral stockade, and the animal, giving vent to a sudden outburst of evil temper, reared and fell backward, crushing the rider beneath. Thus did Newt Winsome's dad—his big, strong, stalwart ranchman dad, with the hearty laugh, and the jingling spurs, and the faint, fragrant odor of tobacco about him—start out on the last long trail.

Newt could still remember how Peggy clung to him sobbing, when she came from the room where the cowboys had tenderly carried the injured man. He could also remember how, after a little time, Peggy bravely sought to conceal her own bitter sorrow for sake of the kid brother, too young to realize the vastness of the loss they had suffered.

How she managed to keep the ranch going during the four years since then

Peggy herself hardly knew. But every six months, on the dot, Banker Spofford got his three hundred dollars of interest money.

Newt loved going to Cactus Springs, even when a trip to Spofford's office provided the excuse for their journey. Now and then he rode in alone for supplies or mail, though there was usually little enough mail for the Three Star Dot, but more often he and Peggy went together, making a gala occasion of it.

"Don't forget we're going to buy a box of .45's, Peg," Newt anxiously reminded his sister, as she bent over to open the safe which still stood in the room that had served Frank Winsome as office, when the Three Star Dot had been a prosperous outfit, shipping steers by the thousand.

Peggy nodded silently, counting out fifteen double eagles from her slender reserves, adding to them one ten-dollar gold piece for incidental expenses.

"You just bet we will, old timer," she smiled, slipping the coins into a little leather pouch. "Come on. I'll race you to the stable! And beat you there, too!"

"Like fun you will!" Newt grunted, rising to the challenge as a hungry trout rises to a grasshopper on the surface of a cañon stream.

Out through the kitchen they boiled like two Texas tornadoes. But at the doorstep waited grim disaster. Peggy was leading by a narrow margin, and somehow her slim foot missed connections. With a sharp gasp of dismay she plunged headlong, and Newt, carried along by his own momentum, leaped clear over her prostrate body to avoid trampling on her.

Instantly he checked his speed, and turned back to where Peggy was trying to rise, her face white and drawn with pain.

"Hurt yourself, Peg?" the boy called. She managed to smile at him, though the attempt was rather feeble.

"I—I guess I twisted my ankle," she said, speaking in a strained tone. "It doubled under me when I fell, and I could feel the thing snap."

"Gosh, that's tough, sis!" Newt exclaimed, his boyish voice expressive of the deepest concern.

"It'll be better in a minute, mebbe."

"You ought to get in the house," Newt said wisely, "where you can sit in a chair. Take hold of me, and I'll help you up."

Peggy obeyed, wincing at the stab of agony that bored through her ankle like a red hot needle. But gallantly she clenched her teeth, hobbling along with Newt's aid, finally to be settled in a chair of the living room.

"We got to get that riding boot off," he declared, sizing the situation up with quite a professional air, "'fore your ankle swells and jams it tight. Can you stand the strain if I pull? But mebbe I better slit the leather with a sharp knife."

"No, don't do that, Newt," Peggy said hastily. "Those are new boots, and I can't afford to ruin 'em for any ankle. Go ahead and pull."

Newt did so, as gently as was possible, though the necessary wrenching caused his sister more suffering than he dreamed. Next off came the stocking. Peggy's slim, graceful ankle was already showing signs of discoloration, and a very noticeable lump.

"What should we do for it?" Newt demanded doubtfully.

"Cold water's the best thing," Peggy said. "That might help keep down the swelling."

"I'll get a fresh pail from the pump," and Newt swiftly departed.

"I'M ashamed to be such a bother," the girl said, as her brother returned. "It's too bad for me to spoil your fun to-day."

"Gosh, Peg, I don't mind that part of it," he insisted. "But I'm sure sorry for you. I bet that ankle hurts like sixty."

"It's better, now I've got it in the cold water," she smiled. "You'll have to ride to town alone, Old Timer."

"But I don't want to go off and leave you like this, Peggy," he protested. "That don't seem right, strikes me. Be different if Mort Radcliff was here."

Radcliff was a rider employed at odd times by Peggy Winsome when a man's services were required on the ranch, and when she could spare the cash for hired help. He was a faithful, well-meaning fellow, yet hardly remarkable for a high degree of intelligence.

Though not regularly a Three Star Dot hand in any sense of the word, Mort Radcliff used the place as his headquarters much of the year, so that Peggy and Newt were less lonely than would otherwise would have been the case. At this particular time Radcliff had a temporary job with a ranchman thirty miles away.

"I wish Mort was here to look after you, sort of, when I'm away," the boy mused on, eying his sister hesitatingly.

"I'll be perfectly all right for a few hours," she insisted. "You don't need to worry about me."

"I won't get any fun out of hitting the trail alone, and thinking of you sitting here all bunged up, Peg. Be a sight nicer to wait mebbe a week—till you can ride again. Why can't we do it that way?"

"You're forgetting Banker Spofford, Newt," she told him. "He'll be expecting his three hundred dollars on time, and we can't disappoint the poor fellow. It's up to you to save the day. Think you can do that much for the old ranch?"

"'Course I can," he averred. "Only it's more fun if you're along."

"You're a darling, Newt, to want me to go with you," she whispered. "Next time I will. Here's the filthy lucre," and Peggy took the little pouch from the pocket of her riding jacket. "Saddle up your cayuse and beat it.

"All you have to do is give the money to Spofford and get his receipt. Don't forget that last. It's important—when one deals with a gentleman of his sort." You gathered that Peggy entertained no misconceptions regarding Banker Spofford's failings.

"What'll you do for chow this noon, Peg?"

"I'll manage somehow. On your way, Old Timer."

"They's no great hurry," he demurred. "I'll leave some grub where you can reach it, and dig up a book or a magazine, or something else for you to read. Then the time won't drag."

To the best of his ability, Newt arranged things for the comfort of the invalid.

"I'll hustle back as fast as I can," he promised. "Don't move around any more'n you have to."

"I won't," Peggy told him. Then, "Oh, I forgot, Newt. In that leather bag is a slip of paper with a list of stuff to buy. The extra ten dollars will take care of everything and leave money enough for your box of shells. Good-by, Old Timer."

"Good-by, Peg," and awkwardly he bent over to kiss her. Then, dropping the heavy bag of gold coins into his coat pocket, Newt started for the stable.

Hidden among the rocks of the sandstone ridge which towered just back of the Three Star Dot ranch buildings crouched Carl Davis. He saw practically everything which went on there.

The accident to Peggy brought a grunt of amusement to his lips, but no display of sympathy for the injured girl.

"Guess they's one party that won't be hitting the trail into town to-day," he muttered.

Later, when Newt emerged alone from the house—following his first trip to the pump for water—the spy's interest increased.

"Kid going alone, eh! Well, that'll be soft. I'll turn the little shrimp inside out if he gets fresh."

Newt saddled his horse within the stable, hesitating as he was about to lead the animal forth.

"I got a hunch," he suddenly muttered. "I ain't going to do it that way a-tall. Here's a time when I got to play her safe."

Swiftly he stripped off the saddle, but almost immediately replaced it. A little further delay followed, while Newt poked about a work bench. Hav-

ing located what he wanted, the boy at length led his mount into the open air, where he swung briskly into the saddle.

The unseen watcher noted this, lips curling back in an evil sneer.

"On his way, is he! About time, I'd say. I'm sure getting sick of sticking up here in the rocks, with nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs. Now I'll dig up my cayuse and pound the trail too. I'll jump that fool kid east of the Salt Wash crossing. That's as good a place as any other."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Spanning the Golden Gate

PERHAPS no group of large cities in the world are separated by such a water barrier as are those clustered around San Francisco Bay. For years transportation in the neighborhood of the Golden Gate has been one of using ship or ferry.

In the last two years three highway bridges have been built across the narrower portions of the bay at a cost of fourteen million dollars. Work has begun on another to cost seven million five hundred thousand dollars; and a fifth that will mean an expenditure of fourteen million five hundred thousand dollars is waiting legal approval before starting.

Two other bridges, for which Federal aid is asked, will cost one hundred million dollars each, and will span the Golden Gate and connect San Francisco and Oakland.

The latter of the two will have two principal spans of one thousand two hundred and fifty feet each and a vertical clearance of one hundred and fifty feet, and a movable span to accommodate ships. The War and Navy departments have offered objection because they believe that such a structure would hinder navigation and endanger a fleet in time of war when it comes to maneuvers.

The Golden Gate bridge will probably consist of a single suspension of four thousand and fifty feet, making it two thousand two hundred and thirty feet longer than the famous Quebec bridge, and about six hundred feet longer than the Hudson River bridge now under way in New York.

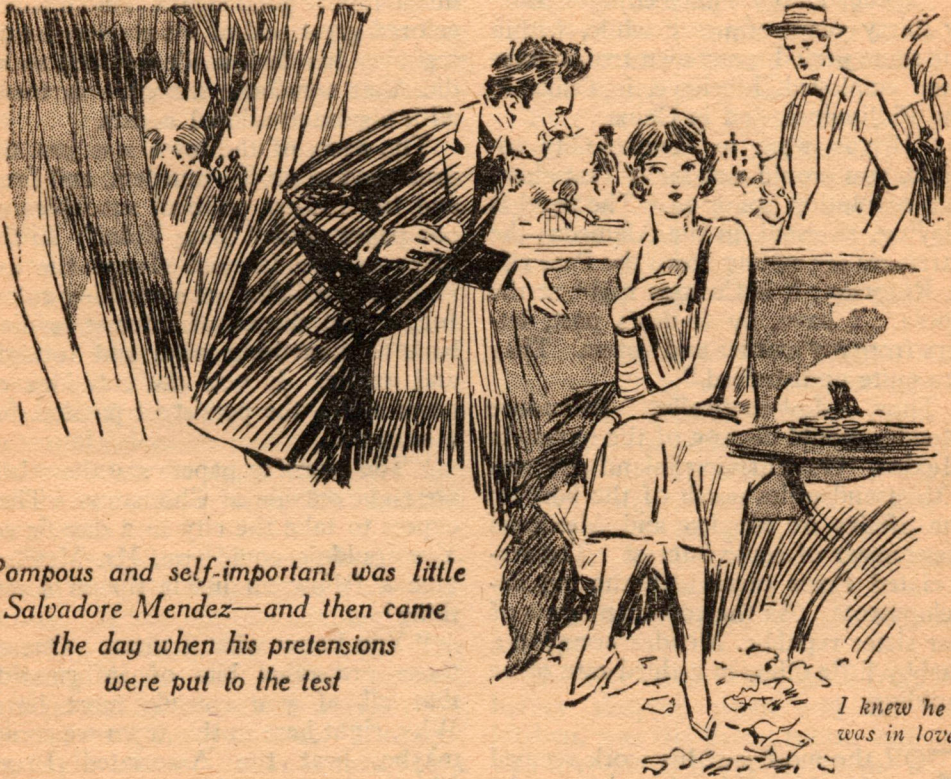
Work has already started on the transbay bridge from Hayward to San Mateo, a distance of slightly over seven miles. This will be the longest highway bridge in the world, but there are few engineering difficulties to overcome. There is shallow water most of the way, and conditions in no way compare with those nearer the mouth of the bay.

A subway connecting Oakland with Alameda is nearing completion, and will cost four million five hundred thousand dollars. This brings the total cost of spanning San Francisco Bay and linking together the cities nestled there to the staggering sum of practically two hundred and fifty million dollars.

Guy Rader.

Not for Publication

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON



*Pompous and self-important was little
Salvadore Mendez—and then came
the day when his pretensions
were put to the test*

*I knew he
was in love*

IT was some years before the Big Scrap; and the Mexican situation had not yet begun to assume serious proportions when I first saw Salvadore Mendez.

He was so amusingly important in his bearing, and so undersized in stature, that I used to spend hours in his company watching his struttings.

In all things he was uncannily like one of those iridescent pouter pigeons: so magnificently authoritative about the chest, so industriously preened, so gentle. I know he was gentle because I have seen him when his eyes were like those of a woman stricken. But not often.

It was his pleasure to look upon life

with a tiny scowl between his brows; to compress his mouth into a straight line and twirl, thoughtfully, one end of his wisp of a waxed mustache. Beyond doubt, he felt at such moments that he was profound and mysterious, even to the extent of thrusting his hand, statesmanlike, into the bosom of his inevitable Prince Albert.

"The trouble with you reporters is that you devote too much space to the minor disturbances in my country," he had said severely. "It is bad for international relations." His frown deepened and he repeated impressively: "It is bad for international relations. We are"—he cleared his throat—"a people of dignity and achievement."

I pointed out that so long as Madero and Huerta and Villa kept up the fire-works south of the border it was difficult to observe the dignity and achievement stuff on account of the smoke.

"Under Diaz we have enjoyed nearly thirty years of peace while, within the same period, your own troops have been employed, I believe, in Cuba, in the Philippines, and in China.

"If you were in Mexico City to-night you would not know that there is a revolution going on. The band is playing, as usual, in the Alameda; the carriages are rolling down the Paseo de la Reforma; it is Carmen night at the opera. I have, by to-day's post, letters from my mother and sisters. They are quite undisturbed."

Thus, diplomatically, Salvadore Mendez would dispose of the unrest in Mexico. Our thriving inland city was a thousand miles north of the border; the affairs of Mexico and Mexicans were never of acute interest. The Associated Press carried all the big developments. As the consular agent of our sister republic, Mendez occupied a shabby little office in a third-rate office building.

FOR the most part his work seemed to be the off-hand assistance he rendered his humble fellow countrymen in matters appertaining to their employment. Where once the Irishman with crowbar, pick, and spade did the railroad track work of a nation, the Mexican peon now held full sway. The Santa Fe alone employed them out on the line by the thousands.

Into the office of Mendez they would come daily in clusters. A man with a bandaged hand smelling of arnica; another with a piece of paper that needed translating; droves of them with the multitudinous complications and complaints of transportation, assignments to bunk cars, the matters of wages—blackish-looking toilers with lowering, expressionless faces.

All of this, though, was mediocre and commonplace, an annoying stream to be shunted aside during the call of any representative of the press.

Mendez never had any news of importance to give us, but he did have uncommonly good cigars. And a hand-colored great seal of his country hanging over his desk made us feel, as he did, that somehow we were in touch with big international events.

The news of the town was just the usual sort of stuff—murders, and fires, and the endless political squabbles of our paper with "Gang Rule." In the office of Mendez was always the unrealized possibility of something colorful; a thin thread of interest leading back to something wild, and foreign, and exotic. It was the cub idea of news value, the persistent passion for a sensation.

"The morning papers say the rebels are right outside of Chihuahua. They expect to take the city in a day or so. You couldn't, could you, Mr. Mendez, give a fellow an inside tip on something?"

"You know what I mean. One of those grapevine bits of information that all of you consuls must have. Why, right here in this town we could, maybe, beat the Associated Press. Think what it would mean, say, if the fall of Chihuahua could be announced from this office—"

NAPOLEON, surrounded by his marshals, could not have been half so portentous. Mendez rose from his creaking chair and walked the constricted floor space with his fat little hands clasped behind his back.

"Why, my good friend, does the press continually dwell upon these purely local adventures? Why don't you write pages about Mexico's beauty, its art, culture, chivalry; its splendor and its grandeur? If I could but take you down the Calle de los Plateros, the street of the silversmiths—"

For the quarter of an hour he talked,

charmingly, with glistening eyes, of his glorious homeland, of the splendors of its capital.

"But about Chihuahua?" I suggested cautiously.

"They will never, never take Chihuahua. Here—" he picked up a long envelope bearing a foreign stamp. "Here is why they shall not!"

The craving to possess the information that was in the missive must have shown in my eyes, for Salvadore Mendez drew it back dramatically from my outstretched hand.

"But—it is not for publication. Diplomacy is another word for silence." Suddenly he lowered his voice solemnly and said: "The walls have ears. Traitors are on every hand. But—you may be assured—no rag-tag swarm of scarecrows will take Chihuahua."

He tapped the envelope significantly and winked a knowing eye. "Secret information—from very high sources."

His thoughts, apparently, drifted from the subtleties of high diplomacy and he dropped the letter, quite casually, into his wastebasket. It later proved to be an advertisement for greaseless soap.

DURING the crumbling of whatever administration it was that he represented, I lost sight of Mendez. A string of out-of-town assignments had taken me off my old run, and upon returning I'd been stuck on police, which kept me pretty well cooped up in the pressroom down at headquarters.

One day the city editor rang me up. "Here's a night assignment," he said. "Slide into a pair of white flannel trousers and run out to Mrs. Seymour Gratfield's lawn pageant. The big boss has an idea we ought to give 'em a column or so—No, nothin' doin'—You're elected the official butterfly, and believe me, son, you'd better be an eyewitness, too."

The minute I saw Mendez hovering around Sallie Logan, I knew he was

in love. Somehow, those things reveal themselves. He was buying her ginger cakes from a striped tent called *Ye Olde English Cook Shoppe*. Mendez, I observed, was merely dallying with the sweets; but Sallie ate hers with a good appetite.

When I came up Mendez nearly pumped my hand off and it looked for a moment as though he might embrace me. Sallie, whom I had known always, looked at me calmly with her bright blue eyes, and said: "Hello!"

That was the one thing that prevented me from getting maudlin over Sallie—those eyes. They were like her father's—old J. D. Logan, who was the principal stockholder in the Handsome Panther Mine down in Sonora. But I'd seen them when they were soft and brooding; then, when I'd go off my head they'd become merely bright and practical again.

It was because of the mine in Mexico, I judged, that Logan had made the acquaintanceship of Mendez.

The three of us wandered around the grounds and talked.

"Mexico is the land of sunshine and flowers, of poetry, and love, and music," Mendez said expansively.

"Its possibilities haven't been touched yet," Sallie remarked, in a businesslike tone. "For instance, the hardwood lumber industry. Given a good concession, adequate military protection, and some decent system of transportation—" Sallie had a head on her!

Mendez nodded gravely. "That is what I have always claimed," he said eagerly. "Any country that could produce *La Paloma* must have a noble people."

"You have the blood of Castile, of course, *señor*, but four-fifths of your population is mongrel; mixed blood, Spanish, Aztec, Yaqui, Maya—" said Sallie gently.

"Pardon," interrupted Mendez quietly. "I, myself, have a bit of the Aztec strain."

Sallie looked at him with a slight lifting of her straight brows. Mendez seemed to flush. For the first time I noticed that, beneath the well-fed plumpness of his face, the cheek bones were high, that his nose had more of an arch than I had thought.

"Well, you spring from a mighty race," Sallie admitted with a smile. "You had wonderful armies, but *you used to tear out the hearts of your war victims.*" Sallie shuddered slightly.

"The Aztecs," said Mendez, plainly uncomfortable, "have always been a just people—a rigid sense of justice. But—you seem to know a lot about Mexico, Miss Sallie."

"I do. Father and I have studied it pretty thoroughly."

"If I can ever be of any service to you down there, Miss Sallie—"

They had forgotten I was along. Mendez's nostrils, at the corners, quivered slightly. Sallie's eyes, if anything, were brighter than usual.

"I might take you up on that some day," she said.

Mendez looked at her with a steadiness I had never before seen in him. "If you will kindly give me the extreme pleasure," he said, spacing his words distinctly.

IT was, perhaps, a week later when I next encountered my friend. The change that had come over him was striking; it was a calamity.

The high gloss of his patent leather shoes was gone entirely; the boutonnière was a dab of faded petals. He was carrying two suitcases and just emerging from a pawn shop; his eyes were tired, haunted. Nevertheless, he managed to greet me with a show of his old effervescence.

"I have been recalled," he said, putting his bags down on the sidewalk. "The *canaille* has its own man in my post." Suddenly he reached down and slapped the side of one valise. "Do you know what is in there, sir?"

I did not.

"The great seal of Mexico," he said proudly. "That is, the official replica of it, the one that hung over the consular desk. I had it painted myself. Also, I have retained all important papers; though I doubt if the dog can read, anyway. Can you direct me, *amigo*, to some quiet, respectable rooming house?"

A suspicion crossed my mind. "How about coming out to my shack for awhile?"

Salvadore Mendez winked his eye. "It will not do for us to be seen too much together. This thing is not yet over. The whole city is filled with spies. That is why I'm giving up my quarters at the Hotel Lorraine. What I want is a very, very humble lodging where they will never find me."

I inquired after his mother and sisters. A spasm of feeling crossed his face. His eyes seemed to melt.

"Thank you for asking," he responded. "No mail is coming out now, but it is quite safe in the capital. There will be, of course, no actual fighting in the capital—there never is."

In parting he promised to telephone me. I did not ask where he was going. It was plain he did not wish me to know.

RAMON ALAVARDO was round in bulk, and he reeked of perfume.

When I pushed open the door of the old office of Salvadore Mendez, he trundled around on his swivel chair and glowered at me with his broad, ugly face, as dark as an Indian's. It seemed incredible that any necktie could be as red as the one he wore.

"Well?" he demanded gutturally, without removing the stubby cigar from between his yellow teeth. Most young reporters are brash; humility comes only with age. My reply, I suppose, indicated my youth. Our new Mexican consul got up and clapped me on the shoulder with a heavy hand.

"So you're from the *Post*?" he belted. "Well, I like you, young man."

I used to know a good many of the newspaper boys down in El Paso—liked 'em all."

In the matter of news he seemed inexhaustible. The troops of his government were chasing the Federals all through Mexico. He went to a wall map of the country and began to stud it with a handful of glass-headed tacks.

"We are here—and here—" He stepped back and punctured the city of San Luis Potosi. "Do you know what that means? It means that within thirty days we will have the whole country cleaned out of every scattering band of the enemy. From these points we can run them down like rabbits—wipe them out. You wants news. I'll give it to you! Here!"

He took a bunch of photographs out of his desk. Every one in the pictures was either dead or dying. A goodly share of them were hanging from trees with ropes around their necks, although quite a few were stretched out flat on the ground.

"This man here," Alavardo remarked, indicating one prone figure, "was General Aragan. He had fourteen bullets in him. You can print any of these pictures you like."

Our sheet wouldn't have printed that stuff at advertising rates.

"Let me give you an interview then," he offered. "You can quote me as saying that Tyranny has been trampled under foot by Democracy. Now we're just like you people—a government of, for, and by the people. We're going to divide up the land."

I asked him about Villa.

"Pancho's a fine man," Alavardo said. "Great patriot. The peons are simply wild about him. He's hot-headed, but he's got a heart of gold. And speaking about gold—"

Abruptly, the consul became confidential; came up close with his stench of perfume.

"We're going to open up a few concessions down there pretty soon—to the right parties. That's one of the rea-

sons the government sent me up here. Now you, maybe, know lots of rich people? You get me, Steve? Maybe you make good money if you send me some people with money."

THE door opened and a drooping countryman hobbled in on a stick.

One of his feet was pillowed in bandages.

"Hey, you!" Alavardo roared. "Vamos! What d'ye think this is? Outside! Outside!"

The crippled man held up a sheet of paper on which something was written. His face was working with pain and apprehension. He made no move to leave. Alavardo's face went black. With abrupt activity he crossed the room, pitched the rickety figure out of the door, and sent him with a kick into a huddled heap in the corridor.

It was luck more than anything else, I suppose, that enabled me to catch the consul, as he reëntered the room, on the exact point of the jaw that sent him off balance and lumbering against the wall.

If you weigh a hundred and twenty pounds you should never paste a man who weighs around one eighty. The realization of this principle came to me at once and I went from there immediately, while the *señor* was still groggy.

In a small city like ours one constantly ran across friends, on the streets, in the theater, sometimes at police headquarters. Four jacks which I'd held in a poker game decided me to dine in style and state that evening at the Hotel Madison.

What surprised me was not that I encountered old Logan and Sallie dining at a near-by table, but that they had Ramon Alavardo with them. The Mexican had put aside his crimson neckwear for something in purple, but—perhaps it was imagination—I could still smell his perfume.

He talked volubly, with many gestures of widespread hands, but his voice was guarded. Old Logan lis-

tened intently, caressing his little bunch of whiskers. His eyes grew bright.

I got out, that's all.

THE next day I went out to Sallie's to ask her about it. Thank Heaven, none of my activities has ever been hampered by over-modesty. By and large I've known Sallie Logan long enough to speak my mind. Even in the dusk I could see the brightening gleam in her eyes.

"Do you know what's happened to the Handsome Panther mine?" she inquired. I didn't know.

"It's petered out—that's what. We're flat, dad and I. Another thing, we've been making good to a lot of investors that—well, that we got to come in. Alavardo doesn't know how broke we are. He's put up a proposition to us, and—"

"Don't touch it!" I cried.

"Why did you say that?" Sallie asked queerly.

I was puzzled a moment myself. I knew, naturally, that Alavardo was crooked; but there was something else in it, too, intuition, perhaps.

"Anyway, it's too late to talk about it now," Sallie told me in her practical little way. "Dad has gone South—left yesterday. He's going across to look at the proposition. Alavardo gave him letters of introduction that will take him through all right. If it looks as good as Alavardo tells it we'll raise the money somehow."

I groaned. "Is there any way you can reach him to stop him?"

Sallie has also what they call common sense. "You take your hat and go home," she said with a smile. "I won't have you putting terrible ideas in my head."

IT happened just like I knew it would. Alavardo broke the news to Sallie and she broke it to me. There was no newspaper stuff; none of this hokum from Washington. It was strictly confidential.

The bandits had old Logan down there in the mountains, and they wanted twenty-five thousand dollars for him. Otherwise it was the firing squad at the end of another week unless they heard good news via Señor Ramon Alavardo. That's the kind of a raw deal it was.

"What are you going to do?" I asked Sallie.

"Do you mean what am I going to do?" she came back. "Why, I'm going to get poor dad out of it, of course."

"But you haven't twenty-five thousand dollars, nor anywhere near that much," I told her.

The thing hit me like a chunk of ice. "Alavardo's been making love to you!"

I have never again seen her eyes so hard, like baked blue enamel.

"He's asked me to marry him. He thinks we have money." The air seemed to me like it was ripping apart. "Poor dad; he'd go through fire for me. It sees like the sporting thing to do, doesn't it? If I can only keep Alavardo thinking we have money—"

I SHOULDN'T have blamed Mendez, but I did. He decided to remain in town until the storm blew over. I found later that he was "in laces" in one of our department stores. The revulsion against everything Latin was complete, without discrimination. I kept away from him three or four days, and at last he looked me up. He threw his hands up in dismay.

"Holy Mother—what is the mat-matter?"

I told him and I told him plenty; the whole kit and kaboodle of 'em, and if the U. S. was a regular nation we'd take an army carrying sprayers loaded with vermin exterminator and wipe out the whole blooming outfit.

Mendez got the color of a dirty sidewalk, after I'd got through, and we were both breathing hard. He was the first to come out of it. The pallor went out of his face and he put his hand on my shoulder.

"I savvy," he said softly. It was the first time I'd ever heard him lapse into the vernacular. Of course, I felt like a dog. Poor Mendez, the pouter pigeon, if they had all been as gentle and harmless as he—

I'VE always had an idea that when a man's emotions get heated up he becomes receptive, in some inexplicable fashion, to impressions that are not conveyed by the ordinary senses.

I don't mean telepathy; perhaps it might best be called an inward, growing conviction that amounts, in the end, to a sure and settled knowledge; an opinion that becomes a fact; mental radio, maybe. But you have—I have—to be under a strain before it works.

The thing began to bite into me that Mr. Logan was already dead. Perhaps my speculations as to what might happen if he made a break for liberty started it. The old boy had plenty of nerve. We all knew that.

It got to me. He was dead, and I would have bet my own life on it. I tried to feel sorry and I couldn't. It was better for him to die than for Sallie to marry Alavardo. Mr. Logan had lived his life—he was an old man.

If there is anything worse than murder it's these rotten marriages. You never know what kind of blood might be in the life stream down in those free-and-easy tropics.

Sallie! I got to thinking of her there on the porch. Seemed like I was looking at a picture of Joan of Arc when she saw visions. Sallie had it—that fineness; that remoteness from self. It's the real thing, and it's the stuff they make martyrs and saints of.

If I could only make her believe the truth of my hunch about her father's death, that would end Alavardo. I went to her. She listened patiently.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, in a thin voice. "And again you may be wrong. In either case, I must go through with my plan."

I was too upset to ask her; the dread was too great.

"Alavardo wants me to go to the border with him; to wait there in El Paso while he goes across. When he comes back with dad—then—"

I tried to tell her, but I couldn't drive the idea through her solidness. Mr. Logan was already dead. Their little tin can revolution was already falling to pieces and another was brewing. Alavardo would get her to the border, and the next thing she knew she'd be on the other side, one way or another, and she'd better be decently dead here at home right now!

If you've ever tried to talk to a woman of her type you know how far I got. She just sat there looking out into the night, and her chin was like a chunk of granite. Class!

ON the way home I made up my mind it wasn't going to be any governmental affair. With me it was personal. Alavardo—and I thanked God he wasn't out of town yet.

Sammy Goldberg took me into the back room of his pawnshop on Locust Avenue and sold me what I wanted. It was a .38 caliber.

Just to feel it in the side pocket of my coat made me happy once more. I don't remember my mother, and from what I recall of my dad I don't imagine he would have waited as long as I did. There weren't any other relatives in particular that would carry on about it.

I rang up the office of the Mexican consulate to make sure Alavardo was in. No one answered the telephone, and I realized it was the lunch hour. That would give me time to go to my room and put on some fresh clothes.

SALVADORE MENDEZ was in my room waiting for me when I got there. I scarcely recognized him. His face was set; it was deeply grained like the shell of a walnut. I

have never seen such eyes: black, glinting diamonds, that seemed to send out frigid emanations.

He kept his hands stiffly behind his back.

"I have been waiting for funds," he said, in a voice that might have come out of some machine needing oiling. "They came this morning. I am leaving at once—"

One word began to beat, to hammer clamorously at the back of my brain: Aztec! Aztec! Aztec!

"She is not for me—she is for you—he is in my office—I advise you not to look at him—there was an ancient custom among our people with regard

to war prisoners which was duly observed—"

"Tear out the hearts of your war victims!" Sallie's words pounded through my brain. He was at the door before I could speak. In that, the last minute that I looked upon him before he passed out of my life forever, there was just a faint hint of the returning pouter pigeon, something struggling to the surface beneath a ghastly exterior.

"Mendez! Mendez!" I cried. "Where are you going?"

Already he was beginning to preen. "That is a matter," he said softly, "that is not for publication."

THE END



Chechako Hill

ONE of the richest gold claims on the Klondike in 1898 was known as Chechako Hill. And it was discovered by two green, young Englishmen, under rather unusual circumstances.

A grizzled, sour old-timer was rocking the gravel from his claim on the Klondike River one day when he was approached by two enthusiastic, but green, Englishmen. They asked the busy sourdough innumerable questions, and finally ended their queries by asking where they would find the best place to look for gold in the neighborhood.

Because he thought it a foolish question, the old man gave them what he considered a foolish answer. He told them the most likely spot he knew was on the top of the big hill, a mile or so up the creek. Shouldering their packs, the greenhorns started up the creek and were immediately forgotten by the old-timer.

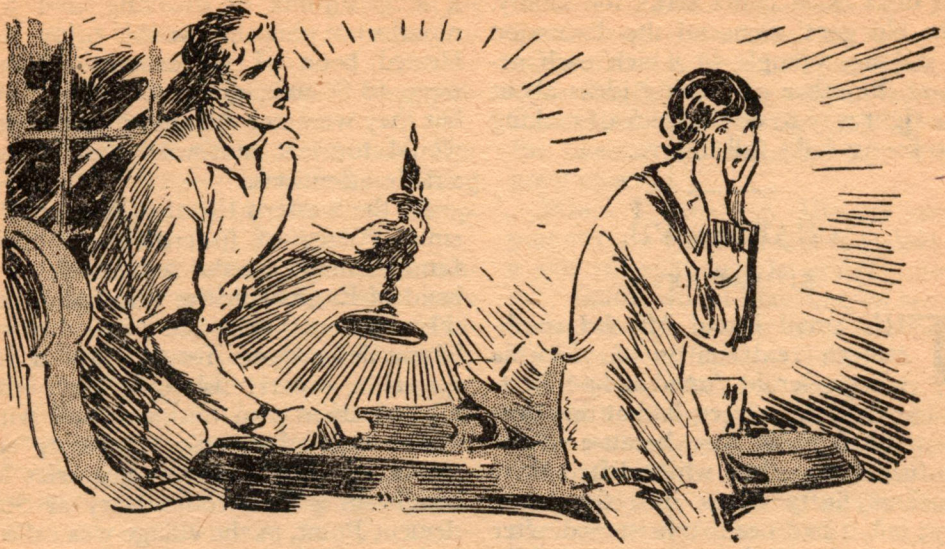
A few weeks later, having occasion to go up the river for some purpose, the sourdough found a makeshift gold rocker on the beach, at the foot of the hill, and a well beaten trail leading to the top. Then he remembered the two Englishmen and decided they had really believed him when he told them about the gold.

Out of the goodness of his heart he trudged up the hill to tell them it was useless to look for gold on a hilltop. Halfway up he came to a lean-to cabin and in it, as he had suspected, were the two fellows.

Before the sourdough had time to warn the Englishmen that they were wasting time, they brought out several tomato cans full of gold dust and nuggets. They had found them in the gravel on the hill.

The shock almost floored the sourdough. And over a million dollars was taken from the top of what is now known as the famous Chechako Hill of the Klondike.

Donald A. Cadzow.



Its golden light fell upon a white-faced girl in blue pyjamas

The Scandal on Kitikat Key

All was peace and serenity on Kitikat Key until, of all things, there arrived—another woman

By LORING BRENT

Author of the Vingo Stories

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GERALD AMADON is a gilded Park Avenue youth who has been cutting a rather wide swath on Broadway, until a publicity-hungry chorus girl gets him into a series of brawls one evening which end up in his being ordered out of New York City by the magistrate who tries the case. The girl, Eulalie Maytime, gets him free by the mention of a jade-green kimono. Gerald leaves the wine and women of the Great White Way severely behind him, and starts off—without his valet—for his bungalow on Kitikat Key, Florida, to live the life of a hermit, and study law, and eat the cooking of old colored Aunt Becky. He tells his rich old Uncle

Jethro, who spends his life cruising around in his private yacht with an old crony of his named Hamilton Finch. They have had Ham Finch's niece, Susan, with them, cruising around, too, but they begin to think that it might be their duty to find her a husband. They would both like to see her marry Gerald, though Uncle Ham knows nothing about the young man's recent escapades, and Uncle Jethro feels a bit guilty about not mentioning them to his friend. Both old men realize that young people hate to be thrown at each other's heads, and that it might not make them fall in love simply to put them on Kitikat Key together with Aunt Becky, if the young people hear

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the deus ex machina creak too loudly. The old gentlemen end the discussion in a long wrangle in which each accuses the other of lacking ideas about the right way to do the trick of making the young folks fall in love.

CHAPTER VII.

KITIKAT KEY.

THE small island off the southeastern extremity of Florida where Gerald Amadon had elected to spend the winter, had at one time been called Palm Key, because of the profusion of palms which lifted their gracious fluffy heads into the azure sky; but it had been rechristened after Gerald had sailed over it one afternoon in an airplane and seen its fantastic and amusing resemblance to a great, sprawling, sleepy cat. Sailing over it the next morning at sunrise, he had dropped down a bottle of perfectly good champagne in its precise center, thereupon uttering the words:

"I pronounce thee Kitikat Key."

His prodigality with real champagne, in this instance, might cause an eyebrow here and there to rise, hence it will be hastily explained that, while Kitikat Key, being within the borders of the United States of America, was legally dry, it was, in actuality, exceedingly wet. It was a handy stopping place for those purveyors of bottled liquids of high potency *en route* from the giant warehouses of Nassau to thirsty gullets in the Florida hotels.

Gerry was friendly with them all. Hardly a day passed when some champagne smuggler did not pause at Kitikat Key for water, gasoline, or merely for gossip.

This winter the coast was patrolled by airplanes, and he would have few winter visitors. But he did not mind. He had had altogether too much civilization lately, and a long stretch of lonesomeness appealed to him. He would have ample time to recover from

a long autumn of drinking, and for months on end he would enjoy the blessed boon of girllessness. There were, to be sure, girls on Kitikat Key, but they were not the kind of girls who would torment him with their undesirable attentions.

At the western tip of Kitikat was a small village of fishermen and their families, descendants, some said, of a band of English pirates who had roved these waters years and years before. These descendants formed now a respectable, orderly fishing colony, who minded their own business, and with whom Gerry had only a nodding acquaintance. Most of his groceries he bought in a little commissary at Settlement Point, as the village was called, and he called there now and then for such mail as came for him from the North.

Kitikat Key was some four miles and a fraction in length, and between his bungalow and boathouses at one end of the key, and the settlement at the other, no living thing dwelled except the pines, the mosquitoes and birds of passage, feathered and human.

His was a splendid isolation. The bungalow had been built on the tapering point of the key in a handsome grove of coconut palms. Waves washed the shore on three sides, which he could view of an afternoon from his deep veranda. On the south shore was a little cove, naturally protected from the robustious northeasters of the winter months, and here were his boathouses for his speedboat, his catboat, and a small assortment of rowboats, surfboats and canoes.

It was, that tip of Kitikat, a little corner of tropical paradise, where a man could dream and loaf and enjoy life at its fullest.

And all of this Gerry heartily intended to do. He wanted to revel in the golden delight of the Florida sun after the dreary dank fall in New York. He wanted to sit for hours watching the changing complexion of

the sea, as it was played upon by errant breezes, and to drink in the colors.

The water at the beach was pale, silvery green, and this shaded off into a green as bright as *crème de menthe*, which, in its turn, gave way to the deepest, brightest blue. Out there, in the purpling depths, were gamy barracuda and sea bass. He knew where there was a rock ledge from which succulent Florida lobsters could be enticed and captured. That tropic sea was, in fact, alive with edible occupants.

Kitikat Key was, indeed, a one-man paradise with emphasis, at the particular moment, on the one man. Behind the bungalow stood a small but stout shanty where dwelled Aunt Becky, who was black, fat and ageless—a woman of deeds but not words. She prepared delectable meals for him, kept his bungalow in apple pie order, and otherwise looked after his creature comforts.

The bungalow had been thoughtfully and selfishly designed as a one-man refuge. It had but one sleeping room, and this contained but one bed. The sleeping room was copper screened against mosquitoes which were, at this time of year, always a bane. It caught the night breezes. Here a man could lie, snug under soft blankets when nights were chilly, and sleep for ten or twelve hours, his senses lulled by the crisp and endless murmur of waves tumbling up on the silver white beach and falling back again into the sea.

In the morning, when the spirit moved him, Gerald took himself down to the beach, threw aside his bathrobe and leaped into cool, invigorating brine as naked as the day he was born. A swimming suit, he declared, robbed the swim of half its pleasure; and there was no one to see; no conventional demand for more modest attire. Even Aunt Becky would be hidden away at the back of the bungalow, preparing his breakfast of cereal, ham and eggs, wheat cakes, and coffee and toast.

It was a great life for a man who didn't mind solitude, and Gerry didn't mind it in the least. He reveled in it. There was nobody to pop in at odd and shameful hours and drag him off on some wild party; there was no telephone to interrupt the even bliss of his days, with some girl or other at the other end wanting to be taken to luncheon, tea, or dinner.

Every evening before he sat down to dinner, Gerald mixed himself a rum cocktail. It was his one drink of the day. He would drink it, standing, always in Aunt Becky's presence, and his toast was always the same:

"To the ladies—God bless their absence!"

How glad he was that Eulalie Maytime wasn't here—Eulalie or one of her ilk! Chatter, chatter, chatter. Clothes, cosmetics, reducing, boy friends, girl friends, scandal, stage, movies, night clubs. Girls digging away cleverly for gold. Girls craving a "Mrs." on their ticket. Girls bored with life. Girls, girls, girls.

"To the ladies—God bless their absence!"

The only other room, aside from the breezy sleeping room and the tiny kitchen, was the living room; and this was a room to bring joy to the heart of any man. It was filled with fine, heavy, solid furniture. You could kick it and it wouldn't break. You could flop down in it and it wouldn't collapse. There was a big coquina rock fireplace against one wall, and on chilly nights a driftwood fire in there made the room wonderfully cheerful and cozy.

The walls were banked with books of all descriptions; books on hunting, fishing, travel; history, novels, biography; science, law, medicine. They were not Gerald's selections; the man he had bought the bungalow from had left them there, but he enjoyed looking at the titles. At least, he enjoyed having them around him. If he ever got bored, he had only to think of all those

books that he could read if he really wanted to—and he would stop being bored!

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Gerald's bungalow was a lean-to built against the south wall. Here was stacked his winter's ammunition, cases and cases of it. There were cases of shotgun shells and rifle cartridges, but the bulk of the cases were filled with machine gun ammunition. Gerald had secured a machine gun from a rum runner who was retiring from the smuggling profession. It was a heavy, water-cooled affair, and Gerald loved it with the same ardor that a child confers upon a pop gun. He dreamed of mounting its tripod in the bows of his speedboat, the *Squirt*, and exterminating pirates with it.

The only objection to that was that there were no longer any pirates. You could not, by any stretch of the imagination, consider the rum runners pirates. They were a peaceable, hard working lot. They minded their own business, which was to buy liquor in the Bahamas at from ten to twenty-eight dollars a case and to sell it in Florida at from forty to a hundred a case.

Lacking pirates to shoot at, Gerald did the next best thing, which was to shoot at imaginary pirates. He constructed with his own hands floating targets, each consisting of a rough raft with an empty keg at each corner, and upon this raft, standing straight into the air, was a stout wooden framework upon which he tacked such targets as pleased his fancy. These were made of cardboard upon which he painted figures of men—piratical fellows—and sometimes the bow of a boat. The work of art he would tack upon the target frame, then tow the raft to a point some five hundred or a thousand yards offshore. Then he would mount the machine gun on the beach and fire in bursts at the bobbing target.

It was great fun to sit behind the machine gun, hold the trigger back,

and see the water spit into the air as the bullets bored into it and finally found the target. This winter his targets were all of a pleasing new design. He copied them with infinite pains from fashion magazines, such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazar*, the *Delineator*, and so on. They were all fashionable girls; and it gave him immense satisfaction to sit on the beach behind his machine gun and riddle the pretty creatures with copper-jacketed bullets.

The *rat-tat-tat-tat-tat* of the machine gun was soothing to his nerves, and, moreover, he loved fine pieces of machinery. The machine gun he considered an admirably fine piece of machinery. And he held in the same esteem the powerful, delicately tooled five hundred horse power motor in his his mahogany speedboat, the *Squirt*, which, on rare evenings, when the sunset breeze had gone, leaving the sea as unruffled as the surface of a billiard table, he would drive along at a forty-five-mile an hour clip.

This motor he overhauled regularly, without outside assistance. He loved to scrape the carbon and grind the valves and take up the bearings. It gave him an excuse for wearing filthy old overalls, and filthy old overalls were a blessed relief after the fastidious manner in which he had been compelled to dress himself in New York.

His law books, when we come upon him, the third afternoon after his arrival, had as yet to be uncrated. And the chances were, they would still be uncrated when spring came. For the present, in any event, he wanted only to rest and to forget womankind.

He had spent the third day of his tenure on Kitikat in a number of delightful pursuits. He had swum. He had fished for and caught several doughty barracuda. He had played with the machine gun awhile, and he had started to dismantle the motor of the *Squirt* for its winter's business.

He was on his wide veranda, happily shaking up his rum cocktail while

Aunt Becky moved in and out of the bungalow with plates and silverware—a plump, silent, black ghost—when he first espied the gleaming white sail of the Lottie Lee, tacking up from the South, although he did not at first identify the oncoming boat as Uncle Jethro's.

The gleaming sail, golden in the light of the declining sun, materialized into several, until Gerald made out the approaching boat to be schooner-rigged. He picked up a pair of binoculars in one hand, while he continued, with the other, gently to agitate the cocktail shaker, and brought the lenses to bear upon the visiting craft.

The cocktail shaker in his left hand moved more and more slowly as he spelled out the name on the bows, and presently it stopped moving entirely. He looked at the cocktail shaker, then he looked again through the glasses; then he slowly shook his head. He placed the glasses on the table and carried the cocktail shaker into the kitchen. Its contents he sadly poured down the sink. There would be no evening cocktails as long as Uncle Jethro was around, for Uncle Jethro was a hardened old prohibitionist.

He would be glad to see Uncle Jethro, anyhow. Dear old Uncle Jethro, with his heart of gold that was all wool and a yard wide! What a debt of gratitude he owed to that generous old boy! Uncle Jethro had been kinder to him than if he had been Uncle Jethro's own son. Uncle Jethro had put him through school and college, and Uncle Jethro had always given him a princely allowance.

With an eye for the approaching boat, Gerald made a hasty inspection of the bungalow. He hid all evidences of the presence of the demon rum, and when the Lottie Lee came about on the final tack which would bring her to the little pier that jutted out into the South Cove, Gerald was down there, waiting to catch the line. He realized that he looked rather the worse for

wear, with a two days' beard sprouting on his chin and one leg of those shameful overalls split up to the knee; but Uncle Jethro, unless he remembered him incorrectly, would approve of all this.

As the Lottie Lee came closer in, Gerald made out two strange faces in the cockpit. One was that of an old man he had never seen before, and the other was that of a bright-faced boy, dressed nattily in sailor's whites.

A moment later Gerald's heart gave a little flutter, when his alert senses informed him that the good-looking boy was not a boy at all, but a girl. The closer in the Lottie Lee came, the better-looking did the strange girl in the cockpit become. And Gerald found some of his iron-bound resolutions wavering. This girl was a peach, a pippin, a knock-out, a darb! He wondered how long Uncle Jethro was planning to stay. Maybe he could urge him to stay longer!

What a fine old boy Uncle Jethro was! Gerald had never appreciated him until now.

The girl in the cockpit was gazing at him with bright-eyed interest. He saw that her lashes were illegally long.

Gerald hadn't seen a girl in three whole days; and it certainly seemed nice to have one come within range of your vision again! Who was the little enchantress? What was she doing aboard the Lottie Lee? Well, all of this would come out in time, of course.

The Lottie Lee came up neatly into the wind. Even in the delightful agitation that the pretty girl had inspired in him, Gerald could still admire Uncle Jethro's seamanship. First the jib came down, fluttering; then down came the mizzen and the mains'l. The schooner slid gently through the pale-green water and made a perfect docking.

Uncle Jethro scrambled out upon the pier and clasped his nephew to his bosom, then held him off at arm's length.

"As I live, breathe and die," he exclaimed, "if you ain't gone and turned into a full-fledged man! Gerry, I want you to meet two old friends o' mine. This old cassowary is Ham Finch, a boyhood pal o' mine, and this buddin' specimen o' womanhood is his niece, Susan Finch."

Gerald was a little amazed when Susan Finch dropped him a curtsy. He had never seen a curtsy dropped, and he almost dropped off the dock in his astonishment; but he was delighted. His amazement grew as he took her in, detail by delightful detail—from her dark hair drawn back primly and knotted at the nape of her neck to her small white shoes peeping out from the sailor's trousers she wore. He had never seen a girl quite like her. She reminded him of old-fashioned pictures in albums bound with plush. But wasn't she a little knock-out!

She extended a slim tanned hand which he dumbly accepted and found it, to his surprise, to be as firmly muscular as a man's.

"How do you, Cousin Gerald?" was her shy greeting.

"Cousin?" Gerald blankly repeated.

"After a manner o' speakin'—yes," said Uncle Jethro, gruffly. "She is more or less my adopted niece, because Ham and me, in spite of his character which is lower than a snake's navel, are closer than blood brothers. Supposin' we walk up to the house and set down for a little chat."

"You'll stay for supper," Gerald urgently urged.

"Can't, Gerry. Got to be under way 'fore dark, and the daylight goes fast in these latitudes. We'll have a half an hour, mebbe."

"Shucks," Gerald complained, genuinely regretful. "I was hoping to have some barracuda fishing with you, uncle."

"Not this time. Later, mebbe," said Uncle Jethro as the four moved up the path toward the bungalow.

The sun had set and the world was

bathed in auriferous light. It seemed, to Gerald, to enhance the beauty of the girl at his side until she became a mysterious little princess. Yes; Gerald had fallen hard, but he was, as we shall presently see, fairly good on the rebound, too.

They seated themselves on the darkening veranda. As Gerald lowered himself to a chair he intercepted, in the twilight, a wink that Uncle Jethro and the funny, horse-faced old man exchanged. It caused a strange feeling to pass over him. After all, he did not know Uncle Jethro terribly well; knew him, in fact, hardly more than as a dear old Santa Claus sort of character who was lavishly generous with his money; while Mr. Finch he knew not at all.

"Gettin' your allowance checks regularly, Gerry?"

"Yes, sir," said Gerry, uneasily.

"If they ain't big enough for your needs, pipe up, son. Money's only good for spending purposes, and I got scads of it. So you're settled here for the duration of winter, eh? Do you like it here?"

"Yes, Uncle Jethro."

"My lawyer tells me you're plannin' to study for the bar."

"Yes, sir; I brought a couple of cases of books to study."

"That's jest fine," put in Mr. Finch. And Gerry saw an understanding nod pass between the two old men. What Gerry did not dream was that the nod meant that Uncle Ham was heartily satisfied with him as a candidate for the hand of the exquisite, wholesome, pure-hearted Susan.

"I wish you didn't have to hurry away so soon," he said, and glanced at the lovely girl as he said this.

A shuffling was heard on the path leading from the pier, and, in the dusk, the black face of Jeremy, the Lottie Lee's cook, materialized. He carried a large suitcase in either hand.

"Yuh that are, Misto Jethro," announced Jeremy, placing the suitcases

on the floor of the veranda with a wide grin.

Susan sprang to her feet.

"Why!" she gasped. "Those are my suitcases."

"Be ca'm, Susie; be ca'm," her Uncle Ham said soothingly.

"Ye see, Susie," put in Uncle Jethro, in a dry, crackling voice, "your Uncle Ham and me—" He stopped, or his voice became too faint to hear, like a wireless station dying out on a staticy night.

"It's like this," Uncle Ham took up the fraying thread. "Uncle Jethro and me, we've been called on to perform a most delicate and dangerous mission. And the Lottie Lee ain't no place for a tender, refined young girl like you while the mission is bein' undertook."

"You're joking!" the girl cried.

"There ain't a chuckle nearer than a hundred miles of either of us," Uncle Ham went on soberly. "We got to drop you off here a few days, honey, while we go on this here delicate, dangerous mission. Cousin Gerald here will take good keer of you, won't you, Gerald?"

"But—say—listen—I mean—" Gerald blurted.

"It's absolutely preposterous," Susan exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me, you two cooked this up between you, even had Jeremy secretly pack my suitcases—planned to maroon me here on this little island with—with—"

A plump dusky ghost floated out on the porch and the restrained tones of Aunt Becky were heard to say:

"How many's they gwine be fo' dinnuh, Misto Gerry?"

"Jest two," put in Uncle Sam, quickly. "Jest Gerry and this here young lady. We're leavin' right away. Come on along, Jethro. We ain't got a minute to linger."

The two old men edged toward the steps.

"Light's goin' fast," gasped Uncle Jethro. "We'll be back in a few

days, Gerry, my boy; and in the meantime, you take good keer of this leetle lady. You mark me?"

"Uncle Jethro," Gerry panted, "if this is a joke, it's gone far enough. Honest, you don't intend leaving this girl behind, do you? Good Lord, I haven't accommodations for her here. This place is rough. It's a man's place. The food is rough."

"No rougher'n schooner food!"

"But the accommodations here—"

"No more cramped than the schooner's!"

"But there's nothing for her to do around here!"

"I'm not going to stay!" wailed Susan.

"Susan," said Uncle Ham in a thick, menacing voice, "I'm orderin' you to stay. Are you goin' to obey me or ain't you?"

"Oh, but Uncle Ham—" Gerry drowned the rest of her protest under a flood of his own.

"Look here, Uncle Jethro; this is pretty thick. I tell you, this is no place for a girl, and I don't take the responsibility—"

He was speaking, he saw, to emptiness. In the purpling darkness, the two old rogues were trotting down the path to the schooner. He heard them gallumping out on the pier, then the rattling of a sail.

"Up with that jib!" snarled a voice.

Gerry rushed out upon the pier. They had cast off the lines, and the Lottie Lee was moving out into the cove.

Gerald gathered himself together for the leap as he ran. He came down, thundering, on the forward cabin and grasped the mainmast to steady himself.

Uncle Ham instantly loomed up beside him.

"What are you doin' on this ship?" the old man barked.

"Listen!" Gerry pleaded. "Let me go along. She'll be all right back there. Aunt Becky will make things comfort-

able for her. Let me go along on this dangerous mission with you. I'm a crack shot. You'll need somebody husky along—"

"Get off this ship! Why, you young coward! Leavin' that poor young girl back there, unprotected. Git!"

"I won't!" roared Gerry. He was conscious that the dock was fast receding.

Uncle Jethro joined Uncle Ham.

"Gerry," he ordered, "git off this boat afore I kick you off. Your duty's back there, pertectin' that poor, defenseless gal. Git!"

"No!" cried Gerry.

The palm of an ancient hand was violently placed under Gerry's nose. Its owner gave a mighty push. Gerry, clawing for a handhold, felt himself flying through space. Then warm brine surrounded him. He came up to hear a harsh old voice saying:

"Fend him away with that boat-hook if he tries sneakin' aboard!"

Gerry treaded water and softly cursed. The Lottie Lee, a ghost on the darkling water, leaving a ghostlier wake of phosphorescence, slid off toward the south.

He started to swim to shore. An unseen wave entered his mouth as he was inhaling. He gagged. He choked. He inhaled more water.

"Are you drowning?" a sweet solicitous voice inquired.

A blubbering sound answered her.

"Hlfphfl!" stated Gerald.

"I'm coming in and save you!" cried the invisible girl on the pier. "I can't see you! Don't drown until I get there! Where are you, Mr. Amadon?"

Gerald discharged a quart, more or less, of Gulf Stream from his lungs and throat passages and uttered a sound that resembled the mating call of the blackfish.

The girl on the pier dove, and she dove with deathly accuracy. She struck Gerald fairly amidships, and down

they went, in a burst of phosphorescent bubbles, together.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORM.

THE sensations that ensued were bewildering ones for Gerald Amadon, and he would look back upon them later with shame and fitting humiliation. He indistinctly recalled, some time afterward, his attempt at swallowing the Eastern Atlantic at one gulp when a great weight struck him violently in the small of the back. Then his nose was rubbed into the sand of the ocean bottom. There were, still later, other recollections, cruel and debasing, of being rolled on a barrel, or being somehow resuscitated by his fair, unwelcome visitor.

When he once again became fully cognizant of his surroundings, he was seated, swathed in blankets, before a crackling fire in his living room fireplace with Aunt Becky squatting imploringly on one side of him and Cousin Susan squatting on the other side, her beautiful large brown eyes bright with a patronizing kind of pity, and her white sailor suit beginning to steam in the process of drying.

He looked blinkingly from the round black face to the slender lovely white one.

"Rum toddy," he managed to say.

"You see?" said Susan promptly to Aunt Becky with an I-told-you-so air. "I knew it the minute I laid eyes on him."

"Give me—a hot—rum—toddy," Gerald gasped, "or I will freeze to death!"

"You must not drink rum," said Susan severely. "Alcohol destroys the brain tissues, eats out the stomach, undermines the liver and ruins one's moral fiber."

"I—want—hot—rum!" Gerald chanted.

"I'm very sorry," said Susan firmly.

"Aunt Becky," he chattered, "m-make me a rum toddy."

"Misto Gerry, Ah cain't. Ah dunno whuh she done hid it."

"She didn't hide my rum!"

"Oh, yes, I did, Cousin Gerald," Susan said brightly. "It's only an illusion that you need a stimulant. If you want a cup of coffee, you can have that."

"But—my heart!" Gerry moaned, suddenly strategic.

"What's the matter with your heart?" Susan suspiciously asked.

"It—it's hardly beating," he breathed. "Without hot rum, I am apt to die!"

Susan gazed at him with round, alluring, suspicious eyes.

"I won't have a drunken desperado on my hands," she said. "I think you're merely simulating faintness. But—oh, very well, I'll let you have one small drink. What do you put in a rum toddy?"

"Rum, hot water, lemon juice and sugar," said Gerald promptly. "Aunt Becky, you get them while she gets the rum."

"Yas, suh."

"And bring me a teaspoon," added Susan.

"A teaspoon!" groaned Gerry. "Bring her that spoon you use for mixing pancake batter!"

Susan returned presently with a tall glass in her hand containing an almost microscopic dose of rum.

"I don't want to interfere with your regular habits," she said, "but I don't want to have a drunken desperado on my hands, either."

"You needn't worry about my annoying you, drunk or sober," was Gerry's hot rejoinder—made after he had tasted the toddy and had hunted in vain for a taste of healing, soothing, revivifying rum. "And as for interfering with my regular habits, your very presence interferes with them."

"I'm not any gladder to be here than you are to have me," she reminded

him. "I'm here absolutely against my will. Bear that in mind, please."

"I don't see how that gave you the right to jump off that dock onto the middle of my back," he complained. "You damned near drowned me."

She looked horrified.

"Oh, you low creature. You also curse, do you?"

Gerald looked at her pensively. It was hard to realize that this beautiful, bright-eyed girl was as old-fashioned as that.

"You are kidding me, Miss Finch."

"Perish the thought! And to imagine that I must stay under this same roof with you! And, on top of it all, ungrateful. You deny, I suppose, that I saved your life?"

"Deny it!" he gasped. "Well, I'll be da— I mean— I guess I don't know what I mean."

"That drink," Susan accused him, "has gone to your head!"

"That drink," Gerald corrected her, with a hollow laugh, "didn't get any farther than my tonsils. But I feel better. How about something to eat, Aunt Becky?"

"Dinner's all ready, suh. Want it out on de po'ch or in heah?"

"We'll dine on the porch," said Susan.

"No," said Gerald, "we'll dine right here in front of this fire."

"I hate being indoors—on a lovely night like this," said the girl. "I'll eat my dinner on the veranda."

"I'll eat mine in the kitchen," said Gerald.

"I think you're detestable," said Susan.

Gerald said nothing. He arose, gathered an armful of dry clothing from bureaus in his sleeping room, and went out in back to change. Then he ate his dinner in the kitchen. And Aunt Becky muttered at him while he consumed it.

"Ah don't see why you's so rude an' mean to dat girl. She's de purtiest girl Ah evah clapped mah eyes on."

Gerald said nothing. He knew that, in a case like this, women banded together, and he wondered how soon Uncle Jethro and that horse-faced pal of his would return.

After dinner Gerald slipped out the back door and looked over his estate to make sure that all was snug. There was a storm in the air. Lightning licked along the horizon, and the low rumble of distant thunder came to him.

He went inside and found Susan seated before the fireplace with a book in her hands. She laid it aside when he appeared.

"I suppose you're aware," she told him, "that I'm every bit as mad at being here as you are to have me."

"I—I gathered that," Gerald politely admitted. She had changed, since he had seen her last, from the bell-bottomed sailor's trousers to a long white skirt. He wondered if she hid her legs because she was ashamed of them. She was, he presumed, either exceedingly bow-legged or pathetically knock-kneed.

"I might as well relieve your curiosity," Susan went on, "as to why I was dumped off here—like a bale of old rags. It seems that they thought it would be awfully nice to put you and me together so that we would fall in love."

"How childish of them," murmured Gerald.

"I suppose," the lovely girl added, "there is nothing to do but to make the best of it until they return."

"You mean—we ought to fall in love?" said Gerald.

Her brown eyes sparkled hotly at that.

"Don't be absurd!" she flashed. "As if I could ever fall in love with a man like you!"

Gerald snorted. "What do you mean—a man like me?"

"Please don't pretend," Susan said impatiently. "Knowing the kind of man you are, I don't see how they dared put me ashore on this island."

Gerald looked worried. "But what kind of a man am I?"

"You certainly aren't the kind of man I'd willingly trust myself with on a desert island! You—you're a hard drinker; you're a—lady killer; you—you're fast; you're—just all round bad!"

"I?" said Gerald in hurt tones. "Whoever in the world put such ideas into your head?"

"I knew it the moment I saw you!"

"Appearances are certainly deceiving. Honestly, a new-born lamb is a roaring lion compared to me. I am as shy as a gazelle. The very thought of a woman frightens me."

"I don't believe you!"

"Wait till you know me better. Among my friends I am known far and wide as Gentle Gerald."

"Well," said Susan, "I simply wanted to have a very distinct understanding with you. I am not going to fall in love with you. I could never fall in love with you. You are not the type of man I could fall in love with."

"What," Gerald wanted to know, "is the type of man you could fall in love with?"

"The man," Susan replied, "with whom I can really fall in love will be tall, dashing and black-eyed."

"Unfortunately," sighed Gerald, "I am tall, dashing and blue-eyed. As far as that goes, you are not the type of girl with whom I could ever fall in love. My ideal is a tall, stately, gray-eyed blonde, and you, unfortunately, are short, plump, brown-eyed—"

"I am not plump!"

"How do I know?" Gerald retorted. "I am only judging by appearances."

Her eyes were flashing again. In spite of himself, Gerald liked Susan. She had spirit, and he liked girls with spirit. She also had quantities of gumption and spunk.

"It will relieve you to know," she told him hotly, "that I am engaged to be married."

This was the purest fiction.

"Well, so am I," he stated defiantly. "That makes it even. Neither of us has anything to worry about. Shall we be friends?"

"Why not?" Susan replied with her nicest smile. "I think it would be a very sensible idea. And now I'd like to turn in. I'm tired. Where do I sleep, Mr. Amadon?"

"In there, Miss Finch," said Gerald, pointing toward his sleeping room. He would be a gentleman and a perfect host if it killed him.

"But that's your room."

"It's quite all right," Gerald assured her. "I can sleep anywhere. I can sleep standing up. I can sleep hanging to a subway strap."

"I positively will not put you out of your room," the girl declared. "I will sleep here—on that couch."

"Not at all," was Gerald's emphatic response. "That's where I'm going to bunk."

"Then I'll sleep on the hammock on the veranda," said Susan.

"The mosquitoes," Gerry pointed out, "will eat you alive."

"You may have noticed," Susan backfired, "that I have a very tough hide."

"I think it's a shame for two nice people like us to carry on this way," Gerald regretted.

"Good night, Mr. Amadon."

"Good night, Miss Finch. I hope you won't mind storms at close quarters out in the open, because we're going to have a baby hurricane and a thunderstorm before morning, and when the wind blows from the south the rain sweeps across that porch as if it were squirting out of a hose, and you're going to be soaked to the skin. Moreover, the lightning out there is pretty spectacular, on account of those tall coconut palms growing on the point. They attract lightning, you know. Hadn't you better change your mind and use the sleeping room?"

Susan turned pale. She would not confess to this impertinent young man

that, since she had been a small girl, thunder and lightning storms had always terrified her. She would rather die at the hand of Thor than admit to any weakness to Gerald Amadon.

She slipped out on the veranda where her suitcases stood, and Gerald presently blew out the lamp on the living room table. After awhile he heard the squeaking of the hammock ropes as she climbed in; then, a little later, he heard the report of a resounding thwack.

Susan was mosquito hunting! The slapping on the veranda became quite vigorous; he was almost sure that he heard, presently, a distinct "damn," but this, he reasoned, could not have been. A girl with Susan's pure mind could not have stooped to profanity over a mere mosquito.

A little later silence reigned, broken only by the lispng murmur of wavelets creeping up on the beach and falling back into the sea. Susan Finch troubled him. He wondered why she wore so many clothes. It was a novelty, to see a girl in this day and age who had so many clothes on.

He fell asleep finally with the assurance that she clothed herself in this way because she had some unfortunate deformity. She was, naturally, ashamed of it, and, naturally, she wished to conceal her misfortune from the eyes of man. Certainly, he reasoned, she was either knock-kneed or bow-legged—and probably much worse. Well, time would tell.

He was awakened by the rustling of fronds of the coco palms which surrounded the bungalow. They were swishing about violently this way and that; agitated by a rising wind. It came in sharp, quick puffs, each one a little stronger than the one before. The rumbling of thunder was now closer at hand, and from time to time the windows and the open doorway were frames of lurid, greenish-blue lumiance.

Without warning rain fell and drummed on the roof. The wind

howled, and the rain struck the south side of the bungalow with a steady, swishing sound.

He sat up and listened. There was no sound on the veranda, but he knew that Susan must be awake. In a few minutes, she would be drenched. What an idiotic thing to do—to sleep out on that veranda in the rain when she might as well be enjoying the dry security of the sleeping room!

A hissing, crackling flash of light momentarily brightened the doorway, and he could see Susan sitting up in the hammock, her dark, silky hair blowing about her head wildly, her arms crossed upon her breast. Then came the crash. Kitikat Key seemed to leap into the air and fall back upon the bosom of the Atlantic.

Another bolt, this time nearer, struck with a ripping, rending sound. One of the palms, he guessed, had been hit. There was a creaking, wrenching sound, then a long swish, growing in loudness and ending with a thud and a greater swish. The palm had fallen.

Lightning flashed and thunder crashed simultaneously. When the reverberations drew away, the tingling of a girl's scream hung upon the nervous air.

"Mr. Amadon!"

He sprang from the couch and raced to the door. He rushed out. In a sustained glimmer of greasy green he saw her totter from the hammock, a slim figure in pyjamas.

"Is anything the matter?" said Gerald, politely.

"Where—are—you?" The question came in gasps. The girl was terrified.

"Here I am," he said, reassuringly.

"I'm—so—scared," she whimpered.

Another flash revealed Susan Finch staggering toward him. Rain drummed on the roof.

She flew into his arms and clung to him, trembling, with chattering teeth.

"There, there," said Gerald, foolishly. She huddled against him, and Gerald found her warm and soft and, all

told, rather more than a very delightful armful.

"Don't worry," he comforted her. "It's going. It's passing. They don't stay long. It's shooting over toward Florida."

"Did it s-strike the b-bun-bungalow?" she stuttered.

He patted her again. He hugged her for a moment. Queer electricity that had nothing to do with the electric storm raced over him.

The rain ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The bursts of lightning were now afar off.

Susan weakly pushed him away.

"You'd better spend the rest of the night in the sleeping room," he urged.

"Yes," was all she said to that.

Gerald lighted a candle. Its golden light fell upon a white-faced girl in pale, figured blue pyjamas.

"I'll bring your things in," he added, and did.

Obviously embarrassed, confused, and still frightened, she obeyed him; went into the sleeping room. There was a bolt on the door. He heard it shoot home with a snap.

"Good night," said Gerald.

There was no answer. And the question still remained unanswered: Was Susan Finch bowlegged or knock-kneed?

CHAPTER IX.

"WHY DO YOU TREAT ME LIKE A DOG?"

GERALD did not fall off to sleep immediately. He lay there on the couch in the living room, thinking of Susan Finch and entertaining a gathering legion of mosquitoes. As sleeplessness descended upon him in greater and greater force, his mind began to occupy itself with the fantastic ideas that the mind generally occupies itself with when sleep is far away and long ago.

It occurred to Gerald that there was undoubtedly something romantic in

having this strange, beautiful girl, even if she was knock-kneed or bow-legged—under his roof. So far as he knew, it was the first time a woman had ever slept under this roof. And there was a strange residue in him, resulting from that few seconds he had held her tight in his arms and she had clung to him. You cannot hold a tender, warm, soft girl in your arms and ever feel quite the same about her afterward.

Gerald wondered if he were falling in love with Susan Finch. He decided that he was. After all, she was a little beauty, and what if she were knock-kneed or bow-legged? All of us have faults, and bow legs or knock-knees are not cardinal sins. Well, he had faults, too. One of his feet was a half size larger than the other.

Anyhow, it seemed fairly reasonable that he had fallen in love with Susan Finch. After all, why not? She could always wear long dresses, and, besides, it would be eminently pleasing to Uncle Jethro. He had never yet gone out of his way to please Uncle Jethro. Why not make this sacrifice? Gerald fell to wondering about ways by which he could cause Susan Finch to fall into his arms again. Yes; he loved her. He would try to get her into a bathing suit in the morning.

His dreams of romance were assailed by mosquitoes arriving in greater numbers and with greater industry. Then the air turned chill. It always did after one of these squalls. He found presently that he did not have sufficient covering. He went out on the veranda for the blankets she had used and found them to be rain-soaked. He returned, shivering, to the living-room couch. He lay down and suffered.

Mosquitoes whined about him. One flew into his exposed ear and he slew it with his little finger. Others came to the assault, and the air grew colder.

It was almost dawn when Gerald fell into a fitful, resentful slumber. Damn Susan Finch! How he hated that girl! She had ruined his little paradise!

He had hardly fallen asleep, it seemed, when a sweet, sleepy voice yanked him back to consciousness. And he opened his eyes upon the slim figure of Susan Finch, swathed in a gray bathrobe. Sunlight was streaming in at the windows, and the air was balmy and warm.

"I wondered if you wanted to take a dip," she was saying. "Aunt Becky said you always went in before breakfast, and breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes. There's barely time. Shall I wait for you outside? It's a glorious day."

The darkness of sleep, he saw, was still in her eyes. They were large and beautiful and rested, and her lower lip was slightly pouting.

"All right," said Gerald, grumpily.

He found his swimming suit hanging on the clothesline out in back. He would, of course, have to wear the cursed thing. His mood cleared a little as a thought struck him. He would now have the opportunity to settle for all time the vexing question of whether Susan Finch's legs were bowed or her knees knocked.

He hastened around the corner of the bungalow and found her standing at the veranda steps, still swathed in the bathrobe. She had imprisoned her dark mane in a bright-green rubber diving cap.

"Do you go in from the dock?" she asked.

He nodded and they made their way down the path to the south cove. It was, as she had said, a glorious morning. The sun was just up—a shining ruby disk above the eastern horizon. The water was faintly ruffled by an easterly breeze.

"What time do you do your studying?" the girl wanted to know.

"Studying?" Gerald vaguely repeated.

"Your law," she elucidated.

"Oh, that," said Gerald. "Oh, after breakfast, I guess."

He wasn't interested in law; he was

interested in having Susan Finch remove that bathrobe. It occurred to him that, even then, he might be cheated and the tormenting question remain unanswered. A girl of her sort would undoubtedly wear the kind of bathing suit that was in vogue during the lamented Nineties, consisting of eight or ten garments, and concealing all parts of the wearer except the head and the feet. It would be just like her to wear a ten-piece bathing suit!

They reached the pier and walked out to the end. Gerald watched Susan Finch closely.

"Dive in," she invited him.

"Ladies first," he insisted.

She removed the gray bathrobe and Gerald's heart turned three triple somersaults and a backflip. Susan wasn't wearing a ten-piece bathing suit. She wasn't wearing even an eight, a five or a two-piece bathing suit.

His eyes swam as he quickly took it in. It was white, and it was in one piece and he promptly made to himself the declaration that never, in his years of attendance at the Ziegfeld revues, the Follies and the Vanities had he gazed upon so rapturous a form. Tremor after tremor laid its hold upon Gerald's heart. The question was answered at last. Her legs, a quick, furtive glance assured him, were neither knock-kneed nor bowed. They were slim; they were shapely; they were the quintessence of perfection!

The owner of these varied charms was gazing at him from cool large brown eyes. Gerald, in his new enthusiasm, took in certain other details that he had overlooked before. Her great eyes were fairly awnined by the longest, thickest lashes he had ever seen growing from a human eyelid. Her neck and shoulders and arms were delightful in their perfect symmetry.

Here, in short, was a girl whom Gerald could adore with all his heart and all his soul.

Susan Finch dived. It was a beautiful dive, a jack-knife. Her slim body

rose into the air from the springboard; her toes and fingertips came together in a light, gracious gesture; then she straightened out. She entered the green brine with hardly a splash, and her slim body mingled artistically with the deeper green of the depths. Never in his existence had Gerald seen tan so beautifully golden.

He dived as she came up, and when his head emerged she said:

"I'll race you to that red buoy."

"Barracuda," Gerry warned.

"I'm not afraid of barracudas," was the perfect girl's disdainful answer. "I've been in sharks' nests in the very heart of the Gulf Stream."

"All right," said Gerald uneasily. "But I never saw a barracuda yet that didn't like a human foot better than any breakfast it could find."

They started to swim. Susan's slim, graceful arms fairly flashed through the water. Halfway to the red buoy she was three lengths ahead of Gerald, and when she reached the buoy she was a fair dozen lengths ahead of him.

Gerald's adoration of this divinely built girl suffered a prompt relapse. He didn't like girls who could excel him at doing anything. His dislike became acute when, as she clung to an iron ring on the buoy, she commented on his swimming.

"Was that the trudgeon you were trying to do?" she asked him.

"Trying?" he spluttered. "That was the trudgeon."

"It might have been," she admitted, "if you had carried your outwater arm over like this." She illustrated the stroke. "You swim sloppily."

"Sloppily!" Gerald growled.

"Watch," she said. "I'll show what I mean." And, pushing away from the buoy, she swam out toward the sea.

She did it all so sweetly, so charmingly, that Gerald felt a little less angry; yet his anger returned when she criticized his attempts at correcting his stroke.

"I learned this trudgeon from one of the greatest swimmers who ever lived," he informed her.

"Probably," she comforted him, "you weren't watching him closely."

Seething, Gerald swam back with her to the pier. Gone was his whole-hearted admiration for that slim, perfect figure.

"You probably smoke too much," Susan commented as they climbed out and started back for the bungalow. "And I've yet to see a heavy drinker who really did well in the water."

"I'm not a heavy drinker," Gerald hotly protested. "I don't drink more than one cocktail a day."

"Then, if I were you, I'd cut that one out. You have a very good figure, Mr. Amadon, and your muscular development is quite fair."

"Quite fair!" he snorted.

"Yes, considering the life you have led. With a little training, you should be what every man ought to be. It's a shame I won't be here long. I'd love to take you in hand, Mr. Amadon. I always feel so sorry when I see a young man whose physique is ruined and whose brain is mushy and soggy from fast living, like yours is."

Gerald made no comment on this. How he hated this girl! They separated to dress for breakfast, and when she appeared, wearing a soft blue dress that came almost to her insteps, a gleam entered Gerald's watchful eyes. He would not permit himself to admit that, in the blue dress, she was more beautiful than any girl he had ever seen. What he permitted himself to say, when they were seated, and Aunt Becky had gone away to fetch the waffles, was:

"It's too bad that a girl with your brains doesn't know how to dress."

Susan Finch looked at him quickly. Then the deep pink of indignation swept up into her face. With her eyes asparkle, she was lovelier than ever.

"Don't you like the way I dress?" she snapped.

"Well, you have a pretty fair figure," was Gerald's revengeful reply, "and your legs are not bad. If I were a girl, I wouldn't use everything at hand to conceal what attractive points I had."

She sat in smoldering silence a few seconds, her eyes lowered. Then she said: "My fiancé likes me to dress this way."

"Well," was Gerald's come-back, "my fiancée likes me the way I am, too. *She* doesn't object to my taking a cocktail once in awhile. She's a generous, broad-minded girl."

"It happens," retorted Susan, "that my fiancé doesn't want me to go around showing my—my—limbs—"

"Listen!" Gerald interrupted her. "Are you a tree? What are limbs? Do you mean legs?"

She flushed more deeply crimson at that.

"I think you're insulting!"

"I think," Gerald retorted, "that your fiancé must be a terrible dumb-bell. Dumb but happy. I know the kind. Who is he, Miss Finch?"

"His name," Susan answered, after a pause, "is Lester Colton."

She said it defiantly. The name had leaped into her mind, because, perhaps, Lester Colton was the last young man she had met. She had met him when the Lottie Lee had put into Miami for fuel and supplies a few weeks ago.

"What's he like?" Gerald pressed, after giving himself time to recover from paralyzing astonishment.

"He's wonderful," said Susan. "So honorable, so clean-minded. You—you haven't told me anything about your fiancée. Who is she?"

"Her name," said Gerald, "is—is Eulalie Maytime." He selected Eulalie because Eulalie, being the last girl he had seen, was the first to come into his mind.

"She sounds like a chorus girl," said Susan.

"As a matter of fact, she is on the stage," Gerald admitted.

"I'll bet she's a blonde," said Susan.

"Why?" Gerald wanted to know, falling into a trap.

"Because the kind of a man you are would naturally prefer a blonde—a bleached one," answered Susan sweetly.

"She is a natural blonde," Gerald retorted, "and furthermore, she is my ideal. So sweet, so considerate, and so—so modern."

"You mean," said Susan, "she smokes, drinks, and wears dresses that don't reach her kneecaps, and goes out on petting parties!"

"I mean," Gerald shouted, "that she isn't a prude!"

Aunt Becky came shuffling in with coffee, toast, and marmalade.

"Look heah," she grumbled, "Ah wants to tell you sumpin, you folks. Ah's got a weak heart, and I cain't stand wranglin'. Whyn't you folks stop pickin' on each other? Mah Lawd, if Ah was as young and as good lookin' as both you all are, Ah'd fall in lub wid each other jes' like dat!"

"Don't be absurd, Aunt Becky," snorted Gerald.

"No, don't be ridiculous," Susan added.

"Ah'm jes' tellin' yo," was Aunt Becky's ominous answer. "If dis scrappin' don' stop, Ah's goin' away and Ah ain't comin' back. Den you-all won't have no chaperone, and den what 'll you-all do?"

"We'll be good," Susan hastily promised. "I'm sorry, Mr. Amadon, that I permitted you to betray your true nature. I promise that it won't happen again. Why can't we be friends until the Lottie Lee returns?"

"Yes," said Gerald, "why can't we? Let's shake on it!"

She gave him her slim brown hand and Gerald squeezed it. Presently they were chattering away on a friendly basis, and Gerald found himself, to his dismay, admiring her lovely, even white teeth, and the curve of her red mouth.

Never had he seen so lovely a complexion. Never had he beheld more provocative dimples. Had he ever gazed upon a more serene, madonna-like forehead? No, he had not. But his thoughts went back to her complexion, and he floundered among trite comparisons. He thought of rose petals and peaches and cream and fine warm ivory.

"We might as well get to work now," Susan remarked brightly.

"Eh? What? Work?" Gerald repeated blankly, as he came out of the spell into which he fell when he gazed upon this delightful creature.

"Yes, work," said the paragon. "Work. Study. Your law."

"Oh, we can let that go till later. Did anybody ever tell you that you have the most beautiful teeth that ever grew in a human jaw?"

"I'm glad you like my teeth, but I think you'd better put your mind on your law."

"You know," he said, "you have the longest eyelashes I ever saw on a human being."

"Law, not eyelashes," said the girl firmly.

"Aw, let's go fishing."

"No, Mr. Amadon. We're going to go to work. Law."

"Do you know what your eyes remind me of?"

"Mr. Amadon, aren't you forgetting that you're engaged and that I am engaged? I suppose you are fickle. You would be."

"You don't know me," said Gerald. "I am stanch and true and steadfast. I think you're the most—"

"Mr. Amadon," she interrupted him, "I know how you detest having me here, but I positively will not stand in the way of your career. You are going to be a great lawyer some day, and you must study to fit yourself. Where are the books?"

"They aren't uncrated yet," Gerald admitted, "and, besides, I'd much rather—"

"Then let's uncrate them. Where are the crates and where is a hammer?"

"Listen," said Gerald, "there isn't the least hurry to start this law business. I have all winter to study those darned books. I'll tell you what let's do, Susan. You don't mind if I call you Susan, do you, Miss Finch?"

"No, Gerald."

"Well, Susan, let's get out the cat-boat and sail to a spot I know about two miles from here where there is a ledge under which the succulent Florida lobster holds forth. We will spear us some lobster and have them for dinner."

"No, Gerald," said the girl, firmly.

"Listen, Sue, there is all winter to study law," he pleaded. "Just look at this beautiful, glorious day going to waste. And here we are—just you and I, all alone, with this glorious day ahead of us. Besides, I don't feel much like working. I didn't sleep well last night, and I have a little headache. By the way, did you ever see my speed boat? It will go faster than forty-five miles an hour—"

"Let's uncrate the law books," Susan checked his eloquence.

Gerald looked at that sweet, beautiful face. Something within him told him that this girl was going to have her way; that excuses and suggestions were of no avail. Bravely he straightened his shoulders.

Presently they were in the woodshed, where Gerry had had the crates carefully stowed, and, hammer in hand, he was knocking off their lids. Then, each with an armful of dull, dreary looking tomes they repaired to the veranda. They seated themselves knee to knee, and Susan opened the first book. It dealt with Admiralty law.

"I think this will be fascinating," said Susan as she thumbed through the pages. Gerry's groan was a silent one. He said, brightly:

"It's going to be an awful bore for you. Don't you honestly think it would be fun to walk down to Settlement

Point and look the villagers over? It's a nice walk through all those palms."

"Later," said Susan. "I studied a little law in school. I'm quite as eager to know more about it as you are. Supposing we read aloud to each other?"

They read aloud to each other. They read aloud until almost eleven o'clock, or until Gerald's brain was weary. Then Susan shut the book and remarked:

"You're lazy, aren't you?"

"Am I?"

"You are. Your brain is flittering all over the compass. Now let me question you on this morning's lesson. What would be the status of a murderer on a ship that was sailing on her course one-tenth mile beyond the three-mile limit of Nicaragua?"

"He would probably be given a captaincy in the Nicaraguan standing army," Gerald replied.

Susan appeared to be provoked. "Kindly tell me what the book said on that point."

"I don't remember," Gerald confessed.

"It's just as I thought," said Susan. "Your mind isn't on this work. This afternoon we will start in again. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Let's take a walk," said Gerald dismally.

They strolled along the beach under the palms to the picturesque, palm-bowered little cluster of whitewashed huts of which Settlement Point consisted. Through the trees and beyond the houses the blue Atlantic glimmered.

Faces appeared at doorways and windows and withdrew. More faces appeared. It did not occur to Gerry to wonder at this unusual activity, or, if it did, he put it down to the appearance of Susan, who was pretty enough to excite any community.

There was a small crowd of darkly tanned fishermen and their wives in McArthur's commissary when Gerald and Susan went in. He purchased a package of cigarettes, and Bull Mc-

Arthur, the proprietor of the store and Kitikat Key's general factotum, said, with a leer:

"Didn't know you was married, Mr. Amadon."

"I'm not," said Gerald.

"This young lady's your sister, eh?"

"This young lady is Miss Finch," said Gerald stiffly. "And we are not related. She is my guest."

The shaggy eyebrows of Bull McArthur drew together.

"Left her maw back at your house, eh?"

"Her mother?" Gerald repeated.

"Sure; her maw's along, ain't she?"

"No one's along," said Gerald, impatiently.

Bull McArthur blinked several times, like a lazy, dangerous fish.

"Oh," said he, grinning again.

"Look here—" Gerald began, and doubled his fist.

"Don't!" a cool voice whispered in his ear, and Susan's hand was tugging at his arm.

Gerald permitted her to draw him out of the commissary and into the glare of the Florida sunlight. He was furious.

"Damn his impudence!" he growled. "Susan, did you hear him?"

"Don't mind it, Gerald. People who live in little out-of-the-way places—"

"I'll beat him up!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind. We're going home." Her voice was trembling. Inwardly, Gerald fumed. He mustn't let her see how upset he was over Bull McArthur's insinuations.

They retraced their steps along the beach. Abruptly, without any warning, Susan Finch sat down on a palm bole and buried her face in her hands.

Gerald stood looking down at her.

"Susan, listen!" he got out huskily. "I'm going back there and knock his block off. I'm going—"

"No," she whispered. "Please don't go back."

He seated himself beside her and placed an arm about her shoulder.

"Listen, Susan; I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll tune up my speed boat and I'll take you over to Miami. You can put up in a hotel there with uncle until the Lottie Lee comes back. I won't have you being sneered at, and people thinking—"

Her hands dropped. She looked at him with brimming, angry eyes.

"Do you think I'm afraid of those people?" she blazed. "Do you think I'd run away?"

"No," Gerald answered promptly. "I don't. I know you wouldn't run away from anything. You're brave. You're wonderful!"

Susan snuggled her hand into his. She was really badly shaken up by that distressing incident in the Settlement Point Commissary, but she wasn't too badly shaken up to do some clear thinking. She was thinking that it was a dreadful shame, indeed, that Gerald Amadon was engaged to another girl. Never in her life had she met a young man who attracted her as did Gerald Amadon.

There must be something wicked about him, she supposed, or she would not feel that attraction so strongly. Girls usually fell in love the first time with men they shouldn't fall in love with, didn't they? There was something about his eyes that frightened and fascinated her.

Last night, she could have clung in his arms, it had seemed, forever. She had wanted him to kiss her, to hold her even more tightly than he had; and yet she had been filled with a tremulous fear of him.

It would have been nice, she reflected, as Gerald pressed her hand reassuringly, to have love come like that—on the blade of a lightning flash, as it were, with thunder rumbling all about.

Yet she and Gerald were obviously not destined for each other. He was engaged to another girl. Perhaps she could win him away from this other girl! Should she try? New England

conscience rebelled; yet Susan had never wanted anything in her life as she now wanted Gerald Amadon. He was the kind of man who appealed to her most. She had been thrilled at the way he had sprung to resent any implication on her character. He would have thrashed that leering creature if she had not quickly interposed.

Susan dried her eyes and sighed. She would have to keep on playing this game. Gerald Amadon was not for her!

"Your fiancée," she said, as she withdrew her hand from his and sprang up, "would certainly say that there was something wrong with this picture."

"Oh, she's broad-minded," said Gerry.

"I'm not," said Susan.

"I don't understand you," Gerry complained. "Why do you treat me like a dog?"

"What more can a man who has lived the kind of life you have lived expect?" she demanded.

CHAPTER X.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE MOON.

LUNCHEON closely resembled a cat and dog fight. Each, more and more resentful of the fact that the other was unattainable, took it out in unkind and unkind words, until Aunt Becky announced that if she overheard one more word of bickerin' she was goin' to up and leave them flat.

Then Susan wept over nothing in particular, and Gerald, discovering too late that the tea in his cup was scalding hot, ripped out a round, smoking, pirate's oath. At which Susan sprang up, furious and indignant and retired to the veranda.

For a half hour Gerald apologized, then she forgave him and reminded him that the afternoon was waning and that they had work to do. Reluctantly, Gerald fetched the book on admiralty

law. An hour later he was hotly debating a point in criminal law with her. The study period stretched out from two to three hours.

"You're not so lazy as I thought you were," said Susan at its conclusion.

"It's mighty interesting," Gerald murmured.

"You have a quick mind," said Susan.

"It's wonderful the way you make me work," said Gerald.

"You will make a great lawyer if you apply yourself, Gerald."

"I would if you were on hand to snap a whip over me once in a while, Susan. You're wonderful."

They gazed into each other's eyes. Then Gerald shook his head, to rid it of the daze, and he passed a hand over his eyes.

"Sue," he said, "how soon are you going to be married?"

"Next month," said Sue, promptly.

"You really love that fellow, do you?"

"Of course I do. I adore him. Just—just the way you adore Eulalie Maytime," she added with a little catch in her voice. "When are you going to be married?"

"Just as soon as she'll have me."

"Love is wonderful, isn't it?" said Susan.

"Yes," sighed Gerry, looking at her.

"Shall we take a swim?"

"Let's," said Susan.

She was wearing, when he met her a few minutes later, a bathing suit as blue as the sky. Her arms and legs were more golden than ever by contrast, and her figure, it seemed to Gerald, had improved since he had observed it this morning. And her eyes, it seemed to him, were laughing at him provocatively—or mockingly.

"I don't understand you," said Gerald, as they walked down to the pier. "I thought you were an old fashioned girl."

"I am," said Susan.

"In that?" said Gerald.

"What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing," Gerald answered vigorously. "But I can't understand a girl of your type wearing that kind of a bathing suit. Why do you wear a bathing suit like that and the kind of clothes you wear?"

"Because," she answered, "we didn't go in swimming in the convent I went to. But we did wear clothes. Don't you think bathing suits ought to be practical? I don't wear a swimming suit to be looked at; I wear it to swim in. And I'd rather you didn't look at me."

"You might try burning my eyes out with a red hot poker," Gerald suggested. "That might stop me from looking. I should think Lester Colton would get after you. He makes you wear long dresses. Hasn't he ever criticized your bathing suits?"

"He never saw me in a swimming suit," Susan truthfully answered.

"When he does," said Gerald, sadly, "you had better have a pulmotor handy. Never in my life have I seen a girl—"

Susan had dived. It was a swan, and Gerald followed her in. When her face emerged close beside him, Gerald asked:

"Does Lester make you wear your hair long, too?"

"He likes my hair long, yes."

"It's beautiful hair," Gerald admitted.

"Is Eulalie's hair bobbed?" Susan wanted to know.

"Oh, yes."

"You prefer your women modern, don't you? Let's swim in. Shall we work on the speedboat this afternoon?"

"I always lie in the sun an hour after my afternoon swim," Gerald answered.

They swam to the beach, and Susan, reminding Gerald very much of a lively, beautiful young seal, stretched out on the sand beside him. She wanted very much to have Gerald make love to her, but her New England con-

science wouldn't let her. It wasn't fair to compete with a girl who wasn't here.

A sail on the horizon momentarily terrified her. Suppose Uncle Ham and Uncle Jethro were coming back for her! But the sail drifted on and presently drifted over the rim of the world; and Gerald was looking at her as no engaged young man should look at an engaged girl, so she sprang up and ran into the bungalow, with Gerry looking at her with eyes that might readily have set the blue swimming suit on fire.

Gerald dressed, and when Susan reappeared she was wearing overalls; overalls spotted with white paint and gray deck paint, and a blue denim shirt unbuttoned at the neck. She had her hair done up in a new way that almost paralyzed Gerald. Every time he saw her, it seemed to him, she was more beautiful; every time she changed into new garb she was a different girl.

"What are we going to do now?" asked the young man, with misgivings.

"I thought we were going to clean the carbon out of your speedboat's engine."

"Haven't we done enough work for to-day?" he gasped. "I came down here to loaf, Sue."

"I hate loafers," said Sue. "Get into your overalls and I'll meet you in the boat shed."

When he reached the boat shed a few minutes later, Susan was unscrewing the last of the cylinder head bolts on the port engine, and the spark plugs of that block were ranged in a neat little row on the work bench.

"You're altogether too accomplished," he told her. "Where did you ever learn about marine engines?"

"I was the chief engineer of the Lottie Lee for two years," was Susan's pert reply. "Besides, I've studied books on marine gas engines. This is a pretty good engine, but in dreadful condition."

"It hasn't been touched since last winter," he apologized.

"Time has nothing to do with the condition this engine is in," she scolded him. "If I owned an engine as powerful and as valuable as this, I'd take care of it. Get busy on that other block, Gerry."

"You have a spot of black grease on the very end of your nose," Gerald informed her.

"*Je m'en fou!*" said Susan.

"What?" gasped Gerald.

"I said, '*Je m'en fou,*'" the girl in overalls repeated.

"What does that mean?"

"It's French for 'I should worry.'"

"French!" Gerald cried. "Do you speak French, too?"

"I speak French, Spanish, Italian—and some English," Susan answered. "While you were living a wild life, carousing, drinking, gambling and amusing yourself with chorus girls, I was trying to do something with my mind."

"I never knew anybody like you," said Gerald, taking up a spark plug and beginning to scrape the carbon from it. "Lester Colton is certainly one lucky fellow. You're so smart you frighten me."

"You've adjusted those firing points too close," Susan pointed out. "You'll get a weak explosion and the engine'll carbon up quicker than ever. Look here, Gerald, when did you take up the slack in this timing chain?"

"I forget," said Gerald.

"You should keep a log," said Susan.

Gerald decided at this point that he disliked Susan a little more than any girl had ever been disliked by any man since time began. She was altogether too smart. She was altogether too energetic. She knew everything, and she was too eager to put it into practice. How silly of him to imagine, as he had been doing on and off since last night's storm, that he could ever fall in love with this girl!

Presently Susan tossed aside her spanner, briskly wiped her hands on a

clump of waste, and announced that it was time to knock off. Gerald climbed wearily out of the engine pit and joined her at the gasoline tank where she was rinsing her hands in a trickle of gasoline. Her hands, he saw, were greasy and black.

Gerald was now congratulating himself that Susan Finch's visit was not to be a permanent one. He would be a candidate for a sanatorium if she stayed on Kitikat much longer than a week.

"What are the plans for this evening?" he asked in a tired voice. "Do we take a ten-mile walk, have setting-up exercises, or have a few hours of ancient Greek?"

"The evening," Susan answered, "is for relaxation. What would you suggest? You are an authority on relaxation, and you ought to have some bright ideas."

"I'm so tired," was Gerry's reply, "that I haven't enough steam to cook up an idea. There aren't enough of us to play charades. You don't drink, so that's out. We lack two people to play bridge, and two-handed poker is pretty dull. The nearest cabaret is fifty miles away, so we can't swing a bender. In a word, Susan, I haven't a single idea. I am putty in your hands."

"We might sit on the veranda in the moonlight and talk," Susan suggested.

"What about?" Gerald inquired.

"Heavens! Is it so difficult for you to manufacture conversation?"

"I am hoarse from talking," said Gerald, "and my brain feels like an egg that has been fried three hours."

"The art of conversation," Susan commented, "is being lost in the jazz and excitement of this age. I would suggest that we select a topic for discussion and spend the evening discussing it."

"What do you mean by a topic?" Gerald asked suspiciously. "Why does a chicken cross the road?"

"I was thinking," Susan replied,

"of selecting some interesting topic, such as why did Babylon fall? Or why is modern civilization headed straight for perdition?"

"They are out," said Gerald promptly. "I am not a highbrow. I don't want to be a highbrow. I thought you said the evening was for relaxation. Wait!" he cried. "I have an idea! I have a flock of new dance records and a little victrola. We'll roll back the rugs and dance!"

"But I don't dance!" Susan wailed.

"Do you mean to tell me," he gasped, "that there is one thing you can't do?"

"I think you're very unkind," said Susan. "I've only been trying to be helpful. I was raised to consider the sloth with contempt, and I've been taught that moths who flutter about the flame always end by scorching their poor wings. Frivolous thoughts and actions lead but to sin."

"They usually pass around the collection plate after great, big, fine, clean thoughts like those have been turned loose," Gerald remarked. "I can see plainly that one side of your education has been sadly neglected. You have more—vastly more—to learn from me than I have to learn from you. Thank God it's all settled. We will dance tonight. You're a fairly bright girl, and it shouldn't take you long to learn the simpler steps of the fox trot, the Charleston, and the rudimentary movement of the Black Bottom."

"What do you mean—rudimentary movement of the Black Bottom?" Susan demanded.

"If you have double-jointed hips," Gerald answered, "the rudimentary movement is easy, but you'll do very well with the equipment you have."

Susan looked alarmed.

"It doesn't sound quite proper."

"That's what a lot of people think," he agreed cheerfully.

"Shall we dress for dinner now?"

"Dress for dinner!" he gasped.

"On Kitikat Key?"

"Why not? Don't people always dress for dinner when they live among savages?"

"Very well," Gerald acquiesced; "we will dress for dinner. Have you a dress that does not touch your in-steps?"

"I have not," said Susan with dignity, "and I will not wear such disgraceful dresses."

When they parted for dinner, Gerald felt much better. He didn't hate Susan Finch as much as he thought he had; she was, in fact, a really likable girl. To be sure, she knew too much, and she treated him as if she were a school-teacher and he were a backward seven-year-old child; but she didn't know everything, after all. She didn't know how to dance. His estimation of her continued to rise until he met her in the living room, and then it soared upward in a leap.

Susan, in a black evening gown, scintillating with brilliants, though it was foolishly high at the neck and in the back, and ridiculously long, was an inspiration and a delight. She had arranged her hair in an entirely different way again, and, while she had not used an atom of make-up, there was about her an alluring, romantic air.

The black made her seem slimmer than ever, and it set off the golden charm of her arms. He realized, when they met, that Susan was not merely a pretty girl; she was beautiful, and he realized, too, that it would have been a shame, in a way, for her to have attempted to be modern. There was about her a serenity, a dignity, lacking in the modern flapper.

After dinner he rolled back the rugs and started the victrola. Susan didn't, it appeared, know the first thing about modern dancing. She tripped over his feet. She became flustered. And she flatly refused to attempt the Black Bottom. She called it atrocious. But she was no longer the self-assured school-teacher; the swimming expert; the gas engine authority. She might

know five languages and history backwards and forwards; but she didn't know how to play.

After two hours of dancing instruction, Gerald was exhausted. Never in his life had he done more hard work in a given day. At ten o'clock he said:

"I think we'd better call it a day."

"Will I ever learn to dance?" Susan woefully asked. She was standing, drooping, before him. Her hair was disheveled. Her cheeks were flushed and moist from exertion, and her eyes were dull with discouragement.

"In time," Gerald encouraged her.

"But you have got to stop being so formal. You have got to throw yourself into it. You act as if it's a disgrace to be in my arms. You must pretend to like being in my arms. You must relax. You must be gay."

"I don't know how," the poor girl confessed. "All my life I've been told that only the serious things matter, and that frivolity is sinful. Try me just once more, Gerry."

Gerald obligingly took her in his arms.

"Relax, Susan, relax!"

Susan tried to relax. Gerald started the victrola.

"Now throw yourself into it, kid," said Gerald.

Susan threw herself into it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I kicked you in the shin!"

He backed away. "The idea, Susan, is to keep your feet on the floor."

In her contrition over the agony of his shin, she seized his hand. And he liked Susan in this moment of her humility more than at any time since they had met. She looked so small, so discouraged and so helpless. Her eyes were misty and her lower lip was drooping, full, red.

"Let's go out and look at the moon," Gerald suggested.

They went out and looked at the moon. It was a perfect Florida night. The soft breeze was disturbing, alluring, mysterious. And the moon, high

and round, sparkled on the water, which, even in moonlight, was green. The light of a ship could be seen far off.

They strolled down the path to the pier, and Gerald proceeded to carry out his plan. He knew that the results would probably be serious; but he didn't care. He simply had to kiss Susan.

"Just look at that moon!" he exclaimed, as they stood there side by side.

It was an old trick, and Susan fell for it. She tilted back her head and looked at the moon. Promptly the moon was eclipsed—for Susan. Gerald's shapely head did the eclipsing.

He seized her—but he did not kiss her. In a twinkling, she was out of his arms.

"Any man who takes advantage of a girl's inexperience," she cried, "is a beast! I am going to bed. Good night!"

He followed her into the bungalow. He heard her slam the door of the bedroom. He heard her shoot the bolt. He sat down on the couch and blew out the light.

If only another thunderstorm would strike Kitikat to-night.

CHAPTER XI.

"MY GOD! IT'S EULALIE!"

SUSAN did not sleep well that night, although there was no thunderstorm to terrify her. She knew that she was venturing nearer and nearer into ticklish waters. She was in love with Gerald, and she knew that it was only a matter of time before he found it out. What then? Although the night was cool, her sheet, her pillow seemed to be steaming.

She wanted to run her fingers through his thick, curly hair. She wanted to take his head in her hands and kiss him. He was such a dear, and so amusing. Susan fell to won-

dering about the girl he was engaged to. Eulalie Maytime! Eulalie Maytime, Susan supposed, must be clever, smart, modern, gay—all the things that Gerald liked and Susan lacked.

It made Susan a little sick and more than a little furious to realize that she had devoted her life to vain pursuits. Her interest had been applied to serious things, and men—the kind of men she could love—were not interested in serious things. Think of it—she couldn't even dance! What chance had she to win a desirable man like Gerald?

Her thoughts flitted over the day they had spent together. It had been the most delightful day of her life. Always the menace of him. Always that dangerous, frightening, exciting look in his electric-blue eyes. The very touch of his hand excited her. Why hadn't she let him kiss her when she had looked up at the moon?

Jumbled impressions trooped through her tired brain. His shoulders. His hands. What strong, broad, beautiful shoulders he had! What powerful, expressive hands! She could thrill again at the fury in him that the man in the village store had fanned. Only her quickness had averted a fight. He would have fought because of a slur upon her!

A faint, faint rumbling, far, far away, attracted her. Her heart leaped. If another thunderstorm would only strike Kitikat Key. Then she could fly to his comforting arms. But the rumbling was not repeated. The distant thunder rumbled off and away beyond earshot.

Her last thought before sleep came was: If he would only stop loving that girl!

Meanwhile, in the living room, a Verdun in miniature was being fought between Gerald and the hungry mosquitoes. Slap. Slap. Slap. He would fall off to sleep, only to be jerked back to wakefulness by a whine at his ear or a pinprick on his cheek. But finally he dozed off and it was daylight when

he awoke, with Susan standing over him in the gray bathrobe, as she had stood over him yesterday.

Once again they swam to the red buoy. Once again Susan instructed him in the proper use of the trudgeon stroke. Later she held his mind to the slippery problems of admiralty law. Still later they worked on the engine of the Squirt.

They were having lunch when the incident occurred which brought the events of the past two days into sharp focus.

Gerald was pouring cream into his coffee and looking at Susan.

"We can put the Squirt into the water," he said. "The sea is smooth enough for a test run."

"I want to take up the slack in that timing chain," said Susan. "And I think the distributor points had better be checked over."

"I want to finish calking up the catboat," said Gerald.

The second day of Susan, he was finding, was not nearly so difficult as the first day. She was, from Gerald's point of view, simply a person from an unfamiliar world. The girls he had known were either time killers or pace makers. They wanted you to entertain them. They were steppers.

All the girls of to-day were steppers, and Gerald was finding a measure of relief—refreshing relief—in a girl who was interested in swimming properly, in making marine engines run properly. Susan had sworn she would get five miles an hour more out of the Squirt than ever before. And in making something of her mind other than a receptacle for the latest wisecracks and behind-the-hand stories. She had kindled in him a real enthusiasm for his legal study. How he was going to miss this girl! He only hoped that Uncle Jethro would put off returning for a long, long time.

"Look here," he said, suddenly, as an idea occurred to him, "you told me that Uncle Jethro had put you off here,

because he and your Uncle Ham wanted us to fall in love."

"That's right," said the radiant girl.

"Well, how come," Gerald wanted to know, "they'd try to start another romance when there's one already under way?"

"You mean your romance with Eulalie Maytime?"

"You know darned well I mean your romance with Lester Colton!"

"Oh, that," said Susan. "Why, they don't approve of Lester." That, she thought, was fairly quick thinking.

"Well, why should they?" Gerald growled.

"Well, why shouldn't they?" she said mockingly.

"For one thing," Gerald retorted. "Lester is not only a bootlegger, but a hijacker. Moreover, he is suspected of being more than a little bit interested in smuggling in snow and blackbirding."

"Snow!" Susan gasped.

"Coke—dope—cocaine!"

"Oh!" Susan gasped, turning pale. "And blackbirding?"

"Running in Chinks from Cuba at a thousand a head. Don't tell me you don't know the kind of fellow Lester is!"

"Yes," she said, "I knew. I'm going to reform him." That was quick thinking, too.

"That road," said the sophisticated Gerald, "is narrow, straight, full of chuck holes and thank-ye-ma'ams and uphill all the way."

"I like a good fight," said Susan.

"You've got one," Gerald growled. "Did you know that Lester is suspected of committing that Everglades murder that happened last month?"

"I—I love him," said Susan weakly and defiantly.

"It seems to me you're mighty broad-minded about Lester," Gerald muttered. "You won't even let me have a cocktail before dinner, but you'll let your Lester hijack, run snow, black-

bird and shoot innocent sheriffs in the back."

"Love makes a lot of difference," said Susan stubbornly, but her knees, under the table, were clicking together.

"It's a shame you couldn't have picked on me instead," he argued.

"That's Eulalie's job. And Eulalie likes you just as you are. You told me so."

"She's very broad-minded," Gerald admitted.

"And I'm very narrow-minded," gasped Susan.

He bent toward her. "Listen, Susan; I think you're the—"

Gerald stopped. They both looked up, rolling their eyes, as people do who have heard a strange, alien sound.

What they heard was the muffled throbbing of a motor boat's exhaust.

"Uncle Jethro!" Gerald growled. "Oh, hell's bells!"

"Gerald!" Susan gasped. "You cursed."

"Yes, and I'm going to curse some more! Damn! I don't want you to be taken away. Doggone it, anyhow," Gerald flung out, recklessly, "I'm just begin—"

He was standing, looking out the south window into the South Cove.

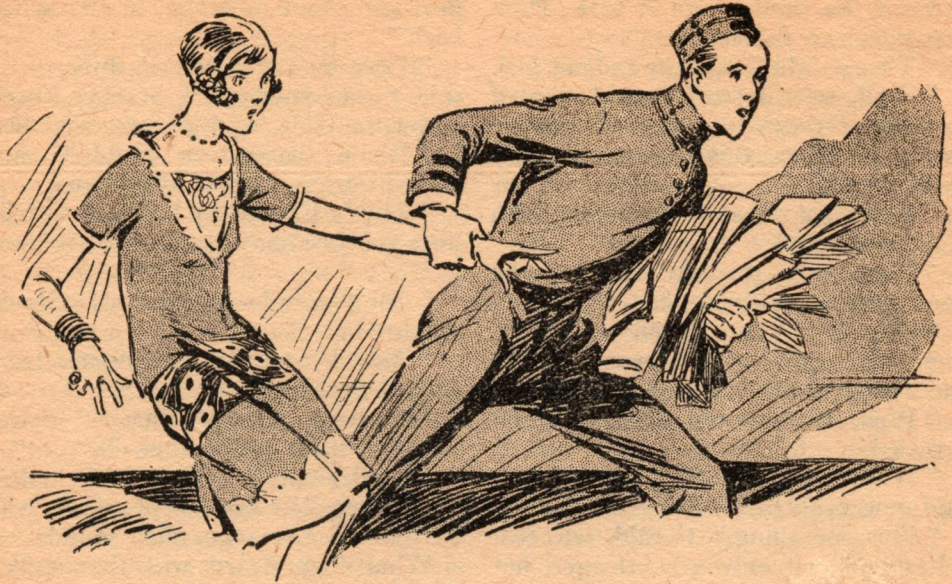
"It isn't the Lottie Lee," he exclaimed. "It's that launch from Miami! Now, who in Sam Hill—"

"There's a girl coming ashore," Susan interrupted, excitedly.

"Why should any girl come ashore on Kitikat? It must be a mistake."

They hastened out to the veranda and down the steps. A girl in flamed red was stepping daintly from the deck of the launch to the pier in the South Cove. She also wore a large flamed red sports hat. Her shoes were gray and her stockings matched her shoes perfectly. Her bright red dress came scarcely to her knees. They were beautiful knees; beautiful legs.

"My God!" Gerald groaned. "It's Eulalie!"



"I want you to meet Miss Bessie Barrow, a natural-born actress"

Knocked Out Where the West Begins

All the trouble began when Two-Punch Simpson received a movie offer and answered the call of the screen in his own inimitable style!

By **THOMAS THURSDAY**

WITH the exception of Charlie Lindbergh—who taught time how to fly—most every guy who cuts a swath in the headlines, whether his stunt was singing "Home, Sweet Home" louder than anybody else or walking down Main Street on his ears, promptly grabs himself a press agent and hops a train for Hollywood, Califilmia. If you ask me, which you didn't, this stuff is as wrong as adult giraffes with two-inch necks.

Who you are is a mystery to me, but I'm Jack Bailey, manager of Two-Punch Simpson, middleweight champ of the world. A couple or three days after he had won the crown from "Horizontal" Hawkins, using every-

thing but an ax to do it, we was showered with a flock of tasty offers otherwise than fisticuffs.

No fooling, the extra sugar that was shoved under our beaks was positively amazing. For the consideration of one grand, Two-Punch signs a testimonial to the effect that he had always worn *McGoldberg's Never-Bust Athletic Belts*; for two thousand berries my cuffing beauty broke down and confessed that *Snyder's Hirsute-Hoister and Stay-Put Gloss* kept his hair in perfect shape, even though his adversus did his best to sock it cross-eyed; for three thousand bucks Mons. Simpson admitted that he owed his great strength, ability and general good

health to taking large swigs of *Hicksapogen*, the Great Man Builder.

He also received an offer from the Vim-Vaude Circuit to play their coast-to-coast theaters, doing a little exhibition boxing, and similar boloney. Two-Punch was about to succumb to that offer, when along came a bid from the land of Hollywood.

To reduce a tall telegram, it went like this: Mr. Ike Smith, president of Beautiful Pictures Corporation, offers Two-Punch Simpson twenty-five thousand dollars to star in a five-reel feature, the scenario to be selected by their expert staff of selectors; all incidental expenses to be paid, including hotel, railroad fare and, if need be, laundry.

"Now that," says Two-Punch, as we lounged in our suite at the Hotel Ritz-Maloney, "is something like it!"

"Yeah," I says. "Eh, it's too bad that you ain't a actor."

"Who says I ain't a actor?" he flares.

"Did you win the middleweight belt by acting?" I demands.

"Just what," he yelps, "are you grunting about? They is a big difference between acting and boxing. Meanwhile, get busy on that movie offer."

"You accept it?"

"Sure," he says, "at double the jack. Fifty thou' would be about right for a boxer who can really act."

"I would put the figure at a million," I says, "for a boxer who can really act."

He gives me a mean look.

"Kindly wire them movie birds," he snaps, "that I will consider fifty grand for one picture."

I shoot the wire to Hollywood and, by return wire, receive this answer:

TWO-PUNCH SIMPSON,
Hotel Ritz-Maloney,
New York City, N. Y.

One of us is crazy.

IKE SMITH,
Pres. Beautiful Pictures Corp.

"Guess which one he means?" I asks innocently.

"It ain't me," replies Two-Punch, "so that leaves him."

"Then the movie racket is out?"

"So's your ears," he barks. "I have personally got a load of important money and I am willing to use it."

"For what?"

"To make my own picture," he says. "What they can do, I can do! Why hire out to them burglars at a paltry twenty-five grand when I can just as well organize my own company and grab off all the profits m'self, hey?"

"I don't know," I admits, "unless it is for the same reason that we pay Cal Coolidge seventy-five thou' a year, when we could get at least a million lads who would take the job at twenty-five smackers a week and cakes."

"Besides," he goes on, ignoring my sarcasm, "I should go over big in one of them Western fillums, playing the part of a two-fisted sheriff or something."

"The sheriffs," I corrects him, "usually have two guns, and only use their hands to eat with."

"So I have decided," he goes on, "that we will pack up and haul hips to Hollywood."

"Great," I says. "I bet Fairbanks will be jealous."

II.

BRIGHT and early next morning—the morning was bright and we was early—we boarded the Climate Special, Los Angeles bound.

"Maybe we could hire Dave Griffith or Herb Brenon to direct our picture," cracks Two-Punch as we whirl through Pennsylvania, "and get a bunch of good actors for a supporting cast."

"Are you going to play the part of the cowboy hero, or the sheriff who gets there in time to shoot the villain full of ventilation?" I inquires, not that I'm a bit interested.

"I will play the part that has the most action," he retorts. "Maybe it would be a good idear to put in a part where I can use my fists, eh?"

"Any part will do," I says, "so long as you don't have to use your head."

"Why be a wet blanket?" he whinnies.

"Because," I says, "I can see a load of grief without using any binoculars."

"Says you!" he snaps. "Well, all I can see is a load of soft money."

"We might get it," I says, "if we go to Texas and drill for oil."

Both time and the train flew along, and we finally debarked in the land of Los Angeles. Two-Punch hires a nifty suite of rooms at the Avocado Hotel, and promptly gets down to business.

"First thing we gotta do," says he, "is to get a good scenario for my big feature. Of course, I could write one myself, but I don't want to bother. Wonder where we can dig up a good scenario writer?"

The bellhop, who had just entered with some cigarettes, almost drops the tray on the floor.

"Excuse me, gents," he says, "but if you are looking for a first-class, but unappreciated, scenario writer, I will be glad to show you what I have written."

Two-Punch looks the lad over with quite the curiosity.

"Who," says my belting beauty, "give you the idear that you could write anything, except home to mother?"

"Mr. Simpson," says the lad, "just tell me what kind of story you want and I will look in my files and pluck it out for you."

"How come," goes on Two-Punch, "that you are delivering kisters, ice water, and cigarettes if you are a good scenario writer?"

"I see that you are a stranger in Los Angeles," says the bellhop. "Otherwise, you would know that a good writer of scenarios ain't got no chance to break into the movie trust with an original story, which is the only kind I write. All the studios have pet writers who can't write for beans, but I think they have something on the boss.

"And I will have you know, Mr. Simpson, that I am not a bellhop by profession; I am a first-class plumber from Times Square, New York City.

"I took a correspondence course in scenario writing and I have graduated with a diploma. Since then I have written more than four hundred original scenarios, but the big movie trust won't give me a chance."

"Well," says Two-Punch, "I am looking for a five-reel feature Western story that is full of action and plenty of plot, and I am willing to pay fifty dollars for it."

"I am sorry, Mr. Simpson," says the neglected genius, "but I can't afford to sell one of my original scenarios for less than a hundred dollars. You see, I have everything complete: story, treatment, and continuity. You won't have to hire anybody to whip it into shape."

"If that is the case," says Two-Punch, "I will give you sixty dollars for it, in real money."

"Well," replies the lad, "if you will put my name on it as the author, I will make the sacrifice. I have a room on the top floor, and if you will wait five minutes I will rush up stairs and pick you out one of the best Western stories ever written. I also know a girl that can play the part of the heroine, and I will bring her back with me."

"What's her name?" demands Two-Punch.

"Bessie Barrow," retorts the lad, "and she can spot all the movie prima donnas two dimples and still beat them in looks."

"Does she live in this hotel?" asks the champ.

"She works at the switchboard; but that is just temporary until she can land in the pictures. She won a beauty contest in Salaam, Iowa, and came out here to try her luck in the fillums. See you all of a sudden!"

"Just a minute!" says Two-Punch, as the lad rushed for the door. "What d'yer use for a name?"

"Willie Sims," says he, "and you will find it at the top of the scenario I am going to bring you."

Shortly after, Willie returns with a flock of paper in one hand and an eye-expanding girl in the other.

"Mr. Simpson," says Willie, "I want you to meet Miss Bessie Barrow, a natural-born actress who the movie trust won't give a chance. There is a part in this scenario, which I have called 'Whispering Cactus,' that will just fit her type."

"I would be so thankful," says the blond panic, "if you would give me a chance. If I once get a start, I am sure I can make the grade!"

"I will think it over," says Two-Punch, "and let you know. Er—you can leave the scenario here and I will read it over to my manager, not that the ape would have brains enough to know whether it was any good or not."

"That will be jake to me, Mr. Simpson," beams the happy Willie.

"Thank you so much!" blushes Bessie, and both exit happy.

"Well," remarks Two-Punch, after the door had closed, "if this guy's scenario has as much action as Bessie has looks it ought to be a riot!"

"With you in it," I says, "it ought to be a riot, anyway. Before you waste your hard-earned jack, I wouldst advise you to stop kidding yourself and accept the offer of Beautiful Pictures. Twenty-five grand is twenty-five grand, and you ain't taking any chances.

"If their picture is a flop, you should worry; you got yours in the bag. If Ike Smith is sap enough to make such a bid you ought to be wise enough to snap it up. Remember, chump, you have no more experience in making fillums than a rooster has with buck-teeth. Why be a boob?"

"Why be a sucker?" he yelps. "If Ike Smith can offer me twenty-five smackers, they must figger on cleaning up at least a hundred thou' on the deal. Why should I give them all 'at loose gravy?"

"It's your coffin," I says, "hop into it. But you don't get a dime of my dough, and that's that!"

"Well, he who laughs last—" begins Two-Punch.

"Must be dumb," I concludes. "Read the scenario and see what sort of bargain you got."

Although he read the scenario aloud for the next hour, all I could get out of it was a load of static. No fooling, lads and lassies, it was terrible! There was a hero and a heroine, and both did their stuff.

The hero's name was "Buckaroo Murphy" and the heroine's name was "Annabelle Custer" and—well, I won't annoy you with the details. It may have been a great Western meller-drama, but I bet a load of sugar against a load of sand that Charlie Chaplin would of been tickled silly to fillum it!

"What d'yer think of it?" asks Two-Punch, laying down the story.

"Eh, what is it?" I asks, with the greatest of innocence.

"What d'yer think it is," he steams up, "a bed-time story? In my opinion, it's a pip of a Western scenario and should ought to make a grand fillum."

"You mean to say that you will buy that mess and produce it?" I asks, dumfounded.

"Why not? I can play the part of Buckaroo Murphy with ease. You noticed that he was quite handy with his fists, when he knocked them bandits kicking, in two or three socks on their chins."

"And I suppose the part of beautiful Annabelle Custer will be played by Bessie Barrow, hey?"

"Right," he says. "I would even give a part to you, but they ain't no wise-cracking monkeys in the scenario."

III.

DURING the next few weeks plenty things happened; don't think they didn't! His first bad break is to motor to Hollywood, with the innocent object

of hiring Dave Griffith or Stroheim to direct his opus.

Strange as it may seem, all these lads regretted, via their third assistant secretary, that it would be impossible for them to consider the matter at the present time, all of which was a polite method of tossing my leather pusher out on his ear.

We finally wound up around Poverty Row, the deadfall where they make the "quickies," and Two-Punch goes into a booking office and remarks that he is on the market for a load of actors and actorines, and leaves our hotel address.

"What about a director?" I inquire.

"I intend to handle that job personal," he says. "C'mon, Toothache, let's take a spin down Santa Monica Boulevard."

For a couple or three hours we ride hither and likewise yon and get back to the hotel about twilight. As we entered, a breezy chap bounces off a seat and comes up to Two-Punch with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Two-Punch Simpson, I believe?" he smiles.

"What about it?" snaps my battler, figuring the newcomer was about to sell him stock in a new device to remove storms along airplane routes.

"My name is Lloyd Lorraine," goes on the stranger, "and I heard you are about to start work on a new feature film. In short, I called to offer my services as director at—well, at your own price.

"To be frank, Mr. Simpson, an outsider like myself has practically no chance of getting in with the big fellows, and I really need the work. I have directed any number of independent features and I feel sure I could direct yours."

"Well," says Two-Punch, "maybe I can use you. Come up to the suite. Speaking of them big fellows, I intend to show them babies where they head in!"

After reaching our rooms, Two-

Punch and Lloyd Lorraine come to a speedy agreement. Then my movie-mad fisticuffer gives Lorraine Willie Sims's great scenario, and the director promptly breaks down and confesses that it is a gem of genius.

The phone rings and the hotel clerk informs us that there is any number of people downstairs who craved to come up and see the middleweight champ of the world.

"Shoo 'em up!" snaps Two-Punch into the transmitter.

"What, all of 'em?" demands the clerk.

"How many are they?" demands Two-Punch.

"I ain't got any adding machine," replies the clerk, "but roughly speaking, I would say there's about two hundred cluttering up the lobby, and I guess there's about five hundred more outside, kept in order by a flock of cops."

"Who's down there," demands Two-Punch, "the army and navy?"

Lorraine grabs the receiver from the champ's hand, and says to the clerk, "I will be right down and attend to the matter." He hangs up and goes on to Two-Punch. "Leave those babies to me; I know how to handle 'em. Wait a sec—I'll be back pronto!"

He returns a half an hour later, somewhat the worse from wear. His tie is neatly shredded, his collar is sticking out, whilst several buttons are off his coat.

"Well," he grins, "that's that!"

"Did the cable bust on the elevator?" asks Two-Punch.

"Oh, nothing like that," replies Lorraine. "I just told the boys and girls that we had already hired our cast, and that they could return to their regular jobs."

"But," says Two-Punch, "we ain't got any cast! Those people must of come from the booking office."

"Most likely," says Lorraine; "but they are just a bunch of hams. I will get you a first-rate cast personally, and bring them here to-morrow morning."

"That's oke with me," says Two-Punch. "But never mind bringing any leading lady to play the part of Annabelle Custer. I have already booked a peach of a girl."

"Forget her!" snaps Lorraine. "I will get you a *real* actress."

This gets my socker the bit red-headed.

"Listen, feller," he sizzles, "I guess you didn't hear me. I remarks that I have already got a good leading lady and I mean exactly that!"

"Oh, all right, then," says Lorraine, piping down. "I merely wished to be of service. Well, see you to-morrow!"

Early next morning Lloyd Lorraine enters our suite, accompanied by a fine flock of lads and lassies, which he proceeds to introduce to Two-Punch Simpson.

"These folks," concludes Lorraine, "are all veteran troupers, and they should make a wonderful picture out of 'Whispering Cactus.' Er—when shall we start shooting it?"

"Right now," I begs, "and please do it with machine guns."

"Report here to-morrow morning," says Two-Punch, ignoring my sound advice, "and we will go out on location. How long will it take?"

"Oh, about two-three weeks," says Lorraine. "It depends upon the weather."

After the bunch had left, I begged Two-Punch to call the whole thing off, but in reply he called me assorted saps, chumps, kill-joys, sour-grapes, or what have you.

"You are due to lose a load of hard-earned sugar," I goes on. "Meantime, Mex Logan is dangling a purse of fifty thou' before your eyes, and all you got to do to grab it is to upset Hit-and-Run Harris during a ten-round brawl."

"I will flatten Harris," says Two-Punch, "when I get through making 'Whispering Cactus,' and not before. Just now I am interested in producing the world's best Western fillum."

"You mean," I corrects, "that you are interested in producing a diamond-studded sap out of yourself. Why—"

"If I crave any more cluck advice from you," he bellers, "I will send you a telegram to that effect. I know what I am doing, and Lloyd Lorraine also knows his onions."

Speaking of Lloyd Lorraine, Two-Punch was right; he sure knew his parsnips. If you doubt it, stick around awhile, and watch the flop of the century!

IV.

A LITTLE over two weeks later, Two-Punch chestily announces to me that they have finished shooting "Whispering Cactus."

"It's a nice day," I says in reply, "and I think I will go for a ride. Er—how much did the whole mess set you back?"

"It ain't no mess!" he yelps, a bit temperamental. "And it only cost me around twenty thou to put over. Why, I should be able to get that much for the New York State rights alone."

"Well, what's your next move?"

"We will give a preview at a studio I have rented, and show the exhibitors and brokers what a gem we have. I am leaving that part to Lorraine; he says he will get some big guys to come down and look it over."

"When they see what a knock-out it is, I should grab off about a hundred grand on the investment. That's a whole lot better than accepting Ike Smith's paltry twenty-five, ain't it?"

"It's a nice day," I repeats, "and I think I will go for a ride. When did you say you was going to show the preview?"

"To-morrow morning, at ten sharp," he says. "If you wanna see a real fillum, come around and get a slant at 'Whispering Cactus.'"

Being somewhat curious to see what sort of piffle my prize glove-glammer had foisted on a unsuspecting public, I went around to his trap the next morn-

ing and got a eyeful. Much to Two-Punch's amazement, there is only a handful of folks on hand at the studio to witness it.

"Most of the big guys I wanted to get here," says Lloyd Lorraine, "are out of town. But we will run it off, anyway, and see what happens."

The lights go out, and I settle back to see what sort of a Douglas Fairbanks my playmate has turned out to be. For the first five minutes, we get the usual information, to wit:

Two-Punch Simpson, Middle Weight
Champion of the World—(flash)—in
"Whispering Cactus"—(flash)—
Original Story by Willie Sims—(flash)

and the customary line of time-wasters.

Before the first reel was over, several polite snickers could be heard among the customers. When the second frame flashed on, the snickers increased; and by the time the gem reached its third delirium, the laughs become frequent and lusty.

"These lads are a gang of low-brows," confides Two-Punch to me. "The poor saps down know a great Western fillum when they see one. I've a good mind to sock some of 'em on the button!"

When it was all over, the customers gave Two-Punch a pleasant smile and walked out briskly. All except one. He comes up to Mr. Simpson with a sober, businesslike air, and introduces himself as F. Wainwright McNulty, a free-lance film broker.

"With a little more cutting and editing," says Mr. McNulty, "I think you will have a pretty fair picture in 'Whispering Cactus.'"

"Thanks," says Two-Punch. "I am glad there is one guy around who appreciates good art when he sees it."

"Of course," goes on McNulty, "the fact that none of the other folk seemed interested in your film should make the price very reasonable."

"I won't take a cent less than one hundred thousand berries for all

rights," snaps Two-Punch, whilst I near swooned with fright.

"Don't mind him," I says, trying to save the situation. "He's only joshing. Why—"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Simpson," breaks in Lloyd Lorraine, "but since we have made 'Whispering Cactus' the movie industry has taken a decided slump. Since Mr. McNulty is the only man interested in the picture, I would frankly suggest that you make an effort to come to terms. Bear in mind, Mr. Simpson, that this is your first picture and you can't expect too much."

"What d'yer offer for the entire rights?" demands Two-Punch, turning to McNulty.

"I will give you ten thousand dollars, cash, for the entire rights to the United States and Canada," replies McNulty, without batting a single eyebrow.

My boy friend almost collapses over a chair.

"What," he bellers, "d'yer take me for, a boob?"

"Not in the least," says McNulty. "I have simply made a bid on your picture, and if you don't care to accept it, that is your privilege."

"But it cost me twenty grand to produce!" whinnies Two-Punch. "When did you and Captain Kidd quit partnership, hey?"

"Well," says McNulty, "that is my best offer. If you don't care to accept it, I will bid you good day."

He sniffs and heads toward the door.

"Listen, brainless," I snaps to the champ, "for the luvva common sense, grab it, and charge the balance up to fun, climate, and experience. Quick; call 'im back!"

"Hey, just one moment!" yells Two-Punch to the vanishing bidder. "I know it's a outrage, but since I ain't had much experience in this game, I will accept your offer. And I hope your check ain't rubber!"

Five days later, I hop out of bed

and look over a copy of the *Times-Star*. After scanning the latest murders, scandals, and other unappetizing whoop-la, I turned to the movie page and read the following review:

If the folks enjoy seeing the best burlesque of Western movies ever filmed, the Alcazar Theater should be playing to standing room for many weeks to come. "Whispering Cactus," which had its première last evening, convulsed the large audience with genuine laughter.

Bessie Barrow, a newcomer to the screen, demonstrated very expertly that she is a natural actress. As to Two-Punch Simpson, middleweight champion of the world, his portrayal of Sheriff Buckaroo Murphy was rather weird. As an actor, it is this reviewer's opinion that Mr. Simpson should confine his acting to the roped arena.

The story was written by one Willie Sims, evidently a new addition to the ranks of comedy scenarists.

Without a single wisecrack, I pass the paper over to Two-Punch, and point out the review. He reads it over and grins broadly.

"Well, what about it, ape?" he says, sarcastically.

"Oh, nothing," I retorts quite calmly. "Only I thought you was producing a hotsy-totsy Western drama."

"Drama—blaa!" he hoots. "Why, you clown, I knew it was a comedy all the time!"

Comb *that* out of your whiskers!

"Undoubtedly," I says, not wishing to rub it in further. "Meanwhile, how about accepting Logan's offer to exchange wallops with Hit-and-Run Harris?"

"Jake with me," he says. "I'll start training right after the—er—honeymoon."

"For Pete's sake!" I yells, "what have you done *now*?"

"You should ought to keep up with the news," he says, with a well-bred yawn right in my face. "Me and Bessie was married last evening. So

you see, wise guy, I got something worth while out of the fillum, after all!"

Before I have time to think up a snappy rejoinder, the door snaps open, and Bessie Barrow and Willie Sims dash in, both beaming like Florida sunsets.

"Guess what?" demanded Bessie, giving her caveman a peck on the cheek.

"Yeah," adds Willie, "just *try* and guess what!"

"Upset the beans," I suggests. "His lordship ain't in no condition for heavy thinking."

"I have just signed a contract with Beautiful Pictures to do three five-reel comedies!" ejaculates Mrs. Two-Punch Simpson.

"And I," says Willie, "have signed up to write 'em!"

"Ike Smith," goes on Bessie, "said he saw 'Whispering Cactus' and liked our work. Isn't it just *won-derful*?"

Keep your seats; the worst is yet to come.

V.

A FEW days later, whilst I was strolling down Hollywood Boulevard, I bump into Lloyd Lorraine, the jovial director.

"Hello, burglar," I greets pleasantly, "how's things breaking? You sure milked my battling beauty, and I don't mean I just reckon so!"

"Well, what would you?" he grins. "However, I am going to write him a letter to-night and explain everything fully."

"I don't think he needs any explanation," I says. "He is aware of the fact that he spent twenty thousand bucks to earn ten, and that his great Western drama turned out to be a great Western comedy."

"Brother," he says, "you don't know the half of it!"

"Just what d'yer mean?" I asks. "It couldn't be any worse, could it?"

"It could and it was. Come over on the bench and sit down; I'll make

it short and snappy. In the first place, my name is *not* Lloyd Lorraine. My correct name is Joe Paterson, and I am an assistant director for Beautiful Pictures.

"When you fellows refused to do a picture for us for twenty-five thousand dollars, we forgot all about it until I chanced to hear you were in town, with the object of making an independent production. I told Ike Smith about it—"

"Enough!" I snaps. "I don't need any diagram to figure out the rest. You got the job as director, under the name of Lloyd Lorraine and, with the exception of Bessie Barrow, grabbed a hand-picked cast from the ranks of Beautiful Pictures and—"

"And," helps out Joe Paterson, "proceeded to make the best Western comedy ever shot! What's more, we should gross at least two hundred thou-

on the picture, besides signing up a new prima donna and a new writer of comedies. However, it is the intention of Beautiful Pictures to be fair and square at all times in their business relations."

"What d'yer mean?" I asks.

"I mean," he explains, "that Beautiful Pictures Corporation will send a check to Mr. Two-Punch Simpson for the sum of fifteen thousand dollars, which, added to the ten thousand he has already received, will net him a total of twenty-five thousand, the sum originally offered to Mr. Simpson for a five-reel picture."

"That," I admits, "will be lovely. But there is one thing that ain't quite clear in my mind; to wit: Who was that guy, Mr. F. Wainwright McNulty?"

"That gentleman," replies Joe Paterson, "was my boss, Ike Smith."

THE END



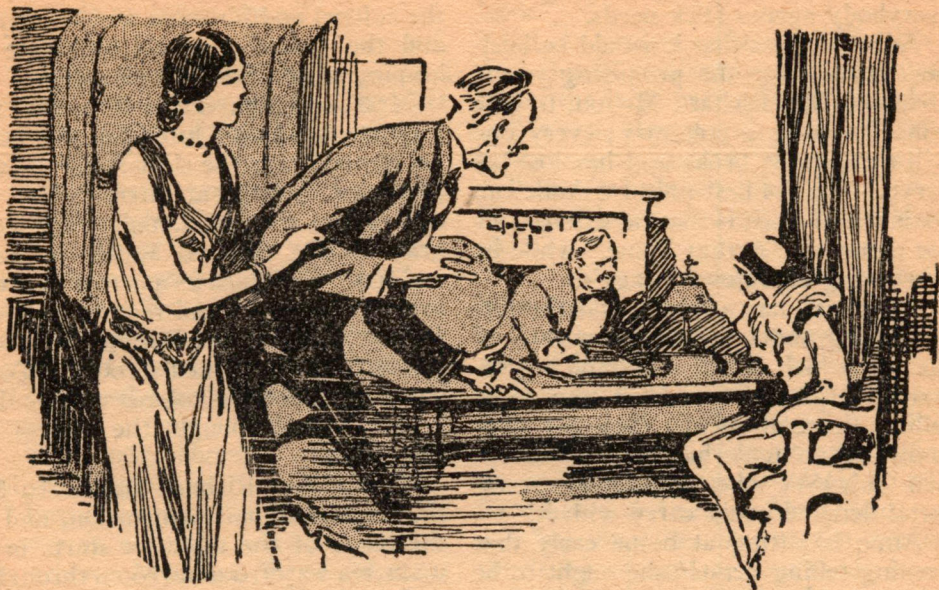
The Doubting Thomas

MY daddy says when he was young,
He was th' greatest rogue unhung.
In lots o' fights he used to mix,
An' he looked jes' like Richard Dix.

An' ma says in her younger age,
Folks wanted her upon th' stage;
She looked like Greta Nissen then,
An' courtin' her were lots o' men.

O' course, that's years an' years ago
When dad was jes' my mother's beau—
But, still, if they're not talkin' rot,
They both have changed an awful lot!

Pat Costello.



The sweet little girl's name was Anne Crosby

Every Minute Counts

Although luxury surrounded him on every side Richard Melton knew that a bullet would reward any attempt to leave his sumptuous prison

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

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

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN the contracts for the new two-million-dollar addition to the Combined Products Company are about to be let, Richard Melton gets so eager to supply the architectural plans for this ambitious structure that he almost has a nervous breakdown.

Though Anne Crosby, who is his secretary and his *fiancée*, wants him to take on the planning of a large group of little suburban houses to divert his mind from thoughts of the big factory contract, which Dick feels would establish his reputation, he refuses on the ground that thinking about the

homes would distract his mind from his big ambition.

While things are in this state, Bill Reeves, who runs the prominent Interurban Employment Bureau, comes in and tries to persuade Dick to get mental relaxation by taking on a particularly lucrative secretarial job which is offered at the home of a multimillionaire named Colonel Samson Bragg, up in Westchester County.

Bill points out that Dick was a whiz of a stenographer in the days when he was working his way through architectural school, and that the work would keep him busy and still not

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 11

strain his mind, giving him the rest everybody agrees Dick needs.

Anne protests that it would be business suicide for the promising young architect, Mr. Richard Melton, to hire himself out as a secretary; every one will think he is broke and has lost his nerve. But the best promise Anne can coax out of Dick is that he will assume the name of "Arthur Vane" while he is working at Colonel Bragg's.

Anne also has a hunch that there is something about the whole matter of the job which is not open and above-board. Both Bill and Dick seem to be telling the truth when they say they know of no underhanded implication that this Westchester County secretarial demand could carry with it.

Anne is sitting at home early that evening telling herself she ought to be ashamed for being unnecessarily suspicious when Dick calls her up from Grand Central Station, right before train time.

He talks to her so long over the telephone that he has to run for the train. And just before he starts he yells into the phone, as a parting phrase, "She's going away without me!"

That naturally does not improve Anne's line of thought at all. In fact, it makes her think of a masterly gold-digger named Gwen, whom Dick once told Anne about having made the acquaintance of during his comparatively innocuous past.

Meanwhile Dick's train is speeding through the night. When he gets to the estate, he finds it gloomy; and Colonel Bragg, who had a reputation in New York for being genial, he discovers is as fierce as a grizzly bear and as forbidding as a dreadnaught.

When he discovers, in addition, that he was not hired as Colonel Bragg's secretary, but as social secretary for his wife, he determines to resign just as soon as he can talk to Mrs. Bragg.

But he is astonished into speechlessness when he sees the lady; she is his old gold-digging girl, Gwen.

A series of ructions follow, in which the colonel and his wife, and the butler and the second man all coöperate in keeping poor Dick from leaving.

Mrs. Bragg threatens him, and the servants blackmail him; but the colonel himself caps the climax for the unfortunate young architect when he orders him to send a night-letter telegram to Mr. Richard Melton to come and lunch with him to-morrow in order to sign a contract and receive payment for the plans of the addition to the factory of the Combined Products Company, of which the colonel reveals that he has secretly bought the controlling interest.

This makes Richard frantic to flee the multimillionaire's mansion, and in the black of the night he starts in to make his way from his room through a series of mishaps which bring him to the front entry hall.

By the time Dick reaches that point, most of the people in the great house have been awakened, and lights flashed on upstairs. As he flattens himself against the wall of the lower hallway, he hears Colonel Bragg's voice bellow from above, sees a thin line of fire from the upper banister, and hears the tremendous crash of a pistol shot.

It hits a point about two inches above Dick's head.

CHAPTER XIII.

WARNED!

A FLIGHT may be a mere flight—until the shooting begins. After that it is likely to become a thrilling flight. We come to a more thrilling part of Richard's early morning tour of the Bragg mansion.

As a piece of reasoning machinery, his brain had quite ceased to function. A level-headed man must have thrown up his hands and bawled his surrender at the top of his lungs, that Colonel Bragg need no longer misunderstand the situation and shoot again.

But Richard did neither of these things. He did shriek quite piercingly, but the shriek indicated plain terror and not surrender.

Yet he did not throw up his hands; instead, he hugged his beloved bundle of clothes a little tighter and all but flew through the air in his wild, although pardonable anxiety to reach the other side of the hallway and the solid security of that open, pitch-black doorway over there. He achieved it, too, just as another shot crashed out and another shower, of mahogany splinters this time, came down upon him.

Above, somebody screamed. That was Gwen!

"Get back there, I tell you! I think I know what I'm shooting at!" said the colonel's loud, too even voice. Furthermore, he laughed in the nastiest and most significant way.

Well? Well? Was Mr. Melton merely to stand here in the gloom, panting, mouthing absurdly, reeling in foot after foot of the longest sheet in the world, while the colonel and his artillery descended the whole flight and got into position for a more effective attack? Obviously, if Richard wished to be able to stand anywhere at all five minutes hence, he was not!

He moved onward.

As to which room this might be, he had no inkling. He—why, yes, he had, too! Had not his deft hand just swept through what seemed to be a complete silver service on a sideboard, sending it rattling and clanging away in every direction?

It was the dining room, of course, and over here should be a door—*was* a door, in point of fact, because Richard had passed through it now, just as the excellent colonel reached the far door and sent a third shot after him!

And this, he assumed, was the pantry. It did seem a bit unlikely, since he had been in here for nearly a second without knocking anything over, but it must be the pantry, and

beyond would be the kitchen, and beyond that, in turn, would— Richard caught his breath sharply. What in the name of common sense had he done *now?*

He had been fumbling along the wall—yes. And the wall had given suddenly under his hand and he had toppled forward and struck another wall, a yard perhaps beyond, against which at present he was leaning heavily, and—ah, he understood now! He had fallen through a swinging door that time, and the door had closed after him.

And by all that was delightfully incredible, the colonel's heavy steps were thudding straight past the door, too!

Many seconds passed. From a considerable distance Colonel Bragg's dear voice floated back:

"No, out this way! Here, you, Wil-
lis, I—" and the rest of it Richard could not catch.

His free hand went upon another hasty exploring expedition. He must be in a closet now. Or, if he were, it was a funny closet; there was no wall at all on this side. Mr. Melton fumbled on and on. Stairs, by Heaven—stairs leading upward!

Well, since the colonel was down here, Richard preferred to be up there. In the nature of things which were happening to-night, this staircase would lead directly into Gwen's bedroom, where the colonel would find him and shoot him. But that could not be helped. With the colonel down here—

Richard climbed speedily, soundlessly. There was a door at the top. He opened it, very slowly, very cautiously. At least, many more lights had been turned on since his last stay on the second floor. This looked like—Mr. Melton blinked and caught his breath. He was gazing up the very rear passage which led to his own room!

Why, had he only known this, he could have come down this way and have been halfway to the station be-

fore now. An instant, he turned rather giddy, then with a small groan he tipped hurriedly up the passage and opened his door. Richard was home again!

And now, came suddenly to him through all his grief, was the time of all times in his life to make every minute count!

There was always the tiny chance, you see, that the good colonel had failed to recognize him at the distance—an infinitesimal, unimportant chance, to be sure, and yet one which, when he had considered it for the tenth part of one second, sent Richard into swiftest action.

One light he turned on, panting; the upper drawer came open and he thrust in his bundle; another little gasp, and his frantic fingers went into the bundle itself. He needed pyjamas! Well, luck was with him for once, since pyjamas were the very first thing his hand touched.

He snatched them out. He kicked off ties; he hurled clothes to the chair beside the bed as he tore them frenziedly from his suffering person. He struggled into pyjamas, switching off the light once more. Mr. Melton, as may have been suspected, was on his way to bed; indeed, he was even now abed.

And, curiously enough, it appeared that he need not have hurried. The chase had not led to his room after all; for the matter of that, nobody seemed interested in the room or its occupant just now. Very faintly he caught voices, but they seemed to be downstairs.

He settled himself more comfortably, rumpling pillows and coverings. In growing astonishment, he waited through minute after minute of complete stillness, and then:

"Very well!" the colonel's voice snapped, quite near at hand.

His heavy footfall was coming straight in this direction, too. Richard closed his eyes and opened his mouth,

snoring lightly and convincingly; and his door was hurled open, and he heard:

"No, the damned hound got clear, but—"

Lights had been turned on with a savage snap. Grunting loudly, sleepily, Mr. Melton sat up in bed and blinked uncomprehending amazement at Colonel Bragg, who stood there, in bathrobe and slippers, momentarily glaring.

Yet his amazement was as nothing at all beside the amazement of the colonel. That gentleman seemed utterly thunderstruck. He mumbled confused nothings and stared blankly at Richard; he even blinked at Richard; for the very first time his iron poise seemed to have deserted him.

"Why—ah, Vane," he stammered—"I—er—thought—"

"What's that?" Richard demanded quite crossly, and finally forced open his heavy eyes. "What's up now, colonel? Was that shooting I heard awhile ago, or did something fall—or did I dream it?"

"Why—"

"I sleep like a rock, once I get to sleep," Richard submitted further and yawned vastly. "I—Lord! Pardon me! Is anything wrong, colonel? Do you need me for anything?"

He stretched. There was a resigned light of almost saintly patience in the eyes which met Colonel Bragg's. The colonel even flushed.

"Um—no; no, of course not, Mr. Vane," he said uncertainly. "I—er—just stopped in to see if you were all right, you know. We have been having a burglar scare."

"A burglar scare?" Richard echoed incredulously.

"Er—yes," said Colonel Bragg, and seemed entirely unable to get the best of the flustered state of mind that was upon him. "A—a—burglar, Mr. Vane. He got away; we found the back door open just now, but there's no sign of him outside. It's all over. There is—er—no cause for uneasiness."

Righteous anger was in Richard's eye as he returned his head to the pillows.

"I'm not uneasy," he said. "Burglars don't worry me a little bit. But if there is any way of managing it, I'd like to get in a little sleep between now and morning. Would it be all the same to you if I moved into some quieter room—in the attic or some such place?"

The colonel drew a deep, shaky breath.

"This room will be quiet for the rest of the night, I promise you," he said, for the moment visibly contrite; and then, gazing still at Richard, he burst out: "But, dammit, I could have sworn—"

"Well?" Mr. Melton asked wonderingly as he paused.

"Nothing, Vane—nothing," the colonel muttered. "You'll pardon me for waking you?"

"Yes—oh, yes," Richard said patiently.

The colonel switched off the lights once more and moved toward the door.

"Good night, Mr. Vane," he said almost humbly.

"Good night," said Richard.

And now he was gone, and for a time Richard merely lay there and chuckled. This was not his normal, hearty chuckle, by any manner of means; it was just a queer, weak little cackle. Still, he was genuinely amused, for the thing was funny enough; he had actually come through this last experience with a whole skin.

If the light or the colonel's aim had been a little better— Oh, well, there wasn't much sense in shuddering over that, was there? Richard stretched out and grinned.

The great consideration just now, you see, was that he knew his way to the back stairs. The rear door was somewhere on the other side of the kitchen; that was pretty safe guessing. Willis would have sense enough to

sneak down and open it again; that might be assumed.

So that at last, after all the dangers and the tribulations, there was nothing much to the proposition of departing beyond waiting here for another hour—and then walking out.

In many ways, this was really the most comfortable time that Richard had known since entering the colonel's home. His hands behind his head, he sprawled there in the darkness and enjoyed it to the full—for all of ten minutes. And then, on his passageway door, a sharp little *tap-tap-tap* sounded.

Mr. Melton frowned. The hour considered, that was a pretty robust rapping. Had the colonel forgotten something or discovered new evidence or possibly—

"You're not asleep, Mr. Vane?" Haggin's voice inquired.

"Oh—you, eh? No; come right in," responded Richard's bright undertone, and he chuckled again.

On the instant, he understood the reason for this visitation. It had dawned upon Haggin at last that the new secretary was really intent upon leaving the ancestral home; doubtless, also, the butler had come to feel that the household had had quite enough of Mr. Melton.

So now he had come to advise Richard that the coast was clear for another try—all of which shows us that fundamentally Richard Melton was an incurable optimist.

"May I turn on the light, sir?" the butler inquired.

"You sure may," said the cheery Richard. "What's on your mind now, Haggin?"

And he grinned as the switch snapped—and then he ceased grinning and frowned again, more wonderingly. That suggestion of elephantine playfulness which he had rather expected to find lurking about Mr. Haggin was altogether lacking. The person's fat face was red and angry; he breathed noisily; and now he advanced with

determined stride and hurled something to the bed.

"That's what's on my mind!" he stated. "There, sir!"

"What's the money?" Richard asked.

"It's the three hundred dollars I accepted from you in a moment of weakness!" said the butler, and self-contempt and suppressed fury sounded in every word. "Will you be good enough to count it, Mr. Vane?"

"I—I guess it's all here, but—"

Haggin drew himself up quite majestically.

"Very good, sir! Good night, Mr. Vane," said he.

"Yes, but—but where are you taking all the dignity and indignation now?" Richard demanded, as sudden alarm shot through him, and he slid his legs from beneath the covers.

The butler's frosty smile all but passed description.

"I'm going to do now what I should have done in the first place," he stated. "I'm going to the colonel and tell him the shameful truth. Now, just a minute, sir!" Haggin added, as Richard leaped from his bed. "Don't try to stop me this time! I'm an old man, but I can fight my way to the colonel if need be!"

"You may go to the colonel or go to the devil, if you like," Mr. Melton snapped, "so long as you don't stir up any fresh mischief for me. What's the shameful truth you're talking about now? Did I upset you by trying to get out of the house?"

"To get out of the house!" Haggin echoed.

"That's what I was doing, of course, and—"

"Save your breath, Mr. Vane," the butler replied shortly. "It happens that my eyes are the kind that see very well in the dark. Need I say any more than that?"

"You need say a lot more!" Richard puffed.

"Very well, then, distasteful as I

find the subject, I'll say it all," Haggin sneered. "When I first roused up and got to this hallway, Mr. Vane, I saw you running from Mrs. Bragg's room!"

He nodded his head, which would have been more impressive if the few hairs had not been sticking out in a dozen directions; he drew his aged dressing-gown about him. Richard sighed.

"Your eyes aren't nearly as good as you think they are, Haggin," he said. "If you saw me making for the stairs—"

"Which I did see!"

"All right. Dry up for a minute and let me talk!" Mr. Melton exploded. "I came out of some damned corridor, not out of any room. Ask the fat woman who thought I was a ghost and fainted all over the floor; she's one of the servants, I suppose.

"Hell! Ask Willis! I think it was Willis who tried to grab me. Ask your own common sense, if you've got any. Why, Haggin, with Colonel Bragg right on this floor would I be likely to— Say, you're a nasty-minded old man, and I'm ashamed of you!"

This was an energetic, honest speech, well delivered with appropriate gestures, and some of its import penetrated to Haggin. He blew out his cheeks and looked hard at Richard; there was new perplexity in his eye.

"Well, I'm not ashamed of myself, because I know what I saw," he muttered. "At the same time you—you're raising a doubt in my mind that maybe—"

"Haggin," Richard said, solemnly and quite emotionally, "I swear to you by everything that's high and holy that I wasn't near Mrs. Bragg's room!"

The butler pursed his lips and scowled, very thoughtfully. Now his gaze wandered to the bed and the little roll of bills; he picked them up and considered them for a time; eventually, with a grunt, he returned them to the pocket of his dressing gown.

"Looka here, Mr. Vane," he said suddenly. "As I've said before, I'd be the last to start trouble for innocent parties. I'm not convinced that the parties are innocent here—and then again I'm not convinced that they ain't. So I'm willing to compromise and here's how I'll do it."

"Yes?"

"The colonel wants you in the house, for how long or for what purpose I couldn't say. But you fix that up with him one way or another, and get out of this home for good and all to-morrow morning, or this morning as it is now, and I'll say nothing. But I'm warning you fair, Mr. Vane, it 'll have to be to-morrow morning!"

"Well, but, Haggin, I can beat that a mile," Richard cried eagerly. "I'll go right away. You unlock that back door and in twenty minutes or so I'll just slip out. It 'll be all right this time. I know the way now."

The butler smiled faintly.

"And how'll you get by Jack?" he asked.

"Who's Jack?"

"He's the chauffeur, sir, and he's sleeping on a cot across the back door just now, by the colonel's orders, to shoot the burglar if he should return. You've yourself to thank for that, I take it."

"Well, he isn't sleeping across the front door, too, is he?" Mr. Melton asked rather desperately.

"He is not, but Mike is—the mechanic, sir. You couldn't get by those boys, Mr. Vane. The colonel told me early in the evening to repeat his instructions to the menservants about your staying here, that is. They obey him."

Rather giddily, as the full significance of these tidings bore into him, Richard pondered.

"Haggin, lend me a hundred of that money, will you?" his small voice asked. "I'll send it back to you."

"What for, sir?"

"I want to fix things with Jack, of

course. I'll send it back to you with interest, Haggin—I'll send you two hundred, on the dead level! Only, I—have to get out of here, Haggin!"

The butler drew himself up; from his rotund person virtuous indignation fairly radiated.

"Have you corrupting the servants with bribery and the like of that, sir?" he cried. "Well, I should say not, Mr. Vane! That's bad business all around, that is. No, sir, you do this open and legitimate; you arrange matters so that the colonel sends you away in the morning."

And here he paused and so far forgot his station as to shake a pudgy finger almost under Mr. Melton's nose.

"Mind, now. To-morrow morning."

"Yes, but—but Haggin—" Richard's queer little voice faltered aimlessly.

"And I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing in letting it go that far, either," the butler grunted in conclusion, and started back for the passage-way door. "Good night, Mr. Vane."

This time Richard did not even answer. The door closed and he sat down upon his large, comfortable bed again and looked around in utter bewilderment. Even once more conditions in this remarkable mansion seemed to have bested him. Why, not ten minutes ago he had known just what he was going to do and when and how. Whereas now—Mr. Melton bowed his head and muttered senselessly to himself.

And the dreadful thing, as he realized mistily, was that he didn't seem to be recovering from this last blow. His resiliency had gone at last.

The Melton fighting blood, which had been circulating so creditably since the French and Indian War, had degenerated into a mere sluggish, lifeless current, just barely sufficient to maintain valueless existence itself. Or maybe it hadn't. Mr. Melton pulled himself together laboriously, with no speed, no energy, without even a trace

of enthusiasm, and gazed about him once more, sighing.

The window, to be sure! Considered solely as a means of exit, one might rate a window fully as valuable as any door. Richard arose and dragged his way over to the window. It was partly open now; incautiously, he pushed up the sash and leaned out.

A foggy, dying moon bathed the scene in faintest, sickliest light. Well, there was the good, solid old earth which supported Colonel Bragg's home and, of course, a few other houses. Richard gazed at it with waxing gloom. It wasn't a mile away, straight down, he assumed, although at first glance that seemed about the correct estimate.

But it was every bit of twenty-five feet from this point, and beside the house on this side ran a wide, hard concrete driveway, than which there are few less comfortable things whereon to fall. Still more, between Richard and the drive stretched sheer stone wall, with never a convenient vine, never even the suggestion of rough spots that might serve as hand and toe holds.

So, if one wished to leave by this route, one did not climb down; one merely dropped. Mr. Melton shook his head sadly. He was sound and athletic enough and all that, but he had never practiced dropping on concrete drives.

He might land on his feet and then again he might land on his head, if his hold here happened to slip, in which latter case beyond slightest question somebody else would be building the new Combined Products factory.

And in whatever way he landed, he was bound to live up the night, momentarily so calm, with a crash that might easily rouse the whole house. Richard shook his head dismally.

Well, then, the sheets? They could be twisted into a rope. He shuffled back and studied the one visible sheet with suddenly keen interest. About seven feet long, eh? That meant about fourteen feet for the two of them.

But the heaviest thing in the room,

about which he would have to knot his rope—incidentally using up some eight or ten feet for that purpose alone—was the chest of drawers, itself a good fourteen feet from the window.

However, the darned chest of drawers wasn't built into the house, was it? Mr. Melton put his strong young shoulder against the solid old thing and pushed; and as it moved a reluctant two inches an uncoiled caster beneath gave forth a shriek exactly like that of the condemned pig at the most cheerless point of his trip through the slaughter house.

Richard, perspiring suddenly, pushed no more. He stood and listened, for many seconds. Well, that one hadn't roused 'em, but another like it almost would. He relaxed and shuffled much less steadily back to his bed; and there Mr. Melton crawled beneath the covers with a long, thin, hollow groan, for he knew the worst at last: *he was licked!*

For a man so honest there was no prettier way of putting the case to himself. He was not to leave Firwold that early morning. He was not to be in his office and call up Colonel Bragg; he was not to dash from his two rooms and bath to the barber shop and back again to brush off the old blue serge and then return to Firwold and take his desperate chance. Nay, Richard was right here, right now, and here to stay.

He groaned again and buried his face in the pillows. He was not the weeping kind, else he would have wept; but there was a quality in that groan more terrible, more heartbroken, than any tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER DAY.

AND then, oddly enough, Mr. Melton seemed aware that he really was not licked at all.

It was a queer and vastly cheering sensation; it seemed to have come upon him before he opened his eyes, which

inadvertently he must have closed for a moment. Yes, he had dozed off and now the strength was back in him—some of it was, at all events.

He sat up energetically and gazed about him. *Morning*, by thunder! And not very early morning, either, if those short shadows over by the window meant anything. Young Mr. Melton reached for his vest and his watch, and then, under his breath, exclaimed his genuine dismay; ten minutes ago, eight thirty had gone into the past.

And he had to escape from this place, get back to the city, become another person and return to Firwold, all before one o'clock. It may be admitted that, as he sat and scowled at the unoffending little dial, Richard was not quite so completely unlicked.

To all intents and purposes the thing he purposed to do was a patent impossibility. Mr. Melton smiled bitterly as he made for the bathroom and turned on water; hope—just fool, unreasoning hope—refused to die within his bosom. He had staked too much on this Combined Products affair to have it fail him now.

Although, to be quite sane again for a moment before plunging into the cold tub, there did seem to be some slight chance of its failing—so much of a chance, indeed, that briefly Richard wished the tub might be fathoms deep and he himself be attacked by complete paralysis, to sink to the bottom and never more arise.

He emerged, happily enough, tingling and free of this morbid cast of thought, but also decidedly sober.

Something good would have to happen and happen in a hurry; just what, he couldn't guess at present. He suspected, however, that whatever it might be, it wouldn't rush from concealment and throw its arms about him. He'd have to keep the sharpest kind of eye open and grab with both hands at the proper second!

Now, if he could just go to a lonely telephone and whisper to Anne for five

minutes; she could call up Bragg later and say that her gifted employer had been stricken down with influenza or measles—no, that wouldn't do. That wouldn't do at all! Seymour and other good friends among the Combined Products people might try to visit the sickroom.

And in any case, Richard Melton, the architect, would have to be here for luncheon to-day and no other day; contracts like this and twenty-thousand-dollar checks do little more waiting than the proverbial time and tide. Richard sighed heavily; really, had he spent days in trying to devise a more difficult situation he could hardly—

"Yes?" called Richard's high and nervous voice.

"Breakfast, Mr. Vane," Haggin's cold tone informed him, "was served at eight o'clock!"

"I'll be right down," said Mr. Melton.

Colonel Bragg, just rising from the table, was alone in the breakfast room when the new member of the household appeared.

The colonel, it seemed, was minded to pass him with the briefest nod; yet, having nodded, he paused, hesitated, stood quite still at last and, hands folded behind his back, considered Richard for a time, much as one might examine a museum specimen.

Mr. Melton found the hard eyes rather puzzling. There was a strong suggestion of hot hatred in them and still an element of doubt which seemed almost to nullify the hatred. More, although this Richard attributed to his own imagination, there was a hint of apology about the man!

"Good morning!" said the colonel.

"Good morning!" said Richard.

"Do you know, Mr. Vane, that you are a problem to me?" the colonel inquired unexpectedly.

"I didn't know it. I'm not being one intentionally, you know," said Mr. Melton, with an artless smile. "Just what do you mean?"

Mr. Bragg frowned.

"Dammit! That's just it!" he said tartly. "I'm not quite sure what I do mean, Vane. You're—you're *odd*! In some ways, that is. You seem to have a certain amount of culture—and also a streak of the unspeakable bounder, in you.

"You seem at times to be well-balanced; and at other times to be neurotically irresponsible as any lunatic I've ever met, and I've met several. Just now you look and act the perfectly normal man; and yet I'm morally certain that something weird and abnormal's going on inside your head!"

"Why?"

"I don't know, Vane! I don't know why! That's what exasperates me!" cried Colonel Bragg. "I—well, have your breakfast, Vane! Have your breakfast!"

His puzzled eyes stabbed into Richard and stabbed again, and drew no more than a wondering smile from that young man. The colonel shrugged his shoulders and strode out; and Mr. Melton sighed and allowed the stony-visaged Haggin to seat him. And now Haggin had served him and—Lord! Here was Gwen, all smiles and sparkle and loveliness!

She slipped gracefully into the chair beside Richard and he shuddered. There was no getting away from it, you see; it was as far beyond his understanding as he himself was beyond the colonel's; but the dread fact remained that plain, old-fashioned terror possessed him every time this beautiful creature hove into sight.

"Dicky, what did he say just now?" she breathed.

"The colonel?"

"Naturally! He—he's jealous of you?"

"He didn't say anything to indicate it."

"But he did last night?"

"Yes," sighed Richard. "I believe that he had some such idea in his head last night."

"Isn't it dear!" Gwen exclaimed ecstatically.

"Oh, it's perfectly darling," Mr. Melton agreed grimly. "I wish you wouldn't lean on me like that, Gwen. I'm not anxious to have him shoot me."

"Oh, he wouldn't shoot you. Not in cold blood. At least, I don't think he would," Gwen glittered deliciously.

Mr. Melton's lips tightened.

"Say! Last night—oh, what became of you last night, by the way?"

"Why, I just flittered down by the back stairs—even so, I didn't miss Haggin by three seconds—and got myself a couple of books and came up the front way with a bored smile. I didn't meet a soul, Dicky; Samson had gone into your room by that time. You were saying?"

"I was just about to mention that he really did shoot at me last night. I don't know whether it was in cold blood or not, but he sure did shoot!"

Gwen showed him all her dimples at once.

"Yes, but you were trying to get out then, and that was silly. He didn't really hit you, Dicky?"

"Thank Heaven, no!"

"Then that's all right," Mrs. Bragg said comfortably, with an entrancing tilt of her perfect head. "Dicky, you have the loveliest thick hair."

Mr. Melton laid aside his fork.

"Pardon the question," said he, "but am I being vamped and, if so, why?"

"You're just being enjoyed, because you're such a dear boy," Gwen informed him cheerily, although she did seem a trifle hurt. "I'm most awfully glad to have you here, Dick. I've been lonely and I like you a whole lot—and you know I do."

"It sounds ominous," Richard observed.

However, he glanced keenly at her. She was a conscienceless little devil, if one ever lived; yet some of this must be genuine. Maybe she really was lonely; maybe she really did like him enough not to desire his ruin; maybe, if

he told her some of the truth, judiciously, she would help him to escape. In so many ways, Richard was just a trustful, innocent boy.

"Well, it isn't," Gwen laughed. "You don't feel so erratic and unusual this morning, do you?"

"No."

"Then hurry up and finish your breakfast, because I think I want you to take a ride with me—we'll talk awhile in the garden first," the lady submitted, and rose and moved beautifully to the tall windows.

"Ride?" Richard said hastily, as visions of endless, time-consuming miles arose. "I can't ride."

"You used to. You told me so."

"I know, but I can't any more. I—I had a fall and it busted my nerve completely. I'm scared to death of a horse now."

Gwen laughed, musically, absently.

"Never mind. We'll find something else to take us out of sight for awhile, Dicky."

"Well, Gwen," said Richard's low and guarded voice, "before we do any getting out of sight, there's something important I want to talk about. Will you come over here and sit down again for a moment?"

He had tried to make the tone persuasive; but in her own fashion and not for the first time, Mrs. Bragg was sweetly ignoring him. She leaned forward, scanning the sunny outdoors intently. Now she turned back with a contented little smile.

"I'll put on heavier slippers, I think," she submitted. "It looks rather damp out there."

"But—"

"I'll be down again in five minutes," said Mrs. Bragg, and patted his admired head in passing.

Very well! They'd talk in the garden, then; they'd talk fast and to the point—or Richard would. Fondly and foolishly enough, he fancied once more that he could see at least the beginning of the path to freedom. He'd master

that absurd fright; if need be, he would make love to the lady! But before he had finished, he'd have her helping him to escape—or die.

Mr. Melton reached for another piece of bacon; it was good bacon; and if Pierre himself made these dinky little biscuits, three hundred dollars a month was a downright swindle on Bragg's part.

Gwen was waiting for him at the windows which gave upon the side veranda.

She slipped an arm through Richard's, and this time he neither shrank nor protested, he may indeed have squeezed this arm a bit with his own. She looked up quite adoringly at Richard as she led him into the long, old-fashioned garden.

Darned pretty place it was, too, Richard observed, and very nicely devised for his immediate purposes. There were overgrown side paths which led, apparently, to remote rustic benches; down at the far end there was an arbor quite buried in early roses. That arbor was the spot if he could get her there!

Mrs. Bragg seemed quite in harmony. Very softly, in her light, fine soprano, she sang a little song as she clung to Richard and kept step with him, a song about love and roses and June! Even in the tension of the moment, with every minute possibly counting off a prosperous year from his future, Richard could not help chuckling.

To look at Gwen, you see, one might have thought her a sixteen-year-old in the throes of a first love by the way she sang, the way she looked up at him, all that. And that smile of hers—

"Oh!" Gwen gasped suddenly, and put a conspicuous twelve inches between them in something less than one second!

Colonel Bragg said nothing at all. He, as it happened, had been sitting there in the rose-buried arbor all the time, Richard understood with a shock. Doubtless he had been watching them; at any rate, he was watching them now!

From his eye, the apologetic quality

had vanished; it was a hard, wicked eye, once more; suspicion, all in a twinkling, was turning to something more definite, more terrible. Yet the smile on the colonel's lips was suave enough as he arose.

"You were coming in here?"

"I—why—we were—just looking about, Samson," his wife replied, quite lost in confusion.

The colonel bowed and gathered up the two or three papers that had been beside him. The colonel then departed; and Richard breathed again and Gwen, terrified eyes upon him, cried:

"Arthur! He saw—oh!"

That was all, but the colonel must have heard it. Mr. Melton, not so loudly, but with much more genuine feeling, asked:

"What's the idea of the 'Arthur,' Gwen? What's the idea of shouting like that?"

"Shouting? I wasn't shouting," said the frightened wife. "And that is the name you're using, isn't it—Arthur Vane?"

"You know my name—or you knew it two minutes ago," Mr. Melton answered quite emotionally. "Look here, Gwen! Something or other is going on here that I don't understand at all. I'm bright enough to know that at least.

"If you're trying to turn me into a target for Bragg, just for your own amusement, say so and let me be on my guard. But I want to know what it's all about and—"

He caught himself just there. What in the name of common sense did he care what it was all about? Why had he wasted precious seconds even in that last speech? With an effort that all but tore his facial muscles, Mr. Melton produced a bright smile—incidentally causing Gwen to look at him with just a hint of new fright.

"Never mind, anyhow," he said. "Let's sit down here, Gwen, will you? I've got some things I want to say."

Mrs. Bragg leaned back and gazed

down the path; the colonel was still on his way to the house. Then, remarkable creature that she was, she smiled quite naturally and said:

"Of course, Dicky. We may as well be here as anywhere else, so that we're together. What is troubling you?"

"Something mighty important, as you'll agree when you hear it!" Richard said briskly. "Gwen, you don't hate me?"

"Good gracious, no!" the lady smiled. "If you had been wealthy as Samson, or possibly a little wealthier, I think I'd have married you."

"Then you don't want to hurt me?" Mr. Melton hurried on, earnestly. "You wouldn't deliberately—"

"Ahem!" Haggin coughed dismally, from a distance of at least ten feet. "Ahem!—Mr. Vane, if you please, sir!"

"Er—what?"

"There's some one wishes to speak to you on the telephone," said the butler and turned away again.

Real concern leaped into Mrs. Bragg's eyes.

"That isn't just a trick of Samson's to get you in there and—and harm you, is it?" she whispered.

"I haven't the slightest idea," sighed Richard.

"Well, be careful anyway," the lady pleaded. "I'm not nearly through with you yet, Dicky."

Mr. Melton hurried off, not too happily. Haggin was loitering near the house; he looked disgustedly at Mr. Melton.

"Still at it, are you?" he sniffed.

"Oh, go to hell!" said Richard, for these coarse words exactly expressed his sentiment.

"What's that?" snapped Mr. Haggin.

"You heard me!" said the new secretary.

The butler quickened his step and moved on beside him.

"You're not hurrying a bit about leaving, are you, m'lady?" Mr. Haggin

asked darkly. "Well, you'd better be, mind me! I don't have to cover your dirty tracks and take your abuse as well! My soul! I think I'll go to Colonel Bragg this minute and—"

"Haggin, I—I—didn't mean to be abusive!" Richard said brokenly. "I beg your pardon—yes, on the level, I beg it! I'm all nervous and upset. As for getting out, I'll leave the second I can fix it with the colonel. Be decent, Haggin!"

"Decent, eh?" said the butler. "You'd best be taking a bit of your own advice and—"

Richard passed into the mansion.

He looked around. Where was the telephone—or had any one actually called? Bragg was reading there in his study; he favored Richard with one black stare and read on. Ah, yes, and over there, across the hall, was an instrument with the receiver standing beside it on the table. Mr. Melton sat down with the usual:

"Hello!"

"Mr. Vane?" asked the dearest, the most dulcet voice in the world!

"Why, a—er—yes, this is Mr. Vane!"

"This is Anne. Can any one hear us on this wire?"

"I think not."

"You talk as if some one were within hearing distance, Dicky?"

"Oh, that's quite true," said Richard.

"All right. I'll understand. Dicky, you *have* let yourself in for it this time! There is a night letter here for you—"

"Yes, I know about that," Richard said. "I—er—attended to it!"

"You mean you sent it yourself?"

"Yes," said Richard.

A peal of unrestrained merriment came to his ear. It was not echoed at Richard's end of the line.

"Well, then, of course, afterward you told him who you really were?" Anne said breathlessly. "You couldn't possibly have done anything else."

"There were — er — circumstances that made that seem inadvisable," sighed Richard.

"You mean that he still thinks you're Arthur Vane, Dick?"

"That's it exactly?"

"Well, then—well, what in the world are you going to do, then?" Miss Crosby inquired, and seemed quite perturbed. "Dicky, you—you have to be there for lunch, as yourself, I mean!"

"You can't possibly risk losing that wretched job after you've driven yourself nearly insane over it. Oh, I just *knew* you'd get into a mess if you did that ridiculous thing, Dick! I said so! I tried my best to talk you out of it!"

"Well, I wish," said Richard, from the very bottom of his heart, "that you had succeeded."

"Oh, Dick, is it as bad as that? You sound—sound as if you had given up hope!" Anne's voice quivered. "Can't you tell me anything more about it?"

"Not just now."

There was a pause; then, full of new life, the dear voice cried:

"Dicky! Had Colonel Bragg ever seen you before?"

"No."

"Then I've got it! I've got it! You'll think I've gone crazy, but I believe I have it! Dick, your hair's so long; come down quick and phone me the train you're taking and I'll have a barber and—and maybe a make-up man or something like that, at the station, and you can get a hotel room and have them change your appearance as much as possible; and I'll go to your apartment and get the—the most different and oldest clothes you have and—"

"Yes, I had thought of that."

"Really? Then hurry, Dick! Hurry! I can't understand your staying there last night, after you knew. Hurry!"

"Er—very well. I'll be down at once. At once!" said Richard. "Yes, I'll let you know which train! Good-by!"

Mr. Melton arose and mustered a worried frown. This frown he escorted directly into the study of Colonel Samson Bragg.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said briefly, stiffly. "I've been called away. I shall have to leave at once."

The colonel sat back and nodded.

"Really, Mr. Vane? No trouble, I trust?"

"Very, very serious trouble!"

"Umum," said the colonel.

"So may I have Haggin get my grip, sir?"

The colonel caressed his chin.

"Frankly, Vane, no, you may not," he said evenly. "I am sorry to interfere with whatever plans you may have made, but you are remaining here for awhile."

"But I tell you—"

"Yes, I heard you say quite loudly that you'd be down at once," Bragg smiled strangely. "It was too obviously for my benefit. You are staying."

"I am, eh?" Richard began. "Well, my dear sir, if—"

"That's enough of the bluster, right there, Vane!" said the same unruffled voice. "Be seated, will you? The time has come, apparently, when you and I must understand each other. I am not an ass, you know; nor am I blind or deaf or incapable of reasoning. I may even go so far as to say that I understand my own shortcomings and appreciate to the full your more youthful charms."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Richard sought to say with cold dignity, and succeeded only in sputtering.

"Oh, yes, you do. In any case, I mean to make myself clearer. There is, plainly enough, some sort of attachment between Mrs. Bragg and yourself," the colonel continued in a matter-of-fact way that was almost as chilling as any rage, as he placed the tips of his fingers together and coolly considered Richard over them.

"How long this has been going on, I do not know. Neither do I know the depth or the genuineness of this attachment. But I mean to know."

He leaned forward. He might have spared himself the trouble of nailing down poor Richard with his eyes. Richard just then was quite incapable of any motion.

"My present impression," pursued Mr. Bragg, "is that this is a new flirtation. I mean to say that Mrs. Bragg may have seen you recently and have decided to have you in the household."

"But be sure of this, Vane," he said, his voice sharpening dangerously, "I am not a man who tolerates trifling of this character in his home. Your idea—if such it happens to be—of pausing for a playful little visit and then flitting off again is doomed to failure."

"You'll remain until I have established the status of this case to my own satisfaction. And then, of course, if it turns out to be a flirtation, I shall kick you down the steps!"

"But—" Richard began dazedly.

"However," the gentleman went on, almost in a monotone, "I have been absorbed in my business; the old story, you know. I'm not prepared to say that this hasn't been going on for some time without my knowledge. Should I find proof, in whatever way, that this is the case, you'll go at once, of course!"

"Well—" Richard began.

"And when you do go," the colonel added, with a faint smile, "you will take Mrs. Bragg with you, Vane, to be your own forever and ever!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST FETTER.

THIS time Mr. Melton gasped aloud. Mr. Bragg merely smiled his grim and whimsical smile.

"Why, I wonder, is the ear such a coward?" he mused.

"Huh?" mouthed Richard.

"Why, Vane, do you writhe at hearing in plain words what you already know so well?"

"Well, one—one reason is that I don't know it so well!" Richard exploded. "In fact, I don't know it at all! And, coming right down to cases, I think you're—"

"No, Vane, you don't really think that I'm crazy, or anything else but disconcertingly accurate in my guesses," the colonel assured him. "And all this puffing and hand-waving is cheap, you know, and not very pretty. Upon my word, I'd like to know that you were man enough to stand up and tell me the truth about this thing!"

"What the Sam Hill's the good of telling you the truth, when you won't believe any of it?" Richard demanded wildly. "What's the use of my—"

"There, Vane! There! Enough of that!" Bragg said, and his smile now held only pure contempt. "I think the interview is over now, Vane. We understand, do we not?"

"Maybe you do; I don't!" cried Richard. "I think—"

The colonel's fist came down with a bang. For the moment he seemed quite angry.

"You wretched fool!" he said. "What on earth can you expect to gain by that pose of righteous indignation? You can't possibly deceive yourself. Certainly, you cannot deceive me. The interview is over, I said."

"Well, so far as that goes, having it over suits me fine!" said Mr. Melton. "Only—"

"And—oh, yes, just one thing more. We shall have to keep up appearances to a certain extent, for the benefit of the servants and of possible callers and so on.

"You will continue to be Mrs. Bragg's secretary; and, while keeping it most clearly in mind, you will also ostensibly forget this little conversation, Vane," the colonel concluded,

with his very smallest smile, and indicated the door. "That's all."

Which it was, by Heaven, so far as concerned Richard Melton! That rather shaken young man turned on his heel and strode out swiftly—for, somewhere in the house, a little clock was tinkling out the hour of ten! He had taken too long in dressing—he had used up too much time at breakfast! Fairly wheezing his emotion, Richard made for the garden once more.

Take her with him! Take Gwen with him! Why—why—the whole old-fashioned garden was dancing mockingly around Richard as he walked. He had conjured up many awful possibilities these last hours, but even his seething brain had contrived nothing like that one!

But it were well to steady himself now; he had been talking with Gwen just before Bragg dropped that sixteen-inch shell into him, hadn't he? *Now* he would have to talk as he had never talked before, because this was indeed his last chance at freedom!

Gwen was smiling expectantly.

"Was it really a call?" she asked.

"It was," Richard said unsmilingly. "Gwen, you'll have to help me get away from here in a hurry now. Bragg doesn't want me to go; so you will have to—"

"Did he say so, just now?"

"Yes, and—"

"Did he say why?" Gwen inquired earnestly.

"He—what? Yes," Mr. Melton replied, with a savage smile. "He wants me here until he's certain that—oh, that you and I are or are not in love!"

"He really said that?" Mrs. Bragg cried delightedly.

"He really did and—"

"Oh, wonderful!" the remarkable lady breathed, almost raptly, and radiated pure happiness!

His haste notwithstanding, Mr. Melton stared at her for a moment. She was not actually vicious; she couldn't possibly enjoy making all hands suffer;

yet she was sitting there and looking as pleased as if some one had handed her a pretty compliment and a gift of roses—or better perhaps, knowing Gwen as he did, a bushel of diamonds and a million dollars. It was all beyond Richard!

"Gwen! Listen!" he cried. "Now I have to go!"

The smile died out. Mrs. Bragg glanced up annoyed.

"Dear me, are you *still* harping on that?" she asked.

"You bet! And I'll go right on harping, and—"

"No, Dicky, you will not!" the lady informed him, with sudden firmness.

"Eh?"

"Sit down here beside me, please. You look exactly like a barnstorming tragedian when you prance around like that. There, that's better. Now, Dicky, I—"

"Gwen, before you begin," said Richard's hollow voice, "I have to get this one statement in edgewise: if you don't help me out of here in a hurry, you're going to ruin my business!"

Mrs. Bragg arched her exquisite brows.

"Do you know, Dicky," she said slowly, "it sounds to me very much as if there might be a woman behind all this excitement. Have you, perhaps, a sweet little girl down in New York who is calling for you?"

"I—I—" Richard stammered. "No! I tell you—"

"I thought as much," murmured Gwen. "Well, I'm sorry, but she'll have to wait until I'm through with you, Dicky; I can't stand aside for any other lady just now."

"But—I mean, my business—"

"Oh, Dicky, do be calm," Gwen pleaded, and pinched his ear. "At least be calm enough to realize that I haven't grown stupid, please. A gentleman with a business capable of being ruined isn't running around under an assumed name looking for a job."

Richard's poor hands went up again!

"Yes, I know how queer it all looks. I haven't time to explain all the ins and outs now, but—"

"You have plenty of time, whether you know it or not, but there isn't a thing to be gained by explaining them, because I'm afraid I'm not feeling very credulous this morning," Mrs. Bragg said, quite crisply, and sat up.

"And, Dicky, this eternal fussing and fretting about getting away from here is becoming a downright bore! Candidly, I'm tired of it. I don't want to hear another word on the subject!"

He was against the ropes—yes; but even now Mr. Melton was not quite thrashed. Within him there remained at least a squeak or two of protest.

"All right, Gwen! But—"

"See here, Dick! For the last time, *will* you stop this wriggling and just stay and lend me a hand, nicely, uncomplainingly?"

"I—can't!" choked honest Richard.

Mrs. Bragg sighed lightly.

"Very well. We shall have to bring out the club and give you a wallop or two, I suppose," said she, and leaned closer to Richard and gazed straight into his troubled eyes. "Dick, you've made a certain estimate of Samson before this, I assume? You know that he's a rather ferocious person of the old, elemental order?"

"Eh? Yes."

"Well, now, just *what* do you suppose Samson would do, if I were to take him your letters and—"

"Letters?"

"Your dear old letters, Dicky," Gwen smiled. "They were too precious to destroy. I've had letters and letters, but none of them so thrilling as yours."

"You mean—what I wrote three years ago?" Mr. Melton stammered.

"Yes, dear, but they're just as fresh as the day you wrote them, because I've preserved them very carefully. And you may have forgotten, but you never put a date on a letter; they're just 'Thursday' or 'Monday after-

noon' and so on. And many days you wrote twice! There must be nearly fifty of them!

"Now, if I were to take them to Samson—he must have samples of your writing; at all events, he'd find means of getting one!—if I were to take them to Samson and tell him that you've been pursuing me, in recent months, I mean, and ask his protection—just *what* do you suppose he'd do, Dicky?"

Young Mr. Melton's thudding heart all but choked him. He had no need to do any supposing, you see. He knew just what the colonel would do, once a romance had been proved; the colonel had told him! He would escort wife and secretary to the door together and send them forth together, to find their new happiness!

"And I should have to tell him also, I suppose, that you forced your way into our happy little home under a false name, just to be near me," Gwen added softly. "Well?"

Mr. Melton said nothing at all. Gwen smiled in her triumphant way.

"He'd shoot you down, Dicky, right in your cunning little tracks!" said she.

Well, unless the colonel should change his mind upon the spur of the moment, she was wrong about that detail, of course. As concerned the broad proposition of dire punishment, however, she was far from wrong.

Mr. Melton smiled quite weirdly. Given the choice between mere death and the gift of this beautiful lady by her husband, he was inclined to think that he would prefer to be put out of his misery on the spot.

"I—don't believe—" he began unsteadily.

"That I have the letters? No, I expected that, of course," Mrs. Bragg smiled, and slim fingers slipped beneath the neck of her light gown for an instant. "So I brought the gem of the collection, Dick. Do you remember this one? It begins, 'Oh, light of my life!'"

Richard winced visibly. Aye, he remembered that one! He also remembered the opening lines, which ran: "I have lived through another frightful seven hours away from you, my love. Hours? No! Aeons!" He remembered the next sentence, too, which began—

"Well, you needn't blush so terribly, Dicky," Gwen laughed. "They were sweet! But you *do* want to stay now, don't you?"

One long minute Richard pondered. She was right—more right than she could suspect.

"Yes!" he said dully.

"Well, that's more like our little man," Gwen smiled approvingly.

"I'll have to—go and phone," Mr. Melton's lifeless voice mumbled on. "Isn't there a—a telephone off in a corner somewhere? Where I'm not likely to be overheard?"

"You're not contemplating any new tricks, are you?"

"No."

"Word of honor, Dicky?"

"Yes."

"Run up in my rooms and you'll have all the privacy you want," said the kindly lady. "It's a straight wire, too, by the way; it has no connection with the regular house line."

So Richard trudged away, head bowed, spirit broken at last. To the best of his understanding, the last hope was gone now. He would explain to Anne as best he could and then—oh, there was nothing after that!

Miss Crosby must have been sitting with her hand on the telephone. Her voice came with the very first tinkle of the bell, in:

"Er—Dick?"

"Yes," Richard said.

"Dick, what train are you taking?" the breathless voice went on.

"I'm not taking any train, Anne."

"What?"

"Nope. I'm staying as I am."

There was a pause of seconds; then: "Oh, you've revealed yourself, of

course!" Anne said relievedly. "Dicky, what in the world did he say?"

"I haven't revealed myself, either. I—I tell you, Anne, I'm in a jam here."

"A what?"

"Yes, a grand old jam. It's too long a yarn to spin over the telephone, honey. I just called up to tell you not to expect me—yet awhile."

"But I can't understand it, Dick. You—you're not going to pass up your Combined Products contract?"

"It's beginning to look as if I might have to do that," Richard groaned. "You see, Anne, I—"

"But you can't! You can't! No matter what happens, you can't do that!" Anne shrilled quite frantically. "Dicky, won't you tell me exactly what has happened—because I *know* there's something you haven't told me—and let me act intelligently? Dick! I'll call up Colonel Bragg and say that you've been taken ill suddenly."

"And he'd find out later on that I hadn't, and, as nearly as I can make out, one lie will kill this devilish contract, Anne. He wants his factory built by an angel! Here! I tell you what, Anne! I've got a hunch that something will happen at the last minute, and—"

"Yes, you had a hunch about going up there, if you remember!"

"—and then again, it may not. I'll wait until about twelve, or a few minutes after, and if I haven't worked the thing out myself before that, you call him. See? And then—"

Richard stopped abruptly. Richard also glanced over his shoulder and started; Gwen, sauntering across the room, was with him once more. She waved a hand and smiled at Richard.

"So—so that's all! That's all!" Richard puffed.

"Well, what's the matter *now*?" Anne asked reasonably enough.

"Nothing! Nothing!" Mr. Melton gasped. "G-good-by!"

"Dick, wait!" said Anne; and there was another little pause—a rather

curious one this time. "You may think me silly, but there is something I want to ask. Last night, when you called me up, you know. You said you were at the station."

"I was."

"You rang off rather suddenly, Dick."

"I remember."

"And you said," Anne continued, not so steadily, "you said: 'She's going off without me!'"

"I remember that, too."

"Do you really? Well, Dick, who was 'she'?"

Mr. Melton's hollow laugh rang through the room.

"I meant the train, Anne—the train!"

And he started, and whisked about and glared at Mrs. Bragg; at least she might have remembered that distant sounds frequently carry over a telephone wire!

"Oh!" said Anne. "And was it the train that laughed—just then?"

"Eh?"

"I heard it, Dick!"

"Well, there are—there are—you see, there are—or there is—no, there *are* one or two people near me!" Mr. Melton spat out, damningly.

"I see," responded Anne's cool, smooth tone. "I won't ask any more questions. You'll let me know later? About calling up, I mean?"

"Yes, I—I'll let you know later!" Richard said miserably.

"Good-by," said Anne, and hung up her receiver—and after that, for a matter of five minutes, sat tight-lipped and gazed at it, her gentle bosom rising and falling with quite unusual rapidity.

Anne, as has been noted, trusted her handsome Richard. And yet Anne was fully and completely equipped with her sex's well-known intuition. More still, even a stupid child, just hearing Richard's voice, must have known that there was something radically wrong—something much more wrong, that is,

than the original incredible muddle into which Richard had personally conducted himself and his prospects.

What, then? Another woman? Had Richard been lying about everything and actually leaving town last night with some other woman? Anne shook her head; she couldn't believe it, mainly because it was one of those things that are just impossible!

Yet what earthly force, save a woman, could be swerving Richard from his purpose of building the Combined Products factory at any cost? And he *was* swerving or being swerved, fast enough!

Why, once Richard saw how the land lay, it would have been the simplest thing imaginable to tell Colonel Bragg the plain truth—the simplest and the safest and the only possible thing to do! Why hadn't he done it? Why all the confusion in his voice?

Why? And then, that laugh! That musical, mocking, assured laugh, laughed by a woman very near to Richard as he telephoned. Yes, *that laugh!*

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an hour, Anne sat there in her solitude, thinking, thinking.

Then, her lovely face at last entirely without expression, Anne moved to the mirror and adjusted her jaunty little hat. And within another ten minutes she was sitting in the private office of Mr. William Reeves, founder and guiding spirit of the Interurban Employment Bureau. Mr. Reeves, as ever, smiled benignly upon the lovely *fiancée* of his old friend.

"Heard from Dick?" he asked.

"Oh, he telephoned—yes," Anne said carelessly.

"Getting on fine, I'll bet!"

"He didn't seem very enthusiastic," Miss Crosby said.

"That's mostly the shock of tearing himself away from you, my pretty one," William grinned. "Give him a chance to get his wind, kid. Wait till

he gets a little air in his lungs and tramps around the woods a bit and does some communing with nature—all that sort of thing. He'll come right down to earth and be himself again. This is going to do him a world of good, Anne!"

"I hope so."

"Oh, you take my word for it, it is! Rest and quiet in a place like Firwold is just what Dicky needs. I don't believe Bragg'll overwork him."

He nodded his bland reassurance. Miss Crosby did not seem quite in the mood to agree.

"Still, I should think he'd be horribly lonesome, up there in a bachelor home," she said indifferently.

"Last place in the world to get lonesome, if it's like some I've seen," William grinned; and then he frowned rather thoughtfully. "Is Bragg a bachelor, Anne?"

"Isn't he? I don't know. Why, I don't even know where I got the idea that he was," said indifferent Anne.

Mr. Reeves frowned on. He was a painfully thorough man, chronically annoyed by a short memory, and, as a consequence, given to settling mooted points on the spot.

"No, I don't think he's a bachelor, Anne," he muttered. "I—I did know and I've forgotten. Here—wait a second!"

"Where are you going?"

"Just over here to look up Bragg. I've got 'Who's Who' and 'What's What,' and all that kind of dope here," William smiled. "Have to keep 'em on hand for business purposes, you know."

He selected a volume and softly rustled through its pages. Had he but turned unexpectedly to face Anne's burning gaze, he must have been astounded! But when he did turn and stroll again to his desk, the book in his hand, Anne's eyes were wholly blank.

"Here he is," mused William. "Yep—he's married, Anne. He was married last year."

"Ah? Anybody we know, Bill?" Anne asked whimsically.

"Nobody I ever met," William chuckled, "but she had *some* name, Anne! Get this: Gwendolynne — not l-i-n, but l-y-n-n-e! Gwendolynne Rayle! Zowie!"

"Gwendolynne!" Anne breathed.

"He must have picked her out of a novel—eh?" William observed. "I should think a man—hey! You're not leaving so soon? Stick around and visit?"

"I just ran out for a breath of air, and I have a—a lot of things to do—now, Bill," Anne said sweetly. "By by, Bill!"

"Good-by, Anne," said William.

When she had gone, Mr. Reeves sat for a time and merely scowled. Gwendolynne—that suggested something or other. No, he had never known one himself, but—hah! That was it, of course: the girl Dick went nuts over, years ago! And wasn't her name Rayle, too?

Mr. Reeves scowled more darkly and grew quite excited. No, it wasn't Rayle; it was Gayle; it was something beginning with a G, anyhow—Gillis, wasn't that it? Yes, of course it was—Gwen Gillis. He remembered now. Still, the scowl persisted until Mr. Reeves shook his head decidedly.

"Couldn't be, of course," he muttered. "Things don't happen like that. Anyway, Dick'd have been down on the first train if it had been; he was scared stiff of her. And at that, even if it was, it wouldn't matter. Anne never heard of her."

CHAPTER XVI.

STRAW GRASPING.

"SO her name," said Mrs. Bragg, "is Anne?"

Richard whirled about with the most remarkably savage jerk! Curiously, that infernal laugh had done something definite to him, something

that heartened while it still infuriated him. He was no longer mere quaking pulp; the laugh had kindled the dying fires and the light of battle was in his eye.

"You might have spared me that!" he snapped.

"The innocent little chortle, Dicky?"

"Yes!"

"Well, dear me! Did it make trouble for us?" Gwen asked unconcernedly. "I'm sorry, of course. It wasn't intentional. But you *did* look funny, you know, hunched over that telephone whispering and puffing, with your face all shiny, trying to explain something or other. What were you trying to explain, Dicky?"

"Nothing of consequence!"

"Upon my word!" breathed Gwen, with some interest. "Are you being impolite, Dicky?"

"Call it that if you like, but—"

"Well, don't be too impolite, because it isn't wise," Mrs. Bragg said, with a little warning smile. "Mamma doesn't want to slap its little patty hands, you know. Is she a lovely little thing—Anne?"

Firmly, Richard stepped over and took the chair beside her.

"Gwen, suppose we don't discuss her?" he said.

"Well, if it's as serious as all that, perhaps we'd better not," the lady mused, after studying him for an unsmiling moment. "Only I must say that, having been in love with *me*, it's not very nice to turn so openly to—"

"And suppose," added Richard, "that we *do* have a show-down, right here and now!"

"What?"

"Yes! You tell me in so many words what it is that you want me to do, and let me do it and get it over with!"

"And be free?"

"Exactly!"

Mrs. Bragg, unfortunately, seemed not even interested.

"Dicky, you get one idea into your head, don't you? And then harp and pound on it until—well, it's exhausting, you know. There is nothing pressing about this little matter of my—er—domestic unhappiness. I've said that before, a number of times."

"Well, my side of it is pressing!"

"Yes? Well, mine isn't," Gwen smiled. "So that's that. I don't even feel like discussing the matter this morning."

"And you mean to keep me here on the leash until you're ready to use me; is that it?"

"You can't dress up an idea in very pretty words," Mrs. Bragg sighed. "Still, I must say that you can grasp one."

"All right!" said this revived Richard, with much decision.

A new thought was taking shape in his abused head, you see—a daring, even a mad thought, but at the same time one rather better than the sickening thought of giving up his cherished factory without even one more struggle! Mr. Melton, eyes narrowed, meditated swiftly; swiftly, too, he stepped to the door and closed it, while Gwen watched rather wonderingly.

"Gwen, you'll accept my solemn word of honor?"

"Um—yes. If it doesn't involve your leaving here and running back to your Anne, Dicky."

"Well, it doesn't. Listen! I give you my solemn word of honor, Gwen, to help you in whatever way you say, short of murder, whenever you say, *if—*"

"Aha! Here comes the catch!" Mrs. Bragg observed.

"—*If* you'll help save my life today," Richard concluded. "Now listen some more!" And thereupon words poured frantically from his hurried lips—words which caused Mrs. Bragg to lean forward and smile incredulously at first and later to smile delighted appreciation.

It may be said in brief that, without

dwelling at all upon the architectural profits of recent years or touching the future's roseate possibilities, Richard told Mrs. Bragg all that she needed to know.

"It's priceless!" that lady commented. "Only what's the answer? Or can there be any answer to a thing like this?"

"Maybe. Gwen, you know Bill Reeves, of course?"

"You introduced him, three years ago—and then chased him away before I could get more than a glance at him."

"Does Bragg know him? Has he ever seen Bill?"

"No, of course not. But you can't possibly be thinking of—why, Dicky!" Gwen gasped.

Even then Mr. Melton was at the telephone and calling for the private wire of the Interurban Employment Bureau's head.

"Bill? Yes, this is Dick!" clicked into the instrument. "Say, Bill, is your door closed—and the window, too? I can't yell what I'm going to say, and I don't want you to miss a word. Ready? All right, then!"

He talked further, telling much the same tale that Gwen had heard, pausing at last for sheer lack of breath.

"Well, for the love of Pete!" Bill commented sympathetically. "That's tough luck, isn't it?"

"The old ship hasn't surrendered yet," Richard stated grimly. "Bill, you wash your face and comb your hair and get up here quick! *You're* going to be Richard Melton for today!"

"I'm—I'm going to be what?" Mr. Reeves gasped. "I didn't catch what you said, Dick."

"You be here at one o'clock! Call up this house as soon as I ring off and tell him you'll be here! And all you have to do after that is to look wise and eat a good meal, and when he gets the contracts out, *sign 'em!*" the desperate Richard pursued.

"Yes, I know it's a wild thing to do, and I'll probably spend the rest of my days straightening it out, but I want that contract signed to-day! Bragg's red-hot and ready to do business!"

"Yes, but—my Lord, Dick!" stut-tered Mr. Reeves, after he had sent three distinct gasps over the wire. "I couldn't do a thing like that! Look at the trouble it might make—will make! Think what—"

"I've thought about all of it! You got me into this fool thing. Are you going to let me lose out now?"

"Yes, but Dick! I—I—"

"Wait, Bill!" said Richard, and contrived to throw such feeling into his voice that Gwen nodded admiringly. "First and last, you and I have been in some tight places together. Nothing very important, of course, but we've always been pals, Bill, and I've always done what I could to get you out of a pickle.

"I've never sat down to figure out the risks, I mean. I've always just sort of—well, you know, leaped to the rescue when I could. And I've always thought you were like that, too, Bill."

And here there was a slight quiver. "Now, if you want to throw me down on this thing, it'll be all right with me, old man. The subject will never be discussed again. That's on the level; I'll never even mention it. Only—"

His voice trailed away. He smiled; he could almost see Mr. Reeves mopping his brow as he answered:

"Well—say! If you're going to feel that way about it, Dick, and—and put it like that, I—well, there's nothing I can do, of course, but just come up and—"

"Luncheon is at one!" said Richard, and rang off.

Mrs. Bragg's eyes were fairly shining as he turned to her again.

"Dicky, I'll say one thing for you: you have nerve!" she commented. "I had no idea that pirate streak was in you. Only—later on?"

"As a matter of fact, this 'later on' stuff may not be so serious," Richard smiled calmly. "Bill's handwriting and signature are very similar to mine, for one thing; if this goes through smoothly, one copy of that contract will be in the company's safe—and I doubt very much if even Seymour would notice the difference unless he looked twice.

"A good deal later on—months from now, when the place is well under way, I'll have to come out with the truth. But we'll all be better friends by that time. I'll take the chance!" Richard said, with his new, indomitable effect. "Now, as to you, Gwen—"

"Good gracious, Dicky! I've no idea of telling Samson you're not yourself, if that's what you mean," the lady said uninterestedly. "It's just good fun."

Her thoughts seemed to be drifting away, too. Mr. Melton drew a deep breath.

"Well, at least," he went so far as to say, "I've done one thing right since I arrived in this house!"

"Yes?" said Mrs. Bragg. "Then let's try another walk in the garden now and—yes? Come in!"

Haggin entered and surveyed the scene with an eye that just lacked plain insolence.

"Mr. Vane, if you please?" said he. "Colonel Bragg would like to see you for a moment."

"Be right down!" Richard said briskly.

Funny thing, too, the way he stepped out now, the way he felt! It was just like getting one's second wind in a race. He had reached a pleasant state, where battering no longer hurt him or confused him.

In fact, if the colonel had worked around to another of his ferocious moods now, as seemed likely, and pointed a pistol at Richard, Richard suspected that he would turn the muzzle aside with a firm hand and then

tell the colonel a good joke! Mighty funny!

Colonel Bragg, however, was unarmed and his lips lacked froth. As Richard entered the library, the colonel was just hanging up his telephone receiver. He glanced at Richard with his weary eyes.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Vane," he muttered.

"Oh—er—that's all right," Richard smiled.

"Wanted you to call up and make my excuses, you know," the colonel yawned. "Gad! I can do with little sleep, but I can't afford to lose an hour of that little if I want any head next day!"

"Yes?"

"Melton! Melton! I wanted you to call up Melton and see if he'd put over that luncheon till to-morrow—or possibly next week!"

"*Huh?*" gasped Richard, and the familiar sensation of reeling was upon him once more!

"Y'see," the colonel yawned again, "I want my wits with me when I talk to this chap and look him over. He's bright! He's evidently sharp as a steel trap and—heigh-ho-hum! Dozen things I want to talk over with him—and I'm not in shape for it to-day."

Richard had regained his breath.

"Well, if you're not in shape for it, colonel, I think it would be a mighty silly thing to have him up here and— and use up all your time and energy and all that, to no purpose!" gushed from him. "I'll call him up at once and say—"

"No use," Colonel Bragg grunted.

"Oh, but I'm sure there is—"

The colonel stared hard at him a moment.

"What the devil's the matter with you now?" he asked. "I'm quite sure there isn't. Mr. Melton just telephoned and accepted my invitation."

"I—I—wouldn't let that influence me, one way or the other," said the remarkable Richard. "This is more im-

portant to him than it is to you—just a plain architect like that, colonel. I mean, he'd appreciate talking it over just when you felt like talking it over. I'll call him up right away and explain! Er—what's his number?"

Colonel Bragg stared on.

"Vane," he said mildly, "one doesn't make a point of inviting a person to luncheon and asking him to postpone on short notice whatever he may have had planned for to-day, and then—"

"I'm absolutely certain that he'd rather come some other time, if he knew the facts!" Richard said doggedly; for good old, slow-moving, spectacled Bill would sit in his office and mull over the problem for all of fifteen minutes, and Gwen's private wire was up just one flight! "I'll attend to it, colonel. What's the number, please? Or shall I look it up?"

He waited, all aquiver, for here again every minute was likely to count so very, very much! The unhurried colonel scowled at him silently. Only, in Heaven's name, must he sit and scowl all day long, while the precious minutes fled? Richard took a forward step; he would look up a number; he would then call Bill's private number; next, in carefully chosen language—

"Colonel, you're all tuckered out!" Richard said suddenly. "Let me look after this matter for you. Where's the telephone book?"

The colonel came out of his reverie. "You may be right at that, you confounded freak!" he muttered, not too flatteringly, and reached for the directory beside his desk. "I'll call him up myself."

"Oh, I—I think you'd better let me do it!" Richard cried. "Looks better, I mean—you know, coming from a secretary! More—more dignified! More—er—more—"

"Vane!" said Colonel Bragg, pausing with his finger in the book and his warm gaze on Richard again, "I assure you that I am still quite capable

of conducting a telephone conversation, if you can contain yourself. Can you?"

"I—why, yes, of course, colonel; only—"

"Then do it and shut up!" snapped the head of the house, and turned the pages.

He had it now. In another minute he'd be talking to Anne. Mr. Melton gritted his teeth hard. It might be all right, of course; at least Anne knew the facts now. Why, it would be all right, of course, for Anne was bright as any dollar.

He had been pretty well staggered, there for a minute. But it was all right now. Really, all he had to do was speed back to Gwen's wire and—

"They don't answer," said the colonel, and hung up!

"But—but—"

"Small office, Vane," the gentleman remarked. "Not many people employed. Melton may have given them the day off. More likely they knew he wouldn't be back and took it themselves."

"But you'll—ah—try to get them again, pretty soon?" Richard asked, because he knew, if the colonel did not, that Anne had just stepped out for a minute, somewhere or other.

"No!" said Bragg, with as much finality as Richard had ever heard put into one syllable. "No kind of a trick to play on the man, anyway. Ho—hum! Damn that burglar!"

He tilted back and closed his tired eyes, and Richard watched him sorrowfully. He had erred again, of course; even that time he had not done the right thing.

Why, if he had waited just another ten minutes before making that heroic dash to the telephone and putting into execution his bizarre and brilliant scheme of calling on Bill, he would have had a whole week, perhaps, in which to work out his puzzles!

And this he had not done and—oh, well, perhaps it didn't matter so much, except, to be sure, that now he was

risking absolutely everything, to no good purpose.

But—here! If the colonel felt that way about the interview, it would be a mere favor to have Bill ring up again and say that he'd broken a leg! Life pulsed through Mr. Melton once more and he started for the door with:

"You don't need me for anything else, colonel?"

"What?" Bragg mumbled, and blinked at him. "Yes, wait a minute, Vane. You're so infernally anxious to do some telephoning; call up the Combined Products office for me."

"What for?" Richard asked sharply.

"What for? Because I want you to talk to them, of course! Get Mr. Seymour—John Seymour. Ask for extension two-four."

"And—and then?"

"And then tell him that I want him up here for luncheon to-day, at one o'clock, without fail!" barked the astonishing colonel, and it was well indeed that he had closed his eyes again and could not see Mr. Melton's face.

"*L-luncheon?*" Richard choked.

"I said luncheon. Tell him to drop anything he may have on hand and come, Vane. Tell him that I want him here when Melton's here; they've been over all this ground together. Tell him to be here! That's why I'm having you phone—so that he can't beg off."

"Oh, my Lord!" just passed Richard's lips.

This time the colonel's eyes opened. They fastened hard on young Mr. Melton; and while there was anger in them there was also something as nearly like fright as one might have expected to find in just that pair of eyes.

"What are you shaking for?" he snarled. "What's happened to you this time?"

"I—er—shaking—nothing! Nothing has!" Richard said brightly. "I'll—ah—telephone—telephone, of course."

"Oh, no, you'll not!" the colonel

corrected. "I'll attend to that myself. But I'll tell you what you will do, Vane! You'll submit to a thorough examination by my physician before this day's out. I want an opinion on you!"

"I—I don't believe you're all right! I don't think you're responsible. I'm going to keep you here till I learn what I want to know, but I'm going to take precautions. Dammit! I don't believe you're safe to have around; you might get violent any minute!"

"Why—colonel—" was the effective remark Richard made.

The colonel, with one hand on the telephone, sat back and glowered.

"The man who said you were a perfect secretary ought to get a reward!" he observed.

"Reward?" Richard echoed.

"Yes! One year at hard labor! Sit down there, Vane!"

He pointed to a chair. Mr. Melton winced again and failed to obey. The minutes, you see, were flying! Indeed, he had never seen time whiz by as it was whizzing this morning, and there was no way at all of telling just how long William Reeves would remain in his office.

A few minutes ago, the heading off of William had been a very desirable thing; now it was purely a matter of life and death! Why, if ever Seymour arrived and found Bill posing as the promising young architect in the case—

"I'm sorry," Richard stated. "But I have to go now!"

"Go where?" the colonel barked.

Richard thought hard in that half second; it would have to be a convincing somewhere that he was going!

"I—er—have to take a dose of medicine, colonel," he said, as inspiration arrived. "It's fifteen minutes overdue now!"

Colonel Bragg's eye grew keen again.

"Oh, you're doctoring already, are you? What are you taking, Vane? A sedative?"

"Yes! Morphine!" Richard cried,

because that was the most powerful sedative that occurred to him at the moment.

"So *that's* it, hey?" Colonel Bragg cried, and his keen eyes opened and glittered fresh rage. "We've got a hop-head on our hands, have we? Well—"

He said a good deal more than just that; he said many of the things which Richard had said, last night, to his re-filled bureau drawer.

Yet he might have said ten times as much and said it ten times as shockingly, without making the smallest impression upon a man as anxious to get to a private telephone as was Richard Melton just then. Moving inch by inch toward the door, he had reached it as the worst of the cyclone passed.

"Is that—er—all, colonel?" he asked thinly.

"It's enough, isn't it?" puffed the colonel. "Go get your damned dope!"

His final wave of dismissal was quite unnecessary. Richard was on his way even then. The staircase he covered three steps at a time, which was quite a feat, their width considered; the upper hall he slid straight across, arriving in Mrs. Bragg's domain rather suddenly and rather noisily. The lady looked up from her magazine, with more than a little interest.

"Was it as bad as that?" she asked quickly. "Is Samson after you? Why on earth did you come *here* if—"

"Excuse me, Gwen; I have to telephone!" said Richard, almost as one word, and continued his lightning passage.

The operator, he assumed, had died at her post! For all of three seconds, he had been pumping away at the hook and still there was no response. Maybe the line had been cut? Maybe—just there a voice came to Richard's ear, and he barked out his number and waited, foot tapping; and then:

"Mr. Reeves!" he snapped. "Mr. Melton speaking."

"Mr. Reeves isn't here," said that gentleman's operator.

"Where is he?" Richard whined.

"He's gone for the day, sir."

"Is he—is he—is he home?"

The young woman down there took her own time in the refreshing of her memory.

"No, I don't think he is, Mr. Melton," said she. "He left in a hurry. He said he had a lot of things to attend to down town here, and then he had to catch some train. Would you like to talk to Mr. Prout? He might know."

"Gimme 'im! Gimme 'im!" Richard cried. "Hurry up! Quick!"

Then he waited—and waited—and waited—and after an eternity was connected with that bright young man who held the post of general assistant to William Reeves.

"Joe?" Mr. Melton asked. "This is Melton! Joe, where'd the boss go when he left the office? I have to catch him on the phone!"

"Um—" said Joe. "I don't know."

"Well, think! Think quick! This—"

"Thinking isn't going to do much good, when he didn't say where he was going, Mr. Melton," the other said calmly. "Is this important? Because he was going to catch some train or other, and if I can find out what train it is, I might send up and get him there."

Mr. Melton smiled shakily.

"That's what I was going to suggest," he said. "He'll be taking whatever train leaves for Firwold after eleven or half past, I think. Only don't send anybody, Joe."

"Go up to Grand Central yourself and be dead sure—*dead sure*—Gee!—to catch him before he goes aboard. Take a couple of the boys with you; there may be more than one train. Will you do that, Joe? I—I'll make it all right with you—*Firwold!*"

"Why, yes, I'll do that, Mr. Melton," said the other.

"And when you do catch him, tell him, without fail, to telephone at once and say he cannot keep the luncheon engagement he made!" Richard said, very distinctly. "Got that, Joe?"

"Sure!"

"He — cannot — get — up — to — Firwold—for—luncheon! Tell him to telephone instantly and *not* to come up! This—this means thousands of dollars to your boss, Joe!" Richard added, straining the truth just a trifle.

"Does it? Well, I'll get him, Mr. Melton. You leave it to me!" Mr. Prout said, with increased interest. "I'll take Harry and the kid and start off right now!"

The conversation ended with a click so businesslike that Mr. Melton sighed his tremulous relief. He sagged, in fact, and sat for a little space, just gazing at the telephone. It was, essentially, all right at last. Joe was a bright chap and devoted to Bill; he'd be sure to find him and head him off.

Actually, Mr. Melton might about as well brace up and be human again; all he had to do now was listen for the telephone bell downstairs and then slip down and listen further and confirm the good news that Bill had been intercepted and the day saved.

He glanced toward Mrs. Bragg's chair; she was no longer there; she had moved over to her big, priceless desk and was rummaging through packed pigeonholes.

"Well, I—guess it's all right!" Richard muttered.

"More trouble?" Mrs. Bragg's uninterested voice said.

"Quite a long story. You see—"

"Well, don't bother telling me," said the colonel's lady, who seemed rather absorbed in her latest activities. "Dicky, you might as well do some real work. I'm going to house clean in this desk; it will have to be done some time soon. Will you come over here?"

"And—" said Richard, as he approached.

"Why, just tear these things up as I pass them to you, Dick," Gwen said, dragging forth bundle after bundle of letters. "I don't want to leave—I mean, it's high time this stuff was destroyed. Fill up that basket, Dick, and as it's filled take it over to the fireplace and touch a match to it. Will you do that?"

Mr. Melton was willing enough to do that. The strain was over at last; any real worrying he chose to do now would be mainly the fruit of a too lively imagination. Joe would catch Bill—and, incidentally, Joe would have to have about another hundred as a reward, for Joe wasn't a cheap person.

Richard sighed heavily. That brought the grand total up well above nineteen hundred dollars; yes, nearly two thousand good dollars, just *gone* because Gwen had happened to see him in the hallway of Bill Reeves's office building!

However, nothing of the kind would ever happen again, that was certain. For all time to come, Richard was cured of nerves and temperament and the habit of worrying over little things, you bet!

Gwen must be tearing up all the letters and papers that had come to her since early childhood! That was the fourth basket of small pieces he had carried over to the fireplace and set ablaze.

And time was hurrying along, too, and, despite all his ear-straining, never the smallest tinkle of a telephone bell had so far come to Richard. He calmed himself and replied lightly to one of Gwen's remarks, which had become few and far between as she destroyed her collection of writings.

It was darned queer, the way she sat and frowned preoccupiedly over those things; it wasn't like Gwen to be so silent, and—

"Say! is that twelve striking?" Richard gasped.

"Yes. Why?"

"Gwen, I want to go down and make sure Reeves has called up!"

"We'll go down presently," Gwen said, in her absent way. "Dicky, tear this lot up in smaller pieces, will you?"

She rummaged on. The pigeon-holes were almost empty now; three more basketsful had gone to the fireplace—and *still* Richard had not been able to catch that tinkle! What if something had slipped? What if Joe had not caught Reeves, after all?

"There! We'll go down now," Gwen said. "Come along, Dicky!"

Beautifully, she moved beside him to the stairs; beautifully and a yard from him she moved down them. But at the bottom Mrs. Bragg slipped a slender arm through Richard's and sighed languishingly.

"Say, Gwen!" Mr. Melton's agitated whisper said. "Don't do that!"

"Take your arm? But you used to like it, Dicky."

"That was before you had a husband! Anyhow, I don't get the idea of it. You do these things only when Bragg's in the neighborhood, and he—"

"Oh, he doesn't mind," said Mrs. Bragg. "Let's look in on Samson and see what he's doing. He ought to—oh, hello!" breathed the lady, as they came within sight of the library. "He's entertaining! Who's the sweet little girl, I wonder?"

Young Mr. Melton turned his angry and impatient gaze toward the library—turned it in this angry and impatient way for the smallest part of a second, and then stood rooted and unbreathing.

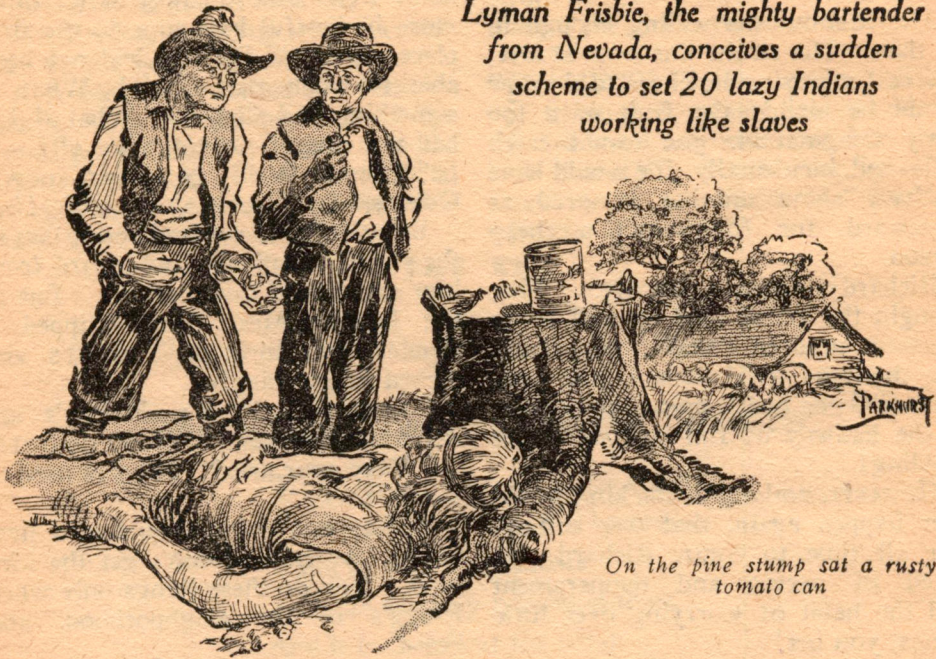
Mrs. Bragg might wonder about the identity of the girl beside the colonel's desk and upon whom the colonel was smiling approval. But Richard did not wonder at all; Richard knew!

The sweet little girl's name was Anne Crosby.

The Man With the Lying Eye

By **BOB DAVIS**

Lyman Frisbie, the mighty bartender from Nevada, conceives a sudden scheme to set 20 lazy Indians working like slaves



On the pine stump sat a rusty tomato can

ONCE, upon a time there lived in the County of Douglas, State of Nevada, an honest German farmer who had bought for himself several hundred acres of sagebrush land upon which he was prepared to settle down for the balance of his life.

He rounded up a score of Piute Indians at one dollar a day to clear the scrub away with grub hoes and prepare it for the plow. Richer soil does not exist anywhere in the Union and once cleared and planted wealth awaits its conqueror.

The Piute Indian, however, is not so easy to master. He toils not, neither does he spin; and so at the end of an experimental month with the red man as a farm hand the honest Teutonic

agriculturist rode into town, tied his horse in front of the Magnolia Saloon and after five or six drinks hand high fell to complaining.

Lyman Frisbie, the bartender, distinguished as the only man in the county who possessed a glass eye, listened attentively at first, as becomes a servitor to cash customers, and then spoke his mind:

"You are right, Herman; Piutes are bums. They are sure enough sleepers. I could have told you that. What you need is a foreman who can put the fear of the devil into them. And that's me." Mr. Frisbie fixed his one good dull eye and his one bad glass eye on the farmer leaning across the bar.

"You can do someding mit 'em?"

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Ya," answered the doubting Herman. "How much you charge, Herr Frisbie, come boss my ranch? Speak it."

"I can't see my way clear to take over the control of your place," said Mr. Frisbie in a confidential tone of voice, "but for a little matter of one hundred dollars in United States gold coin I will guarantee to make twenty Piute slobbs grub ten acres of sagebrush a day for ten days, which is a matter of one hundred acres—and no questions asked."

"Ven you gommense, Mr. Frisbie? I took dot proposition!" shouted Herman, slapping his hand on the wet bar.

"Eight o'clock morning. You have twenty strong bucks ready and I'll be there in the cool of the morning. Just tell 'em I'm the boss and leave the rest to me. I'll make a vacation of this job."

Promptly on time Mr. Frisbie arrived in a buckboard, accompanied by his critical glass eye. He was presented formally to the Piutes as the new pain in their necks.

Beckoning the toilers to grab the implements of torture and fall in behind, Lyman led the little company off to the uncleared acres until he arrived at a pine stump sawed off level and standing about five feet high. This he mounted and requested the red men to gather round and "hear something," as follows, to wit:

"Listen, Injun man, paleface know everything, all same big chief Washington. White man want Injun man grubbum sagebrush so farmer ketchum hay, ketchum wheat, ketchum corn. Injun man no foolum paleface.

"Me know everything, hear everything, see everything. Me big chief, big boss. Heap smart, plenty ear, plenty eye. You watchum me. I watchum you."

With this lucid burst of oratory Mr. Frisbie, the talented bartender of the Magnolia Saloon, began his vacation by stepping down from the pine stump and removing his glass right eye from

its socket. Between his thumb and forefinger he held the glistening object aloft and in a slow but impressive voice announced to the terrified Piutes this self-evident truth:

"Me leavum eye here to watch Injun man. You ketchum grub hoe and go work damn quick."

With that Mr. Frisbie turned on his heel, strolled over to the willow grove on the river bank and promptly went to sleep, his wise head pillowed among the wild flowers.

Twenty terrified redskins, glancing backward at the gleaming and all seeing glass eye of the omnipotent paleface, sailed into the sagebrush bent on a campaign of extermination.

Strengthened by repose the ex-bartender of the Magnolia arose from the lush grass and returned at high noon to his watchful glass eye, where he summoned his wards with a series of war whoops.

"Injun man go catchum grub," said he in guttural tones, returning the optical masterpiece to its socket. And so to luncheon. He knocked them off again at five for the day, and took his eye to bed with him, not forgetting to put in a call for all hands on the morrow at the old pine stump.

The land began to clear of the scrub and the future looked rosy. In the meantime Lyman Frisbie put in a supply of first-class sleep to the murmur of a friendly river.

On the afternoon of the fifth day the farmer stepped out on his veranda and swept his eyes over the partly cleared land.

All movement had ceased. There was not a toiler in sight and the hot sun beat down on a scene of deathlike inaction.

Something had gone wrong with the Frisbie System of Manual Labor. Herman made a cautious detour around the fields and found Mr. Frisbie snoring the afternoon away, his remaining good eye closed in peaceful slumber.

"Vat is der matter mit der Indians?" he asked, rousing the sleeping slave driver. Mr. Frisbie didn't know, but would have a look. With his employer trailing in his footsteps he crept to the top of an elevation and scanned the quiet scene.

Scattered over the field twenty Piutes snoozed their heads off.

Mr. Frisbie, reverting to the vernacular of the pub, began to swear.

A sudden palsy halted his flood of speech, while his solitary natural eye almost popped out into space. On the pine stump he saw not the artificial orb that had made vassals of the noble Piute, but a rusty tomato can.

Under the discarded tin container, sightless and a prisoner, reposed Mr. Lyman Frisbie's glass eye.

At the base of the stump, flat on his back, reposed the intrepid buck Indian who had sneaked up on the "all seeing" ornament and snuffed out its vision. With a cry of rage Mr. Frisbie struck the can violently away and with it went the glass eye, shattered.

TWENTY Piutes, the sleep still in their eyes, gathered about the pine pedestal and witnessed Mr. Frisbie's downfall. To this day he is referred to by the Piutes as "the man with the lying eye."

THE END



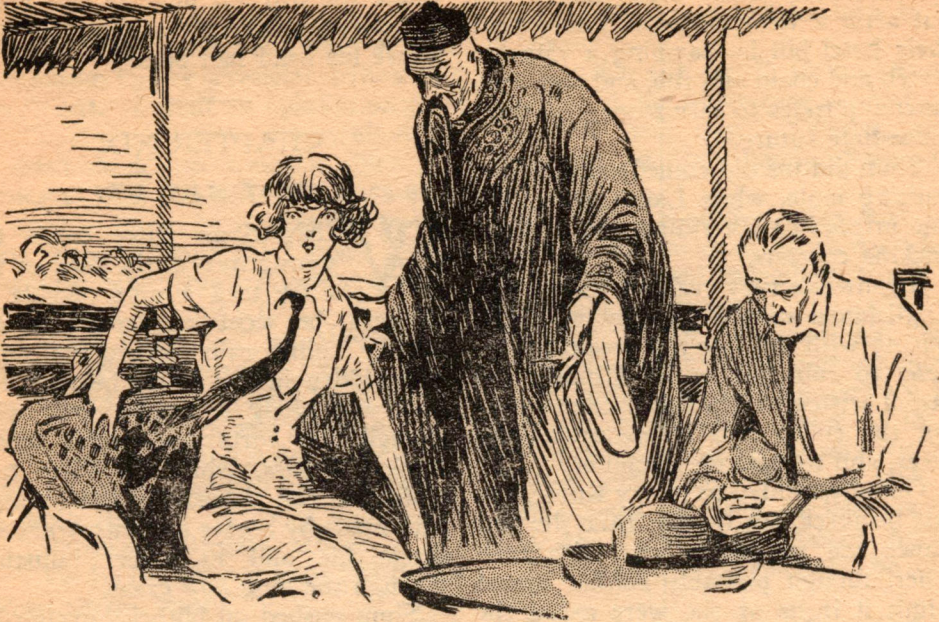
The Stream That Sings the Sweetest

THE stream that sings the sweetest
 And dances with the breeze
 Is not as wide as shadows
 Of its friendly mountain trees,
 And it cannot hear the ocean
 For its own wild harmonies.

The stream that sings the sweetest
 Makes the greatest stir
 When it meets the bitter ocean,
 But it bears a breath like myrrh,
 And spells the moon had woven
 When the mountains sang to her.

O heart, that knows the gladness
 Of earth that has its dream,
 Why cannot you go singing
 Like this little mountain stream
 That gleams to death in waters
 That, a moment, catch the gleam?

Glenn Ward Dresbach.



"Go on, tell her," Quimby flaccidly intoned

Hawaiian Heels

Mystery stalks the Stingaree when naught but a splash of blood marks the spot where Lance Houston had lain

By RICHARD BARRY

Author of "The Long Arm of the Big Gun," "Worth Millions," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LANCE HOUSTON was the greatest cowboy star in the motion-picture world, when he happened to be in a cabaret one evening when a tipsy woman became murderously jealous of her husband. She promptly killed both her husband and another woman with the revolver of Lance Houston, who was sitting at a near-by table.

On the hasty advice of his personal manager, Joe Bloom, Lance sailed immediately for Hawaii, with Slum Ritey, a former cowboy buddy who had been living in Hollywood too, but

had never risen above the rôle of extra in a movie or extra waiter in a speak-easy.

Joe Bloom stayed behind to fix up the district attorney, and if possible to whittle down the size of the news stories following the murder. However, it happened to be just before election, and the district attorney made political capital of his hunt for Lance Houston, and put up a reward of five hundred dollars for information leading to his apprehension; so Joe Bloom had to disappear hurriedly too.

That left Lance and Slum stranded

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 4

in Honolulu, when their money ran out after a week or two. Lance paid their hotel bill by pawning a valuable watch and chain and fob, and then they entered a rodeo to earn money for their immediate future.

Slum did his old comedy stunts on a bucking mule, while Lance won some fine prizes in trick riding and straight bucking contests.

Meanwhile they realized that a rich Englishman named Quimby was conspiring with Ah Long, a wealthy Chinese, to ruin Lester H. Hollins, the genial aristocrat who has been sponsoring the rodeo and its accompanying races, and to steal his daughter.

Quimby wanted to marry Rova Hollins by force, but by that time she and Lance are falling in love with each other, though probably neither would admit it if he or she were asked the question.

Rova knew Lance's true identity, but kept it secret, simply calling him by his assumed name of "Smith."

Mr. Quimby managed to bet with her in such a way that he lost his yacht *Stingaree*, and Rova won it. Right after the big race of the rodeo day eagerly she rode across the island to inspect her yacht. With her consent, Lance rode after her.

And with Lance's acquiescence Slum followed both of them. Rova waited for Lance, and took him aboard the *Stingaree* with her. Lance had an inkling of what might occur, and was very careful; but despite his caution, some one hit him over the back of the head when he was out of sight of Rova.

Almost immediately she found him, she saw he was still alive, and that his head was bleeding. She called for help, and when no one responded, after a short time, she went to look for assistance.

She could not find any one, but got a wet napkin in the dining saloon and ran back to where Lance had lain. When she reached the place on deck

where she had left him, he was gone; and only a small spot of blood showed where his head had been.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT SLUM DID.

WHEN Slum Ritey made the wrong turn at the fork of the Cove trail a mile outside of Weimea, he went on rapidly in the swiftly falling rain toward the sugar mill hidden in the valley below. His way was along a wagon road wide enough for carts and small motor trucks to pass, while the Cove trail which he had passed up was a single path made by horses and men traveling single file and in places indistinct through the long *hilo* grass.

Slum pushed on blithely, urging his horse to its best pace. In about twenty minutes he galloped into a Kanaka village of thatched huts, mostly open at the front. He could see the obese brown women squatting in the doorways fingering the preparation of the evening *poi*.

This sight alarmed him, for he had distinctly heard Nestor say, as he started, that there was no habitation on the way. Perhaps the foreman had meant no white habitation.

Slum reined up before one of the huts and called out: "Hello!"

Several naked children ran out laughing and reached their hands up toward him, begging for coins. He called again more loudly, and a woman in the doorway looked back into the darkness of the hut in the rear. In a moment a male Kanaka came forward, sleepily rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Aloha," he grinned.

"Be this the Cove trail?" Slum demanded impatiently.

The Kanaka looked at him fatuously, his wide eyes slowly opening to the patter of the raindrops which fell into his open countenance without occasioning him any concern.

"*Pehea?*" (what is it?) the Kanaka queried.

"To Slum this was gibberish.

"Cove trail, Cove trail," he repeated insistently and pointed inquiringly along the road.

The Kanaka, who seemed to have an intelligent face, appeared to understand, but he lacked the English words to express himself. He shook his head. "*Pilikea,*" (wrong) he said.

Slum, whose youth had been spent in the Indian country, making his way by means of sign language and partly understood dialects, sensed the negative.

"Cove trail which way?" he demanded.

The Kanaka reached down with a long brown forefinger and in the wet earth at his feet quickly drew a rough map. At one end he indicated the station; at another end the Cove; a little to the side the sugar mill. Then he drew the fork of the roads. He uttered the words, "*Weimea,*" "*Cove,*" and "*Mill,*" as he indicated where each lay. He laid a finger along the trail which Slum had missed.

"Big road," he said. He indicated the wagon way they were on. "Little road," he said.

It was direct, intelligent, friendly.

"Thanks," Slum shouted, as he wheeled his horse. "Yer lingo's all right, if y' are a dumb-bell." He pushed back along the way he had come, leaving the Kanakas to their *poi* and their slumbers. When he retraced the road to the fork and got back again on the Cove trail, he looked at the two for a moment; the double-rutted wagon road and the single-packed trail.

"The country's all right when you get on to it," he muttered. "I see how they figger it. One wheel makes a highway, two wheels a boulevard." He dug spurless heels into his mount. "Get along, hoss," he called cheerily. "Gotta pull down that fool puncher 'fore sundown."

For two hours he shoved on in the

gathering dusk and the steadily pouring rain, along the trail. When he made the turn at the fork he was almost an hour behind Rova and Lance. He had not gained any on them when they reached the crest, but they had not been conscious of the slowness of their progress down the other slope of the divide on the dry side of the peninsula.

For this latter half of the journey, unknown to them, Slum was overtaking them steadily. Due to the inequalities of the land, the depth of the forests on the heights, and the thickness of the grass in the valleys, they could not see him, or he them. He arrived at the Cove only a few minutes behind them.

In fact, as Slum turned the last point on the descent, he saw Lance tying his mount and Lightning to the *coa* tree, while Rova stood near the launch with the hooked-beak man. Quimby's glasses were hanging at his side.

It had not occurred to him that Rova could have more than one escort, for even that one had been a surprise; otherwise he could easily have seen Slum as he rode hurriedly down the last thousand yards.

The launch pushed off as Slum cantered on to the edge of the white sand. He was about to shout, but a precautionary instinct halted him. He saw that the horses were tethered, which seemed to argue that Lance and Rova wouldn't be gone long. He resolved to wait in the bushes and watch for a little while.

He saw the launch reach the side of the yacht, and its three occupants clamber aboard, followed by the Kanaka. Then he led his horse by a circuitous route so that it could not be seen crossing the sands to the *coa* tree where the other two mounts were tied. He began tethering his.

Lance's mount was a three-year-old gelding, but Slum was riding a yearling stallion. When he came into the presence of Lightning he began pawing and neighing. Lightning nickered

shrilly in response. The stallion was tethered at some distance to a neighboring tree, but from there he called across to Lightning, and she responded. They filled the night woods with their mating cries.

It was this call from Lightning which Rova heard across the water on the deck of the Stingaree, and which she thought was a cry of fear at her possible desertion of her favorite mare.

Slum, proceeding down the beach toward the edge of the water, saw the screw begin to turn under the keel of the yacht. It was less than a hundred yards away. Then he heard the exclamations and the loud calls for "Kapala." He could not understand what was being said, but the tones were clearly those of his friend Lance, and they carried a message both of surprise and of anger.

"Gee," said Slum to himself, "this heavy has thrown his harpoon already. Mebbe Lance needs a side kick pronto."

The Stingaree was turning around. Her bow faced toward the shore, and she was describing an arc and putting to sea. As her stern came round, the taut painter carried the motor launch with it, and she was thrown nearer in toward the shore until a space of only thirty or forty yards separated the boat from Slum.

At his feet he saw lying a piece of driftwood, shaped not unlike a boom-erang, though somewhat shorter. He seized this, thrust it into his shirt, and leaped into the sea.

He swam rapidly through the surf and succeeded in getting his fingers in over the swivel gunwale of the launch, as she put about straight and started out. He hung on for a few minutes, not drawing himself up, but being drawn through the water, while he studied the after deck of the yacht.

In a moment he saw Quimby's head appear. Slum dropped low into the water, being pulled along with the gathering momentum of the launch.

He heard another call in Lance's well-known tones, the lighter and more excited tones of the girl, and then Quimby disappeared. In the ensuing silence he drew himself into the launch and lay quietly for a moment, recovering his breath from his exertion.

Then the agonizing cry from Rova, when she discovered Lance's body floated to Slum, lying prone on the waist of the launch. "Guess I'm needed here more'n in the Cross-Eyed Duck," he muttered to himself as he began pulling the launch to the side of the yacht by the painter.

He scrambled to the deck while Rova was below, getting the napkin and water. Bending low, he ran rapidly forward. In the shadows of the late twilight he saw two men pulling an indistinct form around the head of the superstructure. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept after them rapidly, but without making any noise.

The two disappeared behind low-swinging doors in the steerage alongside the cook's galley. Slum was about ten feet behind them, but they were so occupied and so certain that there was no one to observe them that they did not see him.

He saw only the legs of the body they were drawing after them. These were familiar legs. He would have known them anywhere. The swinging doors slammed in Slum's face as he came to them.

Behind him he heard Rova coming back along the deck; heard her horrified exclamation as she discovered Lance's body gone, but his concern was not for "the skirt." In fact, he had an intense resentment toward her. He felt that she was responsible for this bloody situation.

If Lance still lived, and she could be helpful in getting him away alive, he would not hesitate to seek her aid, but he had scant hope that it would be of any value. Slum's impulse was to hide from her as much as from the others. He made himself small alongside the

galley until she went back to the after deck.

Slum tried the swinging door. It opened easily. There was blackness below. It was the way to the steerage cockpit. Softly he clambered down the ladder.

On the left was a bracket electric light with a green shade. Under it lay two bunks, one above the other. On the lower he saw the figure of Lance Houston, face downward. Over it a Kanaka was leaning, engaged in the business of tying the hands across the back.

Slum took from his shirt the piece of driftwood he had picked up on the beach. He crept behind the Kanaka and raised it above his head with the intention of bringing it down in a single fierce blow, but as he elevated it to the level of his eyes he noticed that it lay in his hand like a leveled revolver, the butt in his palm, the barrel pointing out.

The sense of drollery and ironic humor that usually dominated him, came uppermost. He stepped forward and thrust the end of the stick abruptly into the back of the Kanaka, right behind the left lung. "Put up your dukes," he hoarsely muttered.

Shivering with fright, the Kanaka threw up his hands.

"Speak a word and yer a dead man," Slum went on.

The Kanaka's nerveless jaw chattered.

Slum threw an arm around his windpipe, while he seized the rope that still dangled from his hand and quickly tied the Kanaka's wrists behind his back.

Above a folding lavatory at the head of the bunk was a towel rack. From this Slum took a towel and gagged the Kanaka. Then he shoved him down in one corner.

All of this occupied but a few minutes, and was carried on in the utmost silence.

When it was completed, Slum tossed

the dummy "pistol" on to the side of the bed. The eyes of the bound and gagged Kanaka saw the deception. They popped out curiously. He writhed under his bonds, but they held.

"Pull, you varmint," Slum muttered, as he turned his attention to Lance; "the harder you pull the tighter you'll be. Trust a cow-puncher to make a cross hitch that 'll stick under any strain."

He turned Lance over on his back. A great happiness came to him as he saw the steady rise and fall of the widespread lungs of his buddy. After a little searching he discovered the cause of the misfortune, the wen on the back of Lance's head where the blood was now matted and congealed on the scalp.

He found another towel over the lavatory, and some water. He began bathing the wound, all the time whispering softly in the unconscious ear: "Didn't I tell ye not to travel none without a nurse? If you'd only come back with me we'd been clear of all this.

"It's that danged 'skirt' tripped ye up. Ye'd never been in no trouble yet nohow if it wa'n't for women. It was a she devil shot another one in the Cross-Eyed Duck and blew ye into Honolulu. Shot 'er in the back, too, the slippery female, but that wa'n't enough for you to lay you off women for life; you had to get tangled up with this red-headed flapper.

"That's what brings 'em all down—the google-eyed redheads. I'd like us to be ridin' them ponies. Wouldn't hurt my conscience none to leave her to this here heavy and his gang o' niggers.

"Come on, now, cowboy, yer breathin' natchul. 'Long as they ain't soaked ye in the body, reckon yer O K. Ain't nothin' hard 'nough to crack that bone head o' yours."

The throb of the engines muffled any sound that might have penetrated from these muttered whisperings out of the

steerage into the other part of the yacht.

CHAPTER XX.

"HOBSON'S CHOICE."

DOWN in the companionway, Rova almost collided with Quimby as he was backing from the port stateroom which he deftly and quickly closed, though not in time to prevent her seeing that some one was inside. "He's gone! He's gone!" she cried impetuously. "Lance is gone."

Quimby faced her calmly and led the way along the passage to the saloon. There, under the bright lights, he looked down calmly on her features, already swollen with anxiety. "Who?" he asked.

"Lance Houston!" she cried, tossing aside a discretion which she had never really felt or enjoyed.

"My dear Miss Rova, what do you mean?" Quimby affected a solicitous air. "I don't know what you mean by Lance Houston."

"He's gone!" she persisted. "His name is not Smith. That's Lance Houston, the greatest rider in the world. Something terrible has happened to him."

Quimby was genuinely surprised, but held himself in check. "The movie actor?" he asked unbelievably.

"Of course. The greatest star of the pictures. Couldn't you see the way he rode to-day that there's nobody like him."

"Hum!" Quimby parleyed. "Didn't I read something about his being wanted for murder in Los Angeles?"

"Nonsense!" Rova cried. "That's all a mistake. Lance Houston never hurt anybody in his life. Couldn't you tell that by looking at him? He's the squarest thing that ever put his leg over a horse.

"But where is he? When I went along the deck up there just now he was lying down unconscious. It looked

as if the back of his skull was crushed in. I came down here for some water, and when I returned he was gone. Hurry, Mr. Quimby. Help me find him."

"Why certainly, Miss Rova," the hawk-visaged one responded; "let us go on deck."

She led the way to a spot at the head of the superstructure where she had last seen Lance. Excitedly she repeated again all that she knew. Swiftly she knelt down to show where the blood spot was. She uttered a cry of vexatious annoyance. She leaped up frantically exclaiming: "The blood is gone. Somebody has wiped it out."

Quimby rubbed his long, fallow fingers across his lantern jaw. "I wonder," he said slowly, "if you are not seeing things. In the early evening there's a light carries over from *Haleakola*. The Kanakas say they see things in that light—things that aren't so. I wonder if it could have affected you."

A dread apprehension was clutching at Rova's heart. She had no doubt now that there was something malign in Quimby's purpose. She knew she was trapped, but she did not give rein to her impulses at once and turn on him as she was minded. Instead she said soberly: "You saw him here a moment ago, yourself. So did I. Now he is gone. Where is he?"

"Must have dropped overboard," Quimby suggested.

"But I saw him lying here unconscious."

"Maybe he's below somewhere," Quimby started back toward the companionway. Rova went forward.

"Of course, but he's up this way." She darted toward the swinging doors to the steerage, but she was not quick enough for Quimby, who got there ahead of her.

"Pardon me," said he. "I'll take a look first. You might be embarrassed." Quimby gave a cursory glance down over the top of the swinging

door. Very indistinctly he saw the back of Slum bending over the inert form of Lance on the bunk. He thought it was the Kanaka. He faced Rova. "Not there," he said. "Only a couple of the crew."

She sensed the near presence of the man in whom now all her heart was bound up. She tried to push past Quimby. "Let me see," she demanded.

He took her two wrists in his hands and held her firmly. "No, Miss Rova," he said; "the Kanakas are there. They have been drinking. You know how these natives are." He shrugged his shoulders while she tried wildly to push past him. Then he added: "They have taken off their clothes."

She desisted, falling limp against his side. He let go her wrists and placed an arm about her. His touch repelled and frightened her. She caromed away from him as if from something foul, and went back toward the saloon. He followed.

Once more she faced him, her countenance wax white, her eyes glowing dully with fierce intensity, the gray-green iris burning with foiled hate. She realized that what had happened was part of a set prearranged plan, and yet she could not place her finger on any obviously guilty movement of her father's old neighbor.

"Why haven't you stopped the yacht, Mr. Quimby?" she demanded. "I asked you to long ago."

"I started for Kapala, but you—"

Her head went up imperiously. "Well, stop it, at once," she ordered. "The Stingaree is going fast to sea. Put back into the cove. This is outrageous."

Quimby bowed gravely with his chin in his hands, but he did not move.

"I'll tell my father about this," she hissed between set teeth. Her back was toward the sideboard and facing the companionway. Before she could finish her sentence, down the passage, moving calmly, came the tall, slippered figure of an Oriental wearing a long-

sleeved mandarin gown of watered silk, embroidered in gayly colored flowers. He came in, bowing low.

"Aloha," said Ah Long. "You are welcome, Miss Hollins. You do honor to my humble abode." He paused halfway down the saloon.

Rova looked to Quimby in consternation. In this new dilemma she could not prevent herself from looking instinctively toward the man who had so often been a guest in her home.

"Isn't this Ah Long?"

The Oriental bowed still lower. "At your service."

"What does he mean by his abode?" Rova demanded of Quimby.

Quimby sighed, and sat down as if in sudden weariness. He bowed his head in his hands. She stood beside him, looking at him, perplexed and bewildered, but she had no sense that she was in personal danger, and this sudden turn in the situation had the effect of still further reassuring her in this.

Ah Long pulled a chair and placed it close beside Rova. With an exaggerated civility and an unctuous, suave movement: "Please be seated, Miss Hollins," he urged in faultless English. "You are more than welcome in the humble water home of your obedient servant. This has been a tiring day for you. I am sure you must be fatigued.

"Won't you kindly relax yourself and sit down? Your friend, Mr. Quimby here, will no doubt explain to you how he unfortunately has made a mistake." A ghost of a smile appeared on the wrinkled, sallow features of the Chinese. "Just a little mistake," he added softly and impressively.

Quimby looked up as if with shame. "True," he said to Rova. "It was a mistake for me to bet the Stingaree. Alas, even when I made the bet the yacht was no longer mine."

Until this moment Rova had no intention of sitting, but this caused her to sink to the proffered chair beside her. "What!" she gasped.

Ah Long now took a seat, and drew it up to within a few feet of hers.

"Mr. Quimby," he related in silky tones, without inflection, "may have difficulty in explaining to you what has happened. I will spare him the necessity and tell you myself." He turned to the hook-visaged person, who now appeared to be wholly overcome with shame or remorse or despair, yet Rova felt that he was acting.

"If I err in statement, pray correct me," the Chinese said to Quimby.

"Go on, tell her," Quimby flaccidly intoned.

"It is this way, Miss Hollins," the Chinese went on softly, "your friend, Mr. Quimby, has found in the past that he required financial assistance, and he has then come to his friend, Ah Long, who has invariably been fortunate enough to secure the desired financial requirement.

"In return Ah Long has asked only that he be secured against the mutations of this mundane change by the accepted form. Consequently it has come about that for everything that Mr. Quimby owns Ah Long holds a mortgage.

"It is so with his ownership of Manalooa. It is so with his race horses, including the fleet Flapper. It is so with the moneys he has advanced to your father, the respected Mr. Hollins. It is so with this yacht, the Stingaree.

"It was in a rash and unthinking moment this afternoon that he offered to bet with you this yacht against your horse on the outcome of a race. I will not blame him for his lapse of memory. Doubtless he had expected to win and had good reason to think so.

"Perhaps for the moment the fact escaped his memory that the real owner of the Stingaree is Ah Long, and so, Miss Hollins, you will pardon me, I am sure, if I notify you with great regret and my most humble apologies that it is impossible for Mr. Quimby to pay his bet in the form in which it was made."

Rova's head was throbbing with bewilderment. Was this true? Or was it only another subtle ruse in a plot whose purpose she would not fathom? She decided to throw herself on the mercy of the courteous Chinese, whom she had seen before on occasion at a distance, for he was well known as one of the prominent capitalists of the island.

"Very well, then, Mr. Ah Long," she said, in an attempt at brightness, "that's all right. Only turn the yacht about at once, will you please, and set me back on shore, and help me find Lance Houston?"

The Chinese smiled indulgently and looked at Quimby as if they mutually understood that the girl was suffering from a hallucination.

"Be assured we can return ashore," he said. "But as for Mr. Houston—pardon me—is this the movie actor in whom you are interested?"

Why should she persist in the fiction which she felt was useless? "Oh, indeed, Mr. Ah Long," she pleadingly assented, "it is the great Lance Houston himself. He rode Lightning this afternoon and won, and he came with me over the trail. He was here on deck with me just now. I saw him lying unconscious up there only a few minutes ago. He has disappeared. He must be on this yacht somewhere. Help me find him."

Ah Long reached up both of his hands. The gown fell back to his elbows. The hands were long. The nails very long. He brought the palms together smartly. The door to the galley opened. A Chinese servant appeared. Ah Long spoke in Chinese to him, a long command.

The servant disappeared. Ah Long turned to Rova. "The boat will be searched," he said, "carefully, Miss Hollins, be assured."

"And will you turn around and put back to shore at once?" she asked, her voice almost breaking.

"Indeed, Miss Hollins, be assured."

"Excuse me, then." She rose and ran past the Chinese through the passage and up to the deck. The *Stingaree* was speeding along through the water at the rate of ten or twelve knots, headed straight into the open sea. The enormous *palas* of the island lay far to the stern. Already they were miles away.

Like a wild thing, frantic at being caged for the first time, Rova dashed below again. Quimby was alone where she had left him; his head sunk in his hands deeply, his body lissome, overcome apparently with shame or remorse.

"Where is Ah Long?" she demanded. Quimby looked up at her stolidly as if in a daze.

"That damned Chinese lied to me," she cried. "The yacht is going on just the same, headed straight for Maui, or somewhere. Doesn't he know my father can have him expelled from the island for this?"

Quimby looked up at her, opening his hands nervelessly. "Alas, Miss Rova," he protested, "your father can do nothing against Ah Long. All that he owes me is due Ah Long. Ah Long can wipe him out in twenty-four hours."

"The thieving yellow cur!"

Quimby came partially back to his alert self. "S-sh!" He held up a hand. "Remember you are here on his vessel. If I had realized he was here, I would not for a second have permitted you to come on board.

"Believe me, I had forgotten that his blanket mortgage on all my possessions included the *Stingaree*. When I found him in the stateroom here, locked in, I was as surprised as you. Believe me, Miss Rova, I am profoundly sorry, and if you will trust me, I will see you out of this predicament."

Rova placed her hand to her brow. Her head was throbbing with a dull ache. With Lance gone, she was alone here on this small vessel, far out at sea, with Chinese and Kanakas and one white man.

Despite the evidence against this white man, his long friendship with her father and the color of his skin compelled her to turn to him. "Oh, please, Mr. Quimby," she said, "help me find Lance Houston."

"He must have fallen overboard."

"No, no! I feel he is still here and that he is still alive. Come, help me." She started toward the galley.

Quimby rose as if with a weary effort. He gently placed a hand on her shoulder to restrain her. Strangely his touch was not so repellent to her as it had been. "My dear Miss Rova," he said, "I wish you would prepare yourself for something which I know will be shocking to you."

"Oh!" she half shrieked. "Lance is dead!"

This brought a partly amused smile. "It is more important to you than that," Quimby insisted.

There was a terrific catch in her heart. "Nothing could be more important than that," she half sobbed. "Where is he?"

"Listen to me," Quimby continued evenly. "There's very little time for you to think, to consider what I have to tell you. We must talk quickly and quietly.

"Ah Long has returned to his cabin. He has locked himself in. He will remain there until the *Stingaree* reaches Maui. There his people are waiting to receive him. He is coming to them for a ceremony. It is to be a wedding ceremony. Do you understand, Miss Rova—a wedding ceremony?"

Her mind was so filled with thoughts of Lance Houston, with concern for him, with attempts to see some way of probing the mystery of his disappearance, that she did not grasp the significance of what was being said.

Quimby persisted. "They believe Ah Long is coming to them with his new bride, and he has chosen as this bride a white woman, the loveliest in the island, of an old family. This means much to him. Much that is political,

and financial, as well as social. Much, that I fear perhaps you would not understand, if I told it to you, Miss Rova.

"But Ah Long is a powerful man, a very powerful man, in these islands, as you know, and he has made his plans in this case to marry this white woman of his dreams. He has spent years to secure control of all of her father's affairs and he believes that when the moment comes she will consent readily to save her father, and to save—herself."

At last the idea took hold of Rova. Her head snapped back and the blood coursed freely into her ashen cheeks.

"Is that yellow skunk fool enough to think that I will marry him?" she exclaimed.

Quimby bowed his head gravely. "Please speak softly, Miss Rova," he replied. "For both our sakes, I wouldn't have him overhear you speak of him so disrespectfully. We may be able to foil him, but it is not well to antagonize him. Not now."

His attitude was so suave, his words so unctuous, her extremity so perilous, that she found herself accepting mentally the softly intoned "we."

"Good!" she exclaimed. "How?"

Erect again, breaking freely, reassured, his confidence mounting moment by moment, Quimby looked into her trusting, upturned face. "Oh, my dear," said he pleadingly, "you must know what my feeling is for you. I have told you repeatedly. I have confided in your father."

"Yes! Yes!" Impatiently she brushed this aside. "Go on."

"That I love you, Rova. That I have always loved you. That I would give my life, anything I have to save you."

Again the nearness of the man offended her. She stepped back to escape the imminence of a physical contact, for he seemed to be drawing closer toward her.

"I know, Mr. Quimby," she replied, almost petulantly. "I know; we've

had all that out. I appreciate your feeling, and I care for you, too, but as a daughter, or a sister. Please go on, tell me, what shall we do?"

He ran a thin tongue over dry lips. "Your feeling will change in time," he murmured with sibilant softness. "A woman's feeling does change. The nature of your love will change. I am willing to wait for that."

A dawning horror crept into her face.

"What's the idea, Mr. Quimby?" Her voice sounded harshly defiant.

"That you marry me at once."

She fell back a pace, clenching her hands and confronting him with tightly set lips.

He leaned toward her with an insinuating leer. "It is your only chance," he added. "No Chinese in these islands would dare violate the wife of a white man or aspire to the hand of one either. You have your choice, my dear. It is me, or Ah Long."

CHAPTER XXI.

THINGS BREAK.

QUIMBY'S self-control had stood him in fine stead all his life. He was not a man who was accustomed to permitting his emotions to master him. Yet the very fact that he had suppressed his desire so successfully for so long created in his own nature a terrific feeling which played a trick on him at this delicate moment.

Now, strive as he did, with all the force of his strong will to still conceal for a little while the intensity of his emotional quest for this rare loveliness that dwelt in Rova Hollins, still the horrid fact shone in his eyes.

Rova read it unmistakably. The situation she was in, Quimby's words, the dramatic and unexpected appearance of Ah Long, his fantastic, indirect proposal went instantly with her for nothing. She saw only this

lecherous unprincipled man, old enough to be her father, with that repellent glint in his eye.

However, she did not fear him. Half her life had been spent in the saddle at Weimea. She was lithe and self-reliant as any cowgirl. No *pamiola* would have dared affront her for fear of the swift attack from her pummeling fists.

This physical fitness perhaps was at the base of her fearlessness, but her intelligence told her that Quimby would not dare to attempt to secure her assent by force.

For the moment they confronted each other silently, Quimby breathing almost desperately as he looked with famished eyes on this object of his quest, so near, yet not quite won. She relaxed. She breathed more easily.

A subtle emanation from her of youthful resource and of girlish intrepidity added to the tropical luxuriance of her aroused anger. The thought came to her that she, too, was to play for time.

Whatever had been planned, its full scope had not been opened to her. It was useless to demand again that they return to shore. She had done that to no avail. She would not waste her breath.

Therefore Rova's reply to Quimby's proposition that she must marry either him or Ah Long was singularly evasive. A roguish twinkle came into her eye. "That's a pretty tough break for me, don't you think, Mr. Quimby?" she asked. One corner of her mouth twisted down in a sad little droop.

He misinterpreted this. He leaned forward quickly. "Oh, Rova," he muttered, "permit yourself to accept me. You will never regret it, I promise. I love you."

He was reaching for her, when her tiny fist shot forward and struck him full in the mouth. He recoiled at once and a welt began appearing across his lips. The blow calmed the mounting fire in his blood. He sat down weakly.

"You little devil," he muttered.

"You big devil," she replied.

"You start anything again with me, and I'll tear the windpipe out of your throat. That goes for the Chinese, too. Now don't make any mistake."

He dissembled at once and turned toward her pleadingly. "My dear," he said humbly, "you are very quick-tempered. For myself, I can readily forgive you. If I seemed to offend, it was not intentional; but with all my heart I wish to urge you to control yourself with Ah Long.

"With him you are dealing with no ordinary man. I am sure that when morning comes he will find ways to make you realize your situation. I can see what's coming, if you do not, and it was solely in your interests that I have offered myself, and all that I have, my name, and my life, to protect you."

She folded her arms and stood above him. "You're a damned liar, Quimby," she said stoutly.

He turned his head away wearily and shook it slowly. "Too bad, too bad," he murmured, "and my sole thought was to save you."

With an affectation of resigned patience and of affronted righteousness he rose and began ruefully rubbing his lips, where the swelling was rising from the impact of her blow.

She stood thinking rapidly. Morning! It was a cue for her to follow. They were planning something for the morning. Well, that was reassuring. Better wait for morning.

By now the night was black. She would feel much better equipped to meet what she had to meet in daylight.

Quimby was wetting his handkerchief from the water in the *carafe* on the sideboard and dabbing at his lips, his back to her, as she said to him: "There are two staterooms on the *Stingaree*, are there not?"

"Yes."

"Then there is one that is not occupied by Ah Long."

"Yes, there's my room on the starboard side."

"Where's the key?"

He divined her purpose and reached for his pocket. "I don't know," he replied. "We seldom use a key. Perhaps I have one here."

He saw her purpose. He did not want her locked in his stateroom. Even though he had no actual intent of forcing his attentions upon her, still he did not want her to enjoy for any length of time the security of a locked room. She read in his movements and in the hesitation of his reply their stealthy evasion.

She darted quickly beyond him into the passage, opened the door of the starboard stateroom, passed into it, flung it shut, and found, to her great relief, that it had a snap catch above the brass lock. This she slipped into place just in time to hold out the slower moving Quimby, who followed her and rapped sharply, at the same time calling, "Please, a moment, I want to talk with you."

"Good night, Mr. Quimby," came through the keyhole.

"Please, Miss Rova—"

"Good night."

There was silence for a time. She heard him pacing up and down the passageway outside the cabin. The sound of his footsteps rose above the dull, incessant throb of the engine. She looked out the port. She could see nothing but an illimitable expanse of water, a calm sea, many stars, a new moon in the first quarter, no sign of land.

She looked at the furniture in the room. It was of *coa* wood, elaborately carved and polished. A large dressing chair, palpably a man's, was of glistening teak, with mother-of-pearl inlay. On the *coa* dressing table in mother-of-pearl was the single letter "Q."

A pair of military brushes with solid gold backs were engraved also with this letter. There was a double bed with a movable stead; also a connecting

bath. She examined this and made sure there was no outlet from it to the outer passage.

In one corner was a built-in secretary with elaborate marquetry. She examined this and saw that it was filled with letters and documents. It was clearly the habitat of a man of large and important affairs. It was not a guest cabin. It was the owner's stateroom.

Softly and quizzically, she spoke to herself, as if addressing some one unseen. "That was only a hunch of mine to call you a liar, Mr. Quimby," she said. "But it looks as if that was your other name. Ah Long is in the guest room. This is the cabin of the owner of the Stingaree, and it belongs to me.

"Thanks. I don't believe I'll change a thing in it, unless I replace that heavy teakwood chair with something smaller. The desk fills up a lot of room too. Maybe that can come out. Anyway we'll see. Time enough for that."

She began surveying herself in the glass, arranging her hair, tidying her waist. She looked at her hands. They were somewhat soiled from the long afternoon in the saddle. She went to the bathroom and splashed about there for a few minutes.

Despite her reassurance and the recovery of her good spirits, however, she could take only a cursory and subconscious interest in her person or her comfort. Now that she was alone and safe for the time being, the oppressive mystery concerning Lance Houston controlled her thoughts. Who, or what, had hit him? Where was he? She did not once permit herself to consider that he might be overboard.

Rova returned to the door in the passageway and listened. There was no sound of footsteps now. She waited a few minutes longer. She could hear only the ululant swish of the water against the trim sides of the yacht, and the throß of the engine.

She released the catch, waited another few minutes, and then softly, cautiously opened the door a few inches. There was nothing visible in the immediate passage. She opened the door wide enough to slip her head outside.

The only light was one placed indirectly at the head of the companion-way, lighting the steps to the deck. What dim illumination this offered showed no one visible. Leaving the door ajar, and first removing her riding sandals, she slipped in her stocking feet up and down the passage.

She saw no one. She did not dare go past the light up the steps to the deck for fear that if any one were there she would be seen.

She listened for a moment outside the door of the guest-cabin, behind which probably was Ah Long. She could detect no sound. No light was coming through the keyhole. Possibly the Chinese was in there asleep.

Cautiously she explored on into the saloon. It was very faintly lit by the light that struggled in through the ports from the stars and the thin new moon. She quickly saw there was no one in the saloon.

She went on and softly opened the swinging door to the galley. It creaked a bit on its hinges and gave her a terrific fright. Her heart almost stopped beating for the moment, but she held it and recovered herself, and promptly realized that the sound was so slight that it was doubtless drowned by the throb of the engine.

She pushed on into the galley, in dense darkness. Yet she felt the presence of some one. She could detect breathing. She waited a moment until her eyes became accustomed to the closeness of the small room.

There was a small port high in it, and through this struggled a trifle of light from the stars and the new moon. Gradually she was able to see that in one corner on a pallet a Kanaka was sleeping.

To the left was a door. She did not know where it led. Beyond it lay the steerage. She tried the handle and turned it ever so cautiously. She thought she was doing it without making any noise. In a moment the door opened and swung inward. Fearlessly she pushed in and closed it behind her.

Again she stood still. Instinct told her that she was now in the presence of several human beings. She waited while her eyes began to pick out objects in the darkness, for here again there was only a single, tiny port, high in the room.

She thought she saw bunks and men sleeping. Then she thought she heard a moan from one corner, and a body moving. She advanced a step.

A cold, hard instrument was thrust suddenly into her chest. A hoarse voice muttered hotly in her face: "Up with yer dukes, y' slinkin' nigger."

She gasped: "Oh!" and threw up her hands.

An instant later the light beyond was turned on. Its green-shaded back protected her from its full glow, but she saw clearly in front of her a crouching, studded, cherubic, but scowling countenance. Beneath it a menacing hand held what appeared to be a pistol with its muzzle over her heart.

It was Slum Ritey. "One sound and I'll croak ye," he muttered, for he did not yet fully realize the identity of his caller. Wearing her riding breeches, in the darkness she looked like a boy. He thought her another prowling Kanaka, but as the light fell on her red curls and her white scared face, he recognized her.

In his heart he would have liked to have bound and gagged her and thrown her into the corner with the other recumbent figure trussed there, but this did not seem politic in the menacing presence of the common enemy.

"Huh," he muttered, "it's you."

"Who are you?" she gasped.

"Me? I'm Slum."

This was her first personal introduction to the trick mule-skinner. She saw that he was a white man, and something in his slang and intonation told her that he was not of the Islands. Her pulses bounded with sudden wild hope, as she recognized him.

"I'm Rova Hollins, Slum," she whispered. The memory of the corral at the old Maui came to her swiftly, and the cagy antics of the clownish *paniola*. Even before she could ask a question her heart told her his presence there meant that Lance was safe.

He dropped the "pistol," and let it sag in his hand. She saw it was only a stick and smiled quickly at the deception.

"Have you seen your friend La—Hype Smith?" she asked eagerly.

He put his finger to his lips saying "ssh," and tiptoed back toward the bunk. She followed him. There on his side, with his back to her lay her *paniola*.

She could not restrain a sob of relief, and she went to her knees beside him. She placed an arm around him, and a hand fell quickly across his heart. Its regular beat reassured her.

Swiftly, gently, tenderly, her fingers felt up, around his head. A wet towel lay over the hurt. She stripped it off and examined it under the light, bending low so she could see the welt.

She turned to Slum. "Where's the water?" she asked.

"Here." He indicated a wash bowl.

She took a cambric handkerchief from her waist, dipped it in water, and bathed the wound again. Then she replaced the towel in defter, neater fashion.

Much as Slum resented her intrusion, much as he disliked her presence, for he attributed this calamity solely to her, still he could not but admit silently to himself, that her woman's fingers knew better how to minister to a wound than did his cumbersome, gnarled cow-puncher hands.

He would yield no place to her in

affection for the stricken man lying on the bunk, but he realized it was wise to declare a temporary partnership with her until they could get out of this predicament.

"Has he been asleep like this long?" she asked.

"Ain't come to none at all, ma'am."

"How did you get here?"

"Flyin' Kate kicked me into this mess that you doped out to addle poor cow-punchers."

"Me?" Instinctively she resented the tone in the accusation, but there was something comical in the puckering around the squinty little eyes of Slum Ritey that disarmed her. Suddenly the feeling within her seemed warm and melting and comfortable.

For the moment all she knew was that this loutish clown had appeared miraculously. To give expression to the intensity of her relief she threw her arms around Slum and kissed him first on one cheek, and then on the other. "Oh, you darling!" she exclaimed.

He was terrifically embarrassed and slunk from her, shameful. "Ssh," he admonished. "These niggers'll hear y' and cook us all. Look!" He indicated the trussed Kanaka in the corner.

"Ah, this one did it, eh? The scoundrel!"

"Dunno who did it. He was draggin' 'im down here."

She laid a hand on Slum's arm. The space was close down there in the steerage. Slum began to find in his mind excuses for his stricken buddy. What could a poor fellow do when a skirt like that started after him?

"Come," she said, "I want you to help me lift Lance."

Even in the tenseness of the situation, with the menace of the darkness and their unknown dangers all about them, this revelation of Rova's knowledge of the identity of his buddy filled him with fresh suspicion. "What do y' mean—Lance?" he asked, stepping away from her.

Again her hand went to his forearm and she leaned close to him. "Don't you suppose I know who he is, Slum?" she whispered. "I knew it the first moment I saw him. But you need not fear me."

Slum shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway," he admitted, "reckon you'd rather get the blood money for 'im alive than dead."

"Oh, Slum!"

The reproof in her tone made him feel instantly mean and apologetic. "Pardon me, ma'am. Reckon I'm a bit ruffled. Lost my bearin's kinda, what with these slinkin' stick-ups and all."

"Come along then and help me. We must get him out of here. It's not far to my cabin. I can lock him in there and nobody can get him."

Together then, the stumpy little man and the slender girl lifted the lanky, inert Lance and carried him out of the steerage, through the galley, through the saloon, along the passage and into the owner's cabin.

They laid him on the bed. Rova latched the door, and immediately busied herself about the bed.

She pulled down the covers and placed Lance between the sheets, removed his boots, opened his shirt and listened to the beating of his heart, scanned his closed eyes, went into the bathroom and searched in the medicine closet, coming back with a bottle of witch-hazel and a phial of iodine, with which she again cleansed the wound. She found some surgical gauze and binding tape and dressed it neatly.

Slum stood at the foot of the bed awkwardly, embarrassed, and yet being captivated and subjugated against his will moment by moment. She was just a "skirt," and a young foolish-looking one at that, but she went about this business like an old hand.

"You're sure good medicine," he mumbled.

She threw an angelic smile in his direction. "Thanks, Slum."

For the first time the stricken man moved his arms of his own will, and turned over without assistance. As he did so, a revolver, a good mannish six-shooter, oozed out of his hip pocket and lay out on the white sheet. Rova picked it up and looked at it and then laid it aside on the dresser.

"That's funny," said Slum.

"What's funny?" asked Rova.

"The way that gun fell outa Lance's pocket. Just the way that toy pistol o' hisn fell out the night of the murder in the Cross-Eyed Duck. I saw that. He never met none o' them shootin' dames. Never knew 'em from a hole in the wall.

"Never would have gone to no beer saloon if it hadn't 'a' been for me. Just came there to help me. Got a heart as big as the Rocky Mountains, Lance has. Then his gun popped out on the floor thataway jest like thisn did right now.

"It hopped right down under the hand of that gin-soaked dame where she was sprawlin' around like a tarantula. She ups and grabs it and plugs everybody she could see with it. That's how it happened, so help me God, believe me, Miss Hollins."

Rova looked at Slum with misty eyes. She came toward him again and took his hands. "You're just a darling," she said irrelevantly.

This rendered him tongue-tied for the moment. At length he stammered: "Don't y' b-believe me?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "I knew it all the time."

"That's funny," said he. "How come you know it?"

She put her hand on her heart and sighed. "Here," she explained. "Don't you suppose any one would know it must be something like that, just to look at Lance Houston?"

They were standing at the foot of the bed and at opposite sides while this was going on, and they turned at the same time to look down on what they supposed to be the unconscious form of

their friend. His eyes had been closed all along. Now they were open, and there was a grin on his boyish face.

"Hello, folks!" said Lance.

Rova rushed to his side, kneeled, and placed a restraining hand on his brow. It was cool. "Don't exert yourself," she admonished. "You are all right."

"Sure, I'm all right," said Lance. "But it seems like some one cracked me on the bean. How come?"

CHAPTER XXII.

IN PORT.

AT dawn the next morning the Stingaree lay at anchor in a land-locked harbor seventy miles from the Cove whence she had started the evening before. Shortly after dawn out from shore pushed a native skiff manned by four Kanakas—with an outrigger.

In the stern rode a curious figure. He was in his bare feet, wearing blue denim pants, and above this was a threadbare old-fashioned Prince Albert coat. On his head was a stove-pipe silk hat.

He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and his snow-white hair gave a benign aspect to a face that seemed proud of the habiliments and loftily secure in spiritual peace in the presence of the lissome Kanakas who bent to their oars.

In the background a village of thatched huts spread back from the beach. On the horizon could be seen the smoke of a sugar-mill. Near by, through the trees were visible the red tiles of a railway station. Above it stretched telephone and telegraph wires.

The incongruous silk-hatted figure came alongside the Stingaree and clambered aboard as agilely as a monkey, despite his years and the restraints of the cast-off clothing. Expertly he carried his head so that the hat balanced without falling off.

On the after-deck he was greeted by Ah Long clothed in ceremonial vestments of yellow silk, richly embroidered. Beside him stood the thin figure of the calculating Quimby.

"Mr. Quimby," said the Chinese, "this is my friend, the Reverend Mr. Aloysius Quong Lee. He is the pastor of the Presbyterian native church in Sundra. At my request he has come promptly this morning as you will see, and you will find him, I am sure, eager in your service."

Mr. Quimby shook hands with the reverend gentleman, who apparently was a half-caste, possibly a mixture of Chinese, Kanaka, and white. "Mr. Lee," he said unctuously, "I have heard from my friend of your excellent work in Sundra, and I am not unmindful of the religious needs of your parish.

"If you will permit me, I would like to offer a contribution." Whereupon, baldly, he took from his pocket a small wad of bills and handed them to the brightly quivering proprietor of the silk hat.

"Sank you, sir," beamed Mr. Lee, grasping the bills and sucking in his breath as he bowed low. "Sank you. The brethren of my congregation and the sisters will bress you."

Quimby shook himself. He was glad to be through with the preliminaries. "Now," he said, "it is opportune that you are here, Mr. Lee, at this time, for it may be that your services will be required shortly for a wedding ceremony."

"Sank you, sank you." The reverend gentleman sucked in his breath. "I am to plees you with most gratitude."

Quimby bestowed him out of the way on the starboard side in one of the red leather wicker chairs. "Let us go to the saloon for breakfast. We can send then for Miss Hollins."

A moment later, the Chinese and the white man were seated vis-à-vis across the table in the saloon. Silently they drank their coffee and ate their toast.

Ah Long dipped lusciously into an iced mangoe. Quimby satisfied himself with a spread of guava jelly on a buttered biscuit. His appetite did not seem hearty. Perhaps this was natural in a bridegroom on the wedding day.

Calling Rova proved to be unnecessary. She appeared while they were at table. The Chinese serving boy had just departed into the galley when she came in from her cabin, her eyes exultant, her cheeks sparkling with a color clearly not from the rouge pot. She seemed, in fact, quite light-hearted.

"Hello, Mr. Quimby," she called. "Hello, Mr. Ah Long." They both bowed gravely and said "Good morning," and looked at each other somewhat in concern. This was strange. She seemed like a light-hearted school-girl off for a holiday.

"You slept well, I take it," said Quimby.

"Well—I rested. I am greatly refreshed, thank you."

"And—reconciled."

She laughed gayly. "To the wedding," she exclaimed, and then held her head back and gave vent to peal after peal of laughter.

The looks of Quimby were almost black. Ah Long's waxen face was like that of an image. He regarded her inscrutably with a species of mild curiosity.

"We are at Sundra," said Quimby.

"Ah, is that where we are?" Rova lightly replied. "I thought you were headed last night for Maui. Then we are still on the mainland?"

"Yes," said Ah Long gravely. "There is a telephone at the railway station connecting with Honolulu. Your father, I am informed, is at the Moana Hotel there. You can communicate with him at any time, if you like."

"Thanks." She bowed to the Chinese very slightly. Then her face grew suddenly serious, and she added sharply. "And I suppose he will tell me that he can keep Weimea and the Maui

and everything, only, if I marry you. Is that it, as Mr. Quimby has said?"

Ah Long did not move a muscle of his face. He gravely nodded, and then answered slowly, "That is it, Miss Hollins, if you choose to put it in that form. I have hoped that you would see the wisdom of accepting the situation without permitting your father to know that duress was even intended; nor is it, my dear young lady. I will also add that in our marriage relations, if you so desire it, we need have no personal contact."

The Chinese rose. She could not but admire his dignity and repose. He seemed like some impersonal static figure in a moving mechanism. "Now," he said, "if you will pardon me, I will retire for a few minutes to my cabin. We can then proceed with the ceremony." Ah Long moved away like some distant automaton on cardboard scenery.

She turned to Quimby smilingly. "I've got to hand it to him for nerve and audacity."

In Quimby's face was no answering smile. His own conflict with his emotions had left him a bit weak. He felt almost like a man drugged, so overmastering was his desire to consummate his plot and complete his purpose.

"Please come on deck," said Quimby gutturally.

Unsuspecting, for it seemed that nothing malign could meet her on deck, Rova followed Quimby up the companionway.

He called sharply, "Mr. Lee."

The incongruous, white-haired figure in the stove-pipe hat rose and projected himself awkwardly along the deck. Quimby introduced them, "Miss Hollins, the Rev. Mr. Lee." Then he took her aside and whispered, "It must be me, Rova. You never could marry that Chinese."

Now in broad daylight, in full sight of the town, lying in front of them, the whole thing seemed more utterly absurd than ever. The most charitable

way to think of Quimby was that he was mad, as in fact perhaps he was, for there was a half-crazed wild glint in his eyes. A man accustomed to having his way, he was determined now to go through with this thing at any cost.

Quimby came close to her and whispered, "We can be married now by this native preacher. He can do it in one minute. What do you say?"

She glanced impudently at him. "Don't be silly," was her reply. She had not noticed the Kanaka stealing along the rail. It was Mahaia, the renegade jockey. He came along, slinking, with a white bandage in his hands, watching for a glance from Quimby.

As Rova said, "Don't be silly," Quimby gave the glance to Mahaia. The jockey leaped forward, threw the bandage over Rova's mouth, seized her arms from behind, and securely held them. She struggled in vain, but she managed to give one cry before the bandage closed her mouth.

"Lance!" The cry rang shrilly and was cut off.

Quimby nodded to the Rev. Aloysius Quong Lee. "Come here," he said. "This is the wedding ceremony I want you to perform."

The half-caste looked at the struggling girl, still tussling with Mahaia. "But Meester Quimby," he objected, "in a wedding it ees ver' necessaire that both parties consent."

"She'll consent all right. Trust me for that. You read the service, and when it's over and you have sworn to the fact before a notary, I'll double the contribution I just handed you."

The distressed native looked about wildly for relief. He removed his silk hat and mopped his brow. Here was a catastrophe, instead of a benefaction.

"Quickly, Mr. Lee. Pick up your Bible. Say the words." Quimby was prodding him. The half-caste fumbled inside his Prince Albert for the Testament which lay there. He looked pleadingly back across the waters toward Sundra as if he vainly hoped that help

might come from that quarter; something to prevent the necessity of his being an unwilling instrument in this crime.

Relief, however, came from the opposite direction. It boiled out of the companionway three steps at a time. It came in the form of Lance Houston with his six-gun in his hand—barking. He fired it twice just for exercise.

The first shot went through the stovepipe hat of the Rev. Mr. Lee. The second chipped the visor of the yachting cap of Mr. Quimby, which was fortunately in profile so that his marksmanship could be well evident. Quickly Lance stripped the bandage from Rova's face and untied her hands.

"How come?" he queried.

"Better ask Mr. Quimby." She straightened her clothes, while she looked at Mahaia with an intense disgust.

Quimby thought he saw a way even at this stage to absolve himself. He turned on the jockey. "Mahaia, you criminal idiot," he exclaimed, "how did you dare attack Miss Hollins?"

Lance interposed, "Same way he tried to dope Lightnin', 'cause you told him to."

Quimby thought yet he could rise to the occasion. He faced Lance and said, "I'm glad to see you safe and sound, Mr. Smith. I have been offering myself to save Miss Hollins from the ignominy of marrying a Chinese—Ah Long."

"Oh, is that it?" Lance cut in. "You were tryin' to save 'er, eh!"

"Yes, she has been off alone all night on this yacht. Besides, her father is in serious financial difficulty. His estate will be saved and her reputation will be saved, only if she marries some one."

"That's a bright idea, Mr. Quimby," Lance drawled, "only you mixed up the cast. I'm usually the guy that plays the leadin' rôles."

He turned to Rova, "O' course, I don't know how you feel about it," he

added, "but as for me I think y' better get married after spendin' all night with a man in a cabin."

Slum Ritey appeared. "There was two of us," he asserted stoutly.

Rova put her arm through Lance's. "Perhaps I'd better marry only one," she said and turned to the astounded half-caste as she called, "Mr. Lee, come here."

Joe Bloom was ushered into the bridal suite at the Moana Hotel a week later one morning. He had just stepped from the steamer that came from San Francisco." His first words were as usual admonitory, "What's this I hear about your being married, Lance?" he demanded.

Houston brought Rova forward. "Meet the wife," he said.

Joe grimaced in an attempt at a smile as he took her hand. "I don't know how it will work out," he commented.

"You're a fine cloud for a honeymoon!" Lance exclaimed. "If it works out like it started, there's nothin' to it."

"But I was thinkin' of your new contract," the manager protested.

"New contract?" Lance queried "What's the matter with the old one?"

"We're through with the Noted Stars," Joe replied. "They canned you the first week, while the district attorney was hollering his head off."

"Gee," said Lance. "Then I s'pose I'm through."

"Not entirely," Joe explained. "I've got a contract here in my pocket for you to sign with the Master Artists, only I don't know what you'll do with the money. We'll be splitting ten thousand a week."

Lance regarded his manager menacingly. "Joe," he accused, "I believe this whole thing was a put-up job."

Bloom expanded his chest proudly. "If you mean gettin' you out and puttin' the cops on your trail, yes. I knew the Noted Stars had put one over on us in that thirty-five hundred contract.

You're the best drawing star in pictures. Even ten thousand is not enough, but this new contract is only for two years.

"I can boost the ten, after that. Your accidental presence at that murder in the Cross-eyed Duck was a lucky break for us. By keeping mighty busy that first day I managed to keep the necessary witnesses out of sight, for the district attorney raised a fierce holler about you.

"Then I produced enough who could swear how your gun came on the floor, to clear you entirely. The D. A. pulled down the reward for you ten days ago, but that had turned the trick. The Noted Stars had canceled their contract.

"That was all I wanted. We were free again and the market was open. It took me only three days to treble your salary, and I hopped the first boat to come over here and get your signature. That was because I got no answer to my cables. Where were you all the time?"

"Roamin' around," said Lance, holding Rova's hand.

"Romeoin', you mean," Bloom replied, and then added, "but there's one clause in this contract that can't be lived up to."

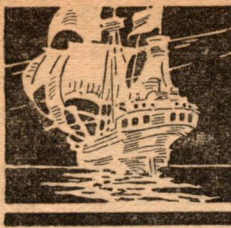
"What is it?" Rova asked.

Joe took from his pocket a fat type-written document, and after due search located the questionable lines and read, "It is hereby agreed that if the party of the second part shall marry at any time during the life of this contract, it will be optional thereupon with the party of the first part to cancel its obligations at once."

"But that's for the future," said Lance. "Don't say nothin' about bein' married already, does it?"

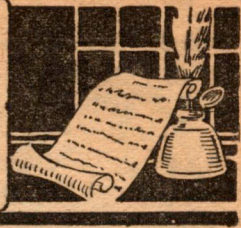
"No," Joe admitted.

"All right," said Lance, his arm around Rova, while she beamed up into his face, "I don't want to get married no more."



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



A GOOD scrap is always interesting—even though it be only by letters. Perhaps that is why Mr. Jones enjoys the difference in opinion voiced in Argonotes:

Little Rock, Ark.

Being a constant reader of your splendid publication, the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, from the first issue to date, I can truly say that in all the thousands of stories both short and continued I have never found one that I did not like. I don't remember how far back the ARGOSY was begun before it was consolidated with the *All-Story*, but if memory fails me not I bought and read the first issue of each when separated, also the first issue when consolidated, some fifteen years ago.

It is a hard matter to say what kind of stories I like best, but I believe that the Westerns are my favorite, with adventure stories next and detective stories third. Zane Gray is my favorite author; Edgar Rice Burroughs is a close second, with Franklin third, with his humorous vein.

I note with amusement the letters that are printed and the comments pro and con. This is one of the best features of your magazine, and it gets the real pulse of the readers' views. This is the first time I have ever broken into print, but wish you all the success in the world, and as long as I live I will be booster for ARGOSY-ALLSTORY.

J. O. JONES.

CERTAINLY the imaginative or "impossible" stories have a strong following. Perhaps in this letter Mr. Fowlkes reveals the secret of their fascination:

Montgomery, Ala.

As every man has a right to his own opinion I would like to express mine of your magazine. I like it best of any I read for several reasons, but principally on account of its cleanliness and of the imaginative stories you print.

I am a draftsman in an engineering office here, and I wouldn't transfer my vocation as an engineer for any other. We all know that in the routine work we do there is nothing duller on earth at times. That's the reason I enjoy your imaginative tales for recreation.

Another feature about your stories I like is the inability to solve the plot before the end. I read a great deal, so the solving of some plots is comparatively easy. I'm glad you don't publish that kind of stories.

The best story I've read in your magazine, to my way of thinking, was "The Mark of the Moccasin," by Kenneth Perkins, I believe. That was a cleverly written story. He has a great style.

WALTER L. FOWLKES.

"SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN" never fails to bring in letters from its fans each week. Yes, we hope to land another story like it before very long.

Chicago, Ill.

About eight months ago, while visiting a friend, I saw an ARGOSY on the table. Getting her permission, I borrowed the magazine and read it. The result was making me an eager ARGOSY fan. The one story I enjoyed most of all was "Seven Footprints to Satan." Do you think it possible to get another story something like it? However, the ARGOSY in all is a great success and I am a satisfied reader.

MILDRED SMITH.

ALWAYS we are glad to receive letters such as this, where the writer simply sits down and tells us what he likes and wants to see in the ARGOSY:

Denver, Colo.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for so many years that I have forgotten the beginning. You haven't many readers that can beat my record. To miss a copy of ARGOSY would be like going to work in your stocking feet. Neither one would be possible to me.

I haven't said much to the publishers about the kind of stories I like, for I didn't believe it would create an impression. However, under Argonotes, I have decided to break my long silence.

I am not keen about the Western stories, for they have too much of sameness about them. "Ride 'Em, Cowboy!" has lost its punch with me. It has become too much like listening to a political speech.

I enjoy pioneer stories, like "Heartbreak Trail," "Now We're Rich," "Blue Sky." "Blue Sky" was the best story I've ever read in the ARGOSY. I like Northern tales, tales of the early goldfields, and financial stories. No story is complete without romance.

There are detective story magazines for those that like them, and there are Western story magazines for those that like them; but for cripes sake, keep the ARGOSY out of the blood and thunder class. Make the ARGOSY

an unusual magazine by publishing unusual stories. Something a tired business man can read without having nightmares as a climax.
N. H. FISHER.

ANOTHER reader who takes issue with C. A. Corey—but we hardly think Mr. Corey includes the historical Western stories in his taboo: as we understand it, he objects only to the straight range and cowboy tale. Incidentally, there are some excellent historical tales on schedule for the near future.

New York, N. Y.

For some reason or other I have never read your ARGOSY-ALLSTORY before your last issue of June 23, 1928. In this issue I don't think I let anything go by, for I read everything that was in it, including your new column on Argonotes. One reader, I noticed, C. A. Corey by name, wrote in this column, and highly denounced the Western stories. I don't think this reader was right in his denunciations, and I hope he reads this with my upholding of the stories contained in ARGOSY. If Mr. Corey meant such stories as "Chili and Tobasco," I don't blame him for feeling against such stories. However, that doesn't mean to say that all your Western stories are "the bunk." On the contrary, this story was the only one in the entire issue that was not very attracting to me.

I read the first installment of your new serial, "Heartbreak Trail," also a Western story. This appealed highly to my imagination, which I may add is the real reason for my writing to you. I have never read a story so interesting and vivid as this one before, not forgetting that it is a Western story. I happen to know something about American history, about the slave question, about the riots and struggles in the new State of Kansas, about the controversy which arose, and about the subsequent election of Lincoln, ending in the Civil War. The author brings us in close contact with the real facts leading to the Civil War, describing the trains of wagons migrating Westward, and how unfairly the settlers were treated when they reached their destination. In history books we learn plain facts. But in this story the author weaves a very interesting story about the real facts concerning the slave question in the United States. Everything is done exact, and in detail. Even John Brown, well known in American history as the man who led a raid against his own race, for the cause of the negroes, is mentioned in this story.

Don't forget, I have read only one part of the story and I am looking ahead when I can read the rest of it. It is a very interesting story, and is not as fictitious as our Mr. Corey thinks. So, although Mr. Corey thinks that all Western stories are "the bunk," one can readily see that a Western story can contain real, true facts of American history.

MOE ALTES.

ON the whole, however, most letters are now voicing the sort of tolerance we like to cultivate. This reader, for example, expresses our sentiments when he says: "If a Western is good, let's have it; if not, let some one else publish it."

Vancouver, B. C.

Enclosed find my Choice Coupon. This is a good idea. I have been wondering if you were going to turn the ARGOSY into a Western story book. Let's hope not.

The charm of an ARGOSY always was its good stories.

I enjoy a story that has a story to tell, but can't stand a Western. They seem to be written all alike. Have been a reader since "Hawkins and His Inventions," "Interesting Nonsense," "Year 2000," *et cetera*.

If a Western is good let's have it. If it hasn't got an unusual twist let some one else publish it.
WILMOTT REEVE.

ONE of our writers wants a copy of the July 8, 1916, ARGOSY. Worth a dollar to him. Have you one? Don't send it; just notify us.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

I did not like.....
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

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

Looking Ahead!

Back to 1800 we go in next week's Argosy, to a period in American history seldom touched by fiction.

THE GOLDEN TRAITOR

by R. de S. HORN

takes us back to those stirring days when the national capital of the young republic was moved from Philadelphia to the wilds of Washington. Invaluable were the records, the plates, the plans, etc., which figured in that national moving and only natural that clever crooks saw an opportunity to seize a fortune. Their villainy furnishes us with an excellent historical novel, replete with action, adventure and romance.

MADMAN'S BUFF

by WILL McMORROW

is a complete novelette of quite another sort. Weird and unusual, it presents an astonishing chain of adventures—the sort of yarn that holds your interest breathlessly and winds up with a real knock-out punch.

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