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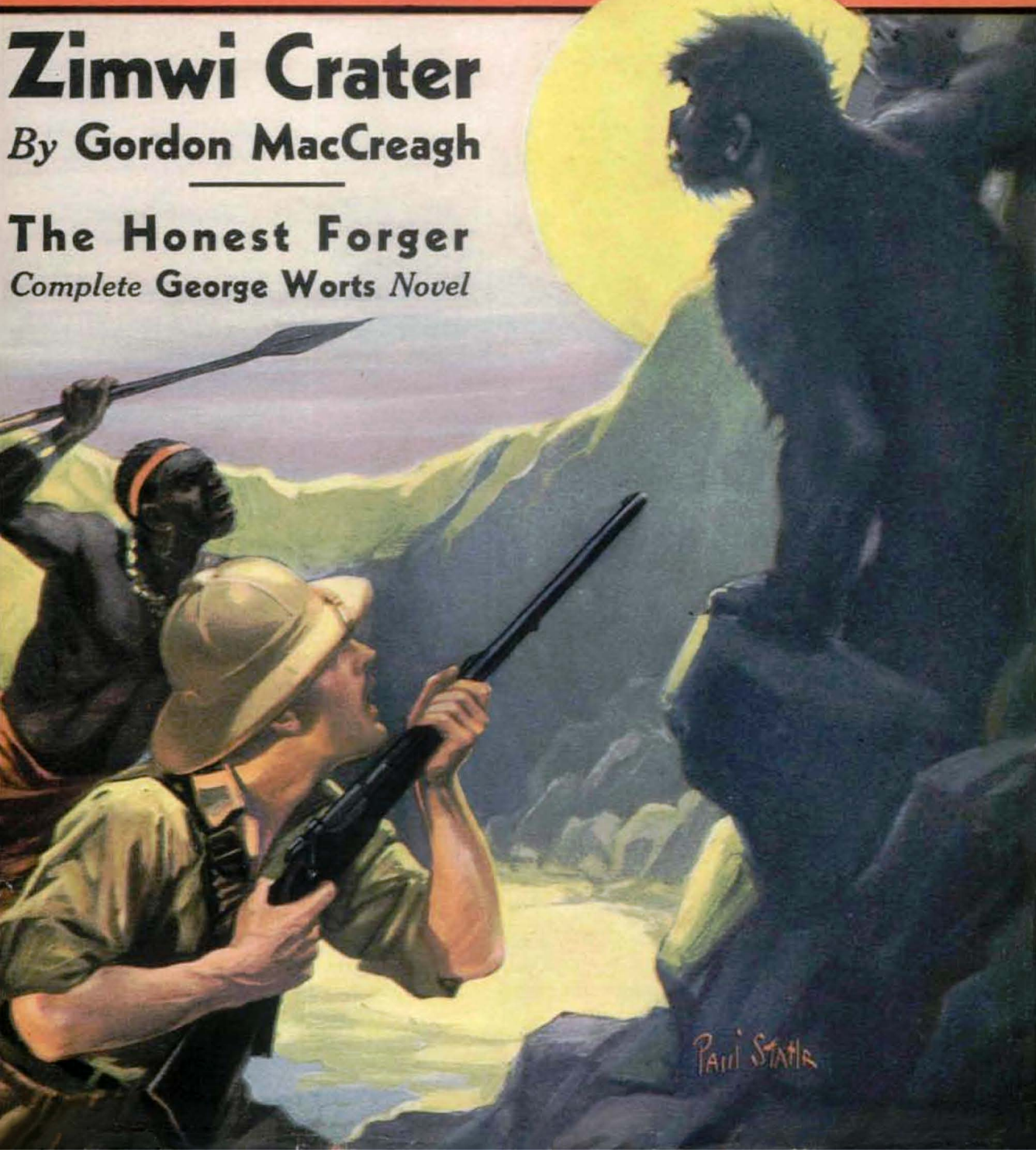

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Volume 249 | CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 11, 1934 | Number 1

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

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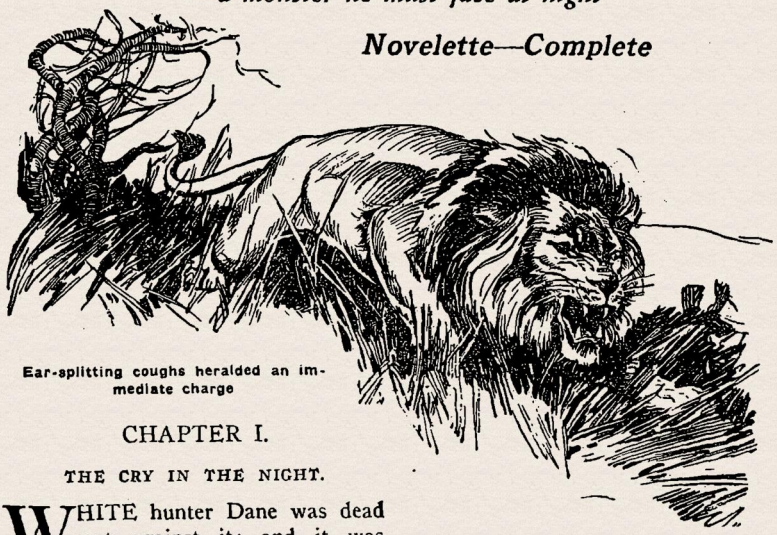
Zimwi Crater

By GORDON MacCREAGH

Author of "Reptile Man," "The Safari of Danger," etc.

A strange, man-killing monster bars hunter Dane's path in Africa —a monster he must face at night

Novelette—Complete



Ear-splitting coughs heralded an immediate charge

CHAPTER I.

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT.

WHITE hunter Dane was dead set against it; and it was Dane's business to know Africa.

"You've got one o' those damfool notions," he told Reynolds, the construction engineer. "There's a whole lot o' superior white men like you who laugh at African superstition. I'm telling you to let it alone till we got some daylight to look into it."

Reynolds dangled his legs over the tailboard of the little ton-and-a-half truck, in which the two men had bumped over the roadless plain from Number Seven camp, and laughed as he looked across the peaceful moonlight at a low, steep-sided cone that rose ghostly out of the night mist.

"Ah, pshaw! Ogres! Homicidal ghosts! You don't look like you're nervous about any of that kind of bunk."

Dane looked like anything else but. His was a big-shouldered, sinewy frame, a face hard and sun scorched with alert eyes, and a wide mouth. He took no offense at the implication of being worried.

"Listen, mister," he was not afraid to admit, "I'm here, alive, and with all my own hands an' feet, because I'm scared of anything that I don't know all about in Africa. This is new country to me. All I know of it is that the natives call that hill over there, *Jubali Ya Zimwi*, the Crater of the Ogre; an' I know enough about natives to

know that they haven't wit enough to invent something out of nothing at all. They'll embroider a yarn; they'll exaggerate it. But I've seen enough of African weirdness to tell you to let it alone *till daylight.*"

Reynolds still laughed; though shortly, and under his breath. Loud laughter seemed to be a thing curiously inappropriate for two men alone in the immensity of Africa. They seemed like ghosts themselves, these two lone humans. Like eerie half-men who floated on nothing.

The night was one of those sudden, clammily cool ones that sometimes come with the early moon. Like a moist blanket, a white mist hung low over the ground. Above the mist protruded the torsos of the men; half a mile distant, the steep little pale-gray cone of the ghost crater; farther away, other round domes of rising ground.

From beneath the mist-pall came the sounds of midnight Africa. Far off, somewhere, a spotted hyena howled its gruesome, *whroo-oo-ee-ee,* ending in its high pitched, idiot shriek; and closer another answered it, chuckling and giggling insanely.

Reynolds shivered. "Lord! Who ever called that ghastly noise a laughing hyena?"

In the ensuing stillness lesser noises came. Soft feet pattered; something suddenly screamed; stones clicked and clattered; voices of nothing whispered and sighed over the tragedy of life in Africa.

Devils, the natives said. Evil spirits that met and told one another of the deaths that they knew of in the night.

His rifle was not there when he reached for it

From away in the direction of the ghost crater came a low, rumbling voice of deep volume that vibrated and shuddered in the still air.

Reynolds involuntarily jerked his feet up out of the mist.

"Ha! Lions!" was his immediate guess.

Hunter Dane sat hunched with his arms locked round his knees. His big frame was shaken with a spasm of shivering.

"Yeah," he grunted. "They've got an obsession down in your office in Nairobi about lions an' they hired me to kill 'em off, so you could run your road in peace. But that was no lion."

"How do you know?"

Dane was ungracious, and pain was racking his joints.

"It's my business to know; just like yours, an' young Anson's down to the camp, is to run a road an' know nothing else. There's some lions around, but none right here; an', so you don't think I'm guessing, I'll tell you how I know. As we drove from camp we came out o' thorn bush an' grass country into bare ground an' rock. I couldn't see it under this damned mist, but I could feel it. Game doesn't eat sand an' rocks, an' where there's no game there's no lions."

That was simple enough—for one who knew. But Reynolds was piqued. "Then if you know so much, what was that noise?"

Dane ruminated darkly over his answer, turning over in his mind all the menacing noises that he knew. Then, "Damned if I know," he said. "An' I think I know every beast in Africa. An' I know enough about Africa not to fool with what I don't know in the night."

BUT Reynolds was feeling that he owed it to his manhood to show some independence; and he was secretly ashamed of having snatched his feet up when that curious roar had come. He slipped from the tailboard of the truck, and immediately only his trunkless head floated above the mist.

"Then if there are no lions, there's no reason why I shouldn't scout around a bit. I'm not afraid of ghosts or ogres."

"Listen, Mister Chief Engineer," said Dane. "I've warned you, an' that's all I can do. I'm not your boss, an' I can't hold you. Nor I can't come with you, 'cause I'm due to go under with this damned old malaria any minute now. I've taken forty o' quinine and half a bottle o' Warburg's. I'll kill it all right, maybe by tomorrow. But, right now, I can't go galloping around the night; an' I know you couldn't carry me back."

"Sleep it off," said the floating head. "I'm going to catch your ghost and you'll wake up in camp tomorrow."

Another spasm shook Dane; and with a curious effect of a rolling football, the head drifted away on the mist.

The crunch of boots on gravel died away. The lesser sounds that had stilled reawoke, curiously sublimated, and difficult to locate under the mist blanket. The little people of the night scratched and scuffled. The evil spirits whispered to one another in glee at impending tragedy. Feet pattered round the truck. Something sniffed windily at the wheels.

Dane did not know what it was; nor was he in a condition just then to care very much.

"Damn fools rush in," he began the familiar quotation; but the chattering of his teeth cut off the rest.

The roaring noise from the direction of the ghost crater rose nearer than before.

Dane could distinguish a sound of murderous menace in it this time. Not lions, he was sure of that; but some queer thing of immense volume in its voice.

"Damn know-it-all fool!" Dane chattered again. He wished he might go out and drag the man in, boss or no boss, by the scruff of his neck. But his limbs were gripped in such shiver-

ing spasms that he could not even sit upright.

The thing that sniffed round the wheels snarled angrily at something else. *Not* lions, Dane knew dazedly. Could that fool look after himself, against even these other lesser things that groped below the enveloping fog?

Then that other unknown *thing*, of the huge voice, bellowed again. A roar of giant, half-human triumph—and something s c r e a m e d ! Horribly! Hoarse with terror and awful pain. It shrieked again and was suddenly strangled short. Enormous sub-human laughter gurgled out of the mist.

Dane heaved himself to one elbow, groping for his rifle. But the nerveless arm slid from under him at the effort. The fever surged over him in hot waves and he, as he knew from past experience he would do, went out.

CHAPTER II.

LION!

IT was late afternoon when Dane drove the lurching truck over the tussocks of bunch grass into camp Number Seven. Dane, hollow eyed and drawn, but steady on his feet and very steady and hard around his mouth. He stalked into the tent where Anson, the assistant-engineer, sat wondering, fretting in helpless ignorance.

And it was little that Dane could add to it; and that little only added to the unbelievable horror.

Anson was young and his experience of Africa was nil. There was courage in his fresh, good-looking face; but he listened to Dane's meager recital with dilated eyes. His reaction was stereotyped.

"Lions!" he murmured. "It couldn't be anything else!"

Dane was merciless. "Yeah," he said. "I knew you'd say that. So I brought this along."

From a wrapping of bunch grass he shook out onto the camp table a gruesome object. A bone, freshly yellow, picked cleanish, with shreds of sinew and raw flesh clinging to it.

"Do you know what that is?" he asked the staring engineer.

He filled Anson's goggling silence himself.

"It's a thigh bone! Human! An' as you see, broken through the middle! Snapped like a pipe stem!"

Anson drew away from the thing. "Lions!" was the mumbled reiteration on his lips. "Damned hyenas!"

Dane shook his head, sombre-eyed. "Something much more complex an' damnable than just lions an' hyenas."

"How d'you know? How can you say that? What else would?" The jerky questions came from Anson, half fearful, half defiant. "You can't believe anything so impossible as ogres."

"Lions," Dane pointed out conclusively, "could crack a bone like that. So could hyenas. But—there's not a tooth mark on it!"

Anson stared at the startling truth. To read the signs of the jungle was not within his scope as an engineer.

Dane elucidated further.

"Whatever killed this, an' had strength enough to smash it that way, was not an eater of meat. And, what's more, having killed, it didn't go away an' leave it. It stood guard through the night; else the hyenas would have got at it. With daylight, it went away, an' the vultures picked the bones clean. So, figure that out, for one of the things that nobody can believe about Africa."

"Good Lord!" All the arrogance was gone from Anson. "Good Lord!

What frightful thing would do that?"

"Yeah." Dane rasped. "Frightful is the right word. An' new to me. D'you know whose leg bone that is—was?"

Anson gaped at him, too fearful of his horrid suspicion to ask. Dane filled in remorselessly.

"Reynolds's! At least," he went on, admitting doubt about what he himself could not understand, "I guess it's Reynolds. That was where the shrieks an' devil-noises came from. An' that's all I know. The ground was too hard for any tracks. So I'll tell you what we've going to do, you an' me."

He threw his sun-helmet aside, and sat down on a camp-cot.

"NOW, let's get this straight from the start. I don't like roads. I'd rather they wouldn't come busting through the back bush. I hired out to your crowd in Nairobi for one reason. 'Cause this road will go an' open up way-back into the Latwa country; an' that's where the traffic an' the derned tourists will go, an' so they'll stay out o' some other country that I want to see left alone; where I can take my hunting parties.

"So, I hired out to your crowd under Reynolds as boss. Now—until they send out another big shot to take Reynolds's place—you're the boss. So, listen. We're going out, you an' me, to look over the ground by this crater where you've been trying to establish your advance camp and been having ghost trouble. An' we're going by daylight. An', when we've got the lay-out, like sensible folks, we're going to hunt down this ogre thing. No devil beast is going to get away with snatching off a man I hired out to look after."

Anson looked at the man, fascinated, dominated by his hard determination to tackle he did not know what, and by the cold logic of his plan of action. Slowly he nodded agreement.

"Good!" said Dane. "You've got sense not to make a fuss about authority. Now, if you've got the nerve to stand by, and a little more sense enough to know that the white man doesn't know everything better than the African in his own country; by the time we're through with this business you'll know enough about Africa to boss the next man your company sends along."

To that Anson also nodded. "I hope," was all that he said.

"Good! There's not enough of today left; so we'll go tomorrow—on foot; so we miss nothing, an' we can take cover. We can't afford to lose any bets against this *Thing*."

An indication of Dane's respect for whatever the Thing might be that inhabited the old crater, was that he talked very seriously to his chief of safari.

With this staunch companion of many journeys into the far borders of the unknown, he had none of the traditional white man's superiority.

"Old friend of many fights," he told him, speaking in Swahili, which is the common language of exchange over most of Eastern Africa, "you have heard the tales of black magic and of ogres that devour men. What *Thing* this may be that lives in the bowels of the earth, and issues forth to raven by night, I do not myself understand. Whether man-made deviltry is connected with it, or whether it is all beast, out of a long-ago past, I do not know. What think you of it?"

The headman was a Galla from the Abyssinian border; a ferocious spear-

fighting people that never were subdued, and have been called the Zulus of the North. Mozumbu, his name, which meant, in his own language, the One-Horned Rhinoceros. An immense fellow, superbly naked, except for a calf-skin apron. His great black chest and shoulders showed innumerable little white cicatrices and scars of past fights.

"Gofta," he said quite simply—Gofta being his own term for the Swahili "Bwana," or Lord. "What have I to do with thinking? Give but the word, and we go forth together to give battle to this devil-beast."

Dane's hard eyes lit with little gray fires.

"I knew you'd say that," he laughed shortly. "We go then, to-morrow. Make all ready."

THREE men, therefore, marched out from Number Seven to find out whatever it might be that came from the crater at night to trouble the advance camp. The country approaching the advance began to rise. Sudden upheavals of tumbled rock lifted like islands out of the yellow plain of high grass, above the waving of which, groups of horns and wide-spread ears showed here and there, and other groups of black-and-yellow striped backs barked shrilly and galloped away.

"Good lion country, all right," said Dane. "Plenty of dens an' plenty of meat. An', over there, in that mimosa thorn patch, a couple of miles ahead, one has made a kill an' is sitting guard over it till supper time."

"How do you know all that?" Anson could not help suspecting the truth of things that, to him, were utter mystery.

Dane only smiled thinly at the unbelieving tone, and pointed to the sky above the thorn patch.

"The buzzards are circling, waiting. If the lion had eaten and gone, they'd be down, feeding."

And, sure enough, an hour later, when the party waded through the hampering grass to the thorn-belt, that reading of the book of the jungle proved correct; though in a manner more gruesome than Dane had anticipated.

Excited natives of the road-gang met them, yammering, white eyeballs rolling, chattering that it was Juma, the brother of Moosa, the lion had taken in the night.

Anson, in his quick relief from incredible beasts of the night minimized the tragedy.

"There, you see? I told you it was lions. You, with your doubts about wizardry and ogres! You've been too long in Africa, Dane."

Dane was serious. "I can make my mistakes, same as other folks—maybe more than some who know Africa. But"—he was doggedly insistent—"that thigh-bone was no lion's job; nor anything else that I know, 'cept that it had the will to kill, an' a tremendous power. However, this is another matter. A lion that will take man, with all these zebras around, an' good cover to hunt it, must be a confirmed man-eater. We'll have to go in an' get him, before he gets another one."

Anson was taken aback. "You mean into that thorn-scrub? Right into his lair?"

Dane nodded coolly. "A lion, poor fool, is a gentleman. He growls first, to let you know he's coming. All you got to do is hold your nerve an' not miss. I wouldn't go after leopard this way. A leopard'll rush you with-

out warning." He slid his rifle bolt, and slipped a cartridge into the chamber. "Come ahead. Better let me lead."

CHAPTER III.

THE SPEARMAN.

WITH the suddenness of a blow, it came to Anson exactly what was meant by bearding a lion in his den. He knew that there were men in Africa—men who had known Africa too long, perhaps—who did it as one of the stark necessities of the jungle. Legends, those stories had always sounded to be; sagas of the pioneers.

He was courageous enough himself but, to be dragged into a sudden personal participation in so crazy an adventure was blood chilling. Yet, perforce, he had to go. To hang back would have meant utter shame; for that was what the chattering native boys did. Though the Galla, with a vast disdain of the Wa-shenzi, men of an inferior breed, stalked silently after his master.

Dane picked his way cautiously through the stunted thorn trees. Wherever a denser tangle appeared he approached it, with rifle ready for an instant shot, looking for spoor, or blood trail. In the more open places he went ahead more easily.

It was in such a place that he made his mistake. A dragging boot-lace bothered him. No man going after lion wants to be hampered by anything that might, with the devilish perversity of inanimate objects, twine itself round some protruding root at a crucial moment, and open the door to death. Dane handed his rifle to Anson to hold, and knelt down to tie the lace.

And it was just that moment that was the crucial one. A lion can hide behind an unbelievably inadequate shelter. Its coloring, designed by nature to blend with dry grass and sand enables it to merge into its surroundings as an integral part of them. From behind a low clump of almost nothing there crackled out the angry beast's preliminary roar; the earsplitting series of coughs that herald the immediate charge.

Dane jerked up to his feet to reach for his rifle. Time he had plenty to line his sights and pick his spot. At thirty feet, was his rule, and aim at the white spot on the chin; then all that a man had to do was hold his nerve and press evenly upon the trigger.

But just there was the rub. A man *must* hold his nerve.

Dane reached for his rifle, sideways, his eyes on the charging beast. And the rifle was not there!

Better and more experienced men than Anson had broken before a lion's charge. And without too much blame. There are few sights more promising of imminent destruction. A lion, its mane flying in the wind of its rush, its snarling gape enormous at close quarters, its spread claws as wide as dinner plates reaching out, the knowledge of its enormous strength and of the lightning feline rip and tear. Men who have seen that sight without a weapon in hand have swiftly died.

And Dane stood weaponless. Anson had involuntarily, without knowing it himself, started back. He stood now ten feet away, nerve-shocked to immobility.

A LION can cover thirty feet in two seconds. Much less time than it would take Dane to leap to his rifle.

With the amazing clarity of tense moments it came to Dane that this was his finish. He was not the first hunter who had made his mistake, his one little unforgivable error in the jungle, and paid the jungle's price.

And then a swift black form slipped between Dane and the charging beast, crouching low.

"Give place, Gofta!" he shouted, and knelt in stiff steadiness. Now there was a superb display of nerve— The naked man, without even the protection of a tough khaki jacket against the chisel claws, kneeling with his spear to meet five hundred pounds of teeth and claws and rage.

Cannily the Galla dug the spiked butt of his weapon into the ground beside him, with cool precision steadied the point to meet the hurtling chest, and at the moment of impact let go of everything and rolled clear.

It was splendidly done. All in fractions of a second. The charging beast impaled itself upon the point. The great blade stood out behind its shoulders. The momentum of the charge carried the brute to the spot where the spearman had knelt a moment before, and there it rolled, roaring fearsomely and tearing the air to shreds with claws that flashed bright arcs in the sun.

In the same breath Dane gained possession of his rifle and fired. The flailing claws jerked in a spasmodic reach, stiffened, and slowly sank, quivering.

"Lord!" came a strangled breath from Anson. "Good Lord! That was close! Awful close!"

Dane slammed a fresh cartridge into place and stood watching the quivering shape warily. When it moved no more a great inhalation swelled his chest and exhaled slowly through wide nostrils. Then he said quietly:

"That was well done, Mozumbu. For such service there can be no reward, but equal service in return."

The Galla grinned hugely with pleasure, but quickly covered his mouth with his hand to hide his emotion. He affected nonchalance.

"Between men what is such a small matter," he said. "It has happened many times back and forth between us."

Anson was finding words out of his temporary paralysis.

"What a splendid thing! A magnificent thing to have done! And I—" His words stammered away in confusion.

"Splendid!" agreed Dane. "An' I hope, when my turn comes to reciprocate, I'll be able to do it as cleanly an' without fuss. An' don't you worry, fella, about breaking before that charge. More experienced men than either of us have done it before now. Come ahead an' let's go look-see that crater."

THE country began to be broken by sharp edged masses of upended shale. Low rounded hills like great boils that had failed to burst bulged from the plain. Beyond was the black cone of the crater that in the long ago had broken through the crust; a quite small one. In the farther distance were other smooth cones. In that inhospitable soil the grass grew less thickly. Going was easier.

A short grunt came from Dane. It indicated confirmation of a condition that he had expected.

"There'll be no lions in that crater," he told Anson.

Anson no longer felt like challenging these cryptic statements of Dane's; but he wanted to know the reason of so prophetic a conclusion.

Dane pointed his rifle muzzle at smudges here and there in the bare dust patches.

"Too many human footprints converging there."

"Well, that would about dispose of any fantastic theory of man-killing ogres, wouldn't it?"

Dane shrugged. "No man knows what fantastic thing can happen in Africa. Your native headman at the advance camp ought to have some ideas—if he'll talk."

And talk the headman did, volubly with much shouting and waving of arms, aided clamorously by his whole gang, glad to find a bwana who understood their talk direct without the headman's painful and inadequate interpretation of native thought into English.

It was an evil place, that crater, bewitched. Devils haunted it; fearsome monsters that rushed forth and rended men who came near when the moon was high. The advance camp at two miles distance was already too near. The line of the survey passed by the very foot of the smooth cone. It must be changed. It must circle far out of the way. Or all the working gangs would immediately desert.

Dane passed the meaning of the clamor on to Anson.

"They all insist on the yarn of *Jubali ya Zimwi,* the Hill of Ogres. I don't know what it means; but if I know my Africa there's something more there'n just imagination. Imagination doesn't smash men's limbs an' then sit up an' gloat over 'em all night. What is the local tribe around here? What do they say?" he asked the headman again.

The whole company screamed replies at him.

"They are Wa-Kashiri, great men and strong, monkey worshipers. They fight with us and drive us away. Nor will they give us food, and we dare not hunt. It is bad country."

Dane translated. "Perhaps," he suggested to Anson wisely, "it may pay you in time an' trouble an' indemnity to dead men's wives to give the place a wide berth."

But Anson stormed in righteous indignation. "A mile of road in this district averages five thousand dollars. And let me tell you that this construction company isn't going to cut any ten-mile detour to please a hundred African ghosts."

DANE nodded. He understood. "Yeah, that's business. Black men's lives are cheaper 'n detours. So I guess the nasty chore is up to us to rout the murderous thing out, whatever it is. An' soon. You notice they say these killings happen when the moon's high? Your last epidemic of slaughter was during the last moon. Four days o' moon now an' one killing already. An' I'm telling you it's not lions here. Something enormously powerful that doesn't eat its meat but kills for sport."

That reminder sobered Anson. Ogres he might well deny; but those mangled killings remained stark fact. "What do you make out of it all, you who read the jungle?" he asked.

Dane shrugged. "I don't know. But there's beginning to be a motive in sight. These Kashiri people don't want strangers around. That means one o' two things; either they're putting over some hokum—though I'm derned if I can figure out what fearful method they use. Or there's some local nocturnal monster— Don't ask me what; there's more things in heaven and Africa than are dreamed of in

white man's philosophy; an' African-like, they consider it sacred high juju an' for that reason don't want any interference. So, after dark, I'm going to crawl out an' lay up somewhere near that crater and see what I can see."

"After dark?" The idea struck Anson as being the height of insanity. "Good Lord, do you take unnecessary risks just for the fun of it?"

Dane seriously shook his head.

"Never at all. But I've got the lay o' the land now, an' this one's necessary. If it's a hokum an' they see us out scouting by day they won't pull it. If it's some weird beast that kills by night it won't be out by day. An' until we find out what it is, it'll keep on killing another of your damfool Shenzies every now and then."

An idea came to Anson; an inspiration, it seemed to him, born of the desperate search for a tangible explanation.

"By golly! Remember what they said: These people were monkey worshipers. D'you think—all the circumstances would fit—not eating meat and so on— D'you think it's big apes? Gorillas or something?"

Dane shook his head. "Two reasons against that. The apes, all of them, need heavily wooded jungle; they couldn't stand the hot sun of this open plain country as well as you or I. And furthermore, no ape ravages around by night. No, this is something that murders by moonlight."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRATER.

THE night came as fast as do all Central African nights. The sun threw gray shadows of low bulging hills and lone umbrella-topped acacias across the plain, dropped like an enormous hot rivet behind one of them; and there was the five-day moon already in place, bright enough to read by, except for leisurely silver clouds that idled across its face.

Dane slipped his rifle over his shoulder and stepped quietly out. The big Galla, as though he might have been his dark shadow, glided behind him. Anson, his teeth set, strove to keep pace and to emulate their silent stride.

The confused chatter of the camp faded away behind them. The outer night was uncomfortably silent. The usual noises of prowling animals were eerily absent around that ominous cone that rose black against the low stars. Anson, his mouth dry, wondered whether it was normal for men to walk into the dark unknown as coolly as did these two in front of him.

Dane had no special destination in mind, except that this thing, whether its object was to prey upon or merely to frighten the labor gang, would advance from the crater towards the camp. Somewhere along that line he would find a suitable place to lie in wait.

The moon, already high, printed hard black shadows of the cone and the low volcanic mounds against the shimmering radiance of the plain, a replica almost of those familiar telescopic photographs of its own face, and as still and aloof from anything human.

In the shadow amongst great lava bowlders that spread from the crater base, Dane found a place that would have to suffice.

"I'd rather be farther away," he accepted the situation. "But we've got to lay low out of that clear light." He settled his hips comfortably for a long

wait, and Anson marveled that he could so casually fish a pipe from his pocket, deliberately disentangle it from odds and ends of string and cleaning rag and methodically fill it. But then Dane paused, sniffed at the direction of the wind, shook his head and put the pipe away again.

He sat silent. The Galla was so motionless that he merged into the gloom and disappeared; only a pale two feet of glow indicated his spear blade. Anson shifted from one uncomfortable position to another, trying desperately to be quiet but creating startling noises.

Other noises, too, began to be apparent. Far shufflings, rattlings of dislodged stones, grunts of low voices.

Dane grunted, too. "Hmh! So it's a man-made hokum. Some smart witch doctor putting something over on us. Well, that makes it a whole lot easier."

Anson breathed with relief. If this whole business were some trickery designated to frighten away his workmen, he had a cheerful confidence that Dane could find out all about it in short order.

But the next noise that came suddenly out of the night jarred the sense of security out of all of them and lifted chill hairs along Anson's spine.

It commenced with a hoarse bellowing, for all the world like a bull roarer whirled by a noisy boy; it boomed on into immense volume and subsided to an insane glug-glug chuckle.

ANSON'S breath caught at his throat and he could feel Dane stiffen. Then Dane grunted again.

"Hmh! I take it back. That isn't human. What make you of it, Mozumbu?"

"It came from within the hill," said the Galla. "Assuredly so speaks the devil of this place."

Dane slid a cartridge into his rifle chamber. "A devil with a voice that big calls for wariness. You all loaded, Anson? All we can do is sit tight and wait."

Long minutes passed that kept Anson's breath short and high in his chest. Crawling half hours; and then away to the left a tiny cascade of stones slid.

The Galla's knee joints cracked as he lifted himself to crouch. No other sound from him.

Soft swishings of bunch grass sounded nearer in the shadow, and again the rattle of a dislodged stone. Even Anson distinguished heavy footsteps. Dane was puzzled.

"Be damned if that isn't human," he muttered. "Wish he'd move out into the moonlight."

But the heavy steps plodded nearer. A big, powerful looking figure loomed in the shadows, coming directly at the three watchers. Dane rose to one knee. Then the figure stopped, stared out over the shimmering plain, shuffled on its feet for a minute or so, turned and plodded slowly back.

Dane completed his puzzled comment.

"And damned if he isn't doing sentry go. A patrol, that's what he is. Now, what the devil—" He broke off, turning over in his mind what might be the purpose of a guard or a watchman at the base of an ancient African crater.

The footsteps plodded slowly back. Dane strained his eyes to pick out details of the man in the gloom. He had no need. This time the man extended his beat. He tramped slowly nearer. A big, bulky fellow he was,

armed with a spear as long as the Galla's, though with the less efficient short oval blade of Nilotic Africa. There was no further hope of concealment. Dane rose to his feet.

"*Jambo,*" he greeted. "*We nani?* Who are you?"

The man sprang back like a wild thing, eight feet in one great startled bound. Then, without a word of reply or challenge, he lifted his spear high and charged in on Dane.

And that showed him to be a savage, a crude back-jungle man, no wily spear fencer such as Dane knew amongst the Galla peoples. Dane knew many things about spear fighting, as well as about many kinds of fighting amongst hard men who hit first and asked questions afterwards.

He ducked low under the futile upraised blade, drove his shoulder into the fellow's midriff, gripped him around the buttocks and utilized the momentum of the charge to heave the man, big as he was, clear over his shoulder.

As the assailant thudded to the dust behind, Mozumbu was already leaping to straddle his back. Though there was no need. The breath had been thoroughly knocked from him.

Dane knelt quickly, before the man might recover and put up a fight, and with a piece of ever useful string from his pocket tied the man's thumbs together behind his back and then his big toes together. It was the most efficient and painless method he knew; quite unescapable as long as any one might sit by and watch against the usual methods of cutting bonds.

DANE rose, well pleased. "Maybe this so unfriendly lout will tell us what he guards so ferociously," he thought. But the man, when his breath had come back to him, proved to understand no Swahili; and neither of his captors knew anything of his back-jungle dialect.

Certain it was only that some great unhuman thing bellowed fearsomely within the crater and that men patrolled guard round it. Whether to keep it in or to keep inquisitive strangers out remained mystery enough even for the African night.

Then the thing bellowed again. The sound welled over the crater lip, booming, gurgling, chuckling, entirely unlike anything Dane knew. He puzzled over it; till a quick resolve came to him.

"Sit tight over this fellow," he told Anson. "I'm going to climb up an' see if I can see anything over the edge. It's pretty steep, but I think I can make it." To the Galla he said in Swahili: "I leave the young bwana in your care."

He paused a moment to consider his rifle. That would be a stiff climb of some four hundred feet; he would have need of both hands. There are few things so unhandy as a gun in such circumstances; so apt to make unmistakable metallic noises—or so easily damaged; particularly during a scramble in the dark.

To leave his rifle went sore against the grain, but Dane shrugged. There were so many things one hated to do but had to. This that he was about to do now was one of them. He handed the gun to Anson. "And don't drop it so sand will foul the bolt," he growled. He looked to see that his Luger pistol was free in its holster, that the safety catch and slide ramp worked smoothly, and stepped softly out.

An immense weight of sudden responsibility descended upon Anson.

The Galla, of course, was a comfort; squatting on his hams, a dark imperturbable image of strength; an enormous comfort; but Anson, for all that, felt horribly alone.

The ghouls, homicidal ghosts, that he scouted so loudly in Dane's presence became very imminent horrors in the close African night, crouching, as he was, at the very foot of an ancient crater out of which some unknown thing bellowed fearsomely. He dreaded to hear it again. He strained his ears to catch the reassuring noises of Dane's progress. But never a sound came to him. Dane was taking no chances at all of betraying his presence to he did not know what.

Quite without noise, therefore, Dane gained the lip of the crater. Here the moon of course painted a bright silver line. Very carefully Dane edged between jagged bowlders till he could look down into the pit.

And he was woefully disappointed. He had expected, he hardly knew what. Lights, perhaps; signs of human occupancy; a juju house, maybe; or failing these, the thing itself.

But he looked down into an empty, steep sided pit. The slope beneath him was bathed in moonlight. His eyes followed the circular rim a couple of hundred yards across to the farther slope in black shadow. For all the rest he might have been spying into the bottomless void of Revelation out of which any appropriately monstrous shape might come.

Though to one side a great jagged darkness denoted a fissure. He knew there must be a fissure; either where the last lava had overflowed, or where rain water, collecting through the centuries, had found a crack and had inexorably cut its gorge of escape.

And now there seemed to be noises of a commotion from that black fissure. Voices, muffled shouts, confusion of many feet. Mystification engulfed Dane again. Those noises were human. Where and what, then, was the—the thing? That was all he could name it; the thing that bellowed inhumanly and frightfully killed men as no human could.

The vague commotion seemed to be receding down the black fissure. Now it sounded outside of the crater. Confused sounds came to Dane over the lip. He had better get down again, he thought. If men were on the outside, and if as ferocious as their fellow whom he had captured, his place would be down with his friends.

And then he saw something. Down on the moonlight plain. A figure that ran in a lumbering trot. A human sort of figure, it seemed to Dane; and then it came amazingly to him that at distance the figure was too large for a man. Four hundred feet below him in thin moonlight Dane could not make it out; or whether it ran crouching upon hind legs or upon all fours.

The creature stopped in its clumsy gallop to lift a shaggy head to the moon, and its bellowing gurgle boomed out into the night. A savage howl of freedom, it seemed to Dane. Then it lumbered on into the shadow and was lost.

CHAPTER V.

HUMAN PREY.

INTO the shadow of the crater where Anson and the Galla waited, it went. They, from their lower vantage point, had seen nothing. But they heard the eerie howl and the shambling footsteps in the dark.

Their prisoner heard them, too, and,

wretched man, inescapably bound as he was, terror gripped him. He chattered frantically to the Galla who understood no word and who was too occupied anyhow, peering out into the dark, crouching behind his rock, his spear blade low over its top.

The heavy footsteps pounded nearer; far heavier than the man's who had plodded sentry duty on that same path. A veritable trail it seemed to be that the three spies had stumbled upon in the dark. The creature followed it, lumbering nearer.

Presently its bulk loomed up through the shadow; a huge thing; taller than a man—much taller. Shapeless in the gloom; ponderous, it shambled ahead.

The horror of the thing lay in the darkness that shrouded it, a monstrous creature of the fog, the only knowledge of it being that it could kill.

Anson held Dane's rifle against his shoulder, his own across his knee. His heart pounded in his throat as the awful question came to him whether a rifle bullet could stop this bulk. Could stop it soon enough, that was to say, if not hit in exactly the right spot. And Anson knew suddenly that, shooting in the dark, he could not be sure of hitting it at all.

A noise caught the thing's attention. A clatter of stones up the crater side—Dane scrambling hurriedly to join his friends. The creature turned his head to listen, growling angrily in its throat. It swayed in uncertainty whether to go for that disturbance or to follow its path.

The prisoner decided it. He knew this thing; knew its hunting ferocity, its dreadful capability. Panic of the thing's nearness broke through his reason. A strangled shout broke from him, an incoherent babble of terror. He scrambled to his feet, hobbled as he was, wretched fool, and staggered bounding across the dark plain in a series of great awkward kangaroo leaps.

The thing looked after the bounding figure, something new to its dull understanding. A long minute it took to make up its mind. Then it roared gustily and rushed after the fugitive.

Ponderously it lurched along. Strength might be its forte, but not speed. The man, unhampered, might have gotten away. But his handicap was hopeless. As it was, he made phenomenal speed in his fear. He passed beyond the crater shadow, and Anson and the Galla could distinguish him in the further moonlight, a grotesque travesty of motion, bounding, stumbling, getting up somehow and leaping agonizedly on.

The beast thing broke into the moonlight, too, shambling enormously after the doomed man.

Then Anson gasped incredulously. Monstrously half human it looked to be; through distance again rendered accurate identification impossible.

SHOUTS came from the distance. Men running round the base of the crater, but far away. The kangaroo man yelled his quite hopeless call for help. He stumbled and pitched to the ground again. The beast creature roared insanely and hurled itself upon him.

The man's shrieks were horrible. The ponderous creature heaved him up and, like a cat flings a mouse, flung the body into the air; then roared delight and batted at the body with fast flailing paws before it could touch the ground. Anson could hear the heavy thuds of the blows from where he stood.

The creature repeated its monstrous

game, flinging the corpse about like some hugely abnormal cat might play with a full grown kangaroo, gurgling insane pleasure, rearing up to meet the sprawling body as it fell, clutching at it in mid air, battering it to a boneless pulp.

A game it was. This thing killed for the mad sport of killing; it made no attempt to eat its kill.

The shouts of the men who ran from around the crater disturbed its play. Some fifty of them, all armed with spears and shields, were advancing slowly upon it. Carefully but resolutely. It crouched over its toy and howled fearsomely at them.

Anson jumped high in the air as a hand gripped him out of the dark.

"Down, you chump! Lay low! Don't stand there gaping! Lord knows who or what may spot you!"

It was Dane's voice. Dane, breathing hard and a good deal bruised; and very characteristically decisive.

"Down and lie quiet. We can't do anything for or against that mob. All we know is—judging from that poor devil we tied up—that they'll be against us. It's their hand. Let 'em play it."

The spearmen presented a solid front to the creature—their creature, it obviously was; the thing of their crater, fetish, juju wanga, or whatever it might be. They did not attack it. Warily they hemmed it round. It growled and ravened ferociously at them; but it seemed to understand the force of numbers. This procedure must have happened before. Slowly the men backed the creature away from its plaything. They surrounded it, yelling, shouting, encouraging one another. Like hounds baiting a bear, gradually they herded it away, back to its lair, den, whatever they had for it. They disappeared out of the moonlight, round the curve of their crater.

"Well," said Dane into the heavy-breathing silence, "what did you see? What hellish thing is it? I was too far to make it out."

"Good God!" Anson found shuddering voice. "It's—it's an immense ape. Like that moving picture, Kong. Not that enormous, of course; but—"

"Impossible," snapped Dane. "And you, Mozumbu. What do you make of it?"

"That," said Mozumbu, "is, without any manner of doubt, the *zimwi makali*, the ferocious ogre of this crater."

Dane only grunted. "Hmh! I can believe one as easily as the other—by moonlight—in Africa. Come on, let's sneak away to camp and be damn glad we're out of it so easily."

CHAPTER VI.

"FORBIDDEN!"

IN the morning Dane was very grimly purposeful. "There's nothing else for it," he announced. "We've got to find out what that thing is. Kong apes and ogre devils may be credible at night, but this is daylight. I've got to get into that crater and look-see."

Anson stared at him as at an equally incredible phenomenon.

"But— Good Lord, man, that's a terrific brute. You saw what it can do to a man."

Dane nodded. "That's just it. I'm here to see that it doesn't do it to any more o' your labor crew—or to you or me. So is an elephant terrific; but a modern rifle is a whole lot of argument."

"But, dammit all, granting all that,

there's its men folk to be reckoned with. There were a good two score of them, and you said yourself that they'd be hostile."

"Yeah, I guess so. But that was last night, too. By daylight two white men with rifles can hold two score savages."

This time Anson stared at the man without speech. Dane was taking it for granted, without question, that he would quite naturally accompany him on this foolhardy adventure. So much so that Dane turned away from him to busy himself with his preparations.

Anson had not the faintest inkling of the fact; but it was with a very shrewd deliberation that Dane was taking him for granted. Dane was there, as he had just indicated, not only to protect the black workmen from sudden death, but also to show their young white bwana how to protect them throughout the future building of that road which he wanted to see completed so that clattering automobiles and puttering tourist folk would use it and stay away from other parts of the country that he would like to see preserved as a wilderness paradise for those discriminating ones who would appreciate it.

And so it was that, there being no question about his readiness to share any danger that might come, Anson with set teeth trudged along with Dane and the Galla to go into an adventure that was not so foolhardy as deadly necessary.

Dane headed for where he knew the fissure in the crater side to be. As the farther plain opened out behind the cone, distant huts were distinguishable; the crudest kind of beehive huts in straggling groups here and there; wholesomely far away, it was noticeably evident. And where the fissure debouched into the plain through a confusion of smooth bowlders and a dry, sandy watercourse, a little knot of spearmen lounged.

"Guards," Dane commented. "Last night the place looked to be empty; but men don't stand guard over nothing. Big fellows, too. That poor devil of last night was no exception."

The guards bunched together at the appearance of the white men and stood with lowered heads, spears pointing; a burly, brutish looking herd; for all the world like cattle before a lion.

ONE of them spoke Swahili. Without preamble or asking what the strangers might want he said truculently: "The way is forbidden. No man passes within."

"And yet," said Dane looking at the well trodden ground, "many men pass this way."

The first speaker was confused by the white man's quick perception. He looked towards a particularly big fellow who stood scowling a little distance apart; but that one made no sign. The speaker repeated stubbornly:

"It is forbidden. It is fetish."

"Fetish," said Dane, "is the black man's affair in his own country. The white *serkali* does not interfere. But when a fetish slays the white man's servants in the night then it must be made to cease; for the servant is covered by his master's cloak and by the white man's honor."

What Dane was reiterating was the old principle of the white man's prestige which alone enabled the white man to hold Africa. The more primitive one finds people the world over, the more fixed is the idea that the servant is a part of the master's possessions and that a damage to a possession must be avenged by the owner.

The big scowling fellow who stood apart fired forth a stream of words, shooting out his thick red lips angrily.

Dane turned quickly to him.

"You. You understand what I said. Why don't you speak direct?"

The man only spat further words at the first man, who passed them on.

"He is a priest of the fetish. He speaks only through his 'mouth.'"

Dane's own mouth snapped tight. He understood perfectly the insolent inference that an important personage addressed an inferior only through an interpreter who acted as the "mouth" of the great one.

The situation had suddenly become tense. When an African becomes insolent there is no civilized finesse about his meaning. He implies crudely and simply that he can lick the white man and what is the white man going to do about it?

And there is only one thing that the white man can do. He must immediately demonstrate his superiority. Otherwise he may as well pack his goods and get out—if he may still get out alive. Conversely no man more quickly than the primitive African responds to demonstrated superiority and submits to it.

Matters stood on the precarious edge of a single hasty action. This was an arrogant people in an ugly mood; sufficiently far removed from the white man's influence to have to have the lesson of superiority thoroughly taught. Unless it should be taught, either by Dane, or later—after his killing—by a regiment of soldiers, that road would never be built.

There was a dozen of the burly guards. Dane felt sure that, armed with his magazine rifle, Anson to help, and the Galla an eager tempest of slaughter, he could fight his way through. But he always hesitated to resort to the ultimate argument of guns. He tried a bluff first.

Making a great show of his rifle, he walked forward. Anson stayed sturdily at his side.

"It is a pity," said Dane with an affectation of personal unconcern, "that so many men must die. Yet the white man's honor in defense of his servants must be upheld."

THE bluff worked; though in an unexpected way. The big fetish priest broke suddenly into a fury of words, this time in direct Swahili, scornful, challenging. The white men came, he shouted, with guns to fight against naked spearmen. If the white man felt so big about his honor, let him uphold it, man to man, spear to spear, leader against leader, armed, or naked man against naked man. He jumped in the air; he postured; he ranted what was really a superb challenge.

The seriousness of Dane's face changed to a wide smile of relief. He had met this kind of thing before; the old principle of trial by combat, champion against champion. It simplified things very satisfactorily.

"This is your rule?" he asked. "The leaders fight in order that much blood may be spared? A very good rule."

The fetish priest was an enormous fellow; bigger even than the Galla. A good six and a half feet he stood. For all that, Dane knew perfectly well that he could thoroughly trounce this savage; just as any half skilled fighter can in short order lay out a burly lout; and Dane stood a good six feet of hard and much experienced fighting man himself.

Yet the delicate question of prestige

must never be lost sight of. A personal brawl was at no time dignified. And there was an insult to be repaid.

"It is a good rule," Dane repeated. "Yet as the fetish priest speaks to strangers only through his mouth, so I fight with minor priestlings only through this, my servant."

"Awah!" shouted the Galla in sudden joyful surprise. "*Assanti, bvana, gofta karimu!* Thank you, master. You are generous. This is indeed a favor!"

He slapped his thighs and leaped in the air. He twirled his spear like a drum major his staff. He breathed a thin, hissing noise through his teeth and minced forward on his toes.

The big fetish man screamed his rage. He would annihilate this servant. He would rip the bowels from him. He would impale him upon his spear like a grass monkey. And then the white man would have nobody behind whom to hide; he would have to fight.

Dane grinned his complete satisfaction. "It was to be hoped," he chuckled, "that the fool would resort to his spear instead of some outlandish weapon of which we might know nothing. Take him, then, with the spear, Mozumbu. But do not necessarily kill him. He is at least a courageous fool."

The man roared his rage and defiance in a great bull voice and advanced with his spear held high aboye his head—the only position known to the average savage for a downward stab, crude and ineffective.

The Galla held his weapon in both hands; but low, point slightly elevated. He made of it, in fact, a bayonet. He laughed as an instructor about to give a lesson.

The big fellow rushed and drove his blade down in a tremendous lunge. The Galla stepped a precise four feet to the right, moving only his right foot. The heavy shovel blade plunged past his shoulder a yard away, and his own long sword-edged blade lay cold across the savage's stomach.

"Thus does one rip bowels, oaf," he admonished. "Not from above like a tree that falls."

THE big man leaped back, an expression of ludicrous bewilderment on his heavy features. The Galla stood laughing at him. The big fellow rushed, roaring his rage again. The Galla's mid haft clicked against the stabbing blade, diverted it under his arm, and the steel shod point of his butt rested against the other's groin.

The big savage could no more understand this sort of spear play than could a brawny, cutlass slashing pirate understand the fine art of fence. But, like the cutlass swinger, he had his courage. He roared fury and rushed again, as clumsily as a bull and as stupidly. The Galla danced around him on springy feet, taunting him, scoring "points" on vulnerable portions of his anatomy.

"Upon the throat—so! A stroke to watch, great fool.—And now at thy spine with the point— Why turnest thou the back to me? So fells one an ox.—Thus again, at long arm, upon thy left breast— Tscha! I had not meant to prick thee so hard. Beware that one. A handbreadth deeper lies the heart.—Wah! Look out, fool! Almost didst thou impale thy clownish self."

It was a superb exhibition of spear play. But the Galla tired of it.

"To slay this fool were a child's game," he growled. "Not to slay him is a skillful and a tiresome business. I must make an end."

And as simply as he said it he did

so. He stepped under the next rush, passed his spear under the big fellow's legs and, using it as a lever, whirled him off balance, snatched at an outflung arm and sprawled him flat on his face.

And there he stood, his foot on the fellow's back, his spear point upon his spine, waiting like a gladiator for his master to turn thumbs down.

Dane motioned to Anson to pick up the spear that had flown from the doughty champion's hand. Himself, he was warily watching the man's followers. Resort to ordeal by personal combat was a fine thing; but angry savages, like other child minds, might not always accept the losing judgment.

However, the rest of the burly guards seemed to recognize their champion's defeat. They scowled and muttered, but made no further hostile motions—their eyes were fixed, like uncomprehending oxen, upon the Galla who still stood with the point of his spear delicately pressed against the fetish priest's skin at a point between two of his dorsal vertebræ.

Dane deliberately passed through them, pushing them apart with his hands. Anson, with good example, pushed a yet wider path.

"So," said Dane. "It is now understood whose honor is strong. We give that fetish priest a present of his life. The fetish must now be shown that the white man is master and his servants are not to be slain. Come, Mozumbu. Let the fellow live. It was prettily done. There will be a gift of a good blanket."

They left sullen and bewildered men behind them and picked their way amongst the rocks of the little stream that during the rainy seasons of centuries had cut its outlet from the crater.

Dane led with ready rifle, wondering what monstrous thing from the lost centuries might have survived in this hole in the bowels of the earth, half expecting at any moment some pre-man period ape ancestor to charge down upon them.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED.

THE way narrowed rapidly to a precipitous gully that zigzagged upwards into the very heart of the crater; upwards, of course, to the point from which the water overflowed; after that down to—what? Dane wondered and was the more cautious. The sun did not reach down into this deep cut. It was dim and cool; just cool enough, Anson felt, to let the fine hairs crawl up and down his spine.

At a particularly narrow point rocks had been piled with enormous human labor, leaving only a narrow opening.

"Ha! I begin to get the idea." Even Dane whispered in that road into the unknown. "This is the door to the cage. A dozen husky men could hold an elephant in there. Whatever this fetish brute is, they left it out whenever they want it to do a horror killing to scare the neighborhood; an' we've seen that they know how to herd it back again. An' it's obviously some nocturnal beast; that's why the guard takes it so easy out there by daylight."

From "out there," muffled through the windings of the deep cut, came sounds of hubbub amongst the guard; shouts, angry words, argument. Dane frowned.

"I don't altogether like that. A chivalrous idea of personal combat is fine; but when savages as smart as

these fellows are get to thinking it over, they're liable to decide that was just bad luck an' they'd like to try it over again, just like kids tossing a coin to decide a bet. Guess we'd better hurry up an' get a look at the layout in there an' then out an' plan a campaign."

The smooth tunnel sides began to be pitted with holes, blow-outs, little caves—the relics of great air bubbles that had formed as the ancient lava cooled. Dark holes like that might lead into all sorts of subterranean channels. Any weird beast might use them for its lair.

DANE spent no time inspecting them. All he looked at was the ground before them and went on. He knew that even a leopard could not come and go from its habitual den without leaving tracks that a practiced eye could read. That some somnolent monster might be using one of those caverns for a temporary lie-up was a hazard that he had to take. That hubbub on the outside worried him more than he liked. Properly cowed natives ought to be silent; not shouting in argument.

Yet Dane had to know what was in that crater; what monster it might be that emerged from the dark interior of the earth to raven by night. That knowledge was as necessary to him as a general's need to know the disposition of his enemy's forces in order to plan an effective campaign.

But, as a dangerously crafty enemy might hide his disposition, so the crater, when they reached it, revealed nothing. Sunlight slanted into the last bend of the dim passage. They stepped round it, and there they were, suddenly within the circular bowl of the crater.

And that was all! A silent, sunlit, ancient crater! No restless caged monster! No litter of bones or smashed fragments! No fetish house! No humans! Nothing! Not even any deep and mysterious tunnel leading into the bowels of the earth!

Dane was taken aback. Entirely nonplused. He had expected, he did not know just what. If not actual life, rampant and charging, at least some signs of life; tracks, bones, something to denote the habitation of a nocturnal beast. But here was only a small, empty crater into which the sun shone.

And yet humans, many of them, were wont to use that passage upon occasion. Dane knew it with certainty. He stood at the edge of the quiet pit and inspected it cautiously. The upper lip, as he had already seen during his brief moonlight survey, dropped away in a steep, smooth wall. A couple of hundred feet below was a wide shelf of tumbled bowlders, a regular gallery that circled the whole inner surface, marking evidently the old normal level of the molten lava. Then a short craggy drop as the furnaces below had cooled and sucked the viscous material back to its subterranean boilers.

The bottom, where Dane had expected to find a deep tunnel that might harbor a prehistoric monster, was now filled level with a smooth detritus of eroded lava and sand. A few sparse thorn shrubs straggled on this floor; a few others found lodgement along the higher gallery. Nothing else. The whole inner pit was open to view. Silent; windless; empty; shut off from the outer world.

There was a stupendous wasted effort about this work of Nature in her ancient fury that caught at Anson's imagination.

"By golly!" he cried. "The Yale Bowl, no less! All empty and waiting for the season to open. Put some seats in, and there's a million dollars of building already saved. And"—he laughed loudly—"a ticket chopper's gate at the only entrance."

The Galla's great hand suddenly closed on his upper arm to shut off his laughter in a quick, "Ouch!" He looked to see Dane softly turning over the safety catch of his rifle. With a gulp of his breath he followed Dane's gaze.

There was something after all in this silent crater of the ogre! Dane's eyes were fixed on the dark opening of a big blow hole in the crater side. Something moved sluggishly within the dimness.

STARING across the bright sunlight, one could make nothing of it. A movement; that was all. Something was alive in there.

Dane stood ready for a bellowing charge. He was cool and confident. In open ground like that with a good light and fifty yards to go he could stop an elephant.

But the thing showed no desire to rush out and attack the intruders. Something had disturbed its rest—Anson's laugh, probably. It merely shifted its position in its lair and returned to slumber.

Human noises seemed to be no novelty; only disturbance. More noises floated in from the outside. Angry shouts and shrill whistles. Dane frowned at that reminder of insecurity out there.

The bulk within the cave shifted again, just as might an ill tempered sleeper awakened by noise without the window.

It heaved itself up from its recumbent position, a moving shadow amidst shadows, and so, on all fours, it seemed to stand as high as a horse.

Anson's breath came in a sharp hiss. What sort of a beast, Dane could not make out; the sunlight dazzled his eyes.

More shouts and whistles came winding up the tunnel. Clamor seemed to have a meaning for this beast. It reared up on its hind legs. Huge. Immensely higher than a horse; and it lurched a step closer to the mouth of the cave.

And then even Dane gasped. The view was still like trying to look across a bright court into a dim room. But the thing stood in sufficient illumination to distinguish a bulking shape that might answer to either of the descriptions given of it by last night's moonlight—a quite incredible giant of an ape or a no less incredible ogre.

A huge, half human bulk that stood eight feet high as it hunched its shaggy head forward to listen to the outside uproar.

Dane was fingering his rifle in hesitation whether to shoot or not when it grunted like an overgrown gorilla and retreated once more into the deeper shadows.

A fresh outburst of yelps and fierce shouts came from without. Dane swore fretfully.

"Dammit all, I don't like that racket out there. We'll have to go see what those fellows are up to. This what-is-it will keep. Nothing can ever escape out of here. Come on."

They reached no farther than the narrow passage of piled rocks—Anson's "ticket chopper" gate. Tall black forms clustered beyond and spears protruded through the opening. Those few were all that could be seen; but the clamor beyond them denoted

many more than the dozen men whom they had left.

Dane's mouth clamped hard. "Hah! Reinforcements! An' that means trouble! Plenty of it! Sometimes with Africans it's a mistake to be lenient. They take it for weakness and try to go one better. We should have made an example of that fetish priest. He'll be vindictive."

Dane was still speaking when a whoop and a rush of black figures from behind swept him from his feet. From the caves and blow holes where they had cunningly hidden, a mob of yelling men swarmed.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHITE MEN'S FATE.

THERE was no time to shoot and little chance to fight. African savages, when their courage has been worked up by rhetoric, can rush to combat in insensate fury; and while their madness lasts they can perform unhuman orgies of cruelty. It requires them either remorseless slaughter or some attention arresting feat quite beyond their own attainment to smash their unstable morale, which, when accomplished, reduces them just as suddenly to cowering, frightened children.

Of Anson and the Galla, Dane could see nothing. All he knew was that in that narrow passage he was the nucleus of a swarm of black bodies that clawed at him in a haze of hot sweat and yelled like so many devils turned loose to mob a new soul.

Dane had seen what was left of white men who had been captured by Africans in their hour of madness. He fought back with desperate fury. The tricks and foul blows that he knew, he used them all. But there were too many of the assailants, big strong fellows. He was engulfed under a wave of them. He felt his face shoved into the dust while half a dozen men knelt all over him. His hands and feet were quickly tied and a screaming gang of men heaved him up and carried him at a run up the zigzag passage.

A horror came over Dane as he conceived a thought of being thrown summarily to the fetish creature, bound hand and foot, as helpless as his last night's wretched prisoner had been.

But that did not seem to be the immediate plan. He was rushed across the crater, pitched into a blow hole cave, and before he could even hobble to his feet, great wooden bars clacked into place before the opening.

The whole thing had happened as fast as any misadventure that had ever come to Dane in Africa. And the situation was more ominous. Anson and the Galla, who had not been able to put up so venomous a fight as had Dane, were already in the cavern.

Dane lay panting from the fury of his struggle, half stunned, half strangled. As his senses began to come to him the first natural thought was weapons; though that thought died in its borning. Guns, pistols, knives, everything had been taken from them. These people were primitive enough, savagely ferocious; but every swift action of theirs, their organization, their whole system of imprisonment of their beast creature showed that they were a long way from being dull witted.

Dane chilled at the realization. When savages are intelligent and when their fury has drowned for the time being all thoughts of consequences, the thoughts of what to do with prisoners are born directly of their own dark devils.

The Galla rolled over to his side. "If Gofta will let me put teeth to his his bonds, I may make shift to gnaw through and we may yet win free."

Dane had little hope of that. Those wooden bars were strong and beyond them stood tall spearmen. But he rolled to his stomach and let the Galla get to work. Nor was there much difficulty. The lashings had been hasty and a temporary measure at best. These captors knew as well as did Dane how good was their prison cell.

SOON all the three were free and on their feet. Dane shook himself and went to peer through the bars. "Best see what we can see," he muttered, not very hopefully, "an' maybe find out what they aim to do with us."

Plenty there was to see, and like a physical blow was the knowledge, when it came, of what these savages with their intelligence proposed to do.

The ogre creature had been thoroughly awakened by the uproar. It came shambling out of its cave into the full sunlight; and there for the first time the complete abhorrence of the thing could be realized.

A vast human thing it was. A shape of enormous hands and feet. It blinked little eyes out of a great vacant face and from its blubbery lips issued, not words, but a babble of glug-glug sounds. Its horror was magnified by the immense blackness of its bulk and the mop of crinkly hair that hung low over its cretinous face.

"Lord! An ogre it is! A homicidal giant!"

For the moment the shock of the knowledge that they had run such risk to gain, now that its realization stood starkly before them, overlaid consideration of their immediate plight.

"Phe-ew!" whispered Dane, peering through the wooden bars. "It's a freak, that's what it is. These people are an unusually big tribe as it is, and this thing has just outgrown them all; and like most freaks, it's half-witted. An ogre is right!"

The giant creature made no attempt to attack anybody. It just stood drooling and clucking to itself. The general populace stood away from it. Its immediate guards stood around; not guards so much as keepers of a tractable but potentially ferocious beast.

"It seems to be tame enough," said Anson. As yet no inkling had come to him of what might be in store.

Dane had no illusions. "Tame by daylight," he muttered to himself. "Idiots are often queerly affected by the moon. It's during moonlight that it goes raving murderous." He repeated his ominous conclusion in Swahili to the Galla.

A big spearman standing outside of the prison bars understood that. He guffawed hugely.

"Moonlight indeed! Wait, white men, till the moon looks upon the fetish this night."

Others took up the grim joke. They jumped up and down, slapping their buttocks. "Moonlight," they howled. "In the moonlight it will be seen who is master; whose honor is strong!"

So that was the proposal in store for the prisoners; stark and unmistakable. Savage enough to be inhumanly cruel were these people and intelligent enough to add refinement to their cruelty. As the Romans in the days of their degeneracy delighted to throw Christian slaves to lions, so these people were already looking forward to throwing white men to their ogre in his madness of the bright moon.

They danced up and down and shouted laughter at the prospect. They jeered details at the captives. It would be a spectacle; a huge joke on the superior white men.

Dane had no stomach to translate that joke to Anson. An added grimness was that Anson himself had named the natural amphitheater the Yale Bowl. Dane looked at the Galla, the Galla back at him, in tight-lipped silence.

MEN brought food to the ogre. It squatted on its hams in the shade of a rock and ate enormously, slobbering clumsily. At intervals it moaned and pressed a thick fingered hand to a bulge as big as a cocoanut above its paunch.

Where hope is non-existent the most far-fetched gleam of hope looms large. "Looks like it's got an enlarged spleen," Dane told Anson.

And that was all that he would tell him. He sat talking in low tones to the Galla, discussing probabilities and chances. And chances looked very slim.

At one time during the tortured afternoon the big fetish priest came and glowered through the bars; appraisingly, as a keeper of Christian martyrs might have done before a Roman holiday. He growled at his late conqueror:

"This time, thou trickster, no skill of spear play shall avail thee. Hand to hand, strength to strength, it shall be seen whose honor is strong."

He barked as a baboon laughs and went away.

Crawling hours later was another disturbance. Shouting men came carrying a limp something. Jeering, they let down the upper bars sufficiently to pitch their bundle over them into the prison cave.

It was Anson's labor crew headman. The wretched man was pallid gray with terror. He had come, he said, to see what delayed the white bwanas. Nowhere near the crater; only a little way from the camp; and he had been pounced upon by a band of these people and brought along.

"Yeah!" said Dane through his teeth. "White man's prestige for the time being has gone by the board. It'll take a miracle or a regiment of soldiers—afterwards—to win it back. An' I guess it'll have to be the regiment— This is Africa!"

More crawling hours passed. Suddenly the floor of the crater was in shadow. The sun had dropped behind the upper rim. In another hour it would drop behind the outer plain; and by then the moon would already be creeping over the opposite wall.

Men began to file into the crater; women with them, noisy, chattering. They climbed a narrow path and began to range themselves along the craggy gallery of old lava that encircled the pit, quarreling over the best places.

Anson's flippant reference to the Yale Bowl had been hideously prophetic. This thing was going to be a show.

Other men came in. Older men, decked out in necklaces of bones and all the gruesome trappings of African fetishism. They were ushered in with ceremony by the fetish priest and other young stalwarts of the cult. They took places where the more objectionable bowlders had been removed—the grandstand.

Dusk came. Drums began to mutter from the shadows.

The rock gallery merged into the encircling dimness. Black silhouetted forms moved like demons around the

rim of a subterranean hell and snarled as they fought for position.

The moon lit a jagged line of silver along the crater's black rim; eerily beautiful; darkly ominous in the shufflings and mutterings of the devils within. In another minute the tip of its arc thrust up into view. With the fascination of a receding eclipse its brilliance ate away a rapidly decreasing melon rind slice out of the blackness of the pit side.

Dane watched it with a chill sinking of the last hope that had never been a hope at all. Presently the whole arena was flooded with cold white light.

The madness of moonlight commenced to grow upon the monster. It bellowed fearsomely in its cave. Its guards, three deep, ringed the opening with spears.

Things were ready for the show to commence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONG CHANCE.

THE central figure in the grandstand croaked orders. The fighting priest, now acting his turn as "mouth" for a greater than he, shouted them broadcast.

Men came to the prison cage; powerful fellows. They lowered the bars and came in with a rush, a horde of them. There was not a chance to fight. The prisoners were taken, four men to each, their arms twisted excruciatingly behind them, and led out into the open.

The chief made a harangue. It lost its effectiveness by having to be relayed by his speaker; but to the African mind the dignity of that proceeding made up for its second-handedness. The demon gallery howled applause. The chief devil silenced them with a gesture. They did things quickly, these people. It was going to be a full program—four acts. Time was not to be wasted.

The "mouth" translated the schedule into Swahili for the benefit of the prisoners and for his own vindictive enjoyment.

"The little servant first, in order that the fetish may thoroughly awaken to the sport. The big servant next—And let us see, thou great white man, how strong may be thy honor in thy servants' defense."

Those of the people who understood Swahili hooted and jeered and translated the taunt to others. The drums grumbled a roulade of guttural applause.

"And then," the speaker continued with the flourish of a showman announcing a special double feature, "the two white men together, in order that all men might see how the black man's fetish will prevail over the pair."

The gallery imps applauded and shouted boasts to one another of what they could personally do to the white men if their own great fetish were not so convenient for the purpose.

The chief croaked another order. The "mouth" passed it on. Then quickly, before Dane could grasp the procedure, the unfortunate headman was pitched forward onto his face where he lay moaning. The others were hustled back to the edge of the arena. The fetish's guards sprang aside, and the maniac thing shambled out into the moonlight. There it stood, monstrously gibbering.

A show indeed! Fit for a Nero or a Beelzebub. A dead pit of ancient hell's fires; the black shapes of demons

who danced and howled amongst the shadows of the gallery; the white circle of smooth sand in the center for the performance.

The ogre bellowed its insane challenge to the moon and shuffled on its great flat feet towards the victim in the center, reaching its thick hands out in anticipation, drooling and chuckling. The man screeched terror and fled before its awful advance; madly, this way and that. The ogre laughed its idiot glee and lumbered after him.

BACK and forth and around the arena the grisly chase proceeded. Demoniac howls and thunder bursts of drum applause cheered each sally. The man was the fleeter. With frantic agility he dodged and ducked. But he tired first. The strength and reserve force of the monster that roared and chuckled gleefully on his trail was immense.

The wretched man dashed frantically to squeeze in behind the guards. With kicks and blows amid yells of delight he was hurled sprawling back into the ring.

Babbling in an insanity of fear himself, he fled away and tried to scramble up the side of the pit. Spear points from the gallery prodded at him and forced him down.

Clawing madly at the rock face, he slid down a sharp incline with a little avalanche of rubble, rasping his naked body cruelly. But what did that matter? For then the monster caught him. And then followed the same grisly performance that the three prisoners had witnessed with their own prisoner during the last night's moon. The thing hurled the body high in the air. Battered at it. Smashed it. Gurgling and chuckling in homicidal fury. Its ink-black shadow in the white moonlight gave a distorted duplication of a devil's orgy. The shadows in the gallery leaped and howled.

A splendid show! But better to come. The chief demon croaked. The "mouth" relayed. Guards ran in and herded the monstrous portent from its kill. The battered corpse was dragged to the edge of the arena and left lying. The monster roared and bellowed its rage at being driven from its plaything; but it slowly gave place. The tremendous exertion of its game was telling upon its lungs. It panted enormously, pressing its hand to its swollen diaphragm.

The drums thundered appreciation of the first act.

The prisoners were hustled to the center again. Next would be the Galla.

"Good Lord!" Dane was murmering. "He hasn't a chance! He's a spear fighter. He knows nothing about bare hands. No African knows! Not a chance!"

Anson spoke through close bitten teeth. His voice was firm, though his outlook was hopeless.

"For that matter, what chance have even the two of us together? Or, do you think—I used to be something of boxer; and I've seen some big men lose to—" The words trailed away to nothing. The odds were too great even for two men together.

Dane scarcely heard Anson's flash of hope that died before it was born. He was biting on his lip with the anxiety of his own thoughts.

"I wonder if—Lord, I wish I knew! Perhaps if I could duck in and land all I have— Many's the time I've wished I knew more about medical science and anatomy. But never like now!"

The chief was making another

harangue. Obviously, from the way his people shouted and cheered, it was about their greatness and their triumph over the white man's supremacy.

The Galla was the least perturbed of the three. Fighting and death was his fatalist creed. He spoke firmly.

"This, Gofta, seems to be the end. Many fights have we seen, thou and I. I had hoped that we might go together when the time came, in hot blood, spear and gun in hand. But the Ngai, the Lord of Ghosts, arranges otherwise. At least will I lay the flat of my hand once across the great beast's mouth; and then—I shall await thee, Gofta. We shall hunt together in the ghost country."

THE chief on the grandstand croaked his order. But before the "mouth" could relay it, Dane strained forward between the men who pinned his arms. He was staking a last desperate hope on a grand play.

"Hold!" he shouted with all the magniloquent brag that, to an African, is the proper preamble to add weight to an impressive deed. "Hold! Let the people be still and hear my word. There has been much talk of the white man's honor to defend his servant. That is a true talk. Let all men see. I will go forth, alone, with my empty hands, and will slay this black fetish and prove the white man's honor strong!"

A startled silence received this stupendous boast; and then a chatter of translation ripped round the shadows of the gallery. The chatter swelled to a roar of derision. Black demons jumped up and down, hooted, whistled, jeered.

The Galla struggled with his guards. "Nay, Gofta, this is a madness," he urged. "The two of you together perchance might escape. But alone!—It is madness!"

Dane smiled tight lipped at him. "Old friend," he told him, "it is in my mind that perchance there is a chance. It was but yesterday that thou didst take an equal risk against a lion to render me a service that cannot be repaid with rewards. It may be that this is my opportunity to repay that service."

"Nay, Gofta, indeed—"

But the roar from the gallery, from the guards, from everybody, drowned the Galla's protests. Jeers flung in Swahili indicated that this mad challenge had caught the people's fancy. Let the white man go forth. Let him show his valor, whether he would stand or would squeal and run.

The chief guffawed his acquiescence to the popular demand, forgetting his dignity to relay his order through his speaker. The populace yelled delight. The speaker took it upon himself to announce:

"If indeed the white man does not run, and succeeds in so much as to lay a hand upon the black man's fetish, his memory will go down as greater than all other men."

"Indeed! Of a truth! Greater than all men! Let him go forth! Let the white man show his honor that we may see it!" The yells were eager and impatient.

Dane was shoved forward and was suddenly alone in the middle of the white, shimmering arena.

"Good Lord!" Anson groaned to himself. "Good Lord! His opportunity to repay!—As cleanly—without fuss. And not a chance!"

In the serene moonlight Dane stood, empty handed to meet a monstrous thing eight feet high that flung men's

bodies about like stuffed dummies—Hideously like stuffed dummies with arms and legs dislocatedly asprawl.

The idiot ogre stood free by the farther wall and gibbered angry noises.

The uproar of the populace died down to a silence that hummed like a taut wire. In that silence the enormity of the resolve that Dane had made on the spur of the moment came coldly to his full realization.

HE must think fast about it, or the chance—the slim chance upon which he built his desperate hope—would be lost. That swelling above the ogre's paunch that pained it—Lord, how he wished he knew more about such things!

The ogre was shambling towards him, slobbering out of its blubbery lips and insanely chuckling. Dane suddenly ran to meet it; and a gasp like a squeaky hinge ran all round the gallery.

The ogre pulled up short and blinked in bewilderment. It was accustomed to victims that ran from it shrieking.

Dane circled round the monster on wary feet. If he could but lure it, befuddle it, into some opening for the one desperate blow that he knew would be his only chance before the great hands would fall upon him and whirl him to his death! He was fervently grateful that the moon that rendered this thing mad gave at least a brilliant light to its every idiot move.

The great bulk shuffled ponderously about to face him, uttering querulous noises.

Dane stamped his feet as a pugilist sometimes does to distract an opponent. The ogre bubbled angrily. Its bewilderment was passing on to rage.

Dane stamped again. This tension could not go on. He must finish it. Life or death, all in the next few seconds!

Again Dane stamped. The ogre roared fury, flung out its great hands and lurched towards him.

With all the speed that he had, Dane ducked under the reaching arms and with all the weight and power of his whole body he drove his right fist onto that unhealthy bulge above the giant's belly.

It seemed to him for the moment before he side-stepped clear that his fist sank wrist deep into the soft hide, and it seemed a miracle that he had stepped clear.

Then other miracles followed swiftly. A choked "Oo-oo-ee-eech" groaned from the giant's throat. Its great hands clutched out at nothing. Its head craned backwards in agony. It swayed like a bull that has received the matador's thrust. For a long minute it swayed drunkenly. An enormous belch gurgled from its throat. Slowly its knees sagged. It groped out into the darkness that covered its eyes. Then it lurched and sprawled on its face. A vast shudder shook it. The huge limbs twitched spasmodically; twitched again, feebly. And so the thing remained, an inert bulk of flesh.

That shudder spread, as though it were an all-pervading sound wave, through the whole assembled populace. An awful silence fell like a smothering blanket over the whole arena. Then, from all round the gallery, came a moaning noise like monkeys make when they are cornered by a leopard and cannot escape.

DANE, through the surging exaltation of his spirit, over and above his enormous revulsion of feeling, knew that black heads cowered

beneath folded arms in the attitude of apes in fear.

He stood breathing star dust and he wanted to shout.

"*Gofta! Gofta!*" The Galla was running towards him. His guards had incontinently let him go. "*Gofta m'kubwa kuliko!* Mightiest of warriors! Whau! So strikes the Lord Ngai himself!"

Anson was there, too. He mumbled incoherent words as he pumped at Dane's hand. "Mum-m-magnificent! A mira-miracle! I don't understand! Wonderful!"

Dane shook free. "Spears!" he snapped at the Galla. "Beat the heads of those guards together and get weapons! Quick! Before they get their wits and think!"

Quite without resistance the guards let the Galla do it.

"Good!" Dane ran up the path to the place of the chiefs and made for the fetish priest. The man cringed away from him as from a devil. Dane gripped him by the throat and dragged the big fellow, unresisting, before the chief. Unresisting, he shoved the man's head down to his own boots, ground his nose well into them and ordered:

"Now tell him. Our guns, our pistols, knives! Immediately!"

And almost immediately they were forthcoming.

The superhuman thing, quite beyond those African's attainment or conception, had happened. Their insensate confidence of a few moments ago was crushed, blasted from them by the white man's miracle. Prestige, that incomprehensible and potent thing, cowed them once again.

A vast satisfaction and security came to Dane as he tucked his rifle into the hollow of his arm—the modern rifle that was "plenty of argument."

"So!" he pronounced then, breathing in huge gulps. "So!" He made his voice carry. "It is understood now, about the white man's honor. Or is it not?"

And the chiefs bowed their heads under their arms and mumbled: "It is understood, *bwana m'kubwa.*"

"Good!" Dane mouthed magniloquent phrases in Swahili which is a language designed for magnificent brag. "Therefore, as a fine for much insolence, which is forgiven only because your fathers were monkeys, let food be sent with tomorrow's daylight to the labor camp; meat and meal and beer; and every day thereafter."

"It will be sent, bwana."

"Good! And before the noon hour let the chiefs come so that orders may be given as to how many men of this tribe shall labor on that road."

"They shall be there, bwana."

"Good! Send now torch bearers who shall crawl upon their knees over the rocks to light the white men's way!"

It was not till they were well out of that twisted passage, smoky with torchlight and devilish shadows, that Dane was able to stretch his shoulders and shed the tension from himself and laugh wholeheartedly.

"Well, so that's that! I guess, young feller, you'll be able to run your road now without any more bother."

Anson was very serious. "If," he agreed dubiously, "I can hang on with both hands and all my teeth to one tenth of what you've taught me about a white man's job in Africa."

"You'll hang on," said Dane. "You've got the good makin's. And you'll not run into another mess like that in a hurry. That was as bad a

hole as I never expect the luck to scramble out of again."

"Luck?" exclaimed Anson with honest indignation. "Why, that was the most splendid—"

"Shucks, young feller, shucks," Dane cut him off, "I got the breaks. I had only one chance—that the swelling on the ogre's middle was an enlarged spleen. I didn't know if it was that, but I *did* know that if a diseased spleen is ruptured, death will be very sudden. It was the only chance I had, so I took it. This is Africa. If a white man gets breaks—and holds onto his nerve—and has a sturdy friend like this old ruffian of a Galla—she's not too hard on him. He'll keep his end up."

And dimly Anson began to understand that it was men like Dane who had always kept the white man's end up amongst the black millions of untamed Africa.

THE END.

Eagles

MANY Americans have never seen an eagle. This majestic bird may measure eight feet from wing tip to wing tip. It weighs only eight or ten pounds, though. The eagle is a form of hawk, and unluckily shares the hawk's piratical fondness for chickens.

Another unattractive trait of eagles is that they won't always protect their young—sometimes will, sometimes not, great fighters though they are when attacked. Young eagles are glossy and handsome, strict monogamists, and use the same nest year after year, building it higher each year. This is poor judgment, for as the nest gets heavier it often brings down the old tree with a crash.

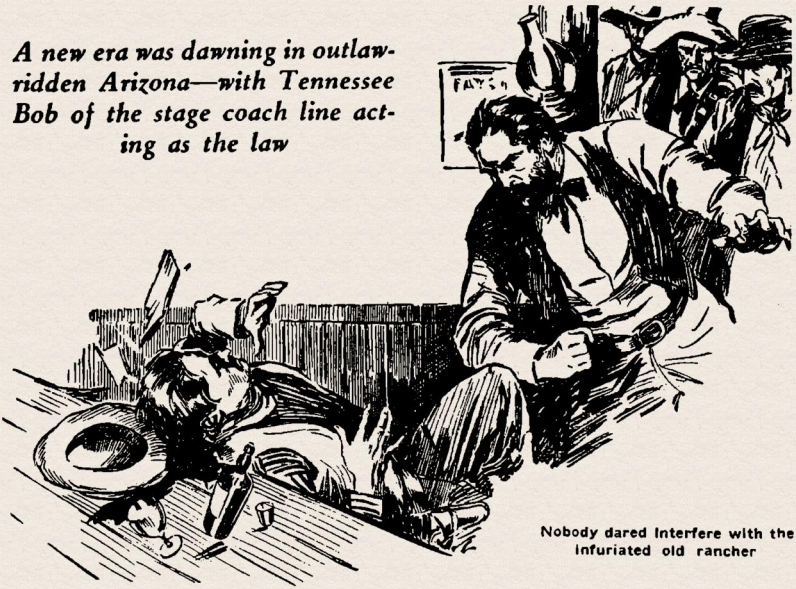
There used to be a notable eagle aerie in Ohio, near Vermilion. It was a giant cone, twelve feet high and eight and a half feet across the top; had been occupied by the same family of eagles for eighty years. So many people visited the nest that two hundred-foot-high observation platforms were put in near-by trees. Canvas screens partly hid the audience; eagles are highly independent and don't like to be looked at. *J. W. Holden.*

West of Apache Pass*

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Breath of the Desert," "Clear the Trail," etc.

A new era was dawning in outlaw-ridden Arizona—with Tennessee Bob of the stage coach line acting as the law



Nobody dared interfere with the infuriated old rancher

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN the stage coach line through the Southwest was put into operation, Dean Pritchard took his desert-bred daughter, Anne, in to Tucson, which was one of the chief stations on the line. The station was in charge of a man named Eggleston; Bill Pringle was the driver of the first coach to come through. And accompanying that first stage was a man whom Anne thought to be the most attractive she had ever seen, Bob Randall, otherwise known as Tennessee Bob, or "The Judge." Tennessee Bob was boss of the stage guard; for protection from outlaws was necessary—and even more, from hostile Indians. The Mexicans, the Opatas and the Papagos were friendly; it was the cruel tribe of Apaches that was giving the trouble.

Anne Pritchard would never forget her first impressions of Tucson, which was the largest town she had ever seen. Even more, she would remember all her life her experience with the insulting Luke Malpass, bully and killer, and leader of a gang of cutthroat outlaws. The first time he saw her he kissed her, and declared his intention of having her for his wife. She was so infuriated at his effrontery that she swore she would kill him.

Pete Leffingwell, keeper of the general store, agreed that he would do what he could to keep the knowledge of this episode from Anne's fiery-tempered father.

There was another man who had encountered Anne Pritchard and found her attractive and desirable, in this rough land where women were scarce. His name was

This story began in the Argosy for August 4

Blakeslee, and he was the leader of that band of hard, wild young men known as the Smoothfaces, so named because as yet their faces were scarcely bearded. It was the habit of the Smoothfaces to befriend all whites, especially immigrant trains such as that under the leadership of the man called Dallo. Nevertheless the Smoothfaces were really outlaws, since they pillaged and plundered the Mexican outlaw bands, who in turn preyed upon the whites.

Dean Pritchard had come to Tucson chiefly to sell lard and hams, but he and his men had camped outside the wild town. Listening to the sounds of revelry and dancing from the town that night, Anne obeyed a wild impulse to steal through the darkness and watch. That was the very moment that Luke Malpass chose to make a raid upon the Pritchard camp, and not finding Anne there, to ride through the town demanding to know where she was. To Anne, from her hiding place, that seemed an excellent chance to kill this man whom she hated so intensely; but as she was about to do so some one seized her gun hand from behind.

CHAPTER IX.

FARSIGHTED.

CURIOUSLY, despite the sudden shock and her great surprise over the amazing interruption that prevented her from killing Malpass, Anne was not frightened. There had been a certain gentleness in the firm grip upon her hand. The action was not forcible, but it was restraining. It was as if a voice had said to her: "I wouldn't advise that, and I won't let you do it."

Anne could feel the man's breath upon the back of her neck, and even before she turned to look up into his face she knew that he was Tennessee Bob.

She did not resist him when he took the six-shooter from her hand.

"I reckon I know how you feel, ma'am," he said in a soft, low voice with a Southern accent. "But shootin' Luke Malpass, right at this minute, wouldn't do. You see, ma'am, his whole gang is in town—forty or fifty of them."

"I intended to kill him," she said.

"I expect you did. He deserves killin', an' you've got confidence in your shootin' ability, I reckon. But shootin' Malpass would bring his gang down on you, lettin' 'em know just where you are. There's goin' to be the devil to pay in town to-night, ma'am, and I'm goin' to get you to a place where you'll be safe."

In the flickering firelight she could see Tennessee Bob's face, and there was an expression of real concern upon it. She was not as excited as she might have been; not nearly as excited as she had feared she would be upon meeting him again. As a matter of fact, a curious calmness came over her, a feeling of security and of indifference to the tumult and the clamor of the scene that was being enacted in the Plaza. She could hear the screams of women escaping from the place; the shouts and curses of men. The clattering of hoofs accompanied by the sounds of shooting, over near the wagon train; and although she was apprehensive of her father's safety she had confidence in the fighting ability of his men.

The bonfire in the Plaza was still burning brightly. Its glare struck the wall of the patio and was reflected into Tennessee Bob's face, who had sunk to the bench and was sitting sidewise upon it, close to her.

He examined the cylinder of her six-shooter, and gravely placed it in her holster.

"You're clear grit!" he compli-

mented. "I reckon you sure would have killed Malpass. What for?"

"I hate him!"

"That's reason enough."

Anne was glad that he made no effort to pursue the subject further. She would not have told him why she hated Malpass. Nobody would ever know that Malpass had kissed her. Leffingwell knew, but he had promised not to tell. It wasn't the physical act of the kissing that had aroused her to turbulent passion; it had been the thought that had been running in Malpass's mind, his conception of her.

"Do you know Malpass?" asked Tennessee.

"I saw him to-day for the first time."

"He was callin' your name, ma'am."

"He would never have called it again, if it hadn't been for you," she declared.

THE light had died down; the clamor had receded to a distance; dancing shadows stole into the patio.

Tennessee stood erect. He was very tall.

"We've got a chance to get out of here now, ma'am," he said. "I reckon we'd better take it." He led her down a dark passageway between two buildings. They came to an adobe wall which she knew enclosed the stage station and the other buildings. The wall was high, but without asking her permission he seized her and swung her to its top with effortless ease. In an instant he was beside her, then over and standing upon the ground inside, whispering for her to jump. Obediently, she obeyed him. He caught her in his arms, laughing softly as for an instant he held her.

"There," he said, releasing her.

Dimly, in the star haze, Anne could trace the outlines of the buildings inside the enclosure, and as she stood there close to Tennessee she could hear intermittent shooting from the direction of the Pritchard wagon trail. Tennessee laughed again.

"I reckon the Malpass boys run into somethin' they wasn't expectin'," he said. "Right afteh I struck town to-day I got word that Malpass was intendin' to raid your father's wagon train to-night, and so I sent a man over afteh Blakeslee's Smoothfaces. They came down along the Santa Cruz, just at dark, and got to the wagon train about the time you was leavin' it."

"You saw me?"

He smiled.

"You were standin' by a mesquite clump, starin' at town," he answered. "You didn't bother to look back of the mesquite."

"You were that close to me?"

"I reckon I was, ma'am. You see, knowin' what I did, I couldn't afford to be far off. You see, I was intendin' to be there when the Blakeslee Smoothfaces came, and I sort of figured to participate in discouragin' Malpass's gang."

"I spoiled your plans!" she said, dismayed.

"I ain't grievin' none," he said, lightly. "But your father, now, he'll be some fussed up when he finds you ain't with the wagon train. You sure he don't know that you left it?"

"I slipped away," Anne told him.

"Well, he'll be burnin' leather mighty sudden, when he finds you missin'. But I reckon it's better for him to get a bit excited than it would be for you to go gallivantin' around, with all this shootin' goin' on. We'll go find Eggleston. He'll be sleepin' his head off, I reckon, and payin' no attention

to what's goin' on outside. Eggleston's an unconcerned cuss!"

HE guided Anne to the doorway of a building, facing the blackness beyond the opening and calling softly.

"I reckon you're sleepin' as usual, Eggleston?" he said.

"Oh, it's you, eh?" answered Eggleston gruffly. "I heard somebody comin', and I was gettin' ready to pulverize 'em."

The station agent now appeared in the doorway, and Anne could just distinguish his face in the star haze. At the same instant he caught sight of her and exclaimed gruffly:

"Who you got there?"

"It's Anne Pritchard," answered Tennessee. He explained that Anne had deserted the wagon train, not knowing of the impending raid, and that he had brought her to the stage station for safety.

"Shore, thar won't nobody bother the station," declared Eggleston. "You come right in, ma'am, and make yourself to home."

"That's right," said Tennessee. "You stay right here with Eggleston, and I'll go over to your dad's wagon train and tell him where you are."

In the faintly luminous light Anne saw him looming tall and big above her. She could not see his face clearly, but she could see that he was extending his right hand, and she took it and shook it firmly.

"Thank you," she said. "I—I think you did right in preventing me from shooting Malpass, and I want to thank you for all you have done for me and for my father."

She was certain that if it had been daylight she would have seen him blush as he had blushed that afternoon when his attention was directed to her by Eggleston.

"Why, it was nothin', ma'am!" His voice leaped and rang with sincerity. "I'm mighty glad to have met you," he added.

And then, before she could speak another word, he had turned to the gate, and Eggleston was letting him out of the enclosure and barring the gate after him.

Anne went into the station, where she sat on a bench in the darkness with Eggleston. She could not see Eggleston, but his voice came to her from a far corner of the room; and somehow, when he spoke she got the impression that he was expressing his amazement.

"That there Tennessee Bob is the fur-sightedest feller I ever seen!" he said. "When the stage line got aholt of him they got aholt of a humdinger!"

CHAPTER X.

VIGILANCE COMMITTEE.

RAIDS such as had been perpetrated upon the Pritchard wagon train were frequent occurrences in the country about old Tucson. Freighters who, either through ignorance of conditions or carelessness, made their camps outside the walls commonly found themselves besieged and robbed. Bands of wild men roaming the country in search of plunder were attracted to Tucson, because the town was a distributing center. Miners transporting metal from Arizona hills; traders freighting merchandise from one point to another; caravans of emigrants bound for California; none of them were aware of the existence of these bands of desperadoes until they awoke in the desert night to face the belching guns.

Tucson's population was predominantly Mexican. The small merchants who maintained stores in the adobe buildings; the owners of larger establishments; the saloon men, and the keepers of dives; the gun fighters who drifted into town from various points of the compass; the gamblers who drifted in, did not concern themselves with the activities of the outlaw bands that infested the country, for often many of the merchants of Tucson were themselves members of these bands. The unfortunate freighters who met disaster while encamped upon Tucson's outskirts received neither help nor sympathy.

Luke Malpass had many friends in Tucson, and the panic that seized the merrymakers upon the outlaw leader's sudden appearance in town after the killing of the two freighters was the result of discretion rather than fear. The people of Tucson knew that this was to be Luke Malpass's night, and that he would brook no interference; therefore they scurried out of sight. Within ten minutes after Malpass and his men appeared at the fire in the Plaza, those citizens of Tucson who were wise and discreet were behind their adobe walls, hidden in darkness.

Dean Pritchard was noted as a terrible fighter and a man of violent temper. But Malpass was also a power in the country, and the hot kisses that he had pressed upon Anne Pritchard's lips had aroused in him a tumult that sanity could not calm.

WHEN he was not successful, followed closely by a dozen of his wild riders he raged through the dusty and deserted streets, searching for her. Wherever a light shone through a door or a window Malpass plunged toward it. He burst forcibly into private dwellings, raging with impatience, his eyes glowing with a fierce, wild light.

"She's hyar!" he cursed to his men, while standing in one of the deserted streets, flanked by the gray adobe walls of the buildings. "You boys scatter and hunt for her. And if you find her, don't hurt her or I'll bust you wide open! Vamose!"

The Malpass riders scurried away in a dust cloud. Malpass stood alone in the street. Convinced that Anne was somewhere in the town, he searched various buildings and the spaces between buildings. Once he burst into the doorway of a *bagnio*, among half-clad Mexican girls and drunken freighters. The freighters were friends of the two men whom Malpass had killed that day. They glared at him, but his guns were in his hands before they could recover from their astonishment over his sudden appearance, and he grinned like a feline at them as he backed out. A single swift glance around the room had shown him that Anne Pritchard was not there. After leaving this place he stood for a few moments in the darkness between two buildings, watching the doorway of the *bagnio* and expecting, hoping, that some of the freighters would rush out after him. But the freighters, having seen the murder light in his eyes, discreetly remained in the company of the women.

Malpass's search took him into Zeigler's saloon, in front of which he had killed the freighters. The saloon was crowded. A single kerosene lamp was suspended from the ceiling, near the center of the room. Several bracket lamps on the walls provided additional illumination. A bar ran along one side of the room. There were several card tables in the rear.

Malpass strode in unnoticed except

by the bartender, whose face whitened at sight of him.

The saloon had an earthen floor, and its gray adobe walls were unadorned and windowless. The bar consisted of two planks, resting upon wooden saw horses, and a keg of beer had been mounted in a cradle that stood upon the planks.

Malpass approached the bartender, who grinned a mirthless, tight-lipped smile.

"So you're back again?" he said. "Them mule whackers was mighty mad. In your place, I wouldn't stay here any longer than it would take me to get out of the door."

"Bah!" sneered Malpass. His gaze searched the room. "You seen Anne Pritchard?"

"Hell, no! What in thunder would Anne Pritchard be doin' in here?" The bartender stared at Malpass. "So that's what brought you back, eh?—You're on the wrong trail, Malpass! Anne Pritchard ain't your kind, nor the kind you think she is. And don't go for to monkeyin' with anything that belongs to old Dean Pritchard."

MALPASS replied, but the bartender did not hear his words, for he was staring at an apparition that had suddenly appeared from the street. Dean Pritchard had burst into the room, hatless, coatless, his great, powerful body filling the doorway. His hair was in wild disorder, the cords of his neck were bulging, his face was dead white, and his eyes were wild with rage.

Pritchard leaped straight at Malpass. He swung a heavy right fist, which landed with a crash under Malpass's left ear. The blow was a terrific one, and the sound of it, like an ax splitting a log, was heard throughout the room. The inmates of the place turned to stare.

Malpass slewed around with buckled knees, falling backward against the planks that formed the bar. There was no mark on him where the blow had landed, but he was dazed. Yet a tenacious consciousness apprised him of what was happening to him, and the instinct for self-preservation was strong. Gropingly, his hands sought the guns at his hips, but the raging, wild-eyed man in front of him would not be denied or obstructed. He tore Malpass's guns out of their holsters with furious strength and hurled them clattering, one after the other, to the earthen floor with such force that they rebounded to a far corner of the room.

No one moved. Dozens of men in the room knew Dean Pritchard by reputation, but they were unaware of what had taken place to provoke him to the mighty wrath that had seized him. He stood in front of Malpass, swaying back and forth in a deadly paroxysm of hatred, his muscles writhing and rippling, his lips showing white through his beard. It seemed he knew that Malpass still retained a spark of consciousness, for he leaned close to the outlaw.

"Whar's my daughter, you damned scullion? Whar is she? Tell me this minute, or I'll pull you apart!"

Malpass evidently realized the import of the question, for he shook his head and tried to steady himself against the rough planks of the bar.

Pritchard set himself. His mighty muscles contracted and he drove a fist under the outlaw's chin. The blow tilted Malpass backward. Another blow caught him upon the side of the face. The rough planks of the bar went down with Malpass and Pritchard raging in the débris. The men in the saloon

crowded around, stunned and awed by Pritchard's wild anger. Nobody interfered. They s t o o d there until Pritchard, at last realizing that the outlaw was unconscious, clambered out of the wreck of the bar and stood up, glaring down.

Pritchard's face was ashen with the rage that still gripped him. He glared at the faces that were turned to his. His eyes roved from face to face with terrible, questing intensity.

"Whar's my d a u g h t e r?" he screeched. "I'll kill the damned skum that teches her!"

NO one answered. Obviously no one cared to risk attracting Pritchard's a t t e n t i o n. Big, broad, wild, he stood in the circle, glaring at them. Malpass was still. His face was bruised and macerated, his eyes were closed. He had received a terrific beating. Now that Malpass was down and unconscious, Pritchard grew more calm, although his eyes were still wild and fierce.

"Luke Malpass's gang raided my wagon train," he told the crowd. "We killed about half of them, but the rest got away. They've got my daughter—my Anne—and I'll tear this damned town down unless I find her!"

No one, it seemed, was foolhardy enough to answer Pritchard. Most of them were Mexican, and this was a quarrel between two ferocious *Gringos*. They dare not interfere, although perhaps both the participants had friends here. There were in the room perhaps a dozen Americans, freighters most of them, who had reason to feel resentment toward Malpass. These crowded forward, close to Pritchard. One of them, a tall, bearded man, spoke to Pritchard.

"There ought to be some law in this hyar town, stranger," he said. "A man ain't got no protection against skunks like this hyar Malpass, which you've knocked hell out of."

Pritchard paid no attention to the freighters. He looked at the unconscious Malpass, and at the bartender.

"Your daughter ain't been in here, Pritchard," said the latter. "I ain't seen her. If Malpass had her, he didn't bring her in here. Just before you come he was askin' me if I'd seen her."

Pritchard s t o o d there, glaring. There was a period of absolute silence, during which a commotion was heard in the street. The sounds of loud, angry voices and the scuffing of boots in the sand of the street; curses; threats; the rumble of a crowd of men in disorder. Then Tennessee Bob stepped into the doorway of the saloon.

He saw Luke Malpass lying upon the wreck of the bar, and he looked at Dean Pritchard, who had wheeled to face him.

There was a murmur in the room. Tennessee Bob was well known to all of them; he was respected and feared. His lips were straight, but there was a smile in his eyes as he met Pritchard's gaze.

"I've been lookin' for you, Pritchard," he said.

He whispered to Pritchard, and the latter's muscles seemed to leap and relax.

"Is that the truth, Tennessee?—Whar is she?"

Tennessee Bob whispered again, and Pritchard drew a great sigh of relief. A mighty hand went out and gripped Tennessee's.

"Thank yuh!" said Pritchard. And now his eyes glowed with sudden sus-

picion. "What you got out thar?" he asked.

"Blakeslee's Smoothfaces," answered Tennessee. "They've rounded up three of the Malpass gang. Maybe a dozen of them got away. There's some more folks out there too. They've organized a Vigilance Committee, and they aim to make an example of Malpass's men.'"

"That's the first sensible thing that's been done in this town!" declared Pritchard. "It's time some one took aholt hyar and cleaned the scullions out!" He now whispered to Tennessee. "Are you sure Anne's all right?" he asked. "She ain't hurt? Nobody teched her?"

"She was lookin' mighty alive and healthy when I left her. And all-fired pretty, Pritchard.—I reckon she'll be safe with Eggleston."

The tumult in the street had grown louder, and now a crowd of men appeared in the saloon doorway, the tall figure of Blakeslee among them.

CHAPTER XI.

QUICK JUSTICE.

THAT was Tucson's initial impulse toward the founding of a punitive law. It represented the determination of a band of substantial men to initiate government for the suppression and regulation of crime and the punishment of criminals.

Grimly the three Malpass riders who had participated in the attack on the Pritchard wagon train were ushered into the saloon. Particularly heinous were the crimes with which these three ruffians were charged. It was claimed that in the crowd were witnesses who had seen them use knives upon three of the Pritchard men.

The Malpass riders were taken to the rear of the room and were stood against the wall underguard, while perhaps a hundred men, including dozens of freighters, several American merchants, Blakeslee's Smoothfaces, Blakeslee himself, Pritchard, Tennessee Bob, and others, congregated near the center of the room to listen to a big man named Brannon, who was earnestly haranguing them.

"It's time somethin' was done hyar!" Brannon declared. "This town is so all-fired rotten that it's worth a man's life to walk on the streets. Thieves, murderers, cutthroats, gunfighters, tin horns, rustlers, highwaymen, raiders and lewd women has got so thick hyar that a decent man or woman can't stay hyar. This hyar Arizony is a part of the United States, and we've got to make it safe for citizens of the United States.

"Of course, we can't help it if them Mexican wagon trains from down yonder gets held up once in a while. This hyar is our country, and they ain't got no right hyar to begin with. But we got to pertect American citizens, and damn if we ain't goin' to do it! We're goin' to start right now—on this Malpass gang!

"Hyar's Dean Pritchard, comin' hyar to sell his hams and bacon and lard, which he's raised—hawgs I mean—in spite of the damned Apaches that has tried to lift his skelp. He brings his goods hyar, so that white men can eat, and this hyar Malpass gang raids his wagon train and tries to take his money away from him. And then thar's this hyar Luke Malpass tryin' to steal Pritchard's daughter. Things is pretty bad when an American citizen has got to run the risk of havin' his own daughter stole from him."

"What air we goin' to do about it?"

asked a man who was standing near Brannon.

"We'll hang Malpass and his three cutthroats, fust off!" declared another.

There was a roar of approval, which Brannon quieted.

"Shore, we'll hang 'em," he conceded. "But while we're talkin' of law and order, let's hev it. The fust thing to do is to elect somebody as Jestice of the Peace, givin' him authority to presarve order.

"We've got voters enough in this hyar room to elect a Jestice of the Peace, and we're goin' to do it. I nominate Tennessee Bob for Jestice. All in favor of electin' Tennessee Bob as Jestice of the Peace of this hyar town will say 'Aye.'"

"There was a wild chorus of "ayes," and Brannon turned to Tennessee, who was negatively shaking his head.

"I KNOW what you air goin' to say, Tennessee," said Brannon, "but we ain't goin' to take no for an answer. If Jestice of the Peace is goin' to interfere with your stage job, why, you'll hev to quit the stage job and go to jesticin' altogether. If you aim to hold both jobs, you kin appoint a depity marshal to make arrests when you ain't hyar, and to hold criminals till you git back to try 'em.

"We'll fix up a jail. Thar's no sanitation hyar, and them thet the marshal ketches we kin put to work cleanin' up the town, so's a man kin walk through it without gittin' stunk out. I hereby officially announce that Tennessee Bob Randall has been duly and regularly elected Jestice of the Peace for Tucson and all the country around about."

"Now, then, Your Honor, we're determined to hang these hyar cutthroats. What's the next step?"

"I don't want the job," declared Tennessee, "but I reckon I'm elected and will have to serve. But if we're goin' to have law and order, let's start right. You say you're goin' to hang these men, Brannon, but before there's any hangin' done there'll have to be a fair trial. Accordin' to the Constitution of the United States, a man charged with a major crime is entitled to a trial by jury. I don't know how juries are usually selected, but if I name the jury I reckon that will be regular."

He called the names of twelve men, including Brannon, whom he named foreman.

"I've never served on any jury, and I'm not certain how these things are handled," advised Tennessee, gazing gravely at all the faces that were turned to his, "but it seems to me that courts always move slowly and deliberately. These men are charged with a crime, and they ought to be given time to get somebody to defend them."

"Shore," agreed Brannon. "We'll give 'em fifteen minutes."

"Thar ain't no son-of-a-gun goin' to defend 'em!" declared a man with a booming, truculent voice. "If they go to gettin' any damned lawyer in hyar, we'll hang him too! They ain't no doubt about their cuttin' the throats of Pritchard's men. They was seen doin' it, and we got the witnesses to prove it. What the hell's the use of goin' through any law rigamarole. Let's take the damned skunks out and hang 'em right now!"

"Lazzius," rebuked Tennessee, "did you vote for me for Justice of the Peace?"

Lazzius grinned.

"Shore."

"Then you voted for law and order," continued Tennessee, "and

we're goin' to have law and order!—You get that straight, Lazzius?"

"I shore do," sheepishly grinned the culprit.

Now that the machinery of law had been put in motion, there was an instant desire to attend to the details of its application. Under Brannon's direction some tables and chairs were moved to the back of the room and were so arranged as to provide a place for judge, jury, prisoners and their attorneys, if any appeared. The prisoners, meanwhile, stood against the rear wall, sullenly regarding these sinister preparations.

The bar had been restored and the bartender was again engaged in the task of filling glasses. The crowd in the saloon was being greatly augmented by the inhabitants of the town, who, having learned of the routing of the Malpass gang and of the capture of three of the survivors of the attack on the Pritchard train, now cast aside their discretion.

Then it was discovered that Luke Malpass had vanished.

"Shucks!" declared an agitator for law and order. "We ought to have tried Luke, too."

There were muttered oaths.

"I reckon the bustin' up that Pritchard gave Malpass sort of squared things for what he done," declared a freighter. "He didn't get Anne Pritchard, anyway; he only tried to. And he didn't have no hand in the raid on the wagon train. He could easy enough git out of hangin' on that account."

"It must have been when you-all was busy electin' Tennessee to the Jestice of the Peace job," explained the bartender. "Luke must have got away then, 'cause everybody was interested in votin'. I seen several fellers standin' around lookin' at him, and it's likely they was friends of his who sneaked him out."

CHAPTER XII.

"PROGRESS."

IT seemed to Anne Pritchard that not more than an hour had elapsed from the time she had seen Tennessee Bob's tall figure vanishing through the gate until she heard her father's voice outside, calling to Eggleston. She was at the gate as soon as the station keeper was, and in an instant she was folded in her father's huge arms and he was patting her head with the mighty fists that only a few minutes earlier had felled Luke Malpass. From the instant Tennessee had left her she had heard the sounds of the tumult that accompanied the activities of the Vigilance Committee, but in answer to her questions her father told her grimly that everything was all right.

"We've got law and order hyar now, honey, and Tennessee is headin' it. He's been elected Jestice of the Peace."

"Where is Tennessee?"

"Wal, he's doin' some jesticin' right now. Thar's a jury, settin' over in Zeigler's saloon, tryin' three scullions which cut the throats of three of my men. Thar ain't nothin' to get excited about now, honey," he advised her, patting her head reassuringly. "Thar was a fight over at the wagon train. Three of the boys got themselves killed and some more got hurt, but they sure salivated the Malpass gang."

"Where is Luke Malpass?"

"Wal, Luke got busted up some, over in Zeigler's. But he got away."

"Tennessee Bob told you where to find me, didn't he?"

"Shore. Honey, you certainly

skeered me some, sneakin' away like that. I thought shore Luke Malpass had got yuh."

"I was here all the time. I know I shouldn't have come into town alone."

"My daughter can go whar she wants to go!" declared Pritchard, defiantly. He laughed. "Luke Malpass is just like a lot of other men in this country, Anne. He blows hard an' talks big, yet thar ain't nothin' to him in a fight.—But it's time you was in bed. We'll go back an' I'll have the boys clean up the mess, an' then you get tucked into bed an' go to sleep. Thar won't nobody bother you now."

Anne and her father went back to the wagon train. It was quiet there, and there was little evidence of the fight that had been waged by the Pritchard men, aided by Blakeslee's Smoothfaces. The Smoothfaces had made camp at a little distance down the river. Anne saw a small campfire there, with several men near it. Close by was a rope corral which enclosed some horses. Blakeslee and most of his men were in the town, Pritchard told Anne.

Anne saw another fire, out in the desert, and saw men digging.

"That's our boys, plantin' some of Malpass's gang. You go to bed, honey, an' don't let anything bother you."

AT dawn the following morning Anne parted the rear curtains of the bed wagon and peered out upon a silent world. The wagons of her father's train were grouped in orderly fashion, and the men were asleep on the ground near the remains of the campfire. Farther down the river the Smoothfaces were also asleep; wrapped in their blankets.

Anne looked toward the town of Tucson. The gray shapes of the buildings were visible, but the streets were deserted. There was no movement anywhere. Even the stage station was solemnly quiet, and the gate closed.

Anne's gaze swept the Plaza, where during the darkness the campfire of chaparral had blazed, flanked by the foolish Japanese lanterns, festooned along the eaves of the building. That was the spot where the gay dancers had whirled and dipped and writhed to the strumming of the guitars. She could even see the patio in which she and Tennessee Bob had sat on the bench behind the adobe wall, when Luke Malpass and his riders had burst upon the throng, seeking her.

She started, gasped; her face whitened and her eyes dilated. For there, where the festooned Japanese lanterns had swung, were now the bodies of three men, swinging by their necks from ropes that were fastened to the eaves. Ghastly, grotesque shapes, their heads awry, their bodies stretched, dangling, swinging, slowly turning.

Anne remembered what her father had said about the jury sitting in Zeigler's. The law! The awful majesty of justice. Those three grotesque shapes, swinging there so idly and so inexpressibly repellent, were, to her as well as to the inhabitants of Tucson, tokens of a new day. Just as the stage line represented progress, the ghastly shapes dangling at the end of their ropes represented the beginning of the end of the terrorism in frontier life.

CHAPTER XIII.

OVERLAND TO TEXAS.

TENNESSEE BOB had acted the roll of chief justice in the first trial for murder that had taken place in Tucson, and it might have

been expected that on the following morning he would be gravely considering the responsibilities that had been thrust upon him. Sleeping in a bunk in the stage station, with Eggleston occupying a bunk opposite him, Tennessee awakened with the dawn. Yet he was thinking of a gingham dress, a beribboned sunbonnet, a slender, graceful form, and a pair of calm, serene and courageous eyes which had baffled him.

The stage which he was to accompany on his trip to Apache Pass would not arrive at Tucson from Maricopa until the second afternoon, and so he went to sleep again, thinking of Anne Pritchard, being reasonably certain that later in the day he would see her again.

But although Anne came to town, Tennessee did not see her. And Tennessee Bob's time was fully occupied, so that he had no opportunity to search for her, or to follow his inclination to visit the Pritchard wagon train.

The newly formed Vigilance Committee was industriously perfecting its organization. The leader, Brannon, had taken possession of an empty adobe building near the Plaza, and had some men at work fixing a section of it into a jail. There Tennessee spent a great deal of his time during the day; and when, toward evening, a rider galloped into town from Maricopa with a message for him, he rode west, accompanied by half a dozen of the stage guard, leaving word with Eggleston that he would be back in time to accompany the east stage on its regular trip the day after to-morrow.

This time Dean Pritchard accompanied his daughter Anne to town, walking belligerently beside her. Together they visited several of the stores; and when, shortly after noon, they were standing in front of the stage station, they interestedly read a handbill which had been tacked upon a bulletin board on the wall of the station by Eggleston:

OVERLAND TO TEXAS*

SAN ANTONIO AND SAN DEIGO MAIL LINE

which is in successful operation are ticketing passengers through to San Antonio, Texas and also all intermediate stations. Passengers and express matter forwarded in NEW COACHES, drawn by six horses over the entire length of our line, excepting from San Deigo to Fort Yuma, a distance of *180 miles, which we cross on horse back.* Passengers guaranteed to ride in coaches, excepting the 180 miles mentioned above. Passengers ticketed from San Deigo to

FORT YUMA—EL PASO—MARICOPA WELLS
FORT BLISS—TUCSON—FORT DAVIS
LA MESILLA—FORT LANCASTER—
FORT FILLMORE—FORT HUDSON
—AND—SAN ANTONIO

The coaches of our line leave semi weekly from each end at 6 o'clock, A.M. on Wednesday and Saturday. *An armed escort travels through the Indian Country* with each mail train for the protection of mail and passengers. Passengers are provided with provisions during the trip, except where the coaches stop at Public Houses along the line, at which passenger will pay for his own meal. Each passenger is allowed 30 (thirty) pounds of Personal Baggage, exclusive of blankets and *arms.* Passengers from San Francisco can take the C.S.N. Co.'s splendid

STEAMER SENATOR, CAPTAIN TOM SEELEY

which leaves San Francisco on the 3rd and 18th of each month and connects with our line. Passengers going to San Antonio can take a daily line of four-horse coaches to Indianola, from which place there is a semi weekly line of splendid mail steamers to N. Orleans.

*Note: Authentic copy of a handbill of the period.

FARE ON THE LINE AS FOLLOWS

San Deigo to Yuma $40
San Deigo to Tucson $80
San Deigo to El Paso $125
San Deigo to San Antonio... $200
(Intermediate stations beyond Ft. Yuma, 15c per mile)
Passengers can obtain necessary outfits at San Deigo.

"They mean business, I reckon, honey," said Pritchard.

"Yes," answered Anne, absently.

"The fare from San Diego to El Paso is a hundred and twenty-five dollars," ruminated Pritchard. "And it's eighty dollars from San Diego to Tucson. Eighty from a hundred and twenty-five leaves forty-five. That would be the fare from Tucson to El Paso. Wal, I reckon I'd want to be paid the forty-five to ride in one of them contraptions, thet fer."

"El Paso—" said Anne dreamily. "El Paso means 'The Pass,' doesn't it?" Anne gazed at the desert country surrounding Tucson. More to herself than to Pritchard she said, "I should like to see El Paso."

"Eh! What's thet?—You want to see El Paso? Wal, El Paso wasn't much when I seen it, fifteen years ago."

"That was when you were on your way out here, with mother, wasn't it?"

"With your mother and *you*," corrected Pritchard. "You was about three years old then."

"HAVEN'T you ever wanted to go back there, dad? I mean, haven't you any longing to see real cities, such as you used to see and such as I have read about?"

"No. Can't say as I have." He gazed hard at Anne and a speculative gleam came into his eyes. "I reckon El Paso would be a sight to you," he added. "You talked several times about going to El Paso. Shucks, gal, you ain't seen anythin', have you?"

EGGLESTON emerged from the door of the station. He grinned at them—admiringly at Anne, apologetically at Pritchard. In Eggleston's hand was a letter.

"Pritchard," he said, "I got to apologize to you. You been in town two days, and until I heard you and Anne talkin' out hyar I clean forgot that I had a letter for you. Hyar it is. It's postmarked El Paso. You got some kin thar, ain't you, Dean? Wal, I hope it's good news."

He gave the letter to Pritchard, who opened it, turned his back and began to read it. Eggleston smiled at Anne, slyly.

"Tennessee's gone to Maricopa Wells," he whispered.

Anne started, and Eggleston saw the tell-tale flush that stole into her cheeks.

"I thought mebbe you'd like to know," added Eggleston.

His eyes were twinkling.

"I understood he was traveling to Apache Pass," Anne said quietly.

"Shore. He was headin' that way. But thar's trouble at Maricopa Wells, and he's gone to settle it. Tennessee's always whar trouble is. Ain't he a hell terror, ma'am? Take last night. Fast work, ma'am!"

Eggleston went back into the station and Anne looked at her father, who had finished reading the letter. His eyes were troubled.

"It's Milly," he said. "She's sick. Carrie says she'll die, most likely, and they're wantin' me to come thar.—Milly. Shore, she's gettin' older; and fifteen years is a long time, lookin' back. But I can't go, Anne. I can't get away. Time I come back, I wouldn't

have no ranch left. The Indians and outlaws would have dragged it off."

Pritchard was silent and thoughtful that evening as he and Anne walked back to the wagon train.

The next morning after breakfast he met Anne near the bed wagon.

"You're goin' to El Paso, honey," he told her. "I've fixed it up with Eggleston. The east stage is due this afternoon. They're runnin' an extry. Soon's you get yourself dressed up, we'll go over to Leffingwell's and get you a whole outfit for travelin', and a couple of travelin' cases. I wouldn't let you go if it wasn't that I know thar'll be a good guard. Eggleston says for shore Tennessee will go east with the stage you're goin' on. And nothin' ain't goin' to happen to you when Tennessee's along."

"But Tennessee is in Maricopa Wells," said Anne.

"Shore. But he'll be hyar with the east stage this afternoon."

ONCE more Anne went into town, and once again she visited Leffingwell's store, making her own selections and being warned more than once by Pritchard that she could carry only a limited amount of baggage.

"Wal," judicially decided Leffingwell, "I reckon they do make exceptions. But you don't expect to wear all that finery on the stage coach, Anne?" he said. "Thar's an army post in El Paso, and I hear they's some passable good lookin' officers thar."

"They wouldn't notice me."

"Wouldn't, eh? Then army officers ain't got as much sense as they ought to have!"

While Anne was in another part of the store, Leffingwell and Pritchard, standing near the front door, spoke together confidentially.

"The Indians are raisin' hell in spots along the stage route," warned Leffingwell.

"It's safe enough," contended Pritchard. "Besides, I've arranged with Eggleston to double the guard all the way through, me payin' the extry costs."

Anne and Pritchard took the purchases to the wagon train, where Anne spent the rest of the morning packing two valises and a hat box, together with a small leather bag. Later Pritchard hauled the baggage to the stage station, where Eggleston stored it, pending the arrival of the eastbound stage. Quietly, Eggleston had recruited four extra riders, friendly Opata Indians, to augment the regular guard, and these men lounged about the station enclosure or attended the horses in the corral.

Pritchard did not intend to advertise the fact that Anne was to take the eastbound stage. He kept her inside the station. She was attired in garments suitable for traveling; fascinatingly arrayed in gray broadcloth, full skirted and jacketed, and a small bonnet.

Calm as always, outwardly, inwardly Anne was palpitating with excitement and anticipation. Later, when she boarded the stage and found herself the only occupant, she gazed northward over the desert reaches, with troubled, anxious gaze. For the guard had not arrived with the stage, and she could see no signs of them between Tucson and the horizon.

The stage driver, whom she heard called Cathcarte, was a stranger to her. She heard him telling Eggleston that there had been a "hell of a fuss just outside of Maricopa Wells," that one of the guards had been wounded in a fight with Indians, and that the re-

mainder of the guard would be along in a couple of hours.

As soon as the horses could be changed, the gigantic vehicle rumbled off eastward across the desert, accompanied by the four new guards; and Anne, sitting in the spacious rear seat, continued scanning the northern distance with the hope of seeing the guard.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRECIOUS CARGO.

THERE had been a brush with Apaches, on the trail just south of the Casa Grande ruins, and as Cathcarte had told Eggleston, one of the guards had been wounded. A dozen roving savages had hidden themselves among the rocks that lined a narrow pass and attacked the stage as it rumbled through. The fight was short but deadly, and in the end half a dozen of the savages had fled into the desert hills.

The incident had delayed the guard for two hours; and when at last they reached Tucson to change horses, the stage had driven on ahead. Anne Pritchard was some miles east of Tucson on the trail to Benson, although Tennessee did not know this.

Tennessee found that the spot where the Pritchard wagon had stood was vacant, and Tennessee knew that Pritchard had gone back to his ranch on the Santa Cruz. The chief of the stage guard had not expected that Pritchard would depart before the guard returned to Tucson.

As he rode out of the station enclosure with his companions Tennessee glanced westward over the vacant desert. Regret stirred him. He was strangely affected by the knowledge that Anne had departed. But he knew what had happened to him, and his brows wrinkled and his lips twitched with dry, self-accusing humor.

"You ain't changed any," was his thought of the desert as he squinted into its glare. "You're just the same to-day as you was yesterday and a thousand years ago. It's me that's changed. Seein' a girl a couple of times, and then all of a sudden not seein' her, has made things seem different."

He rode away with the members of the guard, following the stage trail, not even taking time to speak to Eggleston, except to inquire about the time that the stage had left.

His departure with his riders was so sudden that he did not hear Eggleston calling after him:

"Stage has got a passenger, Tennessee!"

Tall and loose in the saddle, riding at the head of his men through the Arizona sunshine, Tennessee's thoughts were of the girl he had met.

"Things go by contraries," was his mental comment. "I'm ridin' east and I want to be ridin' west.—Do you suppose she's thinkin' thoughts like that?" he asked of the silent waste of world that engulfed him. "Ain't she pretty when she blushes?"

He couldn't explain to himself his regret over not seeing Anne again. "It's like havin' a friend go away," he told himself. Yes, he liked her. There in the patio, while watching the scene in the Plaza on the night Malpass rode through Tucson searching for her, Tennessee had almost yielded to an overpowering impulse to caress the girl's hair; and if he never saw her again he would never forget how implicitly she had trusted him. "But she ain't to be monkeyed with," was his decision.

It was late afternoon when the guard caught sight of the stage, rolling along in a dust cloud in the sandy waste ahead of them. It was miles distant, but Tennessee could distinctly see the other four members of the guard, accompanying it.

"Eggleston told me he had sent four extra riders," he said, speaking to the horseman nearest him. "This run is to have an extra guard all the way," he added. "Stage must be carryin' somethin' valuable."

"You're goin' right on to Apache Pass, eh?" said the horseman. "You'll be sort of saddle weary by the time you get thar," he laughed. "Gettin' to Benson, we'll have rode nigh on to ninety miles to-day."

"I expect I'll do some sleepin' from Benson on," said Tennessee. "I figure on pilin' into the stage and stretchin' my laigs."

The day waned. Far and near, the slanting rays of the sun touched the peaks and crags. Long lances and streamers of color appeared in the sky. The mesas were outlined, clear and sharp, and a monstrous hush, ever deepening, stole over the land.

Twilight had come and gone when the stage rolled up to a station near Pantano, and the guard, now close behind, rode through the gate of the enclosure surrounding the station to change mounts. Several station attendants changed the stage horses for fresh ones, and while engaged in this task they laughed and joked with members of the guard. Only the station agent approached the stage coach to talk with the driver, who got down and entered the station.

"She's certainly a good-looker," whispered the agent. He had been astonished and somewhat awed, at glancing into the stage through the open window nearest him. "Gosh!" he gasped. "She's like a pitcher—sleepin'! I reckon if she'd have opened her eyes and looked at me I'd of jest naturally keeled over!"

"Ain't she a hummer?" the driver declared. He seemed to swell with pride. "She's Dean Pritchard's gal," he announced. "Goin' to El Paso. Dean's sister is dyin'."

"Extry guard, too," commented the agent. "It's lucky I got a change of hosses.—Shucks," he added, worried. "I hope she gets through. Them Indians is pretty bad around Apache Pass. Wouldn't it be too bad if anythin' happened to her?"

"Nothin's goin' to happen," gruffly answered the driver. "Tennessee's along. He's goin' all the way."

The station agent seemed relieved. "I thought I recognized him, ridin' through the gate," he said. "Wal, now, that certainly makes me feel better." He hesitated, squinting his eyes at the driver. "You reckon we'd better wake her up and give her a cup of coffee, or somethin'?"

"A cup of *yore* coffee! Why that thar coffee that you make would be sudden death to a delicate critter like her. First place, it don't taste like coffee. Second place, it ain't coffee.—Don't you disturb her. We'll hit Mescal in a couple hours, and I'll have Mrs. Mathews fix her up somethin' to eat and drink."

TENNESSEE strode into the station. Upon a box near the center of the room was a lighted candle and in the flickering glare of the primitive light the agent and the driver greeted the boss of the guard.

"Was Ed bad hurt?" asked the driver.

He was referring to the man who

had been wounded in the fight at Casa Grande.

"He'll be laid up for a couple weeks, I reckon," answered Tennessee.

Tennessee looked tired. His hat was off and his black hair was matted and tousled.

He seated himself on another box and leaned forward, elbows on his knees, his chin in his cupped hands. The station agent and the driver watched him, their eyes gleaming with respect and admiration.

"I ain't hankerin' for yore job, Tennessee," declared the agent. "You must have rid nigh onto ninety miles to-day. And Cashion tells me yo're goin' on to Apache Pass."

"Correct. I'm three days late now. You got enough men to ride guard to Benson?"

"Shore. The boys that come with you can turn in and wait for the west stage. The four extrys can go through to Benson, 'cause they've only rid from Tucson."

Tennessee leaned back and stretched his arms above his head, luxuriating, yawning.

"I'm a passenger from now till mornin'," he grinned. "My horse can trail along, and I'll pick him up when I feel like ridin'. Good thing the stage is empty. I can stretch out in it and snore."

Cashion and the agent exchanged glances. The agent deliberately winked an eye at Cashion, warning him to silence.

"Figurin' on sleepin', air ye?" said the agent. "Strikes me that if I was boss of the stage and thar was a valuable cargo aboard, I wouldn't figure on doin' a powerful lot of sleepin'."

Tennessee looked at him. His eyes were heavy with weariness, his voice was freighted with indifference.

"I reckon I'll sleep," he said. "There ain't no cargo valuable enough to keep me awake." His eyes, however, lighted with interest. "Is it gold?"

"We ain't sayin'," answered Cashion.

"Secret shipment, eh?" said Tennessee.

"You might call it that."

"Sure," he commented. "That's why the extra guard is along."

He yawned again, got up, went to a wash basin and washed his face and hands. He combed his hair, while gazing at his reflection in a broken mirror attached to the wall of the station. Then he picked up a brush and knocked the dust from his clothing. Even his boots received attention.

Again Cashion and the station agent exchanged glances.

"Never saw a man so particular about his clothes," smiled the agent. "You'd figure that he was expectin' to meet a girl," he said to the driver.

The driver winked. "You can't never tell," he said.

TENNESSEE detected subtle undercurrent in the conversation and he gave each one of them a level, probing glance. And then, deciding that their talk was pointless, he strode to the door of the station and grinned back at them.

"You boys go ahead, talkin' wide and handsome," he said. "But be sure that the guard gets off right. I'm goin' to climb into the stage and get some sleep. So long."

The stage, horseless, stood in front of the quiet enclosure. A moon was just rising and its light drenched the lower peaks and flooded the entire San Pedro Valley. Its light also drenched the stage, but did not penetrate the dark interior of the vehicle.

The air had now chilled, and the vast desert country which hemmed in the station was calmly beautiful. It would be a good night to sleep.

Tennessee opened the door of the coach and stepped inside. Instantly he knew that the stage was occupied. He could not see distinctly, but a shape of some sort was on the seat beside him.

There came to his nostrils a faint aroma. Perfume, perhaps, and the delicate, unmistakable scent of a woman's hair. He sat rigid, for he was now certain that he heard some one breathing. And then, just as he was about to speak, a voice, quite calm and serene, yet with a slightly mocking lilt in it, addressed him:

"So you came, after all."

CHAPTER XV.

CONVERSATION IN A STAGECOACH.

"YOU!"

"Yes."

Tennessee was sitting erect. Thoughts of sleep had entirely deserted him. His head was turned toward her, and he seemed to be making an effort to see her face, which of course was impossible in the dark interior of the coach. His voice had sounded vibrant, startled, and it had expressed delight. She was glad that the situation had stirred him.

"Then you didn't know that I had taken the stage?"

"I thought you had gone home with your father's wagon train."

"Eggleston didn't tell you?"

"I didn't have time to talk to Eggleston. We were two hours late in reaching Tucson."

He sat very still. To his ears came the subdued voices of the station attendants and the guard; the stomping of horses; the creaking of leather and the rattle of chains from within the station enclosure. Outside was the moonlit desert, the silent hills, the desolation of space.

So Anne Pritchard was the valuable shipment? Now he understood why the extra guard had been sent. Also he knew that previously, inside the station, the driver and the agent had been laughing at him. He sat, wondering. This situation was awkward, for him, yet he was not as embarrassed as he might have been. An ecstasy such as he had never before experienced enthralled him; but never much of a talker, he could think of no words to express what he wanted to say.

Anne's voice came to him again. It was so astonishingly calm and natural that he was startled.

"I'm going to El Paso," she said.

There seemed to be no answer to this, and so he was silent. It had not occurred to him that Anne might think he was impertinently curious regarding her presence in the stagecoach.

"One of father's sisters is very sick," Anne went on. "Father felt that he couldn't leave the ranch, and so he is sending me."

Still it seemed quite unnecessary for him to speak, and so he remained silent, wondering why his thoughts were so chaotic. He could think of nothing except the glorious fact that Anne was here. And considering this phenomenon, he realized that a clear thought was at last flashing into his consciousness. There is the semi gloom, a wayward smile twitched his lips.

"I DON'T seem to do any regular thinking," was his mental comment regarding his condition. "I'm here and glad of it, and that's about all."

He remained silent, watching and listening, for the men were now hitching the horses to the stage, and the guard was mounting. From just inside the station gate he could hear some one chuckling. The agent and the driver, of course, were laughing over his predicament. Yet he wasn't annoyed over the trick which they had played on him. His thoughts began to clarify.

"So she's sick?" he said, remembering.

"Who is sick?" asked Anne. Then a ripple of laughter tingled Tennessee's ears. "Oh, you mean my aunt, father's sister? I had begun to think you hadn't heard me."

"It's them boys, fussin' with the horses, I reckon," he answered.

"Certainly. They are making an awful racket, aren't they?" she conceded dryly, for now there was really very little sound, and had been none to speak of.

"I expect I ain't very much annoyed, ma'am." The edge of his embarrassment had worn off, and he was now more sure of himself. "I expect I was sort of day dreamin'," he admitted. "And meetin' you unexpected like this, when I was thinkin' you were on your way home, sort of fussed me up a little. But I'm over it. You can turn your wolf loose now, ma'am."

"Oh, I have no intention of poking fun at you, I assure you. I understand that you don't permit it—from men."

"You've got me, ma'am! I reckon I don't know what you mean."

"Why, I've heard that you don't permit men to trifle with you."

"Depends upon what might be called triflin'."

The horses were hitched, and the driver clambered to the box. They could hear the swish of reins and the sound of the brake blocks being released. Tennessee leaned forward and stuck his head out of the open window.

"Guard all right, Cashion?" he called.

The driver's voice floated down from the box. There was amazement in it.

"Shucks!" he said. "I thought you'd be asleep by this time. You was so powerful ready to snooze."

The stage lurched, started, and rolled eastward, its wheels crunching the hard sand. For a time it moved along the level plains, then it went down a slope and into a gorge of utter blackness, where the moonlight did not penetrate. The coach lurched, rumbled, swayed.

They could hear Cashion cursing the road builders. Presently they were out of the gorge and climbing a slope, an upland. The horses labored, the harness creaked. Then the moonlight again—a sea of silver.

"Are you asleep?" asked Anne.

"No."

"But you rode all the way from Maricopa Wells?"

"Yes."

"I should think you'd be sleepy and tired."

"I never felt less like sleeping in my life."

Silence.

"ARE you really from Tennessee? Or is that just a name men have given you?"

"I'm from Tennessee. You're Boston," he drawled.

There was that in his tone which caused her to straighten a little, as if she detected a trace of amusement.

"I suppose you are a Buchanan Democrat?" she said. "And I suppose you believe in slavery?"

"I ain't never consulted myself about that," was his reply. "I don't see any particular harm in it."

"No slave owner does," she declared positively. "Does your family own any slaves?"

"Some. They did when I left home."

"Was that long ago?"

"Ten years ago, ma'am."

"When you were nineteen?"

He was silent long enough for both to hear the steady clatter of the hoofs of the stage horses and the guard. Then he said quietly:

"Seems we've both been investigatin', ma'am."

"What do you mean?"

"I ain't been advertisin' my age, and yet you know it."

"Father told me."

"Sho! And what made you ask him? Did you think I was forty—or maybe older?"

"I suppose I was just curious, as you were when you asked my age of Eggleston."

"Did I do that, ma'am?" he asked, pretending astonishment. "And did Eggleston tell you I asked him?"

"Sir!"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. I don't doubt your word. It sort of startled me to find out that Eggleston was so talkative. But was any harm done? You wanted to know my age, and I wanted to know yours. I reckon that makes us even."

CHAPTER XVI.

INDIAN TALK.

ALTHOUGH Tennessee had been a stage guard for some months, and was familiar with the route and with the vehicles themselves, so that no longer was there any novelty in either for him, the lumbering stagecoach had now become an enchanted carriage which glided smoothly through a country redolent of romance. Sleep? He wanted none of it. Never in his life had he been more awake than now, never more sentient, never as keenly delighted.

Tennessee's attitude toward his traveling companion was that of grave and restrained interest. He seldom spoke unless provoked into doing so by Anne. Thus, somewhat reluctantly, he had been forced to give his opinion of "The Liberator," the young lawyer named Lincoln, who had suddenly achieved such prominence in the East. He had not burdened himself with a great deal of information regarding the question of state's rights and other political problems of the day, and he was amazed to discover that Anne had somehow kept herself fully informed as to what was transpiring.

He was interested in her knowledge of these things, but his interest in Anne herself was more keen. Yet he wisely restrained himself, knowing that he might easily talk too much.

They reached Mescal shortly before midnight, and there the horses again were changed. Tennessee escorted Anne to Mrs. Mathew's place, which was a small adobe building flanked by half a dozen other adobe houses, situated at the foot of a slope and surrounded by undulating hills that formed a valley.

Mrs. Mathew was a large, comely, genial woman, who greeted Anne warmly and hastened to set food before her.

Tennessee did not enter the eating house, leaving Anne at the door, glancing once at her face in the weak glare of a kerosene lamp on a counter. Anne

looked back at him also, standing there in the doorway, his hat in his hand, his black hair tousled, and her thought was that she had never seen a man who was so wholesome looking. While he, striding away in the moonlight toward the stage station, was aware of a terrific elation which swelled his lungs until they seemed ready to burst.

He was unusually quiet when he joined the men at the stage station, so that the driver and the station agent whispered together and smiled at each other. They smiled again when, half an hour later, they found him missing; and one of them, going outside, saw him standing beside the stagecoach, talking with Anne Pritchard.

DRIVER and guard ate in Mrs. Mathew's place, and after they had departed Tennessee sat for a time at the little counter, eating his meal and talking with the lady.

She told him that during the past few days several small bands of Indians had been seen back in the hills, and at this news his face lengthened a little. But he spoke softly.

"You didn't mention the Indians to the passenger, did you, ma'am?" he said.

"Mercy, no! There's no use scaring her, maybe about nothing. Them Indians might have been hunting parties, meaning no mischief."

"Yes," he said.

He went down to the station and talked with the agent, asking various questions and learning that the agent had received no reports of any trouble with the savages. But when Tennessee climbed back into the stage for the run to Benson, not many miles to the east, he carried his rifle.

"Indians?" asked Anne.

"Not takin' any chances," he laughed, reassuringly. "You carrying a gun, ma'am?"

Anne produced from a holster at her belt the gun which she always carried when away from the ranch house.

"I've heard you know how to use it, too," he said.

Yet, in spite of this war-like conversation, nothing happened; and at two o'clock in the morning they were in Benson. There the horses were changed again, but this time Anne did not get out of the coach. However, Tennessee talked long with the agent at the stage station, where the guard was again changed, and where he received some news that brought his lips into straight, hard lines. Luke Malpass and several of his outlaw band had passed through Benson the day before, going east.

CHAPTER XVII.

DRY LAKE.

THE Dragoon Mountains of the San Bernardino range were just receiving the first rays of the sun when the stage drew up at the station at Dragoon Springs. Tennessee had been asleep. The jolting stop of the vehicle awakened him, and he saw Anne sleepily rubbing her eyes.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"This'll be Dragoon Springs, ma'am. There's a station here. We change horses again, and drivers."

Anne's hair was slightly disordered, and her hat was awry, but she was more beautiful than ever to Tennessee. He must have stared at her with frank admiration in his gaze, for she blushed.

"Tired, ma'am?" Tennessee asked, gently.

"Why, no. That is, not as tired as I might be. But I'm hungry."

"I reckon I could do some serious eatin' myself."

Tennessee opened the stage door, got out, and assisted Anne. Then he escorted her to a restaurant, a small place, and turned her over to a woman he called Mrs. Johnson.

When Anne emerged from the restaurant, the vast San Pedro valley was aflame in the early morning sunlight. The mighty Dragoons, southward, loomed high and bare over the sandy waste. Northward the foothills of the Caliuro range were in shadow, formless to the vision, dull, dead. The higher peaks of the range were sharply outlined in the sunlight, except where the dark shape of mighty Mount Graham of the Pinalenos fell upon them.

It was Arizona. Dry, hot, desolate.

The stagecoach was covered with dust. Ropes of dust hung from the manes, forelocks and fetlocks of the horses that had made the run from Benson. Anne's clothing had been carefully brushed by Mrs. Johnson, and when Tennessee appeared all signs of travel had been removed from his clothing also.

Anne was disappointed when the stage started, to find that Tennessee did not intend to ride inside with her. She craned her neck out of the open window to see him at the station gate mounting with the other members of the guard. She leaned back in the deep seat, and presently, lulled by the swaying motion of the vehicle, went to sleep.

They were deep in the desolation of Sulphur Springs valley. Within a few miles of the stage rose the black foothills of San Bernardinos. Anne had intended to stay awake, for she knew that this was the Apache country, and their chief, Cochise, was a ruthless, daring leader whose depredations made him feared by every ranchman in the Southwestern country. Tales of Apache horrors were not exaggerated.

A few miles beyond Dragoon, about half way between the town and another town which was later to bear the name of the notorious Apache chief, Cochise, the stage came to a lurching stop. Anne awakened suddenly, instantly apprehensive of an Indian attack. She was certain that an attack was imminent when she saw a lone Indian running across the desert toward the stage. The savage was running with long, easy stride, and Anne sat rigid, expecting each instant to hear the crack of a rifle and to see the savage fall.

But nothing happened. The savage continued to run toward the stage, and then she saw the figures of other Indians at the base of a foothill, not more than a hundred yards distant. They seemed to be grouped together, as they watched the lone savage approach the stage.

SHE heard the horses of the guard coming up, and then she saw Tennessee ride past the coach window. He halted his horse opposite the driver's seat, and instantly Anne heard his voice, addressing the driver:

"What's up, Johnson?"

The driver laughed.

"Now don't get fussed up, Tennessee. That's a band of friendly Injuns, back in the hills thar, and they allus lay for me on this run. They'll camp there for two or three days at a time, waitin'. I bring 'em tobaccy from Tucson. The other drivers passed it on to me."

Tennessee laughed also.

"So that's it, eh?" He wheeled his horse, glanced into the stage at Anne, smiled, doffed his hat, and once more disappeared behind the stage.

The lone Indian runner had slowed his pace. Now he came on again. He was naked except for a breech cloth and a pair of moccasins. His body was dark bronze, and his black, coarse hair was smoothed flat to his scalp.

He reached the side of the stage and received a small package from the driver, which he acknowledged with an unintelligible grunt, and Anne, leaning forward the better to witness the transaction, became suddenly aware that his black eyes, keen and wild like those of an animal, were regarding her. She wasn't afraid. She had seen many Indians. She had even killed some of them. Yet she knew that it was not wise needlessly to expose herself, and so she drew back.

Now Johnson, the driver, dismounted from the box. Anne heard him mumbling something about the horses, as he climbed down and went to the heads of the leaders.

Again Tennessee rode past the stage window. He, too, went to the lead horses, and Anne could hear him talking with Johnson.

She looked out of the window again, and this time she experienced a real start. For she saw half a dozen Indian ponies, with riders, coming toward the stage from the base of the foothills; and accompanying the Indian ponies were half a dozen horses ridden by white men.

To be sure, there was no reason for alarm, for she had heard the driver tell Tennessee that the Indians were friendly, and it might be supposed that the white men accompanying them would also be friendly. But this was Arizona, and no one could tell what threat of violence or death might lurk in the dust and sun of its mysterious distances.

She sat quietly in the seat, listening, not showing her face at the windows again, for fear that she would attract attention to herself. She heard Indians and white men ride up and halt their horses close to the stage; she heard the guard talking with them, gruffly at first, as if suspicious of their intentions, their tone becoming more friendly afterward.

There was something seriously wrong with the harness, she gathered, from the driver's exclamations and complaints. Several times he made trips back and forth from the lead horses to the boot of the stage. Evidently he was searching for material and tools with which to repair the damage that had halted the stage.

She could hear the strange white men talking, and she did not like the sound of their voices. They were vulgar and profane. Occasionally one of the Indians spoke in the guttural labials of the Apache, and at such times a shudder of repulsion ran over her. She did not like Indians.

THE silence that had descended upon the stage was the silence of a vacuum. It was dead, awesome in its depth. Through the left coach window Anne saw the forked limbs of a giant saguaro, or barrel cactus. Its dull, gray-green color was loathsome; and she saw a horned toad nestling in the hot sand at its base.

The sun poured down with dazzling brilliance. Fine, feathery dust particles floated lazily into the coach through one window and out through the other. Northward, where the sand stretched to interminable distances, appeared a gauze-like veil of rose and saffron.

She had heard several strange voices and now she suddenly heard another—a familiar voice. She straightened, her face whitening.

"You got any passengers aboard?" said the voice.

The voice belonged to Luke Malpass! How had Luke Malpass got here, and why had he come? These were the interrogations that flashed into Anne's mind. And although she did not hear an answer to Malpass's question, she heard him continue:

"You ain't sayin', eh?—Must be somethin' mighty valuable!"

There was a short silence, then a step on the hard sand, and Luke Malpass appeared at the window of the coach, on the right side, and peered in at her. Although she loathed the man, her first impulse was to laugh at him, for there were great black and blue welts on his cheeks and jaw. One eye was partly closed and discolored; his lips were puffed and macerated.

She divined that he was as much surprised to find her there as she was at his appearance, for his eyes dilated. Then he laughed deeply, his voice vibrant with satisfaction.

"It's you, eh? I'm sure glad to see you!"

He laughed again, and rested both elbows upon the window sill.

He seemed to be enjoying her agitation.

"Luke Malpass," she said steadily, her lips white with the fury of the emotions that seethed within her, "if you don't get away from that window this minute I shall shoot you!"

Malpass merely grinned.

"Well, there ain't no law ag'in' a man lookin' inside one of these contraptions, is there? Shoot, and be damned to you!"

Luke Malpass's eyes were the boldest she had ever seen in any man. He was a wild, reckless buccaneer of the wilderness, and she really believed that if she had taken him at his word he would have laughed as he received the bullet.

INSOLENTLY, he leaned farther into the window opening.

"Where you goin'?" he asked.

"That's none of your business, Luke Malpass!"

"Mebbe not. But you're headin' somewhere, east.—Cuss me if you ain't the purtiest girl I ever seen!"

While Malpass had been talking to Anne, Tennessee had approached. He now stood behind Malpass, several paces distant, his hands on his hips. He did not appear to be listening, but Anne was certain that he had heard. There was the ghost of a smile on his lips.

"It's against the rules to annoy the passengers, Malpass," he said quietly. It was curious how he contrived to express contempt in the few words that he had addressed to Malpass. The words themselves meant little. But the spirit which clothed them, the deliberate and studied challenge in them, were understood by Malpass.

He turned and faced Tennessee, and his voice filled with hatred.

"So it's you!" he said. "Still playin' wet nurse for the stage line, eh?" He glared at Tennessee. "The Judge, eh?—I heard you swung three of my men."

He was big enough, physically, to crush Tennessee with a blow. Yet watching Tennessee's face, Anne somehow felt that something more than physical superiority would be necessary to defeat Tennessee.

"You and me will have it out some day, Tennessee!" threatened Malpass.

"Right now, Luke," returned Tennessee. "Step away from the coach and flash your guns!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Honest Forger

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Gold Coffin," "Buddha's Whisker," etc.

The Million Dollar Moofus might be the world's worst painting, but its fate involved Lawyer Hazeltine with an honest forger

Complete Novel

"That's the man!" exclaimed the witness

CHAPTER I.

BABY KILLER.

GILLIAN HAZELTINE was deep in a study of the harsh new kidnaping laws of his state when the door of his private office flew open and a beautiful young woman with red hair and green eyes rushed in and threw her arms around his neck.

She wore a smart new fall outfit of French blue; a small, rakish disk of a hat to match. She smelled freshly of the crisp fall morning, and of the distinctive and ardent French perfume she used.

"Darling!" she cried. "They told me to come right in. Oh, I know how you loathe interruptions.—But don't frown! This is frightfully important."

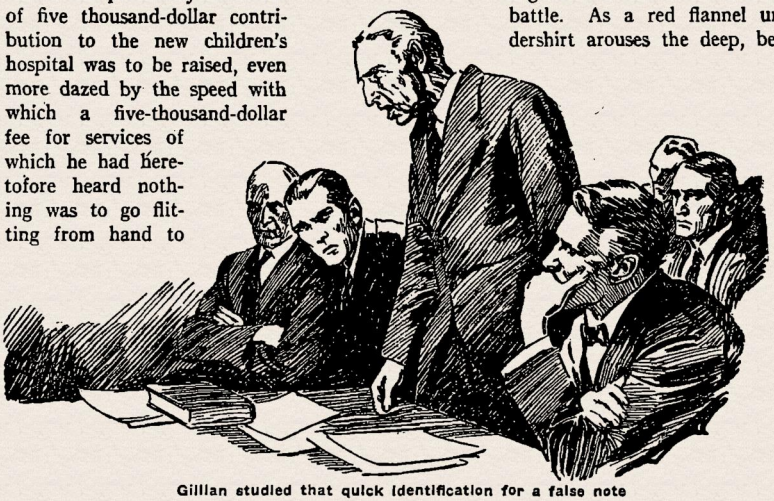
She was stripping a pair of dark-blue gloves from her slim, beautiful white hands. Her green eyes had more sparkle, more mischief per carat, than the rare and exciting emerald which she wore in conjunction with her platinum wedding ring. Her lips were parted, to exhale little gasps. Her cheeks glowed and outblushed the rose.

Perching on the edge of his desk, she bestowed upon him her most ravishing smile, thus giving the busy lawyer an inkling that one of sundry axes was about to be given a little whetting. She said rapidly, in a soft, excited little voice:

"Gillian, I've found the way to raise

the five thousand we promised for the new children's hospital! All you have to do is go into court and represent a poor, persecuted old man for about fifteen minutes. If you win, you will receive five thousand. You will then simply endorse the check to me, and I will endorse it to the Building Funds Commitee, and it will all be shipshape and dandy and perfectly grand and in the bag!"

Slightly dazed by the rapidity with which his previously unheard-of five thousand-dollar contribution to the new children's hospital was to be raised, even more dazed by the speed with which a five-thousand-dollar fee for services of which he had heretofore heard nothing was to go flitting from hand to hand, Gillian Hazeltine brought his steel gray eyes to focus on his wife.



Gillian studied that quick identification for a false note

Perceiving that look in his eyes, the green-eyed, red-haired young woman rolled her heaviest batteries into battle formation.

"All you have to do," said she, "is to go into court at eleven o'clock and defend a poor old man named Eddie Wogan, who is to go on trial for forgery."

"This morning?"

"Um-h'm!" A nod.

He glanced at the handsome electric clock on his desk. The time was now 10.30.

"Impossible," said Gillian. "What did he forge?"

"A check—an express check. I'm not sure of the details. All I know is that it's an outrage, that Mark Storm is personally handling the prosecution, and that in your bright lexicon there is no such word as impossible."

SHE was aware, of course, that the mere mention of the district attorney's name would cause the glaze in her husband's eyes to brighten to a gleam and a glint—the crimson flicker of battle. As a red flannel undershirt arouses the deep, belligerent instincts of a bull, so did the name of that crook, that charlatan, that mountebank, that four-flushing, back-stabbing scoundrel awaken in Gilliam Hazeltine the instincts to violence.

"The express company will pay Mark Storm five thousand dollars for poor old Mr. Wogan's conviction," Vee Hazeltine elaborated.

"The Uxtico?" Gillian said quickly.

"I believe it is the Uxtico, if that's the Universal Express Company."

"It is."

"Well, I believe poor old Mr. Wogan is accused of having forged an Uxtico check, years and years ago; and Uxtico, being a powerful and brutal organization, is will-

ing to pay five thousand dollars to have an example made of poor old Mr. Wogan."

"The blinding light of understanding," Gillian said, "is beginning to penetrate the dark and sinister mystery of it all. You are attempting to arrange a neat little frame-up. I am to go into court for another fight with that human polecat, and you are to get the plunder—if I win."

Mrs. Hazeltine smiled a little sadly.

"No, dear. Not I—the new hospital. It is all in the interest of a new, beautiful, comfortable, sunlit hospital for the children of Greenfield.—And I haven't told you everything. If Mark Storm wins a conviction, he has no intention of sending his check to the Building Funds Committee."

"Who is the chairman of this committee?" Gillian asked suspiciously.

The lovely redhead did not flinch. "I am. I was just elected, at a meeting of the general and sub committees at Tessie Tinch's."

Vee Hazeltine glanced at her diamond-and-emerald wristwatch.

"You've less than half an hour to get over to court," she warned him.

A stubborn look at the corners of his mouth caused moisture to appear in the corners of her eyes.

Gillian opened a gold humidor at the back of his desk, removed from it a fat, blond perfecto, from which he leisurely bit the end and removed the band. He lit the cigar, leisurely puffed, and went to the window which overlooked the beautiful blue Sangamo River. With his back to it, he then gravely considered his green-eyed, red-haired wife.

"I suppose," he said, "that Storm intends to use his fee for some foul and scurrilous purpose?"

Vee said swiftly, "He is going to buy an imported canary yellow roadster for that hard-boiled platinum blond widow!"

"Practically all of the facts are now neatly arrayed," Gillian said.

"Yes, darling."

"Am I correct in assuming that poor old Mr. Wogan has five thousand dollars on hand—in cash—to pay for his defense?"

"No, Gillian. Some one has offered to come to his rescue. The money—five thousand in cash—has just been placed in escrow at the First National Bank. If you win the case, the bank will pay you the five thousand. If you lose, the money will be returned to the donor.—But you won't lose!"

"Then all that remains to be cleared up," her famous husband said amiably, "is, how did you get wind of poor old Mr. Wogan, and— who is the public benefactor whose check I am to endorse for you to endorse for the new hospital?"

VEE HAZELTINE moistened her lips with the tip of a small pink tongue. She gave a charming little silvery laugh. But it didn't ring true.

"You'll be terribly amused!" she laughed. "I met him at Tessie Tinch's, this morning. His name is Lester Emerald."

"Not Eggs Emerald?" Gillian cried.

"I—I believe he was once called Eggs. But—"

She stopped, with open mouth, at the almost ferocious look that had suddenly entered Gillian's face. He was coming slowly toward her, his lower lip slightly outthrust.

"Vee," he said, "was Eggs Emerald a guest in Tessie Tinch's house?"

"Y-yes," Vee said, faintly.

"Didn't she — didn't you — realize who he was?"

"Wasn't he some kind of racketeer in New York?"

"'Some kind of racketeer in New York!'" Gillian repeated, hollowly. "He was the most despicable, most contemptible, most obnoxious racketeer in the whole breed of them!—A baby killer!"

Vee said, with swift resentment, "I don't believe that!"

"A baby killer!" Gillian repeated. "Certainly you read about it in the papers—his Milk and Egg Dealers' Protective Association. If a milk dealer didn't fall into

line, his milk was mysteriously polluted with kerosene. And the egg dealer who bucked the 'association' had eggs smashed by the thousands of dozens. Who was responsible for the rise in price of milk of a cent a quart in New York?" Gillian demanded eloquently. "Who boosted the price of eggs to the consumer two cents a dozen?—Eggs Emerald!"

"But you don't understand," Vee warmly protested. "He's reformed. He gave up racketeering. He feels horribly guilty for what he's done, and he wants to make amends. I think you're taking a very unfair attitude. Where's your broad-mindedness?"

"My broad-mindedness doesn't apply to two-legged rattlesnakes!"

"The fact remains," Vee said hotly, "that Mr. Emerald has offered to help us, in every way possible, to raise the million which we need for the new hospital. Beggars can't be choosers. Finance committees, in times like these, don't look gift horses in the mouth. Mr. Emerald very generously offered to help us. He merely wishes to kill two birds with one stone. He is sorry for poor old Mr. Wogan, and wants him to have the best available lawyer. He is waiting in the outer office. I want you to meet him."

"I don't want to meet him!" Gillian protested, as she went out the door. "You can tell that human cockroach—"

But it was too late. Vee was walking rapidly, setting her high heels down so hard that she could not have heard him had she wished. And Gillian was beginning to realize that the first thundercloud in a long, long time was darkly taking form over his domestic happiness. He never interfered with Vee's social activities, and she seldom trespassed on his professional territory.

She was now, as he saw it, involved with one of the most dangerous figures in the American underworld.

Standing hopelessly in the center of his large, luxurious office, he watched his wife as she came along the corridor with a tall, slender, youthful blond man of about thirty-nine, whose manner was that of a prince of the royal blood.

MODERN crime breeds strange figures, and Lester—Eggs—Emerald was one of its strangest. He was curly-haired, blue-eyed and pink-cheeked. There was nothing brazen about this man. He might have been a successful motion picture actor, or an up-and-coming young business man. His double-breasted tan suit was perfectly tailored. He wore it with ease and distinction.

Swiftly taking him in, Gillian felt a pang of unreasonable envy. Eggs Emerald was a rat—but he was a handsome rat. He was taller by four inches than Gillian. His eyes were so clear a blue and so direct, his smile so modest, that Gillian suffered a moment of doubt. Perhaps Eggs Emerald really had turned over a new leaf, perhaps he was on the up and up.

"Mr. Emerald, this is my husband," Vee was softly saying.

Eggs Emerald gripped, firmly shook, and released Gillian's hand. There was a curiously hopeful, anxious air about Eggs Emerald that impressed Gillian, in spite of his prejudice.

The ex-racketeer was saying, in a low, somewhat embarrassed voice, "It takes a lot of nerve to crash in here, Mr. Hazeltine. I won't attempt to apologize. Mrs. Hazeltine says she's explained why I'm here, and that you're opposed to having anything to do with me. I certainly don't blame you for feeling that way. I know my reputation is pretty sour, and it's going to take me a long time to live it down.—Let's drop it."

Gillian, weighing each word on the delicate scales of his judicial mind, knew that Eggs Emerald, whether or not he was honest about having reformed, was still as smooth as gun oil.

"We won't drop it!" Vee cried.

Her air was no longer merely defiant. Her green eyes were sparkling angrily.

"Gillian, you have twelve minutes to get over to the courthouse. I've asked you to help, not me, but the children of this

city. Will you or won't you?" she demanded.

Gillian, as if he had not heard her question, or the finality of its tone, was watching the clear blue eyes of Eggs Emerald.

"Eggs," he drawled, "what does this fellow Wogan mean to you?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Hazeltine," the ex-racketeer earnestly answered. "I simply heard about his case. He's a poor old duffer—on a tough spot."

"Not one of your old mob?"

"No. The truth is, I don't even know him. But I do know the reputation of the prosecuting attorney. I'm convinced that he intends to make this a Roman holiday. He will get five grand if he knocks Wogan off.—If you don't step into the case, it's a set-up for Storm. It got under my skin."

Gillian, watching Emerald's eyes, and his boyish, strangely innocent mouth, said, "Mrs. Hazeltine tells me that Wogan is innocent."

"I'm convinced that he is," Eggs Emerald firmly answered. "I want to see him get a break. I know he will—if you go to the front for him. I suggested to Mrs. Hazeltine that I would put up five grand for your fee, the check to be turned over to the hospital fund." His eyes darkened and his mouth hardened a little. "Here's my angle, Mr. Hazeltine. A couple of years ago the papers played me up as a baby killer. There are men walking the streets of this city who rate more blame than I ever did. Your prosecuting attorney is one of them, and I don't care who hears me say it!"

"Can you prove that?" Gillian snapped.

"The proof would be on that desk if I could!"

"Why did you come to this city?"

"It's a pretty clean town. I like it here. Right now, I'm out to show the world I've got as much sympathy for kids as any other man."

Vee interrupted nervously, "Darling, you've got just ten minutes.—Are you going to take this case?"

Gillian withdrew his fascinated eyes from the racketeer's innocent blue ones, from the ruddy, youthful face of the most notorious of American racketeers. He gave his anxious wife a faint grin.

"Yes," he said. "I'll take the case."

His eyes darted instantly back to Eggs Emerald. But the innocent blue eyes betrayed nothing—nothing but the glow of honest gratitude.

CHAPTER II.

TANGLED THREADS.

GILLIAN waited until his wife and Eggs Emerald had gone. She had an address to make before a delegation of women at the City Club, and Mr. Emerald would say a few words, too. Gillian, with a thoughtful dent between his steel-blue eyes as he watched them go, presumed that Vee knew what she was doing. She was the cleverest woman he had ever known. And she knew, of course, that it would not hurt her reputation, which was above reproach, to be seen in the company of a man like Eggs Emerald.

Vee was obviously aware that Eggs Emerald was an asset to her newest cause, and Gillian realized that she was deliberately using Eggs Emerald. He understood perfectly why refined, respectable women would be thrilled to see and meet a man so notorious. It was all in the interest of the proposed and eminently worthy children's hospital.

Yet Gillian was worried. He did not fully trust Eggs Emerald.

When the door closed behind them, he rang for his secretary; and when Miss Walsh came in, he said:

"I'm leaving for the courthouse to take the case of a forger named Wogan. Have our investigation department get busy on Lester—Eggs—Emerald. I want to know what he's been doing since the City of New York decorated him with tinware. And have the I. D. find out what they can about his financial standing."

"Yes, sir," Miss Walsh said crisply. "You had an appointment with Mr. Davis for ten-thirty. He said it was important,

but I knew you were busy. He is still waiting."

"Anything else?"

"You have a one o'clock luncheon appointment with Mrs. Tessie Tinch, at her house. You wrote her about her investments, and she phoned yesterday, asking you to come there for luncheon to-day."

Still with that dent between his eyes, Gillian went out. In the outer office a pale young man sprang up from a chair. More than pale, his complexion was slightly green. He was a slim, neat young man with skin ordinarily like milk, and hair always like patent leather. His eyes were those of a mystic—black as coal, without pupils, and quite unfathomable.

This was Silky Davis, one of Gillian's oldest friends and clients. Once Silky had been a big-scale bootlegger. He had been a tough bootlegger, too, not above an occasional bit of hijackery, if the moon was right and the cops were elsewhere. Gillian had saved him from fifteen years of more or less solitary meditation on his sins; had showed him a chance to make a handsome income, honestly. Silky was now an honest brewer, reaping the rewards of virtue.

Silky was here this morning to see about a loan which Gillian had been arranging with the First National Bank for an addition to the brewery.

GILLIAN said amiably, "You have the fine, healthy look of a dill pickle that came out of the dill too soon. What's the matter? The loan's all ready for your John Hancock."

"Listen, chief," Silky said tensely, grasping his arm. "I've either been having bad dreams, or else I just saw Eggs Emerald come out of your office—with your wife!"

"Is that why you're now the color of a seasick school teacher?"

"What's that guy doing up here?" the brewer panted.

"He has turned over a new leaf. He is helping Mrs. Hazeltine raise the million she wants to build a children's hospital."

"Oh, yeah?" Silky cried. "*Maybe* he's reformed—and maybe every shark in the ocean has grown a set of rubber teeth. I admit, it's none of my business, and I know that curiosity once killed an ostrich. But—"

"Walk over to the courthouse with me," Gillian said amiably, "and I'll explain. I am mystified and suspicious, and I can use your expert advice."

When he had explained Eggs Emerald's benevolent proposal, Silky darkly shook his head.

"Once a mug like Emerald finds out how easy it is to milk a sucker he never quits. I tell you he has something out on a limb, chief—some new racket. I would feel a lot better if he picked some other town to settle down and reform in. I would like to check up on this guy. And if you don't mind, I'm going to have a couple of my old gang tail him. It is better to be safe than a sucker. Am I right?"

Gillian laughed. "You're always right, Silky. Okay. Check him up and have him watched. If you'll drop in at the First National, Chester Teel will have your loan papers ready."

Gillian went on into the courthouse. Even as he went up in the elevator, his lips, his eyes, all the lines in his square, good-natured face were preparing for his forthcoming encounter with Mark Storm.

His dislike of the prosecuting attorney was not entirely due to the fact that Storm was an unscrupulous rascal who was too clever to be trapped. It was more personal than that. Mark Storm was tall, handsome and distinguished—a commanding figure. His charm, his courtly manners, always made Gillian feel awkward and ill at ease. But this time, he vowed, Storm would not make him feel gawky and inferior. This time he would put Storm in his place with his own charm and courtliness.

In spite of these resolves, he was strangely conscious of his hands and feet, as he entered Judge Mayberry's courtroom. Mark Storm and an assistant were seated at the counsel table. When he saw Gillian he sprang up and came forward with outstretched hand and charming smile.

Always it was like this. Always, somehow, he took command of the situation.

He was immaculately dressed. As usual, he wore a white carnation in his lapel. It belonged there.

He had the dignity, the courtly manner, the air of an ambassador. Perhaps his height and his fine figure had something to do with it.

Shaking Gillian's hand, he looked down benevolently at him, as a democratic king might regard a ragged but deserving foot soldier.

HE told Gillian how well he was looking. Gillian's face became darkly red as he tried to return the prosecuting attorney's patronage with the same kindly, courtly air. But he lacked Storm's gift. As always, Storm made him feel gawky, gangling—a bumpkin.

Gillian knew that it was deliberate; knew that Storm always tried, in every way possible, to put him at a disadvantage and to make him feel self-conscious. But in spite of knowing it, Gillian could not combat it. He was convinced that Storm had been expecting him. There was a secret gladness in Storm's eyes, and in his smile. It was as if Storm was delighted that Gillian had come. And Gillian wondered why.

"I didn't know you had a case on in this court this morning," the district attorney said, smoothly.

"The Wogan case," Gillian answered, and in spite of his discomfort, he shrewdly watched Mark Storm's handsome brown eyes.

They betrayed no concern, and Gillian was left to draw his own conclusions. Either Storm considered the case won before it was tried, or he had had previous information. Having no facts to go on, Gillian could only guess—and wait. But he wondered about that smile.

He said, casually, "What's the dope on Wogan?"

"Oh, he's an old stir bug," Storm answered in his rich deep voice. "Back in 1918, between trips up the river, he forged a three thousand dollar Uxtico check, in Steel City. I've had Mr. Wogan checked from city jail to city jail, and from prison to prison. He was released from the Ohio State Penitentiary three weeks ago. He was rearrested, waived extradition, and was brought here for trial."

"Why here? Why not Steel City?"

"Perhaps they were surer of a conviction here," Storm answered with a little chuckle.

"I'd like to see his record," Gillian said grimly.

"Certainly," Storm said. "And it's a dandy."

He gave Gillian a typewritten sheet of paper. Gillian seated himself at the far end of the counsel table and scrutinized Eddie Wogan's record. It was one of the most amazing criminal records Gillian had ever seen. Eddie Wogan had, in his long career as an enemy of society, been convicted *forty-two times!*

Horizontal lines made their appearance on Gillian's judicial forehead. Forty-two convictions, on counts ranging from shoplifting to highway robbery. A very versatile man was this Eddie Wogan!

Gillian went swiftly down the list, looking for felonies. As a criminal, Mr. Wogan had been a piker most of his life. But thrice he had not been a piker. Once he had aided in a silk truck robbery. Once he had looted a cash register. On another regrettable occasion, he had participated in a filling station stick-up.

The case of Eddie Wogan, as Gillian considered it, became more and more desperate.

HE heard chairs scraping, people rising. Looking up, he saw Judge Mayberry, a thin-faced, cold-eyed, ascetic-looking man, taking his place on the bench.

Gillian placed the damning record of Eddie Wogan on the table with a somewhat unsteady hand. Looking from that neatly-typed sheet of paper to the thin, almost cruel face of the justice was a sharp contrast. Judge Mayberry had made for

himself a reputation as a hard judge; he hated all criminals. Gillian, whose belief was that even the hardest of criminals deserves a fair trial, felt very sorry for Eddie Wogan.

The judge, looking about the courtroom, saw Gillian, and gave a thin, fox-like smile of surprise. He said sharply:

"Mr. Hazeltine, are you appearing for the defendant in this case?"

"I am, your honor."

Judge Mayberry, looking at him, frowned, pursed his lips and said, "Bring in the defendant."

Bailiffs departed through the doorway leading to the Bridge of Sighs and into the premises of the jail. Judge Mayberry called Gillian to his desk and said, "Mr. Hazeltine, I must confess that I'm a little taken aback. I have had no intimation that you were to handle Wogan's case."

"I was retained," Gillian answered, "less than an hour ago, your honor."

"Then you have not a case prepared."

"No, your honor."

Judge Mayberry showed his displeasure by a slight compression of his thin lips.

"Yet the defendant has been in custody, in this jail, for upwards of three weeks. Why was there so much delay in securing counsel?"

"I don't know, your honor."

Mark Storm had been listening. "I'm quite sure, your honor," he said suavely, "that Mr. Wogan's case must merit Mr. Hazeltine's attention. And of course we are flattered to have Mr. Hazeltine here. To be sure, I, too, was surprised to learn that Mr. Hazeltine was taking the defense."

"Why?" Gillian dryly inquired.

"Isn't it your rule never to defend a guilty man?"

"Has Wogan been *proved* guilty?"

Storm gave him his charming smile. "You've seen his record."

"His record has no bearing on the present charge."

"My calendar is rather crowded," Judge Mayberry interrupted. "I hope you gentlemen don't intend to make mountains out of molehills."

Gillian returned to the counsel table with a prickling feeling in his arm muscles. It was obvious that the judge looked upon the trial of Eddie Wogan as a routine affair, to be despatched in a matter of minutes. Judge Mayberry was displeased at Gillian's appearance on the scene, for that might mean a fight, and a fight might mean a long trial. It was beginning to appear that the cards were stacked against poor Mr. Wogan.

THE jail door opened and Gillian had his first glimpse of his client. Even if a hundred men had filed through that door, there could have been no question that this was Mr. Wogan.

He was, according to his record, sixty-two years old. But he had the frosty hair, the hollows in neck and temples, of a man well past eighty. The mark of the convict was strongly upon him—the waxen pallor, the hopeless sag to the shoulders, the shuffling feet, the vacancy in his slate-gray eyes. His small, clipped head, perched atop a long, stringy neck, and the dewlaps under his chin, gave him a grotesque resemblance to an old turkey gobbler. He moved stiffly, putting his feet down in slow mechanical rhythm. If you had never met his kind before, he would have made your flesh creep.

But Gillian had met many of his kind. He had nothing but sympathy for the Mr. Wogans of this world—miserable unfortunates who seemed to proceed unerringly from one mistake to the next.

The prisoner lowered himself with a futile sigh into the chair beside Gillian and said, in a dull, whispery old voice, "Are you fronting for me?"

"Yes."

"You're Gillian Hazeltine, ain't you?"

"Yes."

The old convict squinted at Gillian. He gave a shrug and a headshake of futility.

"No chance," he muttered. "Even with you frontin' for me, they ain't no chance. It's a frame."

Gillian had heard that one before—often. Not one criminal in fifty came to

him for help who wasn't, if you would take his word for it, the victim of a frame-up.

A clerk was droning the charge. At its conclusion, Gillian automatically entered a plea of not guilty, and as automatically asked for a postponement on the grounds that he had not had sufficient time to prepare a defense.

The judge curtly granted his request, then glanced at Storm.

"I can make room for this case at ten o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth," he said. "Are you free then, Mr. Storm—Mr. Hazeltine?"

The prosecuting attorney consulted a notebook and said, "Yes, your honor."

"Yes, your honor," Gillian affirmed. "What is the defendant's bail?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Storm smiled sadly. "Of the defendant's forty-two convictions, Mr. Hazeltine, three were for felonies."

Gillian was aware of that. He was surprised that Eddie Wogan's bail was so small. Under a new state law, patterned after the Baumes Law of New York, a man four times convicted of a felony automatically went to prison for life.

"If the court please," Gillian said, "I prefer a jury trial for the defendant."

Having legally no alternative, the thin-lipped judge granted this request. But he added, frostily, "I trust, gentlemen, that you will not permit the issue at stake to become confused. I do not care for courtroom fireworks."

Possibly he was referring to Gillian Hazeltine's habit of turning dignified courtrooms into three-ring circuses.

GILLIAN accompanied Eddie Wogan and a bailiff over the Bridge of Sighs into the jail. When Eddie Wogan had been locked in his cell and the bailiff was gone, the old convict burst out:

"There ain't a chance, Mr. Hazeltine. Oh, I know all about your reputation. When you take a man's case, you move heaven and hell to get him off. They say you've even bought judges and bribed juries. Well—that judge ain't for sale. He hates convicts.—You watch. He'll give the jury a directed verdict!"

Gillian interrupted this flow of pessimism with a crisp, "Now, come clean, Wogan. Did you or didn't you forge that check?"

"So help me God, I didn't!"

Gillian quoted a famous remark, "'Only a damned fool lies to his lawyer.'"

His client quoted another. "I'd swear on a stack of Bibles a foot high on my mother's knee that I'm not lyin'."

"All right. How's your alibi?"

The old man groaned. "How can I remember where I was on this day or that, fifteen years ago? All I know is, I wasn't in stir. It happened between the time I got out from the Buffalo jail, after a six months' rap for liftin' a spare tire, and went in for a ten months' rap in Cleveland, for purse snatchin'. I was out of stir four months, that time. But I didn't forge no check. I never had three thousand bucks in my life!"

"Were you in Steel City on or about the time that check was cashed?"

"No, sir. I wasn't in Steel City any of that time."

"Where were you?"

"Just driftin'. Buffalo—Columbus—Cincinnati — Toledo — Detroit. On the bum."

"Where were you on the date that check was cashed?"

"How do I know? Maybe Columbus, maybe Toledo."

GILLIAN, who knew that human memory is far less reliable than it appears to be when a glib witness takes the stand, was inclined to believe poor old Mr. Wogan. A guilty man, with Wogan's criminal experience, and knowing that a conviction on the present charge would send him behind bars for life, would surely have prepared an alibi; might even have arranged for alibi witnesses.

It seemed to Gillian that Eddie Wogan had been the football of cruel fate for so long that he no longer hoped or cared.

The dull slate eyes stared at him with-

out change. Eddie Wogan shook his clipped white head.

"I didn't forge that check, Mr. Hazeltine. But you can't prove it in no court."

"How did you prove it to Emerald?"

"To whom?"

"Eggs Emerald."

"The big racketeer?"

"Yes—"

"But what's he got to do with it?"

Gillian, eyeing him suspiciously, answered, "Don't you know he's paying for your defense?"

The dull slate eyes peered at him. "Are you kiddin' me?" croaked Eddie Wogan.

"Certainly not."

"Well, I don't get it. It sounds phony."

It sounded a little phony to Gillian, too; but he was inclined to believe poor old Mr. Wogan.

"All right," he said, "prove it to me."

Eddie Wogan did his best. And at the end of his brief recital, Eddie Wogan had convinced Gillian not only that he was an innocent man, but that his case, if presented dramatically to a jury, might give him a fighting chance.

So optimistic was Gillian that he left the courthouse smiling. He was even chuckling a little when he got into his car.

But his high spirits soon departed and the dent reappeared between his eyes. With nothing more than intuition to go by, he was still suspicious of Eggs Emerald's benevolence, and he still wondered why Mark Storm had been so pleased when Gillian had appeared in Wogan's defense.

Somewhere, Gillian was sure, an individual of darkest color was concealed in a woodpile. He had the feeling that he was being drawn into a whirl of murkily mysterious events.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. TINCH'S PAINTING.

THE mansion of the late Johnathan Tinch occupied an eminence in what had at one time been the most exclusive residential district in the city. The social tide had moved on, leaving the Tinch mansion behind like a proud old ship left high on a deserted beach.

Back in the Gay Nineties, the monstrous old brick house had been proudly pointed out to visiting strangers as a showplace. It occupied a knoll of velvety green lawn, shaded by fine old elms and maples. The estate was surrounded by a high iron fence through the pickets of which could still be seen an iron antelope and an iron hound, set in eternal attitudes, respectively, of panting alarm and panting desire, one on either side of the crushed bluestone driveway which wound in graceful swoops from the ornamental iron gate to the porte-cochère with its iron lacework. The Tinch mansion was an affair of bulging surfaces, each of which gleamed with a bay window. The veranda, like the porte-cochère, was elaborately ornamented with iron filigree. There was a cupola in the precise center of the old-fashioned mansard roof.

In Gillian Hazeltine's opinion, it was the ugliest structure in Greenfield.

He parked his coupé under the porte-cochère, trotted up four steps and pressed a large brass button, richly carved, which, by clever mechanical means, set up a pure silver chiming in the depths of the old house.

A bent old woman in the gray uniform of a housemaid opened the door, peered at Gillian, gave him a cracked smile, and said in a cracked old voice:

"How do, Mr. Hazeltine. Step this way. The missus is expecting you."

Gillian had been reliably informed that Minnie had been in the Tinch employ as a housemaid these forty-seven years, girl and woman.

He was conducted through a twilight of drawn shades into a stiff and stuffy parlor, furnished according to the voluptuous ideals of the Grover Cleveland period. Here he was left to wait.

HIS eyes roved, as they always did, to the whatnot in the corner, with its collection of souvenirs—seashells, a bullet fired in the battle of Gettysburg, a

cube of polished marble from Carrara, and the uppers of a set of false teeth said to have been worn by Mad Anthony Wayne. His eyes roved from this proud collection to the portrait in oils of the late Johnathan Tinch which hung above the black marble fireplace.

This portrait, to Gillian, was an atrocity quite in keeping with the house itself. Not the subject which it portrayed, for Johnathan Tinch had been, with his sweeping walrus mustaches, his fierce black eyes, a strikingly handsome man. It was the portrait as a job of painting that distressed Gillian.

He knew its story well. At the time of her husband's death, Tessie Tinch had had no picture of her husband other than an old tintype, taken of the two of them when they were bride and groom. One day, some years after the lamented departure of Mr. Tinch, a man had called at the door, an itinerant artist. Tessie Tinch had shown him the tintype. And what followed was, of course, history.

Every visitor to the Tinch mansion heard that story. Gillian had heard it countless times.

The artist's name, incredible as it seemed, had been Moofus—Oscar Moofus. He had taken the tintype and had had a silverprint enlargement made of one-half of it—the half containing Johnathan Tinch. Upon this enlargement he had painted a horrible likeness of the late Johnathan Tinch, signing his name—O. Moofus—in bright blue paint in the lower right-hand corner.

This had occurred in the year 1908. A school of such portrait painting was in full blossom at that time. Such portraits were known to the trade as buckeyes—quick jobs, executed by men who might have been or should have been barn painters.

So, for twenty-five years, this buckeye of Johnathan Tinch had been hanging above the black marble fireplace, in a heavily carved gilt frame. Once a year, Tessie Tinch hired a man to come and regild the frame.

The portrait of this man with crimson cheeks, blazing eyes and sweeping black mustaches, was, to Mrs. Tinch, a masterpiece. She referred to it as The Moofus, quite as if it were a genuine, priceless canvas by Rembrandt. And she was wont to say, "He is not well known, but he should be—this Moofus."

She regretted that Oscar Moofus had vanished forever, after completing her husband's portrait. She was convinced that he had died promptly after finishing what might well have been his great masterpiece. Otherwise, he would now be famous.

Visitors heard her story, looked at the portrait and marvelled—but hid their smiles. For that portrait was to Tessie Tinch a shrine; and visitors, having no respect for the portrait, had an abundance of respect for Tessie Tinch.

SHE came trotting into the parlor—a rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed old lady of some eighty summers. She came whistling.

Gillian loved her as he would have loved his own grandmother. In fact, he often wished that he had a grandmother just like Tessie Tinch.

Whistling was not her only gift. She was endowed with a fine, lively sense of humor. And she drove her own car, a snappy little red roadster that was known to every cop in Greenfield and received as much consideration as the mayor's limousine.

"Ah!" she said. "I see you are looking at The Moofus."

She stopped and gazed at the buckeye. Gillian, watching her, was always amazed at this. For as she looked her eyes became entranced. She seemed to lose her age, to become a young and lovely girl again. It was a miracle.

And now she was telling him, once again, the story of The Moofus, marvelling once more at her wonderful good fortune in having had Oscar Moofus, that unsung genius, call at her door, twenty-five years ago.

"It's so like Johnathan, Gillian!" she sighed. Then she became her bright-eyed, crisp self. "You wrote me a letter," she

said accusingly. "You wanted to see me about my investments."

"I did, Tessie," he said firmly. These investments of hers had been, for years, a bone of contention between them—the list of sickly stocks and moribund bonds which she would not sell because they had been good when Johnathan had bought them.

"Conditions are changing," Gillian said. "I don't believe you realize how rapidly conditions are changing."

"Suppose we have luncheon," Tessie said.

They went into a cool dining room, panelled with walnut, blackened by age.

Over Gillian's favorite luncheon, which was pig's knuckles and sauerkraut, he tried to argue with her. "It's positively criminal," he said. "If you had only acted on my advice, as far back as 1928, and as recently as 1931—"

"I know," she chirped. "I know it by heart, Gillian. When Johnathan died I was worth almost ten million dollars. Because of my stupidity, my obstinacy, my not acting on your advice, for which God knows I pay you plenty, I am now worth little more than a million. But I would not part with those securities any more than I would with The Moofus. Will you have another pig's knuckle?"

"Another thing," Gillian said, feeling the absurdity of trying to argue with this frivolous old lady. "How much are you contributing to the new children's hospital?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

He put down his fork. "Tessie—" he began.

"Don't bother saying it," she stopped him. "I know I'm an old fool. But that's my contribution, and I'd like to see any smart lawyer stop me from contributing it!—Now! Is there anything else?"

"There is," he said wearily. "As your hired advisor, I think I should warn you against letting such men as Eggs Emerald come to this house. As you know—"

"Yes, yes, yes! I know. He's a racketeer. They called him the Baby Killer. But have things reached the point where I must ask your permission to let charming, attractive young men come to this house? Oh, dear! Gillian, why don't you have me committed to an institution for nitwits? You are worse than a husband or a son. Stop advising me! Let me go rollicking along the road to hell in my own foolish way.—Minnie, Mr. Hazeltine will have another pig's knuckle!"

GILLIAN gave up. He felt ridiculous. Tessie Tinch paid him royally for his advice — and never acted upon it! If she had followed his suggestions regarding her investments, her estate, in spite of the depression, would still be in the neighborhood of ten million. It had shrunk to about a million. That, certainly, was plenty for any one; but what he feared was that it would shrink to nothing. However, as he left the house he vowed, as he had vowed a hundred times before, that he would never again try to advise Tessie Tinch.

Reaching his office he found, on his desk, a neatly typed report from his investigation department on the activities of Eggs Emerald. This report stated that Emerald, after hastily leaving New York, had gone to Mexico City, then to Cuba, then to New Orleans, and finally to Hollywood, where he had lived for about one year before moving to Greenfield.

He had lived lavishly in each of these places, but had done nothing sensational, and had been apprehended in no criminal activities. There was faint, but only faint suspicion attached to his presence in New Orleans at the time of the kidnaping of Austin Ruggles, the Texas oil magnate who had been returned unharmed to his family, following the payment of $400,000. There was also faint—but again, very faint—suspicion attached to his presence in Hollywood, during the period when Gloria Schuler, five-year-old daughter of Olga Schuler, the screen star, had been kidnaped and held for $350,000, which had been paid.

It was evident, in short, that Eggs Emerald had either behaved himself scrupu-

lously, since his hasty exit from New York, or that he had covered his tracks with the skill of sheer genius. The police of several cities had watched him closely since his flight from New York, but he had not once been detained or even questioned.

Gillian read with deep interest a record of Emerald's transactions on the New York Stock Exchange. This was a complete record, accounting for every transaction made for his account with the brokerage firm of Harnedy, Lawlor & Macfarland, over a period of three years. Although large, it had not been an active account. Evidently Eggs Emerald seldom speculated on the stock market. Most of his securities were in the form of tax-exempt government bonds.

Much as the record told, it was of very little help to Gillian. It did not enable him even to hazard a guess as to what the notorious ex-racketeer was doing here in Greenfield.

"Emerald took an eight-room apartment, five weeks ago, in the Brundage Arms Apartments," the report concluded. "He has been living there quietly, with a manservant named Willard Ramp, about whom we have yet learned nothing, except that he has been in Emerald's employ for two years. . . . More to come."

SILKY DAVIS telephoned in mid afternoon.

"I've been doing some keyhole work, chief," he said. "The wise guys all say that Eggs is here on business, but nobody knows what business it is. His reform gag is a big laugh. He has an apartment at the Brundage Arms. It has four exits, or entrances—front door, service entrance, and two fire escapes. They're all covered.

"Now, here's the big blow-off, chief. Emerald and your old pal Mark Storm are thicker than Mississippi gumbo! They've met nine times, that I've accounted for, each time in Tony's Piccarello's speakeasy on Center Street. Each of them takes a separate table, and they pretend they don't know each other. Then one will get up from his table and saunter into the men's room, and the other will get up and saunter into the men's room. That's where they hold their confabs. It's a lead pipe cinch that they're cooking up something.—Am I right, or am I right?"

Gillian thanked him, went to the window and looked down on the blue reaches of the beautiful Sangamo. Standing there, with cigar clenched in teeth, hands clasped behind him, he often wrestled with his knotty problems. As often as not, the solution to some intricate riddle would be given to him, as if it had taken form, like a precious mist, from the shimmering bosom of the river.

But the Sangamo gave him back no answers this afternoon. What was Eggs Emerald planning to do in Greenfield? Why were he and Storm holding these secret conferences? What was their purpose in having Gillian take Eddie Wogan's defense? Why had Eggs Emerald wormed himself into Vee's confidence?

They were full-bodied questions. They formed no picture, no pattern. They were a jigsaw puzzle, with most of the pieces missing.

AT four-thirty sharp, Gillian unlocked and opened a drawer in his desk and removed from it a long, shiny box of red cardboard. With the box in his hand, he left his office.

Miss Walsh looked up from her typewriter as he passed her desk. She glanced at her wristwatch, and her eyes darkened a little. She compressed her lips.

She said sternly, "Just a moment, Mr. Hazeltine!"

He pretended not to hear.

He had reached the door into the outer office when she called, more loudly, "Mr. Hazeltine!"

He stopped; turned with a look of innocent inquiry.

Miss Walsh pushed herself back from her desk and looked at him with stern speculation. "Are you leaving for the day, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Yes, Miss Walsh."

"Can I reach you by phone if anything important comes up?"

"I—I'm afraid not, Miss Walsh."

"By messenger boy?"

"No," he said hastily, and started to turn.

"Why do you slip out every afternoon at exactly this time?" Miss Walsh swiftly asked. "Where do you go? What do you do?"

"It's a private matter," Gillian said firmly.

"Every afternoon at exactly four-thirty," his crisp and efficient secretary said, "you go sneaking out of here with that red box under your arm. Every morning when you come to work you still have that red box. You lock it up in a desk drawer. What's in that box?"

"A—a trained lizard," Gillian said defiantly.

Miss Walsh looked at the box with large round eyes. "I see. You go out and you meet another man who has a trained lizard. You have lizard fights."

"Lizard races," Gillian corrected her.

"You've been staging these lizard races every afternoon for more than a month," Miss Walsh said.

"Yes," Gillian answered, as he started through the door again. "You see, it's a lizard marathon."

Safely reaching the outer office this time, he proceeded upon his mysterious errand. At a little after six, gleaming-eyed and smiling smugly, he arrived at his house, where he hid the little red box until morning, when he would return it to the drawer in his office desk.

HIS beautiful redheaded wife was not, however, aware of his gleaming eyes, his smug smile. She looked tired; she said she was a nervous wreck.

"It's a much harder assignment than I expected," she said. "Everybody says I'm a fool to try to raise money for charity in times like these. But Lester—Mr. Emerald—is really wonderful. What do you suppose he's done?"

"Kidnaped Henry Ford?"

Vee dismissed that bright comment with a weary little sigh.

"To-morrow night," she said, "we're putting on a big show at the Polo Club. The general public is invited. Admission is a dollar. Supper will be a dollar extra."

"Was that his idea?"

"Yes. Isn't it a peach?"

Gillian was compelled to admit that it was. The swankiest of Greenfield clubs, the Polo Club was denied to all but the very elite. The public would gladly pay a dollar to rub elbows with Greenfield's social lions, to have the privilege of tramping through the sacred halls.

"The committee members are supplying the food and the servants to serve it," Vee amplified. "And Mr. Emerald is paying out of his own pocket for the entertainment. It's going to cost him a fortune. He's having Melody Martin's Hotcha Boys, from Chicago, to play for dancing. He's even bringing on Rhoda Larendo, the dancer, from New York. And there'll be several vaudeville acts."

Gillian went into a silence, of which Vee, prattling on, was unaware. To-morrow night's affair at the Polo Club was another bright little piece for his jigsaw puzzle. Ordinarily, he hated such functions, and avoided them when he could. But Vee did not have to wheedle him into going to this one; wild horses could not have kept him away.

Upwards of four thousand people paid one dollar to attend the Polo Club party, and almost that many paid another dollar for the supper which was served after the entertainment.

Eggs Emerald was an efficient, suave, charming master of ceremonies. He introduced each of the vaudeville acts, made witty remarks, and from time to time reminded his audience of its duty to the fine new children's hospital.

With the distaste of a mongoose watching a performing cobra that was safely out of reach, Gillian, in a box with Vee, Tessie Tinch, Chester Teel and Mrs. Teel watched Eggs Emerald. And he watched Mark Storm, who occupied a near-by box, his

companion a platinum blond widow. She was a hard looking young woman, and if Gillian didn't look sharp, she would shortly be the recipient of an imported canary-colored roadster.

From Vee's point of view, the party was a great success. Almost eight thousand dollars was taken in. Yet on the drive home she was despondent. Even with Mr. Emerald's continued helpfulness, she did not see how her committee could possibly raise such a huge sum as a million dollars.

"The rich people aren't contributing," she said. "The only really large contribution we're getting is fifty thousand dollars from Tessie Tinch. The rest claim they've nothing left in the world but frozen assets. I'm afraid we're licked."

Gillian said nothing. He knew that Vee and her hard-working committee had bitten off more than they could chew. Greenfield was badly in need of a modern new children's hospital, but money was still too scarce.

They were undressing for bed when the telephone in Gillian's study, adjoining the bedroom, started to ring. Gillian, as he picked up the receiver, absent-mindedly glanced at the clock above the desk, wondering who could be calling so late. It was one minute of twelve.

When he said "Hello!" a hoarse screech shattered against his eardrum: "Mr. Hazeltine! This is Minnie! Come over at once! Something horrible has happened!"

"What?" Gillian gasped.

But the line clicked. Minnie had hung up; and when he tried to call the Tinch mansion, the line was busy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOOFUS DISAPPEARS.

WHEN Gillian reached the great brick house, he found two radio patrol cars and two dark sedans parked under the porte-cochère. The front door was open, and so he walked in.

The house seemed to be full of policemen and plainclothes men. Sergeant Murdock, of the riot squad, was coming from the direction of the kitchen, with a sandwich in one hand and a glass of milk in the other. When he saw Gillian, his eyes bulged slightly.

Minnie, in a state of cackling hysteria, met Gillian in the hall.

"Oh, thank God!" she cried. "Here he is! Here's Mr. Hazeltine! Now we'll find out what's what!"

Gillian said, "Calm down, Minnie. What's happened?"

For answer she seized his hand and pulled him into the parlor. She dropped his hand and dramatically flung out and up a thin, shaking arm.

"Look!" she shrieked. "It's gone!"

Gillian was staring. The Moofus was, indeed, missing. Where it had hung was an oblong of faded wall paper.

That portrait of Johnathan Tinch was, as far as he was concerned, a ridiculous specimen; but it ceased being a ridiculous specimen when you looked at it through the entranced eyes of Tessie Tinch.

"Where is she?" he snapped.

"In her room! Locked in!" Minnie wailed. "In a state of collapse!"

"Try to tell me what happened, Minnie."

"Yes, sir. And I know you won't waste any time tracing down the monsters who took it," Minnie said, "the way these so-called policemen are doing. Look at them, Mr. Hazeltine! All they want to know is what's in the icebox!

"It was like this, Mr. Hazeltine. When we came home from the Polo Club party, the missus went in there, as she does every night before going to bed. I was in the kitchen when I heard her scream, 'It's gone! The Moofus is gone!' And when I came in here, there she was, lying on her back on the floor, like dead. And The Moofus gone!

"I got her smelling salts and fixed her some spirits of ammonia. And when she came around, I helped her up to her room. It was awful, just awful, Mr. Hazeltine. She didn't cry; she didn't say anything

except, over and over, 'It's gone! It's gone!' And now she's locked in there and won't see any one. I told her not to worry. I told her you'd get it back for her. She said she didn't want to see you. She said all she wanted was to be left alone."

Gillian had a mental picture of the pert little old lady, stricken by this tragedy, and he felt suddenly rather ill. He was certain that with the loss of the dreadful portrait he had found another bright little piece for his jigsaw puzzle. But there was so little he could do!

HE made brief inquiries of the police. They were doing everything possible—going over the entire lower floor for fingerprints and so on.

All the servants, he learned, had been helping at the Polo Club supper. The house had been deserted all evening. Sometime during the evening, thieves had entered the house and taken the portrait of Johnathan Tinch. Sergeant Murdock was of the opinion that it was an inside job.

That, Gillian had observed, was always the sergeant's favorite opinion, on the scene of any crime.

"Nobody knew better than these servants," the sergeant elucidated his theory, "how big a value the old girl set on that painting. They knew she'd pay a fortune to get it back."

Gillian neither agreed nor disagreed with this theory. He had a mental picture of Eggs Emerald, bland, charming, handsome in his perfectly cut dress suit, moving about the stage at the Polo Club; making witty remarks; making sober and emotional appeals for funds with which to build the hospital. And he was seeing Mark Storm, no less charming, no less distinguished, sitting smilingly in his box with the hard little platinum blond widow, like a king complacently smiling on his subjects.

It wasn't a question of alibis. Storm and Emerald, Gillian was positive, had cleverly engineered the whole thing. They had had the portrait stolen, and they would hold it for a fat ransom. Perhaps he was jumping at conclusions; he was always a little too ready to credit Mark Storm with a leading part in any rascality. Perhaps he was wrong, too, in believing that Eggs Emerald had had a part in this.

He did not mention his suspicions to his wife, but he discussed them freely with Silky Davis, on the morning following the theft.

Pacing up and down his office, with cigar smoke streaming in banners from his wide shoulders, Gillian said, "It's the new trend, Silky. That's why I suspect those two. Not merely because they've been meeting secretly in Tony Piccarello's washroom. That's nothing but a corroborative detail. The main point is this: a man like Emerald doesn't quit. He goes on.—Where does he go? We know he was in the booze racket until that played out. We know he jumped from booze to a safer racket—milk and eggs. He quits that, for what?"

"Putting on the snatch?" Silky, who knew his underworld, shrewdly guessed.

Gillian said, "Yes. That was the crime trend—the big shot crime trend. After booze, and after protective associations—kidnaping. And now that's playing out. Too many states have made kidnaping a capital offense, pushing through laws similar to the New York state law, which makes kidnapers subject to the death penalty, and any person paying or handling ransom money guilty of a felony.

"The next move is the kidnaping or theft of inanimate objects on which the owners place a tremendous sentimental value. What could have been easier picking than that awful portrait? And you know and I know and half the world knows that Tessie Tinch prizes it as highly as if it were a living person—her own son or daughter. And she will pay accordingly to have it returned!"

He ground the cigar between his teeth. He smashed his fist into his palm with a gesture of savage futility.

"It burns me up!" Gillian snarled. "That fine old girl! Now they can wring out of her every cent she has in the world!

And I can't stop her! She'll never listen to me."

HE smashed the cigar into an ash tray and picked up the telephone. He called the Tinch mansion. When Minnie answered, he asked for Mrs. Tinch. He was certain she wouldn't talk to him, but she did.

"I'm terribly sorry, Tessie—" he began.

"Yes," she interrupted in a forlorn little voice. "Everybody's sorry. But I don't want any advice."

Gillian swallowed and said, "Have you heard from the thieves?"

"No! And I want you to understand, Gillian, that I wish to deal with them directly, personally—not through you."

"Very well," Gillian said, wearily. He hung up the receiver and groaned. "She's going to handle it alone," he said. "That means it's up to you and me, Silky. How many men can you dig up?"

"My old mob is waiting for the crack of the whip!"

"Good. Have Eggs watched night and day.—And the same goes for Mark Storm. —I've had another report from my investigation department." He picked up a typed sheet of blue paper from his desk, and read aloud: "Further check-up on Emerald's activities in his five weeks in Greenfield: this man has been meeting many socially prominent people, but the janitor and the elevator boys at the Brundage Arms report that no one has ever called on him at his apartment, with the exception of Mrs. Hazeltine, who has called for him twice in her car but did not go up to his apartment. . . . More later."

Gillian tossed the blue sheet into his wastebasket.

"That," he said bitterly, "is technique. A modern big shot criminal operates his show by remote control. You can't check up on his contacts. Why? Because he's made all arrangements beforehand, down to the last small move! As far as we know, his only contact has been with Storm. And what does that prove?"

"That they're both in it," Silky said dreamily. "Look here, chief. You've been after that rat for years. Each time you're on the point of putting the skids under him, he shows up with a nice clean slate. This time, hang it on him!"

Grimly, slowly, Gillian said, "If I only could!" Then, "They got me to take Wogan's defense. There's a rat there, too, just as there was a rat at that Polo Club party. But what's the rat? What's the gag?"

He rang for Miss Walsh. When she appeared, he said, "Trot over to our investigation department and tell them to get busy on this Eddie Wogan. And tell them to dig still farther back into Eggs Emerald's past. I want specific details. Names—dates—places. I want his day-by-day history ever since he got kicked out of high school."

"Yes, sir."

Silky left to follow out instructions, and Gillian went over to the First National Bank for a conference with Chester Teel, the president.

Gillian did not tell Chester Teel whom he suspected of stealing The Moofus, but told him emphatically that he was being blocked in any attempt at recovering the portrait, and that Tessie Tinch herself was doing the blocking.

"She won't have any help from me," Gillian said to the bank president. "She's as stubborn as a Missouri mule. The parties who took the portrait know how highly she prizes it; they know she'll kick through with her last cent to recover it. What I want to know now is, how many figures can she line up in front of that last cent of hers?"

"She carries a whopping balance," Chester Teel answered.

He phoned his cashier and made inquiries.

"Her balance this morning," he told Gillian presently, "is one hundred and seventy-eight thousand, four hundred and ninety-two dollars and forty-seven cents. It's our largest non commercial balance."

"It won't buy back The Moofus," Gillian said firmly. "I think she'll be selling

off some of her dud securities, in a few days. Let me know when it happens."

HE returned to his office, to stare down at the beautiful Sangamo. But that fine blue stream, winding to the sea, stubbornly refused to give forth useful hints.

He went forward with his preparations for the defense of poor old Mr. Wogan.

Shortly before noon, on the following day, Chester Teel telephoned. He said excitedly:

"Tessie has just left the bank! She cleaned out her safe deposit boxes, and she gave us a couple of bushels of stocks and bonds to be sold at market, proceeds to be credited to her account. They are going over to our broker to be sorted and sold."

Gillian gave Tessie Tinch time to reach home, then he telephoned to ask if she had heard from the kidnapers of The Moofus.

"No," she said stiffly.

"Will you get in touch with me, or refer them to me, when you hear from them?"

"I will not!" Tessie cried.

"But don't you really think it would be wiser to let me handle this affair, Tessie? After all, I've dealt with a great many criminals. I know how their minds work."

"I intend," the stubborn old lady replied with warmth, "to handle this matter without interference from you or these nosey police or any one else!"

"Wouldn't you prefer to pay the lowest possible ransom for that portrait?"

"I want The Moofus!"

"Of course," he said. "But wouldn't it be wiser to let me do the bargaining? I want you to have The Moofus, but I don't want to see you lose your fortune, through over eagerness."

"No, you don't!" Tessie cried. "You want them to deal with you so you can have them trailed and grabbed! You don't care about The Moofus. I want The Moofus back—not destroyed!"

Her voice broke. He could hear her gulp. She was on the verge of crying. He was so sorry for her that he could have cried himself; she was such a sweet old lady. But he could not let her have her way. For her own good, he had to outsmart her.

He spent the remainder of the day and evening in going over the detailed reports on the past of Eggs Emerald that were now pouring into his investigation department by telegraph and airmail from various parts of the country. Most of the names, dates, and other data were useless, but he believed that he was beginning to build, with a few solid facts, a steel fence about the clever, sly, elusive Mr. Emerald.

On his return from lunch on the following day, he found a typed memo on his desk blotter which said:

> Mr. Teel phoned while you were out. Tessie Tinch's securities brought a total of $861,211.26. Her bank balance is now $1,039,763.73.

Gillian studied these figures, then telephoned Chester Teel.

"We are going to have to use strong-arm methods," he said. "Sometime soon, Tessie will phone, wanting a large part of that balance counted out for her, but I believe she will call for it in person. At least, I'm counting on that. Have your tellers make a record of the number of every bill that is given to her. The instant she comes for the money, get me on the phone. At the same time, notify Silky Davis. And don't let her leave the bank until Silky tells you that his preparations are complete. Naturally, this whole affair must be handled with the greatest delicacy.—

"Unless I'm cockeyed, Chester, that rotten portrait is going to be priced higher than any painting on earth. There isn't a Rembrandt, a Gainsborough or a Botticelli in existence that would sell to-day for more than half a million. Even the Mona Lisa wouldn't bring a million in this market. But the portrait of Johnathan Tinch, executed by Oscar Moofus, an obscure barn painter, is going down in his-

tory not only as the worst job of painting on record, but as the highest-priced! Unless we can do something about it, that portrait will become the Million Dollar Moofus!"

CHAPTER V.

POOR OLD MR. WOGAN.

THE case of the People *versus* Eddie Wogan was scheduled for trial five days after The Moofus was stolen from Tessie Tinch's parlor, or two days after Gillian had received word from Chester Teel that Tessie's bank balance had risen to more than a million dollars.

As Gillian saw it, there was more than coincidence in all this. He was now firmly convinced that Mark Storm was a silent partner of Eggs Emerald in this latest variation of "the snatch." And he was reasonably certain that Mark Storm was the originator of the idea; had seen the possibilities for a quick and easy fortune; had perhaps even sent to Hollywood for Eggs Emerald, master of smooth criminal enterprises.

Since the night of the robbery, Silky's men had watched every move of both Storm and Emerald. The fact that neither made any suspicious errands, received any suspicious visitors, or made any attempt at seeing or communicating with each other—all this proved nothing. No doubt their plans had been completed and their final arrangements made weeks previously.

Gillian was certain that Mark Storm and Eggs Emerald had planned the Polo party and had cleverly commandeered all available servants, so that Tessie Tinch's house would be empty and unguarded. For a similar reason they had managed to enlist his interest in the case of poor old Mr. Wogan.

Gillian did not suspect Wogan of complicity; the old boy was simply a fall guy, a pawn, a creature who happened to be handy to their interests. On those long afternoons when Gillian had stared at the Sangamo, hopeful for useful ideas, he had reached these conclusions; and it had suddenly occurred to him that Eggs Emerald usually had a trick of killing two birds with one stone. It was through his discovery of this character trait—the earmark of a born piker!—that Gillian believed that if he were given time and opportunity, he would be able to bring about the downfall of Eggs Emerald.

Reasonably suspecting so much, it was only natural that Gillian should enter the courtroom that morning in a state of mind which made him impervious to Mark Storm's courtliness and his grand manners. It was therefore something of a shock when, as he came down the aisle toward the counsel table, Mark Storm arose, greeted him as if he were visiting royalty, and succeeded in making Gillian feel as if he were a country bumpkin, all thumbs and ham-like feet!

Flushing, Gillian accepted the handshake from his bitterest enemy, endured the flattering comments on his appearance, and permitted himself to be introduced as "the great, the famous, Gillian Hazeltine" to Storm's associate counsel—a battery of grim and earnest men from the Uxtico legal department.

They acknowledged this florid introduction with cold smiles and brief handshakes. It was evident that they had only one purpose in life—to see that Eddie Wogan paid for the forging, fifteen years ago, of that $3,000 Uxtico check.

GILLIAN was followed down the aisle by Miss Walsh and one of his assistants, Aaron Savage, who carried a roll of brown paper. Aaron Savage, however, was not very familiar with the case, so that the burden of the defense rested on Gillian. It was the type of case which he couldn't delegate to any assistant, as it called for his own peculiar courtroom talents—most of all, a perfect sense of drama and timing. And added to this burden was his belief that to-day was the day when the ransom for The Moofus would be demanded of Tessie Tinch. Actually, in leading him into taking the case of poor

old Eddie Wogan, his enemies had sprung an ingenious trap. They had reasoned—correctly—that he would not desert Eddie Wogan in his darkest hour.

With Eddie Wogan's fate resting on his shoulders, Gillian was practically helpless. Storm's and Emerald's aids would, he believed, demand their ransom money at the psychological moment of the trial. It might be morning; it might be afternoon.

He instructed Miss Walsh to stay near one of the courthouse public telephones, to acquaint Chester Teel with the number of the phone, and to relay immediately the bank president's message when it came.

Because of Judge Mayberry's insistence that no time be wasted, a jury of twelve good men and true was impanelled in something less than an hour. Then: "Is the State ready?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Is the defense ready?"

"Yes, your honor."

Mark Storm made the opening address to the jury for the prosecution. Said he, in part:

"Gentlemen, it is my purpose to prove to you that this man, this felon seated here at this table, did deliberately forge and present for payment at an office of the Universal Express Company, in Steel City, on the afternoon of March tenth, 1918, a check for three thousand dollars. And I will prove to you from official records that this man, this Eddie Wogan, is not only a hardened criminal, in the strictest sense of the term, but that he is a felon with a record possibly without parallel in the criminal annals of the United States of America! The first witness for the People is Sergeant Herbert Steel, of our city police department. Will Sergeant Steel take the stand?"

Sergeant Steel, a heavily built, red-faced man of about forty, in civilian attire, walked heavily to the stand. He settled himself comfortably, folded his hands on his bosom, and fixed his hard bright blue eyes on the prosecuting attorney.

Storm said, "Sergeant, on the evening of October first, did you present yourself at the warden's office in the Ohio State Penitentiary, in Columbus, Ohio, with a warrant for the arrest of the defendant?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew that he was to be released on that date, after serving a year's sentence in connection with a silk truck robbery?"

"I did."

"And did you arrest him, arrange for his extradition and bring him to this city?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you previously familiar with the defendant?"

The sergeant grinned. "I was. I knew him well. I guess every cop in this country is familiar with Eddie Wogan and his record!"

JUDGE MAYBERRY glanced at Gillian, as if anticipating an objection, but Gillian did not object. He would have been within his legal rights had he objected to this introduction of Eddie Wogan's criminal past. But he was anxious to have Eddie Wogan's past completely aired.

Encouraged, Storm brought out still more facts relating to poor old Mr. Wogan's offenses against society. Still Gillian offered no objections, and when the witness was given to him for cross-examination, he covered ground that the prosecuting attorney had not dared to trespass on.

"Are you aware, sergeant," Gillian asked, "how many times Mr. Wogan has been convicted for criminal offenses?"

"No, sir."

"Would you care to hazard a guess?"

Storm was looking alertly at Gillian.

The sergeant gave a somewhat foolish grin and answered, "More, I guess, than I could count on all my fingers and toes!"

"Then you aren't aware," Gillian said, "that Mr. Wogan has, in the course of his criminal career, been convicted on forty-two separate and distinct occasions?"

The jurors stared at the defendant with faces of astonishment.

Sergeant Steel laughed and said, "I guess Eddie made a good job of it!"

Gillian now proceeded to enumerate the occasions on which poor old Wogan had been convicted of a criminal offense.

Mark Storm was uneasy. He looked puzzled, and slightly annoyed. And when the long list of Eddie Wogan's convictions had been read into the record, Gillian excused the witness.

The next witness called by the State was an agent of the Universal Express Company. At present employed in the Chicago offices, he had been, on that fateful day in 1918, the cashier of the Steel City office. He had cashed the $3,000 check. His name was Maxwell Salt. He was about fifty years old, a thin, gray, short-sighted man who wore thick-lensed, steel-rimmed spectacles and had the look and the air of a clerk — the meekly married clerk of the comic strips.

Duly sworn, Mr. Salt related that at about two-thirty on the afternoon of March 10th, 1918, a man had come to his window and presented a $3,000 company check to be cashed. The man had produced ample proof of his identity, including a letter of introduction from the then mayor of Steel City, which had proved, on investigation, to be as spurious as the check.

"Do you identify this check as the one which was presented on that date?" Storm asked, proffering to the witness a pale green slip of paper, yellowed at the edges with age.

"I do," stated the witness.

STORM requested the court's permission to introduce this check as material evidence, Exhibit A, for the State. The check was examined by the judge, the jury and Gillian. It had been made payable to, and was endorsed by, Augustus K. Strinberg.

Eddie Wogan looked at the check and glumly shook his head.

Mr. Salt elaborated on his testimony; and while testifying, kept his pale gray eyes fixed steadily in the direction of Eddie Wogan.

"Mr. Salt," Storm said crisply, "can you describe the man who came to your window to have that check cashed?"

"I can," Mr. Salt answered emphatically. "He was a tall, thin, pale man of maybe forty-seven or forty-eight. He was well dressed, and he talked like an educated man. He wore a dark red-and-blue-striped necktie, a dark blue worsted suit, and a brown felt hat."

"Do you recall this from memory," Storm asked quickly, as the courtroom, including even the judge, smiled, "or are you quoting from the description which you gave of the man at the time the check proved to be worthless?"

"I am quoting from that description."

The smiles vanished.

Gillian interrupted. "Just where was this description? I failed to find any record of it or any copy of it."

"I had it among my personal papers," Mr. Salt said stiffly.

"Thank you.—Pardon me, Mr. Storm."

"Not at all, Mr. Hazeltine. I always appreciate these fine points that you bring out. Now, Mr. Salt, did you, at the time the check was cashed, notice the color of the man's hair or eyes?"

"No, sir. That is, not his hair. But he had off-color blue eyes."

"Would you recognize that man if you saw him now?"

"There is a fair chance that I might."

"What I mean, Mr. Salt, is, would you recognize him now, making due allowance for the fact that a man's appearance may change radically in fifteen years, if most of those fifteen years have been spent behind pris—"

"Objected to as inferential and leading!" Gillian broke in.

Judge Mayberry sustained him, and requested Mr. Storm to re-phrase the question.

"Question is withdrawn," Storm said graciously. "I'll put it this way — Mr. Salt, do you now recognize in this room the man for whom you cashed that worthless check?"

"I certainly do!" the witness cried. "That's the man."

With an outflung hand, he was pointing unquestionably to the end of the table where Gillian, Aaron Savage and Eddie Wogan sat.

Storm requested Wogan to rise.

Storm drove the spike home. "You definitely and positively identify that man as the man who cashed that forged check?"

"I do! You bet I do!"

Mr. Salt's voice was quavering with excitement. His glasses had slid down almost to the end of his nose. He was peering excitedly over them, with spots of feverish color in his cheeks. It was a most convincing display. His very appearance of meekness, and his almost hysterical excitement, made Mr. Salt an excellent and damaging witness. He was, of course, Storm's star witness.

Gillian believed that with Mr. Salt, Mark Storm had fired his broadside and would now cease firing.

"Your witness, Mr. Hazeltine." The prosecuting attorney bowed. "Your honor, the State rests."

CHAPTER VI.

NEAR-SIGHTED WITNESS.

GILLIAN had been prepared for Mr. Salt. He had learned always to be prepared for Storm's carefully coached witnesses. Storm merely took advantage of the accepted courtroom rule that four out of every five witnesses who swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, take the stand with the deliberate intention of telling lies. Gillian had spent some time in checking up Mr. Salt very carefully.

He asked Mr. Salt the nature of his eye trouble, and the witness immediately acquired a hostile air. He had no doubt been warned that Mr. Hazeltine was dangerous and tricky.

"My glasses are merely corrective," Mr. Salt answered defiantly. "Nothing serious is the matter with my eyes."

"I asked you," Gillian said, a little more firmly, "to explain the nature of the weakness which your glasses are intended to correct. Is it astigmatism? Short-sightedness?"

"A little astigmatism, perhaps," the witness conceded.

"How long have you worn glasses?"

"Since I was a schoolboy. — But my eyes have always been good!"

"With or without glasses?"

"I see better with glasses," Mr. Salt admitted.

The prosecuting attorney yawned behind his hand.

"Mr. Salt," Gillian proceeded, "for how many years have you been employed by the Universal Express Company?"

"Twenty-one!" the witness snapped.

"In the course of those twenty-one years, how much of the time have you acted as a company cashier?"

"Eighteen."

"Continuously?"

"Continuously."

"How many customers, on an average, do you deal with per day?"

"I don't know."

"A hundred?"

"At a guess—yes."

"A hundred men and women per day?—Mostly men?"

"I suppose so," Mr. Salt said, with a bored air.

"Say, seventy-five per cent of them?"

"Around that, I guess."

"In other words, seventy-five men per day, for eighteen years, have come to your window, bought express checks or cashed express or company checks. Correct?"

"I suppose so," the witness said wearily.

"In short," Gillian summed up, "we have a procession of men—not to mention the women—coming to your window. Seventy-five men a day—approximately three hundred days a year—for eighteen years." He looked at the ceiling. "By quick arithmetic, that's about twenty-two thousand men a year—or a total of about *four hundred thousand* men in the eighteen years you have been serving the public."

"Call it that," Mr. Salt said, derisively.

"All right. We'll call it four hundred

thousand. Now, Mr. Salt, of that remarkable parade of men, can you recall the color of each one's eyes, the way he talked, the color of his hat and necktie?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Salt cried, and added triumphantly, "But how many of those four hundred thousand men presented forged checks to be cashed?"

"YOU'RE missing my point," Gillian said pleasantly. "How many of those four hundred thousand men could you identify, if that amazing parade were to start passing by you all over again, at this very moment?"

"A lot of them!" Mr. Salt cried. "Yes, sir! A whole lot of them! I've got a mighty good memory for faces. A man has to have, in my line."

"Neckties, hats, eyes, complexions?" Gillian asked gently.

"Yes—and hair and teeth, too!"

"Mr. Savage," Gillian said, "will you please come here?"

Gillian's assistant arose and walked close to the witness stand. Mr. Salt glared at him. Mark Storm, with a puzzled, wary air, walked over and stood beside Gillian. He stood so close that Gillian could smell the fragrance of the white carnation in his lapel.

"What's the purpose of all this?" he asked.

"I merely wish to check up on the witness's testimony," Gillian answered. "Now, Mr. Salt; I want you to look closely at this young man. Have you ever seen him before?"

"I think I have. Yes, I'm certain I have."

"Kindly state the circumstances—the date, the occasion, and so on."

Mr. Salt, staring at Aaron Savage, licked his lips and frowned.

"I've seen him, but I'm not certain where."

"I object to this as irregular," Storm said quickly.

"I am merely," Gillian said to the judge, "attempting to test this man's reliability as a witness, your honor."

"I shall withhold a ruling," the court decided. "You may proceed tentatively."

"Thank you, your honor. Now, Mr. Salt, you have had ample time to study this young man. Can you state definitely when and where you last saw him? Can you tell me the color of the necktie and hat he wore?"

"It—it seems to evade me," Mr. Salt muttered.

"When did you leave Chicago to appear in this case?"

"Yesterday noon."

"Yesterday morning, until noon, were you at work at your usual task as cashier in the Chicago office?"

"I was."

Gillian turned to his assistant. "Aaron," he said, "tell the jury when you went to Mr. Salt's window in the Chicago office, what you did there, and what you wore at the time."

The young man answered, "I went to his window yesterday at ten o'clock sharp, wearing a black-and-white-check suit, an orange necktie, a green hat and a pink carnation."

THE courtroom began to laugh. When order was restored, Gillian said, "Did you have witnesses?"

"Yes, sir. I had two detectives from the Chicago homicide squad go with me to the express office. I went to the window and bought a thousand dollars' worth of traveller's checks from Mr. Salt. Here they are."

He produced a small imitation pigskin billfold and opened it, displaying a small sheaf of traveller's checks.

"The two witnesses," Gillian said, "are now waiting in the witness room, if their corroboration is necessary."

There was an interested stir in the room.

Storm uttered a short, hard laugh. "Your honor," he said, "I contend that this elaborate performance is too absurd for us, as intelligent men, to take seriously. Patently, Mr. Salt is a very busy man—far too busy to notice the color of the hat and necktie of every man who casually

comes to his window. This testimony is worthless. It proves absolutely nothing."

Judge Mayberry glanced inquiringly at Gillian.

"There are two issues at stake, your honor," Gillian said. "The witness's powers of observation, and his powers of vision. I am merely endeavoring to prove to the gentlemen of the jury that both Mr. Salt's powers of observation and his eyesight are not what they are cracked up to be."

"Have you proved it?" Storm demanded.

For answer, Gillian, master of courtroom surprises, walked to the counsel table and picked up the mysterious long roll of brown paper. He unwrapped the paper and unrolled an optical chart.

"Gentlemen of the jury—and your honor—you will observe on the floor at my feet a chalk mark. I wish to mention that this morning, before court opened, I hired a surveyor—a certified civil engineer—to measure exactly twenty feet from the witness stand, in this direction, and to make a chalk mark. This was for purposes of scientific accuracy. Any one here is at liberty to check this measurement. Twenty feet, as you will note at the top of this chart, is the distance at which the lettering that appears on it is supposed to be read. Now, Mr. Salt, I wish you would begin at the top and read as far as possible toward the bottom."

Mark Storm indignantly objected, but Judge Mayberry, although obviously displeased by the introduction of the optical chart, overruled him.

"Visual acuity is certainly an important factor in deciding the merits of the evidence which is being introduced," the court ruled. "This test is, in my opinion, reasonable and fair. The witness will please read the chart."

"'E,'" read the witness, in a thin, high voice.

"Excellent!" Gillian complimented him. "Next line?"

"'Q—W—M,'" the witness read.

"Splendid! Next line?"

"'Z—K—L—V—O,'" Mr. Salt said falteringly.

The courtroom giggled. Storm glowered.

"All correct," Gillian said cheerfully, "with the exception of the 'K,' the 'L,' and the 'V,' which happened to be, respectively, a 'B,' an 'F,' and a 'P.'—Really, Mr. Salt, you should see your oculist."

WHILE the courtroom tittered, Gillian selected from the papers at his end of the counsel table a manila envelope measuring about ten by twelve inches. From this he removed a colored lithograph of a man's face. The courtroom burst into applause and laughter. Judge Mayberry scowled.

The witness peered at the lithograph. Gillian was holding it beside Eddie Wogan. The head was lifesize—about the same size as Eddie Wogan's.

When order was restored, Gillian said, "Now, Mr. Salt, I want you to identify the man in this lithograph. You will note that the head is lifesize, and that the color of eyes and necktie are faithfully reproduced."

"Your honor," Storm broke in, "I object to this insolence!"

"It is still a test of the witness's visual acuity—a most important test, your honor," Gillian argued.

The judge, with a grimace, nodded at Gillian. "The witness will identify the man in the lithograph."

Mr. Salt was staring at the lithograph. He stared through his glasses, and he stared over them. His eyes screwed up into nests of wrinkles. He peered. Finally he shook his head, as if baffled. Then he became belligerent; and Mr. Salt now closely resembled the comic strip character who rebels at fate, the turning worm. He seemed to bristle. His myopic eyes flashed and gleamed. The tip of his nose became pink and began to twitch.

"I don't quite place him," he said frostily.

Again the courtroom burst into laughter.

A bailiff banged with a gavel. Judge Mayberry covered a smile with a hand.

"What is your political party, Mr. Salt?" Gillian asked.

The witness answered, "I am a Democrat."

Mr. Hazeltine said, "Then you ought to recognize this gentleman. He is the distinguished leader of your party."

"It's Postmaster General Jim Farley!" Mr. Salt shrilled.

The courtroom burst into roars of laughter, and Gillian returned the lithographic likeness of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to its envelope.

Mark Storm was strenuously protesting. "I heartily object to this bandying about of our President's likeness for purposes of cheap courtroom showmanship!" he shouted above the uproar.

Judge Mayberry waved his objection aside. He ruled that all of Mr. Hazeltine's tests were fairly and legally admissible as evidence. It was Mr. Hazeltine's right to attack the credibility of any State witness, directly or obliquely.

Gillian was through with cross-examination. Seating himself beside the prisoner, he realized that he had not succeeded in dislodging from the minds of the jurymen their conviction that a man with a criminal record such as Eddie Wogan's might very well have forged that check—very probably *had* forged the check. But Gillian had effectively disproved Mr. Salt's testimony under direct examination; had proved that although Mr. Salt's eyesight might not have been so bad fifteen years ago as it was now, nevertheless Mr. Salt had not proved that the man who presented the check to him was the man now on trial.

Before Mark Storm could begin re-direct examination, the court ordered a recess for luncheon. He said to the jury:

"Gentlemen of the jury, we are about to take a recess until this afternoon at two o'clock. The court admonishes you not to speak about this case among yourselves, or to permit any one to speak to you about it. You will keep your minds open until the case is finally submitted to you. The defendant will retire."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEFENDANT.

GILLIAN walked rapidly out of the courtroom. He went to the nearest telephone and called the First National Bank. Of Chester Teel, he asked, "Any word yet from Tessie?"

"Not yet, Gillian."

"She will probably telephone shortly after two o'clock. I'm so sure of that that I'm going to ask Silky Davis to go to your office. Can he wait there until she comes?"

"Yep."

Gillian then called Silky and asked, "Are you ready for the pay-off?"

"I'm all set, chief."

"Got the paint and the artillery?"

"Right here beside me!"

"I expect Tessie to call at the bank, sometime after two. The tellers will take all the time they possibly can, counting her money. The instant she gets there, Chester Teel will phone me at the courthouse. Go over to his office, do your stuff—and wait for me."

"Okay, chief."

After lunch, Gillian returned to the courthouse, posted Miss Walsh at a telephone, and proceeded to the counsel table.

When court convened at two o'clock, Gillian tried to dismiss Tessie Tinch and The Moofus from his mind, and to deal with the battle that lay ahead of him.

The afternoon session opened with Storm's re-direct examination of Mr. Salt. The prosecuting attorney took him back and forth over his previous direct testimony, vigorously attempting to rebuild a fallen Humpty-Dumpty.

Gillian saw him glance frequently at the clock over the bench, and he knew that Storm was deliberately killing time.

When Storm at length finished, Gillian did not take the witness for re-crossexamination. He was sure that the seed which he had planted in the jury's mind was still

alive, and that with the proper persuasion it might grow and blossom into the bright flower of an acquittal. His address to the jury was brief:

"Gentlemen, I will attempt to prove to you that it would have been utterly impossible for the defendant to have forged and presented that check. I will attempt to prove to you that some one has deliberately tried to make the defendant the victim of an old police custom. Captain Morgan will take the stand, please."

Captain Morgan was the chief of detectives of the Greenfield Police Department—an iron-jawed, gray-haired man of fifty, with cold, gray, metallic eyes. His ears indicated that he had, in earlier years, followed the profession of pugilism. Captain Morgan was one member of the police department who, Gillian knew, was not under the political thumb of the prosecuting attorney's office. A fighter, Captain Morgan did not in the least fear Mark Storm.

THE prosecuting attorney eyed him coldly, when the chief of detectives took the stand.

"Captain Morgan," Gillian said, "I want you to tell the jury briefly how any police department goes about apprehending the unknown perpetrator of a crime, when either the public or influential people demand the criminal's arrest. Isn't it true that your first act is to order a rounding up of all known criminals in the vicinity who *might* have committed that particular crime?"

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't it true that ordinarily you would attach most suspicion to the criminal whose record was longest—that is, to the criminal who was known to specialize in the type of crime committed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you have to do with the arrest of Eddie Wogan?"

"Nothing at all. The order for his arrest wasn't put through me. It came directly from the district attorney's office."

"Do you know how the district attorney's office happened to order the arrest of Eddie Wogan?"

"I do. At your request, I checked it up. Mr. Storm had come down to headquarters. He went through our records bureau and our rogues gallery. He looked at a lot of pictures and he read over a lot of records, and then he gave the word to put the pinch on Eddie."

Mark Storm interrupted with irony, "I trust, captain, that you had no objection to that procedure?"

"No, Mr. Prosecuting Attorney," Captain Morgan drawled. "All I wondered was why you spent so much time deciding between Johnny the Sling, Buffalo Willie, and Eddie Wogan. From your conversation with our man in charge of the records bureau, I found that you hadn't come there to look up Eddie Wogan's record in particular. You went there looking for any fall guy who fitted your specifications!"

"We might bring over the man in charge of your records bureau to corroborate that remark!" Storm purred.

"How can we," Captain Morgan snapped, "when we know that you sent him to New York on some errand or other, only day before yesterday!"

The judge interrupted to say, "Mr. Hazeltine, have you finished with this witness?"

"Yes, your honor," Gillian said, and smiled.

He was delighted with Captain Morgan's combativeness, his fearlessness. Storm could shout at him, could insult him, could endeavor to trip him and trap him, but Captain Morgan stood his ground.

Gillian glanced at the clock. Two thirty-four!

He glanced apprehensively at the doorway, wondering if his reasoning had been wrong. Then he saw Storm glance sharply, worriedly, at the clock, and was assured.

WHEN Storm finished with Captain Morgan, the time was two-forty-five, and the chief of detectives had not back-tracked a step. He empha-

sized the point Gillian had made; there was no account, in the complete official record, of Eddie Wogan's having committed a forgery. He was not the type. Criminally speaking, he was small fry. It took a cleverer crook than he to forge a big check.

Storm asked impatiently, "Captain Morgan, do you mean to say that you believe that every crime this man has committed is in this record?"

Captain Morgan shrugged.

Storm: "Don't you admit that it is quite possible, in view of the defendant's versatility, that forgery is one of his accomplishments?"

The witness: "I do not. Where's the proof of it?"

Captain Morgan repeatedly denied that Eddie Wogan's record had the least bearing on the forgery of that three-thousand-dollar check, fifteen years ago. And at the end of his testimony, the seed of doubt—if Gillian was gauging the jury's mind aright—was beginning to sprout. The intentness with which they had stared at Eddie Wogan at the beginning of the trial had changed. They were no longer certain.

The time, Gillian believed, was now ripe for him to spring a simple but important little surprise. He said:

"The defendant will take the stand."

Eddie Wogan, looking more than ever like a forlorn old turkey gobbler, walked with his chain-gang step to the stand and seated himself with hands folded in lap, eyes downcast. He seemed to be a sad, broken old man.

"Mr. Wogan," Gillian said gently, "I want you to tell the gentlemen of the jury the story of your life, from the time of your first conviction."

"I—I can't remember very well," the old man faltered.

"Isn't it true that you have been a criminal, of one kind or another, all your life?"

"I—I guess it's true," Mr. Wogan sadly answered.

"Weren't you sent to a New York State boys' reformatory—a reformatory for incurably bad boys—at the age of nine, for stealing ice cream off a back porch at a birthday party in the town of Amityville, Long Island, where you were born?"

"Yes, sir. That's true."

SOME of the jurymen were smiling, not superciliously but sympathetically. Eddie Wogan made a striking picture of tragedy, with head bowed, shoulders sagging, chin trembling a little. In fact, he was following Gillian's directions to the smallest detail.

Gillian wanted to make those twelve good men and true cry, if he could. Unless he could bring the sparkle of tears into their eyes, his case was lost.

"And from the beginning," he said, "you went from bad to worse, didn't you, Mr. Wogan?"

"I—I guess I did."

"Good God!" Gillian suddenly shouted, as if with exasperation. "Didn't you ever try? Didn't you ever make a single attempt at being an honest man?"

The old man did not look up. He slowly nodded his head.

"Sure, I tried."

"Did you try to get a job when you came out of the reformatory?"

"Yes, sir. I got a job drivin' a milk wagon."

"Why did you quit?"

"I didn't quit. My boss found out I'd been in a reformatory, and he fired me."

"Did you ever try again?"

"Yes, sir. And I kept on tryin'."

"Do you deny that you committed any of the crimes listed in your record?"

"No, sir. All my life I've been arrested for one thing and another."

"Why didn't you make good on any of those jobs you had?" Gillian demanded.

"Partly because I didn't have any training. Almost every time I applied for a job they wanted a man with training. And every time I did get an honest job and thought I had a chance, somebody would come along—generally a cop—and—out I'd go!"

Eddie Wogan stopped on a dull, futile

note. Gillian observed that the eyes of the jurymen were already a little bright; not moist, but bright. It was a hopeful sign. As for himself, he was beginning to perspire.

The time was now 2.55. He saw Mark Storm looking dreamily at the clock, checking it against his watch. The zero hour, Gillian believed, was rapidly nearing.

"Go on, Mr. Wogan," he said gently.

"And after awhile," the old man continued, "nobody would hire me because—because I looked like what I was. I—I had to give up being honest.—Look at me!" he cried in a suddenly frantic voice. "Just look at me! Who would give a job to anybody who looks like me?"

A woman in the rear of the courtroom shrilly cleared her throat. There was, above this noise, the sound of rustling, of restlessness. It was this sound—the birth of emotion—for which Gillian had been waiting.

AND just at that moment—the worst possible moment—Miss Walsh came tiptoeing down the aisle, white-faced, white-lipped, big-eyed, with a folded note in her hand which she gave to Gillian.

As if displeased at the interruption, he accepted the slip of paper, unfolded it and read:

Tessie at bank. Drawing out one million. Teel says he can't hold her long, as she is in frightful temper.

Smiling faintly, Gillian whispered, "Tell Teel to hold her if he has to lock her in a vault."

Then, with a dreamy look, he folded the paper and stuffed it carelessly into his pocket. Had he or hadn't he lost his sway over the jury? Their eyes were still bright; there was still that restless sound among the spectators.

Gillian strode over to the court stenographer. He picked up the three-thousand-dollar check and walked quickly to the witness stand.

"Mr. Wogan," he said, "where were you on the afternoon of March tenth, 1918?"

"I don't know," the old man moaned.

"Were you in Steel City?"

"No, sir. I was not."

"But you don't know where you were?" Gillian demanded, in incredulous tones.

"No, sir. I don't remember. All I know is I wasn't in stir. From February sixteenth, when I was let out of the Buffalo jail, to June eighteenth, when I was sent to jail in Cleveland, I was out o' stir. But I wasn't in Steel City. I was just driftin'—Buffalo — Columbus — Toledo—Detroit—Cleveland. Just driftin'—tryin' to get a job."

"Then," Gillian said swiftly, in stern, militant tones, "you firmly deny, do you, that on March tenth, 1918, you presented a forged check to the Universal Express Company's office in Steel City and received three thousand dollars in cash?"

And Eddie Wogan said, in a thin but firm old voice, "I did not. How could I?" And he repeated pathetically, "How could I?"

Gillian had placed the check in the old man's hands. Eddie Wogan, with twitching lips, stared, not at the check, but at Gillian.

"I can't read it," he cried. "You know I can't read it, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Why not?" Gillian snapped.

He looked at the clock. Five more minutes had slid by.

He wondered if Tessie Tinch had already left the bank.

"Do you need glasses?"

"Glasses!" the old man wailed. "What good would glasses do? I can't read at all!" Then he cried in a voice of abysmal woe, "I never had a chance to learn! I've spent so much time in prisons that I never learned to read or write!"

Above the confused roar of voices from the spectators, Gillian shouted:

"The defense rests!"

He strode rapidly over to Aaron Savage, bent down and whispered into his young assistant's ear, "Storm will take at least

an hour summing up. Hold the fort till I get back."

Then he walked rapidly out of the courtroom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FISHERMAN.

WITH a canvas cylinder on the seat beside her, Tessie Tinch was driving her smart little red roadster eastward along Cloverdale Boulevard. She drove carefully, stopping punctiliously for red traffic lights, never exceeding the city's twenty-five mile an hour speed limit.

Frequently the little old lady glanced into her rear-view mirror. Not satisfied with that, she frequently put out her head and looked behind her. But until she reached the city limits she was evidently not satisfied that she was not being followed. No cars appeared to be following her, so she drove on, a little faster.

Her speedometer needle crept up to thirty-five. When she reached the River Road fork, the road behind her was utterly empty. She turned left onto the River Road, and the speedometer needle crept steadily up to fifty-five.

SILKY DAVIS was standing in the doorway of the First National Bank when Gillian arrived.

"She's gone," Silky said. "A good five minutes ago. She took one million bucks in a single long bundle. She specified that it was to be five inches in diameter, and no more. The tellers have the number of each bill."

"Got guns?" Gillian snapped, as they climbed into his coupé.

"Yes. And if you ask me, we ought to have a gang."

Gillian started the car. "I don't think we'll need a gang. I think this will be smooth.—What color paint did you use?"

"Black.—Look there!"

But Gillian had already seen it, a long, thin streak of glistening black dots on the pavement ahead.

"When she went into the bank for the money, Silky said, "I did just what you told me; I fastened a gallon can of black paint underneath her car, and punched a little hole in it with the point of an ice pick."

A block beyond the bank the trail became more definite. It ceased to be occasional black drops and became an apparently endless fine black thread—a beautifully blazed trail!

Gillian drove rapidly. Near the city limits, a policeman in a Ford overhauled the speeding coupé. When Gillian did not slacken speed, accelerated and drew alongside.

When he recognized Gillian, his grimness vanished and he shouted, "Anything going on, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Follow me!" Gillian shouted.

He followed the trail of black paint out Cloverdale Boulevard to the fork, and thence out the River Road and to Washington Park, which occupied the hillside above the river, not far from the site of the proposed new children's hospital.

The black paint trail curved into the park, went on to the eastern end, and ended in a puddle, still accumulating, under the rear end of Tessie Tinch's smart little red roadster.

The policeman pulled up quietly, stopped his engine, and came over to where Gillian and Silky, each with a blue revolver in his hand, were peering into the bushes.

Gillian said softly, "There she is!"

He had seen a figure in white. He broke through the bushes and ran down a footpath.

To his left, and far below, he saw through the autumnal foliage the glitter of the sun on the river.

Tessie Tinch was standing defiantly beside a lilac bush. She was pale. Her eyes were glittering with terror.

"You're too late!" she cried hysterically. "Go away!"

"Where's that money?"

"Gone!" she was crying. "Why did you come here? I didn't want you to come!

I wanted you to leave me alone. Go away, Gillian. The money's gone. It's gone!"

BUT Gillian had seen. Just in the ground beyond her, partly concealed by her stiff white dress, he had seen a neat round hole, approximately seven inches in diameter.

He walked quickly past her, kneeled down and inspected this aperture. The hole was evidently quite deep. He could not see the bottom of it, but what he did see puzzled him. The hole was lined with a galvanized pipe!

He bent down to examine it closer, and heard a faint, faraway rushing sound. The sound of water!

"What have you found?" Silky panted.

Gillian said swiftly, "She dropped the money down this hole—down a pipe! Come on!" And to the puzzled policeman, "You, too, Pat!"

"What is it?" Pat growled.

"A snatch job," said Silky, plunging through the bushes after Gillian.

"Oh, please—please don't!" the old lady whimpered. "Please don't go after them!"

Revolver in hand, Gillian was bounding down the steep slope of the hill toward the river. Not far from the bank, he had seen a lone fisherman in a shabby rowboat. A large outboard motor glittered and gleamed on the stern of the boat, and the lone fisherman was in the act of pulling in his line. It was evident that he had hooked a fish very close to the shore.

He was reeling in rapidly as Gillian, at risk of broken bones, came plunging down the hillside.

When Gillian was about thirty feet away, the line became taut. Gillian stopped, steadied himself, took swift but careful aim, and fired. As if by magic, the fishline parted in the middle, and the inshore end dropped into the water. Gillian floundered out into the water and snatched up the line.

The fisherman was now spinning his motor. It gave a cough, a gasp, a sputter, then a steady roar.

Waist deep in water, balancing himself precariously in the mud, Gillian aimed deliberately at the glittering machine, and fired. The engine sputtered and died.

SILKY and the policeman now arrived on the scene.

Gillian said, "Grab him, Pat!" and gave a jerk on the line.

The line ran downward into the water, presumably into the lower end of the galvanized pipe, which was below the surface.

At his brisk yank, the line suddenly went slack. A dozen feet away, a white object bobbed to the surface.

Gillian floundered through mud and water and captured it. The long line had been tied to the canvas bundle, presumably by Tessie Tinch, following the directions from the kidnapers.

Gillian untied it. He looked up, and saw that Pat and the lone fisherman were fighting together in the water. Evidently the policeman had reached the boat, and in a struggle had pulled the lone fisherman overboard. Silky was swimming out to them.

Gillian waded ashore with one million dollars, wrapped in canvas, under his arm, and watched the fight.

He looked at his watch. It was water-soaked, and had stopped at three-forty. He had been away from the courtroom for thirty-five minutes.

Above him, Tessie Tinch was wailing. He saw the policeman climb upon the lone fisherman's shoulders; saw the latter vanish under the surface. When he came gasping and choking to the surface, there was no fight left in him.

Gillian called, "You'll have to ride back to town in Tessie's roadster. I can't wait. Take that fellow to jail, Pat, and book him on a suspicion charge. I'll attend to him later."

He climbed back up the hill.

The heartbroken old lady cried, "Gillian, you've ruined everything! They'll cut my picture into little pieces! They'll burn it up and I'll never see it again! They said they would!"

"Who said so?"

"I—I won't tell you!" she sobbed. "They told me not to tell you."

"Now, stop worrying," he said gently. "You'll get your Moofus."

With the canvas cylinder held firmly under his arm, he trotted to his car, got in and drove back to the city. He paused only long enough at the bank to leave the canvas cylinder with Chester Teel and to say:

"Put this back into Tessie's account. I'll explain everything later."

He drove to the courthouse. Ominous silence met him as he entered the courtroom. The judge was not on the bench. The jury box was empty. Storm was gone. Eddie Wogan was gone. Only Aaron Savage, looking pale and worried, and two of the Uxtico lawyers, engaged at the other end of the table in a whispered conference, were there.

Aaron saw Gillian, and walked up the aisle to meet him.

"The jury's been out twenty minutes," he said. "I couldn't do a damned thing. Storm summed up in less than twenty-five minutes. I waived summation, hoping you'd be back. Then Storm ducked out. And the judge instructed the jury."

"A directed verdict?"

"No. He was reasonably fair. He stressed Eddie's obvious lack of education, and he talked a long while about reasonable doubts."

Gillian waited. As the mud on his clothing dried, it turned white. He tried to scrape it off with a thumbnail. He knew that he must look ludicrous, but he didn't care. He felt guilty. If the jury returned with a conviction for Eddie Wogan, he would never forgive himself.

At four-ten, the door of the jury room opened. Twelve sober-looking men filed into the jury box, and the judge was called. Eddie Wogan was brought back from his cell. White-faced, dry-lipped, Gillian waited through an interminable interval while the clerk of the court droned through the ancient formula. Standing up with his book, he polled the twelve standing men. Then:

"Gentlemen of the jury," chanted the clerk, "have you arrived at a verdict for Eddie Wogan?"

"We have."

"What say you?"

The halting, rumbling voice of the foreman answered, "Not guilty—and we recommend that an honest job be found for this poor fellow!"

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE BAG.

GILLIAN leaned heavily against the counsel table, his face suddenly wet with the perspiration of relief. He gave a whistling little gasp, then grasped poor old Mr. Wogan by the hand and enthusiastically shook it.

The old man was smiling; in some magical way he seemed to be changing. The years seemed to drop from him, and the stoop left his shoulders. His eyes, so dull since Gillian had first met him, had acquired a youthful luster. He was not the same man; he no longer resembled an old turkey gobbler. He looked miraculously as if he might once have been a gentleman. It was mysterious, startling. It was as if all along Eddie Wogan had been playing a part, and now that there had ceased to be a need for it, had become himself again.

He said, in a strangely cultivated voice, "That was splendid, Mr. Hazeltine! I can't thank you enough for your brilliant handling of the case. It was really superb."

Gillian stared at him with cold, steel-gray eyes—dubiously, as if his ears were cheating him. Then, with a shrug, he turned abruptly away and walked to the bench.

"Your honor," he said, "I would like very much to have a few minutes with you in private. This case isn't by any means closed."

He was closeted with Judge Mayberry for perhaps a half hour. Emerging from the judge's chambers, Gillian proceeded to his office.

Miss Walsh looked up with a bright smile from her typewriter. "I hear you got a verdict," she said.

"Yes," he said.

She glanced at her watch. "It's after four-thirty. Isn't there a lizard race this afternoon?"

"No," he said. "No more lizard races." He went into his office, closed the door after him, and telephoned Eggs Emerald, at the Brundage Arms.

"Eggs," Gillian said, "I want you to come to my office as fast as you can. I have something that will interest you."

"Certainly, Mr. Hazeltine," the ex-racketeer answered. "I'll be down immediately."

IT took Mr. Emerald less than twelve minutes to reach Gillian's office. Miss Walsh ushered him in—handsome and distinguished in a gray suit. He stripped off chamois-skin gloves, and cordially shook Gillian's hand. He looked like a man fresh from Meadowbrook. His clear, sparkling blue eyes were eager, yet respectful.

Gillian said, quietly, "Eggs, do you know what you're here for?"

The handsome blond man shook his head, smiling. "Something in connection with the new children's hospital, of course?"

"That's right," Gillian said. "Things aren't going so well with the building funds committee. In fact, something drastic must be done, or the sick and injured kids of Greenfield won't have a fine new hospital at all. Only about seventy-five thousand has been raised, of the million needed. I've asked you here to suggest that you make a generous contribution."

Eggs Emerald's eyes were still bright, but tiny wrinkles had made their appearance in the corners.

"A 'generous contribution'?" he repeated, vaguely.

"Say one million dollars," Gillian said.

The ex-racketeer stared at him. Then he chuckled. "You're joking, of course?"

Gillian said, "You have almost a million in your brokerage account, with the firm of Harnedy, Lawlor and Macfarland, in New York. You have a sufficient balance in the Eighth National Bank, of New York, to make up the difference. I have here a telegram, which I have written to your brokers to sell all your securities at the market and send a check for the proceeds, minus their commission and the Federal tax, to your bank account. In fact, this is a copy of a telegram which I have already sent, signed with your name. All you have to do is to write the necessary check for one million dollars."

A faint flush had stolen into Emerald's face. His eyes were still clear—with the clearness of ice.

"Go on," he said thinly. "Get on with this gag. It's panicking me. Look at me laugh!"

"Another item," Gillian said, "is an oil painting—a portrait owned by Mrs. Tessie Tinch. That portrait, Eggs, is to be returned to her house by eight o'clock this evening."

Eggs gave a bark of laughter. "You must be nuts, Hazeltine!"

"I'm copying your favorite trick," Gillian said quietly. "I'm killing two birds with one stone.—I'll make a confession. I can't *prove* that your mob stole that portrait, but I know that your mob did steal it. And I can't prove that you took part in the kidnaping of Austin Ruggles, in New Orleans, or Olga Schuler's daughter in Hollywood, although we both know damned well that you ran both jobs."

"Do we?" Eggs Emerald said softly.

"Yes," Gillian drawled. "We both know it. And we also know that you were a pretty tough booze racketeer before that racket stopped paying. We both know you earned a reputation as a baby killer by polluting the milk supply in New York City. We know all this, but I can't prove it."

"So what?" Emerald asked, even more smoothly.

"So we go back—away back—to the days when you weren't quite so smooth. I may be mistaken, but I believe that's just what your pal Storm did. I have a hunch that Storm sent for you to come here be-

cause he had stumbled across a mistake, 'way back in your past."

Gillian paused a moment. Emerald's eyes were two spots of glittering chromium.

"My hunch," Gillian went on, "is that Storm used that early mistake of yours as a club—not to force you into taking charge of The Moofus job, but to beat you out of the lion's share of the proceeds. That's my hunch, because that's the way Storm's mind works. He is fundamentally of the blackmailing type."

Gillian stopped again. Emerald's eyes were still fixed steadily on the lawyer's mouth.

"YOUR hunch machine works overtime, doesn't it?" the racketeer sneered.

"Perhaps," Gillian said. "And of course I don't expect you to squeal on Storm. It wouldn't be ethical."

"Suppose," Emerald said, his handsome mouth still twisted into that ugly shape, "we can the sarcasm."

"Okay," Gillian said briskly. "Suppose we get down to hard facts."

He picked up from his desk a telegram and a sheet of blue paper, the latter one of the forms from his investigation department.

"This is a telegram from the chief of police of Steel City," he said. "It came this morning. It says, 'According to your request, we have arrested and are holding Steve Wesson.'—Here." Gillian said graciously. "Read it."

When Emerald had read the telegram, Gillian quoted one sentence from the blue form: "'We have etstablished that Emerald was in Steel City on March 10th, 1918.'"

Looking up from the blue form, Gillian said, "Have you forgotten Steve Wesson, Eggs?"

Emerald, staring, said nothing.

"Very well, Eggs; I'll refresh your memory. He was an old side-kick of yours. You dropped Steve, some time before you became a big shot, but Steve was pretty useful to you in those early days. Steve doesn't like you, Eggs. In fact, he insists that you always were a louse. You may be interested to know that Steve reformed long ago—gave up crime and opened a little cigar store, and has been doing very well indeed. We've had him put into a cell, only for his protection, Eggs. He understands that. Do you?"

Emerald, with frozen eyes on Gillian, would not answer. His face was sullen, forbidding, grim.

"Here are some more facts, Eggs," Gillian went on. "Steve has three fine, respectable witnesses who will gladly testify that you were in Steel City on March 10th, 1918; and that you went to the Universal Express Company office on the afternoon of that day and cashed a three-thousand-dollar check which you had forged. My investigation department has dug up other witnesses who will gladly testify that you arrived in Steel City on March 7th, 1918, in a side-door Pullman—on the bum—borrowed clothes for pulling this little forgery job, and departed for New York on March 11th, 1918, with a roll of bills fat enough to choke a horse."

Gillian paused again, then quickly went on. "It's only too bad that I can't prove that you and Storm deliberately framed Eddie Wogan, to satisfy the express company's thirst for vengeance, to remove forever any threat against your past that might rise to confront you, and to keep me occupied in court while Storm, with your help, grabbed a million for The Moofus. But although I can't prove that, or that you were a big booze racketeer, with plenty of killings to your credit, or that you polluted the milk supply of New York, or that you took part in the New Orleans and Hollywood kidnaping jobs, I *can* prove that you passed that bum check, fifteen years ago. I can send you up for a nice long stretch on that—because it's in the bag, Eggs."

He stopped. Eggs Emerald had entirely lost his splendid rosy color. He had a white look, even in his blue eyes.

"Here," Gillian said, removing a folded document from an inner pocket. "This is

a bench warrant, with the ink hardly dry, issued by Judge Mayberry, authorizing your arrest on that old job of forgery. Now, do I get one million dollars for the new children's hospital for tearing this up, or do I call a cop and have it served?"

CHAPTER X.

WINDFALL.

WHILE talking, Gillian had opened the shiny little red box at his elbow and removed the beautiful, gleaming revolver which it contained. He pointed this at Eggs Emerald.

"You dirty, lousy, blackmailing son—!" Mr. Emerald began.

Gillian leaned forward and pressed a button on his desk. Miss Walsh opened the door. She took in the tableau and uttered a little shriek.

"Heavens!" she cried. "What are you doing, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Teaching my latest lizard a new trick," he answered. "Telephone for a policeman, Miss Walsh."

"Wait a minute!" Eggs cried.

Miss Walsh withdrew, closing the door.

Emerald panted, "Look here, Hazeltine! I'll write the check!"

"Of course you'll write the check!"

"Then call off that cop!"

"The cop," Gillian said gently, "is only going to take you to jail for a few days, until your check is honored. You will be released the instant the million is paid. And part of our agreement, of course, is that The Moofus must be returned to Tessie Tinch this evening."

"I'll attend to that," the racketeer said hastily.

When the policeman had come and taken Mr. Emerald away, to be booked on a suspicion charge, Gillian called the Greenfield *Times* and asked for Josh Hammersley, who enjoyed the distinction of being the last of that vanishing race, star reporters.

"Josh," Gillian said, "I have a story for you. Eggs Emerald has just given his entire fortune—one million dollars—for the new children's hospital. I would like to see you play this up for all it's worth."

"Are you telling me?" Josh roared.

This attended to, Gillian telephoned Silky Davis at his brewery. Then he went home.

HE found his green-eyed, red-headed wife in their bedroom, powdering her nose before her dressing table, in last-minute preparations for dinner.

He said, "Vee, it gives me the greatest pleasure to add this little contribution to your building fund."

He placed the million-dollar check on the dressing table. She glanced at it, stared, and gave a squeal. Then she jumped up and stared at him.

"Gillian! What does this mean?"

"Our friend Eggs," he said, "is leaving town shortly. He wanted to contribute this to the cause before he left."

Vee continued to stare at him. "Ah," she said. "I know. You blackmailed him!"

"More than that," he confessed, "I have aided in the compounding of a felony. I have permitted a criminal to escape the jaws of justice!"

He explained just what he had done. He told her the inside story of Eddie Wogan's trial, of the Polo Club party, of the disappearance of The Moofus, of his mad chase along the black paint trail after Tessie Tinch.

Vee interrupted. "Darling, are you asking me to believe that you shot a fishline in half?"

"My dear," Gillian said, "when I was in Nevada, this spring, I fired six shots at a man, and missed him every time. And so for the past month—and longer—I have been visiting a shooting gallery at four-thirty every afternoon, shooting at a string suspending a silver dollar. Any one who could shoot through the string got the dollar." He swelled his chest with pride. "Only yesterday, the man who runs the shooting gallery paid me ten dollars to keep away!"

"My hero!" Vee breathed.

"Tessie will receive her Million Dollar Mooïus this evening," he continued. "I regret that, once again, Storm has escaped his just deserts. I might have nabbed him; I might have let Tessie pay that ransom money, then waited for Storm to begin spending his share of the plunder. The number of every bill is on record at the bank. But it was too great a chance. It was safer to strike while the iron was hot. And it was better to smash Eggs Emerald forever."

"But he'll be free in a few days!" Vee wailed.

"I took the matter of his punishment into my own hands," Gillian explained. "To-morrow's papers will carry the story of his magnificent contribution. And Silky Davis is now spreading the story to the great American underworld of precisely what has happened to Eggs Emerald. The underworld will laugh itself sick. And when the underworld begins to laugh at one of its big shots—a rattlesnake has been de-fanged. He's through. He's washed up.—From now on, Eggs Emerald is a bum!"

There was a discreet tapping at the bedroom door. It was Toro, Gillian's Japanese houseman. He had an envelope in his hand. In his impeccable English, Toro said:

"A messenger boy just left this for you, Mr. Hazeltine."

Gillian took the envelope, which had been addressed to him in purple ink, in a graceful, old-fashioned hand.

He tore it open and removed a sheet of paper, folded once. Three slips of paper were enclosed, one green, one white, one blue. The note had been penned in what was once described as a fine Spencerian hand.

My dear Mr. Hazeltine:

To clear up any doubts which may exist in your mind, I assure you that I was quite innocent of the crime of which I was charged. I believe you will be delighted to know that I am buying a farm in Michigan and that I intend to spend the rest of my life there. At my advanced age I have learned that crime does not pay. Forty-two convictions can't be wrong!

With highest regards,

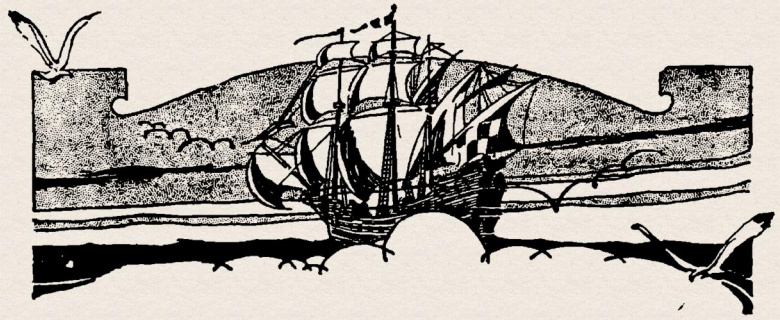
Ever your admirer,

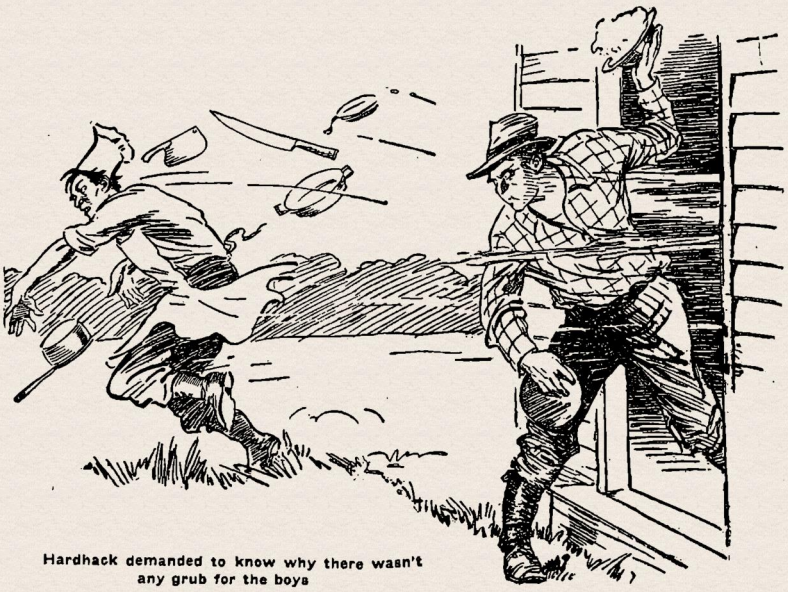
EDWARD WOGAN.

Gillian examined the three slips of paper which were enclosed with the note. He sat down on the bed and began to laugh.

Each was a check. Each was written to the order of Gillian Hazeltine. Each was for one billion dollars. They were signed, respectively, by Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, and J. Pierpont Morgan!

THE END





Hardhack demanded to know why there wasn't any grub for the boys

The Sharkskin Mitten

By H. H. MATTESON

When a would-be bridegroom in the Aleutian Islands gets the mitten from his girl, he tries to pass it on to his rival

THE Coast Guard ship's engines had suddenly ceased their throbbing. My Japanese ward boy came knocking at the door of my quarters.

"Please, Mister Doctor," he said, "some one wig-wagging a signal with a burning stick. It says, 'Send quick the doctor ashore, and the ship's chaplain. Hurry!'"

Never knowing what one may encounter in these remote, seldom visited Aleutian Islands, I directed the Jap to fetch the three emergency kits to the sea ladder. The chaplain, a grave-faced chap, was waiting for me. Presently a fishing dory, manned by a little, wizened old fellow, came alongside, and we got in.

"Something serious," I said to the old man, "that you want us both—the doctor and the preacher?"

The old man was rowing fisherman fashion, standing up and thrusting the oars from him. He paused, held the oars with one hand, pointed into the darkness with the other. I could make out a blur of lights, a trifle to the port side, but fully a mile away. On account of reefs, the deep draught Coast Guard ship dared not come in close.

"That there is the bunk house," said

the old fellow. "Them bloply lights. In that bunk house, to-night— They hain't been no such fight since little David fit Goliar!"

The little man bent again to his sculling, his words punctuated by the oar thrusts. His manner suggested that, to avoid interminable maunderings and divergences, it would be wise to let him tell what he had to say in his own way.

"You see, Doc—and you, Reverend—the Puffin Bird, him coming to our island started disaster. Not that he wasn't welcome, neither. Joe Melcher hefts a hundred and thirty, and he's full of song and laughter. Hence his nickname, 'Puffin Bird,' such being the joyfullest birds in all Alaska way.

"If either of you gents has ever been shore side on Three Skull, our island, you hain't forgot Talis Gordon, the young widder that runs the trading store.

"It's account of her like frequent with women, that the Puffin Bird and Hardhack Emory come to a head-on. It's like a wave dashing agin a rock—Puffin being the wave.

"I and Puffin get pretty friendly, both being menial, and bunking together. He was cook temporary; I'm night watchman, patrolling the cannery, the ship's yard, and everything. I hold our bunk down days, and he sleeps nights. Hardhack Emory is the boss.

"As fer Puffin Bird, he hain't been on our island for long. He owns a fox farm on Thunderbird. He come frequent, and he bought his flour and bacon and *kinootl* tobacco off Talis Gordon. But it's just of late that he camped down permanent.

"It hain't but a week ago that Puffin comes squandering into Talis's store. He sets down. And Talis, being the friendliest, she smiles very kindly at him.

"ON a high shelf, among the sailor's palms and corsets and hymn books, is a new accordion in the box. Puffin Bird, inquiring polite if Talis cares, takes down the accordion. He leans back in his chair, sucks this squeeze-box full of wind. Then he sets hands and heart into a booming deep chord that fetches Talis plunk up agin' the counter. Very soft and earnest, Bird begins singing a little song in the Indian lingo that they both understand.

"Without you, I'm a wind blown leaf that frosts have withered from the tree—"

"Two spots of red begin to burn on Talis's cheeks, Bird tells me, and as Joe sings on them brown eyes gets soft.

"'Why, Puffin,' she says, coming out from behind the counter, 'that's wonderful! Are you just singing in general, or are you chanting that ditty at some mark definite?'—'Definite, at a mark,' says Puffin.

"He raises up, lays down the squeeze-box. He takes her hands in hissen. 'Dast I aim a song where I want it to light?' he says. 'Dast a failure like me sing out his mind and soul to a girl like you?'

"'Failure?' she says surprised. 'You always pay prompt for *kinootl*.'—'Oh, I know,' he says. 'I'm weak. Here I raised up forty fine king and vixen foxes—no finer. I can't sell them kings and vixens. I just can't kill and skin 'em. No. They're pets!'

"'That there hain't failure,' she argues back, prompt and decisive. 'That there is a kind of poverty-struck nobility. It hain't that you're weak, Puffin. You got strength a-plenty.

Only, you give it out to critters that maybe don't count for much but can't put up their own fight.'

"Talis stands looking steady at Puffin, and him at her. Then she busts out bawling.

"She cries louder. Puffin Bird tries to comfort her. 'Leave me cry,' she says, kind of mad. 'It's relief. When a party is carrying a full cargo of grief crying is like pulling the whistle cord when a b'iler is about to bust.'

"'Grief?' says Puffin Bird, looking at Talis, who is so healthy and purty, around at her store worth twenty thousand dollars. 'You got grief?'

"She calms herself down. She stands looking steady at Puffin. Then she speaks, so low that he hain't sure she's talking at him at all. 'Why—why didn't you sing me that ditty song before—before it was too late?'

"Then, Puffin tells me, what crying she done before was only a fringe. Oh, she cries so bitter! 'I'm articled now,' she sobs, 'to marry Hardhack Emory. Why—why did you so long delay the singing of that song?'

"Puffin tells me the shock was like when you're pawing around in a fish box and you grab a water snake. After a minute, he gets aware that Talis is talking to him.

"'The nuptials is soon to be,' she says. 'Day after to-morrow.—Hardhack, after several men has failed, he's the successful suitor.'

"You see, Talis reads a lot into magazines, and she listens over the radium, so she uses strong language. 'The articles are agreed,' she says, 'between I and Hardhack. If I'd only known you was a suitor— If only you'd sang that song before—'

"She blows to a ca'm again, Talis does, and she goes on telling Puffin how Hardhack gets to be the successful suitor. 'Since Henry Gordon dies and leaves me this store,' says Talis, 'many suitors has come forth. To do 'em honest and fair, them suitors in general hain't after the store. No. It's my cooking; it's my fame for cooking *ko-pa-tuk* and bacon that's the lure.'

"This *ko-pa-tuk*, gents, is wild sorrel, fermented like we made sour krout in I-owe-a. Only delicater.

"HARDHACK EMORY is the first man that, in wooing, don't reveal out how what he really wants is a cook. Hardhack, as a suitor, boxes the compass complete. Not only does Hardhack say he don't want no cook, but that follering the nuptials, Talis will eat in the company chuck shack, do bookkeeping at sixty dollars a month, with a hired hand to run the store.

"'In the fluster and surprise of listening to a man that didn't want a cook, Puffin Bird,' Talis says, 'I gave heed to his tender plea.—Why—why, Puffin, did you delay that song so long?' Articles is articles, to Talis Gordon. She holds 'em sacred. The dies is cast; her matrimonial course is laid and charted; the nuptials with Hardhack Emory has got to go fo'ward as on the manifest.

"The third night follering Puffin Bird's singing the wedding is. Though her heart is as distant as the pole from a compass, she'll marry Hardhack Emory or start a seam. Hardhack, being frugal and forehanded, he's arranged to have the big wedding supper in the chuck shack, at company expense.

"The very identical afternoon of the day that Puffin Bird comes singing into the store, Stan Weber, the company cook, gets holt of two tins of vodka and a bottle of bitters. Stan is a ugly

tillicum when in liquor, as cooks usually is. He's fat, too, and snarly.

"Near the bottom of the second tin of vodka, Stan declares he's a avenging angel, and he whacks Chetwoot over the head with the feeding pan. Chetwoot? Oh, he's a pet black bear, raised up on the island since a cub. He weighs six hundred, Chetwoot does, and he eats regular out of a dish pan, at the back of the chuck shack. Chetwoot is finicky; he leans strong to pie and cake, but he scorns stale bread.

"Stan, in liquor, hain't in no notion to compromise with a bear. He slings a dozen old biscuits into Chetwoot's dish. Chetwoot sniffs disdainful, hauls off with a paw, cuffs that dishpan a hawser-length out into the bresh. Unreasonable mad, Stan lopes into the woods, fetches back the pan, belts Chetwoot over the head with it. Chetwoot lets out a woof like a steam salmon cooker had blew up. Chetwoot swings and cuffs off most of Stan's lower jaw.

"They's a cannery tender happens to be in, and they load Weber onto it and start him for the hospital at Dutch Harbor. Which leaves the camp plumb destitute of a cook.

"Puffin Bird tells me that the episode of Chetwoot agin Stan Weber inspires him with a notion. Though his own case with Talis is hopeless, Puffin tells me, he will go into bondage for her sake, and make hisself over into a cook. Hardhack, desperate, don't even ask the Bird if he can cook. Hardhack simply points to the cooking tools and tells Puffin to lay to, that his wages is sixty dollars a month.

"THE first day, what with mommixing up the things he's fed hisself as a bachelor, corn meal mush, bacon, et cetry, Puffin don't do so bad. But he's plumb terrified, Puffin is, when Hardhack sticks his binnacle in the chuck shack door and commands the Bird to construct a wedding cake.

"They hain't no cook book, so Puffin Bird is wild. He seeks my counsel. We got a hand, Ben Thone—he's the same party that wig-wagged the distress signal to you gents tonight—who was in the Navy, in the supply department. In his duffle, as luck will have it, Ben's got one of them little Navy cook books. Puffin Bird snatches onto the cook book and retires to the galley to read and meditate. Puffin Bird lets out a yip. There, into the Navy cook book, is the whole reckoning on how you make a delight wedding cake. Puffin commits the recipe to heart, so he can say it backward.

"The morning of the day set for the nuptials, Puffin Bird gets his first rebuff. He asks Hardhack for four dozen eggs and other stuff out of the store room. Hardhack is terrible stingy. He just moans, Hardhack does, and says it's sinful waste, four dozen eggs. Abashed, little Puffin Bird retires to the chuck shack. He's nervous. He's miserable over losing Talis Gordon. In honor, he feels he's got to build a fitten wedding cake, even if Hardhack does count eggs like they're the jewels of Ophir. Puffin Bird organizes according.

"It's eight bells of the afternoon of the wedding day, me getting up at four o'clock to have my prog, and I go on watch at six. Puffin has got the ingredients of a *hiyu* wedding cake all mommixed up in a tub. As I show in the door, Bird is breaking egg after egg into the tub.

"His face pale and twitching for nervous, Puffin refers to the Navy cook book. He runs out into the bresh, cuts hisself a thumb-size branch three foot

long, tears back and lights into that cake mess with the switch.

"The first swinging belt with that switch, the eggs begin to fly up in Puffin's face and all over the walls, ceiling—everywhere. But he keeps on lambasting away with the stick, saying how the book says to whip in the eggs for a wedding cake delight.

"When the wads is good and gooey, Puffin Bird begins to pour it into pans. Eight pans is made. He shoves them into the oven of the big camp hell box.

"It's chuck time—six o'clock—when I come back. The hands is all lined up, awaiting supper, but they hain't any. Puffin Bird is concentrating exclusive on the wedding delight. So when the hands begin to fret and yelp, Hardhack, mad like always, comes storming into the chuck shack, demanding to know why the *muckamuck* hain't on the table for the boys to set and eat. Puffin Bird just points to the hell box.

"Hardhack, he leans and yanks open the oven door. He grabs his nose, and goes stampeding to the door for air. The smell that rolls out of that oven would stagger a walrus. It's the eggs into the wedding delight. Poor Puffin Bird, terrified when Hardhack wouldn't give him no four dozen eggs, he takes and rows acrost to Flattop and gathers twelve dozen sea gull eggs. To allow for size, Puffin breaks all twelve dozen into the cake.

"You should have saw that cake, gents! Or cakes. They was close to a foot high, all spotted and mottled, swole and bloated, like a Siwash with the smallpox.

"HARDHACK charges back into the chuck shack, snatches up Puffin by the neck and pants, heaves him out into the bresh, slinging stove lids after him, cleavers, butcher knives—everything loose.

"Puffin hits a running, tears right on and into our room in the bunk house. He sets there pale and trembling when I come in. By that time it's seven o'clock. The nuptials is set for eight. Hardhack is all disordered and crazy. The hands is ugly, account of no supper.

"Hardhack, his shoulders humped up like when a man makes up his mind, walks rapid over to the back door of Talis Gordon's living quarters. When he knocks, Talis emerges out. She's purtier than a dolly varden trout fish. Eyes is bright, face is flushed. She's breathing hard, her bosom storming up and down. She's got on most of her wedding gear, but not all. As she stands at the door, open just a crack, she's holding up to her bosom a wad of cloth that's like a lace curtain.

"'What is it, Hardhack?' she asks, plenty cold, for nuptials what is only a hour away. 'I hain't dressed yet. What is it?'

"Hardhack, he's used to giving orders, and having 'em follered on the jump. 'You just got to come acrost to the chuck shack,' he says severe, 'make a wedding cake and cook a take of prog for the hands. That plumb dam eediot, Puffin Bird, that you're so terrible fond of, he made a wedding cake that would unstomach a sulphur-bottom whale!—Come on! And hurry!'

"Oh, I'd snuk up to hear. No one ever pays attention to the night watchman.—Talis, looking out of the crack of the door at Hardhack, why, her eyes was like when you rub match heads in the dark. Kind of like little wisps of curling smoke seemed to emanate on out of them brown eyes of hern. Her face wasn't rosy no more. No. White. And her lips were like the steel edges

of a wolverine trap. She shoots her free hand through the door crack, gives Hardhack a strong push back, slams the door, and locks it.

"Hardhack, looking plenty sore, goes raging back to the chuck shack to take it out on somebody. But he cools hisself down and begins to plead whining can any of the hands make a wedding cake. None can.

"Little before eight o'clock the boat preacher comes warping in. He climbs out of his boat, comes up to the chuck shack looking sick and religious. Hardhack he goes prancing back to Talis's door, knocks and pleads pathetic for Talis to come on out; they'll have the nuptials without no cake or supper.

"No answer. And still no answer.

"Hardhack kicks on the door and yells. He swears. He gives the door one last kick that sent the panels in with a crash. He turns and walks away plumb dejected. At ten o'clock he hands the boat preacher a dollar, slings hisself into his room, and bangs the door shut.

"I talks earnest with Puffin Bird, who's still in our bunk room, all a-shiver. From there I crosses to Talis's place, knocks easy, whispers who it is. Still looking cold as splicing irons, Talis leaves me in. But when I begins to converse real free, she starts to smile. I tell her how poor Puffin Bird, aiming to express his fidelity, his hopeless but still stanch love, had made endeavors to construct a wedding cake for her. Into that cake, the wedding delight, I says, he had broke and whipped twelve dozen sea gull eggs.

"TALIS she falls down onto the edge of her bed and laughs like she'd die. I tells her the ingredients of that wedding delight. I'd heard Puffin muttering 'em so frequent that I knew 'em by heart. Nine pounds of sugar, I tells her, went into the wedding delight, thirty-five pounds of flour, two quarts of molasses, seven pounds of lard, five pounds of currants, seventeen ounces of sody, and so forth. That recipe, like all of-'em in the Navy cook book, was a plenty ration for three hundred hands. I thought Talis would blow her clews.

"From laughing hearty, she goes cold again. 'It is all off with Hardhack Emory,' she says, decisive. 'Off for all time.'

"I'm a little stiff as to j'ints, but I gets up and does a caper. I'm from East to West for the little Puffin Bird. Hardhack has always demeaned me down and domineered at me. He's always sneering how here I am, seventy years old, and only a night watch at thirty dollars a month. When Talis says it's off with Hardhack Emory, a spasm of the Bible goes over me like where it says, 'The heart rejoiceth and is glad.' I begins praising the Puffin Bird, flowery and earnest.

"The soft light comes back into her brown eyes. 'Yes, yes,' she says, her lips soft and red. 'Little Joe Melcher! The Puffin Bird!' I could actual feel her voice, soft and silky, speaking his name. Like when you rub the head of a dog you like.

"'The very first time Hardhack shows up again, I encourages, you give him the mitten.'—'The mitten,' she says, kind of confused. 'What mitten?'

"Talis hain't familiar with the customs of the Corn Belt down in the States. She was born and raised in Juneau. 'When I'm a boy in I-owe-a,' I tells her, 'fifty-fifty-five year ago, when a girl give a feller the bounce for good, why she give him the mitten.—Hardhack will understand,' I says, 'him being born in Indiana.'

"'Then he's going to get it!' she says, determined. 'The mitten!'

"Then she goes on talking about the Puffin Bird. 'Just to think!' she says. 'Out of all the suitors—Hardhack included—Bird is the first not to ask me to cook. Instead, bless his heart, he was trying valiant to cook for me! Bless his heart!'

"THE day follering the defeated nuptials, Hardhack is like raging lions. It's my advice to Puffin to hide out for a spell. Puffin goes acrost the island, hides out in the cave where Chetwoot quills up for the winter. Secret, I pack him over his *muckamuck*. And that grub don't come out of no company kitchen, neither. It's prog that Talis cooks with her own little hands, dispatching tender and consoling messages along with every little brown biscuit.

"The idea of having Bird hide out don't suit Talis. The third day Puffin is in his cave she sends word by me for him to walk out bold and come that very night to supper with her in her quarters. Private, Talis confides in me that does Hardhack molest the Bird further, she'll work personal on Hardhack with Gordon's old siege gun six-shooter.

"I'm just starting to convey off this message to Bird when I hears *muck-lucks* pounding the trail. I squinches down to look and listen. It's Hardhack. It's his first appearance at Talis's house since the episode of the mom-mixed wedding cake. He knocks respectful. Talis opens the door. She don't greet him none, except to point a finger, pistol fashion, and tell him to wait.

"In no time she's back. She hands something through the door to him. 'It's the mitten,' she says, cold and decided. 'That's final.' And she slams the door.

"Hardhack stands staring at the mitten. His face, never kind or human, is now something terrible. He glares at the mitten, turns growling in his throat and heads for the chuck shack.

"Frequent, as you gents know, mud sharks is ketched in the salmon traps. Indian Louie gathers up them sharks, and his *klootchman* strips the hide and makes it into mittens. When a shark skin drives it's all ridges, snags, and hooks—sharp as razors, and as hard. The scow yard hands wear them sharkskin mittens to rake barnacles off scows and ships. Talis buys them mittens off the *klootchman;* sells 'em to the hands. It's one of them knife-cutting sharkskin mittens that she's gave to Hardhack Emory!

"I'M coming back along the trail, fetching Puffin Bird with me. I'm telling him how Talis has got a special kettle of *ko-pa-tuk* with bacon onto the stove for him, and how once a man eats it he's never the same again.

A long arm reaches from the bresh; a hand snags Bird by the throat. Hardhack slings Bird up onto his shoulder, still hanging onto his neck, and goes loping to the bunk house.

"I hain't got no speed in my legs no more. It's maybe a minute or two before I can get to the bunk house, so I can look in at the winder. Hardhack, with the sharkskin mitten on his hand, is chasing Puffin Bird all over the room, striking vicious at Bird's face. Why, a lick of that mitten—it's like you'd blubber a whale with a flensing knife.

"Around they go, Hardhack slashing and Bird dodging. Three, four circles of the room, and Puffin Bird, half the beam and tonnage of Hard-

hack, flashes around sudden and drives a smash into Hardhack's face. Blood comes scuppering out of Hardhack's mouth. He swings the mitten savage, but misses.

"Around and around they go it again. Hardhack has fetched away in the tops. He's crazy. 'She give me the mitten!' he kind of squeals, 'and I'm giving it back to you.' He makes a slash that near cuts off Bird's ear, but in return he gets one in the belly when Puffin ducks and rams his head into Hardhack amidships.

"Puffin Bird is fighting like a cornered wolverine—and I tell you, gents, a wolverine's the fightenest critter that wears hair or hide or feathers. Bird has got Hardhack's face beat to a pulp. Puffin's own face, head, hands, is like a bear had chawed him.

"It's terrible, that fight is. I observes one similar, years ago on Onga Island. One of them kinky, red-haired Irish terriers is fighting a Kodiak bear. Oh, yes. The little red dog dies, final, but he dies with every gleaming tooth sunk to the gums in that bear's throat.

"Around and around they go, Hardhack slashing with the sharkskin mitten and Puffin Bird whipping in his licks, like lightning flashes. They're both streaming blood like a pig-sticking.

"I'm staring in the winder terrified when something moves at my elbow. It's Talis. 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' is all she says. But it's like the moan of the dying, that 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' Then she turns and runs whimpering back to her house. My God, gents, that fight—

"But here we be."

THE old watchman drove the dory up beside the wharf, tossed the painter about a cleat. He led the way over the trail, which divided, the right going to the store, the left to the bunk house. "Has Puffin Bird any relatives whom we should notify?" I asked, turning to the right, in the belief that Talis Gordon would have taken the stricken man to her home.

"This way, Doc," said the old man, plucking my sleeve and turning me to the bunk house. "Puffin hain't the patient; it's Hardhack Emory. Emory is in here. Puffin, Talis has patched him up good; he's in her place.

"LANDING interrupted my narrative a lot. Just as Hardhack, he was ripping off Puffin's shirt, prior to flaying the little man alive with the sharkskin mitten, Talis comes charging out of her house. She runs like the wind. She crashes in the bunk house door. It's like the scream of a cougar when its cub is hurt, the way she shrills at Hardhack Emory. The kettle of boiling hot *ko-pa-tuk* is swinging in her hand. She heaves it in Hardhack's face, and a gob of it goes sizzling down inside Hardhack's flannel shirt, where Bird had tore it down.

"When that steaming mess, sticky like glue, fastens onto his face, his hide down his body, Hardhack runs hog wild, tipping tables, ripping down pictures. He's burned bad, Doc."

The old man opened the door, signed for me to enter. From the open door of a room beyond came moans.

"Listen, Doc. Soon as you get Hardhack patched up and composed down, you come on over to Talis's. She's got a fresh kettle of *ko-pa-tuk* onto the stove. The Reverend will go along over there with me now. He can kind of con the articles, and get hisself organized. The three of us is invited to set and devour down the nuptial feast with Mr. and Mrs. Puffin Bird Joe Melcher."

THE END.

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

DOUBLE COFFIN

TWO young Japanese lovers, unable to marry, ended their lives together in a coffin. The man, who was thirty-seven, was employed in a department store in Yokohama. The girl was a pretty twenty-two-year-old manikin. They went to a friend's house, where each took a sleeping draught, then crawled into the coffin. A hole had been bored in the side of the coffin, and through it a gas tube had been inserted.

A FINGER IN THE PIE

IN the Fifteenth Century, meat was usually placed on the table in a common dish, into which each guest plunged his naked fingers and literally "helped himself." An ancient book of manners gives this admonition: "Don't keep the hand too long feeling about in the dish; don't take too large a piece; don't wipe the fingers on the coat."

THEIR LEGS TASTE!

BUTTERFLIES taste with their legs. Their taste in detecting the sweetness of sugar is sixteen hundred times as sensitive as that of the human tongue.

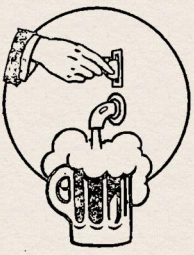
SHOEMAKER ON CRUTCHES

A MAN in Capetown, South Africa, wanted work badly. He had lost one leg in an accident, but on crutches he started out. In ten weeks he reached East London, Cape Province, seven hundred miles away. And since he was a shoemaker by profession, he didn't worry about wearing out his one shoe!

LAZY MOTHER

THE brush turkey, which is found in eastern Australia, has ideas that belong to the machine age. Her eggs the hen buries in decaying vegetation, which produces enough heat to cause incubation. When the chicks are hatched they care for themselves.

QUICK DRINK



IN Buenos Aires, when you go into some restaurants you don't have to wait. Beer and wine may be had by putting a coin in a slot machine, in some of the places where a "quick lunch" is the feature.

MOUTHFUL OF EGGS

CICLID fish are noted for their unselfish devotion to their young, and the parents provide for them what is perhaps the strangest of refuges. The eggs are carried in the parent mouth until they hatch, the parent going without food for three weeks during the incubation period. After that, the young return to the mouths whenever danger threatens, until they attain an age when they are able to fend for themselves.

DIES OF SHOCK

WHEN a freight engine of the Soo Line ploughed off the track and was wrecked in a tangle of rails and ties, an engineer of the Minnesota and International Falls Railroad died of heart failure while watching the wreck from his automobile, a half mile away. Neither the engineer nor the fireman of the wrecked locomotive was hurt.

Snarling, the beast flung itself on the prisoner

Flood

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Brigands of the Unseen," "The Fire Planet," etc.

Her plans complete, the mad empress of the ocean people starts her conquest of the world

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

IN the year 2032, Americans along the Atlantic seaboard noticed that tides were becoming higher and higher. The following year, the Atlantic Ocean began to creep inland; then, with a rush, rivers began to back up and the ocean surged over the land.

Bat Frane, young New York newscaster, received a frantic call from his friend Joe Bautista, who was investigating conditions, in his amphibian, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Joe wanted Bat to join him before diving beneath the waters of the St. Lawrence to investigate rumors of an undersea people.

In Joe's amphibian they went down to a depth of 500 fathoms, and discovered a submarine city, protected by a huge dome. They were captured and taken inside, then transported down through the earth's shell to a strange underground world.

There they were placed with two other prisoners—Mary Allen, Bat's sweetheart, and Mita, a girl of the underworld who had been condemned to death for revolting.

Bat was taken before Rhoa, the woman ruler of the region, and she declared that she would spare his life after she took a fancy to him. The others, she declared, should die. Mary discovered her brother George, whom she had believed to be dead.

And Bat learned the cause of the floods. Rhoa, with strange scientific weapons, was causing earthquakes under the sea. It was

This story began in the Argosy for July 28

her plan to conquer the outer world. Bat, Joe, Mita, Mary and George formed a plan to escape, but there was a sudden hitch in their plans when Mary was ordered before Rhoa.

CHAPTER VIII *(Continued).*

FLOOD IN THE CASTLE.

BAT and Joe both were gripping George.

Bat gasped, "You know best what we should do. You know this accursed place."

"I'll go after her," George decided. "All of you stay here."

"But listen," protested Joe. "Suppose the Gian guards—"

"If they come you'll have to run for it. Take the apparatus—get into the tunnel I've started. I explained how the things work, Joe. You and Bat can handle them."

He started off, but Bat clutched at him.

"I'm going with you."

"Don't be a fool. You stay here. I can pose as Ghoul—go anywhere—"

"I'm going," Bat declared. Mita called softly to him, but he ignored it. In the corridor he argued again with George.

"I'm going—I won't leave Mary up there."

"You don't have to, you idiot! I won't be discovered. I'll get her down here."

"I'll go with you; hide upstairs. If there is a fight I'll be there to help. Or I can give myself up. Rhoa will take me out with her. I'd rather do that if she's going to take Mary."

Insane to stand arguing like this. George yielded abruptly. He whispered again to the anxious Joe; he closed the door softly upon him and Mita; fastened it. He and Bat started back. Along the corridors, up the inclines. They tried to plan. Bat would hide. George, impersonating Ghoul, would go and find out where Mary was.

They had reached the corridor of the upper story. George whispered.

"I'll show you where to hide."

But they both stood transfixed. There came a rush of padding footsteps; the blur of a gray shape bounding forward; an eager, whining growl. The oblong gray body struck Bat full. He felt a stab of pain as the animal's horn ripped through his sleeve and tore the flesh of his arm.

Grewsome beast! Its hot, fetid breath was on Bat's face as it reared, pawing, its head askant as it tried to sink its teeth into Bat's throat. He heard George shouting a gruff command; but the animal ignored it. The weight flung Bat backward; the corridor wall saved him from falling. His hands clutched the doglike neck.

And now George had sprung to Bat's defense. George's knife—which he had been hiding under Ghoul's gaudy jacket—ripped into the animal's side. It lunged, breaking Bat's hold on its neck; it screamed. Another half minute, and Bat and George together had it down; Bat throttling it, George stabbing until presently they stood over it, watching it writhe, weltering. And the thought flashed to Bat: this commotion; George had shouted—the animal had screamed with such a piercing shriek.

Bat said swiftly, "We must get away from here—"

TOO late! The figure of Rhoa, gray, imperious, jeweled statue, stood in the corridor behind them. Two huge Gian women leaped upon George, wresting the knife from

him. And others seized Bat. And there was Mary's voice:

"Bat, George, don't — don't fight them! You'll be killed!"

And Rhoa's ironic drawl: "So? You play part of a fool so naturally, George Allen. Even me, you tricked. And you—escaping me, Bat Frane? That would be bad, indeed. Come, all of you."

They were dragged to the roof-top. Rhoa's plans had changed. She was leaving now. The last of the Gians were on board this last of the air-cars. And Rhoa had abruptly decided to take Mary. A weakness, that she should be afraid to have this little woman rival near her and Bat? Some such idea must have been in her mind. And obviously she knew nothing of the planned escape of Joe and Mita. She was leaving them in the subterranean cell to die.

She said now, "You, George Allen, go on board the car. You will I attend to later."

"Ghoul is imprisoned below," George said. "There is no need for him to die."

"So? Why did you not kill him? He was in your way. Let him die—he no longer amuses me."

She waved George to the air-car. She seized Bat and Mary.

"Stay here with me. I shall show you just a little of my power. This is the end of this castle—it has served its purpose."

At the parapet of the roof a Gian woman stood with a cubical black metal projector. Rhoa seized it.

"Now you shall see—"

Dim, silent scene here from the roof-top. The flowered trees of the garden were wholly below this level. Looking over their tops the little mound-houses and crooked streets were visible. Deserted little inner city; beyond it was the towering hundred foot dyke-wall, with the sullen surface of the flood-water up near its top.

Rhoa aimed the projector; slid a lever of its firing mechanism. There was a low hum. A vague gray beam leaped out, so like this subterranean dimness that it was scarcely visible; but Bat could discern where it struck the dyke-top and clung with a six-foot circle. A moment...Then Rhoa snapped it off. At the wall there was the faint sound of a hiss; a puff like colored fire and Bat saw a brief radiance and a rising swirl of gas-fumes.

Amazing chemistry — this swift transition of rock and mortar into dissipating gases. At the dyke-top there was now a six foot crescent segment gouged from the upper rim. And the water, hissing from the heat, spilled through it.

AGAIN Rhoa fired. A large gouge, lower, down. The water sprang through like the spouting jet of a spillway. And in a moment the wall between the two holes broke away. A single rent now, with a cascade of water, lashed white. Bat could hear the tearing wall, mingled with the splash of the water. Rocks breaking inward. A ten-foot area burst through. Then another; a minute, with the jagged edges of the breaks holding, then swept away with the rush of the widening torrent. A five-hundred foot segment of the dyke crumbled from top to bottom, all in another minute. With a giant roar the hundred foot wall of water came surging; spreading in every direction; filling the little streets; grinding and tearing at the houses; splintering, breaking them—then rising to bury them.

The flood was over the castle gar-

den now. Ten feet of water. Then twenty. It poured into all the lower doors and windows of the castle. Bat and Mary stood staring. The lower castle floors—all the corridors and rooms—would in a minute or two be flooded. That subterranean cell of Joe and Mita—would they be able to escape from it? Bat could imagine Joe now, hearing the water coming. If only Joe would have the sense to take his apparatus and escape as George had directed. Melt his way down, under the flood and up again. If he and Mita could do that before the water overtook them—

Bat heard Rhoa saying, "Nothing can stop it now, Bat Frane."

Nothing indeed! And in just such a fashion as this, Bat knew, Rhoa had started the world cataclysm. A rift—like the rift of this dyke—spreading of its own momentum so that nothing could stop it.

There was only surging, litter-strewn water all around the castle, half way up its height, when a few minutes later Rhoa shoved Bat and Mary onto the air-car.

Again that subterranean air-flight. An hour or more of weird and dark flying underground, over a different route this time. Doomed realm! Bat caught only vague, detached glimpses of it—patches of lurid distant volcanic fires—areas of inundation—roars of distant, rending cataracts.

Then they landed at the base of an upslanting tunnel. Artificial, this ascending corridor. Fairly straight here, with all its inner surface melted, fused and then congealed. Rhoa's melting beam—a gigantic projector undoubtedly—had created this passage. The fumes of burned gases still lingered; but not enough to require the helmets of artificial air.

It was a long upward climb on foot, with changing air-pressure and quality. And at last the party emerged into the upper world. Night was here now. Bat found that they were upon a mountain-top, with familiar gray clouds and a starry sky. A mountain-top, strewn with a Gian encampment.

On a rocky ledge Bat and Mary stood with Rhoa! Amazing this wide gray vista! Rhoa stood with a smile plucking at her lips. Bat and Mary gasped. Was this their familiar world—this gray and turgid watery desolation!

CHAPTER IX.

WORLD EMBATTLED.

THE night of May 10th, 2033, when Bat Frane and Joseph Bautista flew an amphibian from Gaspé and disappeared into the Saguenay deep; and Mary Allen vanished from her home on the heights of Quebec City—this night of May 10th and 11th brought a chaos to the Atlantic seaboard of North America unprecedented in the history of civilization. Communications were down over the entire coastal area by midnight. No one could more than guess what was transpiring save in the tiny locality he personally could envisage. There were millions of dead that night—more in those first hours than in any others, for the thing came with the suddenness of an earthquake.

The Atlantic Ocean—during May 10th and 11th—from Labrador to the southern Caribbean, inundated all the lowlands. In a day, a changed map. The Atlantic Coastal Plain, back to the Appalachians, now was a sodden mass of turgid water, strewn with an appalling wreckage, dotted with pro-

jecting headstones of what so brief a time before had been the proud structures of man's handicraft.

The Gulf Coastal Plain, north to the Ozarks, was almost the same. Florida showed only as a few little islands, with swirling water between them, dotted with the tops of taller pines. The West Indies shrank to blobs which had been the mountain heights. A blanket of water was over the Bermudas, leaving only the little signal-hills, crowded with people like a vessel's crew who had mounted to the masts as their craft sank under them.

No one could say how high the ocean rose in those first hours of the 10th and the 11th. Nor was it ever determinable, for it was so different in so many places; and so many factors influenced it. On the North American mainland, backing rivers flooded all their drainage area and made greater flood. Lakes broke their enclosing banks and surged away. Disturbed weather brought wild, crazy winds, lowering the inundating flood waters in some places, and raising them in others. Torrential rains swept areas where seldom such rains had ever before been known.

There were, that night of May 10th, weirdly gigantic ocean currents, with sources in and near the Gulf of St. Lawrence, sweeping north and east and south—so gigantic that the little Gulf Stream was tossed away and lost. Europe and South America had no real disaster until the 11th and 12th. But theirs, for all their warning, was greater. Roaring storms lashed the onrushing ocean torrents into monstrous waves, gathering speed and momentum and size as they progressed—like rolling snowballs, moderate at the top of the hill, gigantic at the bottom.

The 12th and 13th brought to Europe, Africa and South America tidal storms and a sweeping wall of water that carried everything moveable before it, pounding and tearing at mountains, surging into valleys and over plains; scattering cities; seeking in a myriad paths the places where it could find its level. The Isthmus of Panama, save only its mountains, was swept away—a spillway poured into the Pacific.

The flow and ebb of the normal moon-tides were hardly distinguishable these days, except that in some places far up in what had been a valley or an interior marshland, and now was a sodden, litter-strewn lake, there seemed a pausing at the low-tide time, followed always by a greater inward rush.

A week of the flood, and still there was no abating. Always a rise . . . water encroaching upon the land . . . the land-map of the world so weirdly, steadily shrinking.

NO one could say when the breaks occurred in the floor of the Pacific. Perhaps it was about the 18th—and doubtless the location was about 40° N. Latitude, and a Longitude nearly midway between San Francisco and Yokohama. The Pacific American Coast, the Japanese Islands, the Province of China, and all eastern Asia almost simultaneously were swept by monstrous tidal waves. The sea pounded now, far up the American Sierra Nevada Range and the Cascade Mountains, spilling through in places to make a lake of the great inner basin, beyond which were the heights of the Rockies.

The narrow, but city-strewn Pacific Coastal Plain, now was gone. A new seacoast everywhere in the world. What a vast pounding of wreckage against these new shores! Mangled,

scattered cities, sucked out to sea, flung back.

From Arctic and Antarctic, great ice-masses came surging down; melted; or were swirled back to the icy-regions again by the crazy ocean maelstroms.

About the 18th also, the internal fires of the Earth began manifesting their disturbance. Adding to the abnormality of the wind and rain-storms, now came volcanic activity everywhere in the world. In Australia, Japan and Hawaii, a few major volcanic eruptions; and from every other known crater, premonitory rumbling, smoke and uplifting volcanic ash. And there were earthquakes, largely under the floor of the Pacific. Outraged nature, in countless diversified ways, seemed seeking the progressive destruction of the world. By the 18th, all effort at normal civilized government was a farce. Nations were things of the past, political memory. This, now, merely was a throng of embattled humans, struggling to keep alive. Yet a semblance of the past order remained —the organization by which civilized man conducted his existence still tried to function. Police air-cars flew from one mountain range and upland plateau to another, guiding the fugitives. The government which had been at Washington still tried to call itself a government, issuing its advices, its commands, from the little mountain town where now it was established in western Oregon. The western plateau of the Department of the United States—and all the Rocky Mountain region, was jammed into chaos by the influx of millions of refugees.

WHAT an amazing resource mankind could show when faced with a battle for life! In the highlands, upon a sunny day when by chance there was no air-storm, the crowded, busy scenes had all the aspect of a boom of upbuilding. An influx of air-cars of every manner and form—governmental, commercial, private. Land-transportation jammed, with every conveyance in use. Building beginning. Swift, crude shelters at first. But larger structures were planned. New cities to be built . . . New values created, so that many men shoved through the milling crowds beaming with anticipatory thoughts of riches . . .

This in the American highlands. But the Andes, the Alps—everywhere the same . . . Amazing resourcefulness. In the fertile plains of the plateaus, farmers great and small were planning the planting of food-crops to the limit of every inch. In the highlands, optimism ran rife. The hunger and want of to-day's chaos would soon be appeased. If only now the accursed sea would stop rising. A new world would emerge from the panics and the chaos—a world wholly different—but greater than the old.

This, the highlands. But still there were uncounted millions who were dead; and uncounted other millions struggling at the new and changing shores. And they too had their optimism, born more of despair than of hope. Families clinging to their wrecked and flooded dwellings at the edge of a rising upland lake; others floating upon great pontoon rafts, hastily built; a hundred on some, a thousand on others; living in tents of canvas; and fed daily by governmental planes coming down from the highlands. Other thousands trapped in the tops of tall buildings of the flooded cities which a week ago had been miles from the sea—trapped and waiting for rescue; or starving and finding rafts of

floating wreckage, abandoning themselves to a voyage on the flood, to seek what now might be the shore. By the 20th, surface ships which by some miracle were still afloat, were everywhere gathering desperate survivors. The land-trains upon new schedules and upon sections of their tracks well back from the sea, were regularly transporting food and passengers. The large air-liners, upon wholly different routes and stopping places, resumed mail, food and passenger transportation from one distant world-point to another.

The birth of a new world. If only the water would stop rising. It seemed, by the 20th, that volcanic activity and air-storms were subsiding. World communications now were in a little measure being re-established. The news was optimistic. By the 22d, normal moon-tides were beginning to be apparent. The worst was reached! The oceans no longer were rising. The newscasters, on the 25th, were blaring it. There were no newscasters to be heard at the wrecked shores; but in the highlands the people were triumphant.

With what singular optimism may one look at the wreckage of his neighbor's home and say, "This is the worst that can happen to us."

And during all this chaos, another menace had come. It was discovered on the night of the 14th. Puzzling. But who, then, had time to give it more than the briefest of notice? By the 16th it was recognized as a menace; and on the 17th it was frightening. But only to those in its immediate locality and to government officials was it known.

No newscaster was allowed to mention it; and only by rumor did the news of it spread.

The menace of Rhoa and the Gians. . . .

CHAPTER X.

HUMAN MOLES.

DR. ALLEN stayed on the Heights of Upper Quebec City during the 10th and 11th. By then, there was no remaining semblance of the old St. Lawrence. An island-dotted lake swirled over all this region. It slowly rose to the top of the razorback ridge. The refugees here were being taken away throughout the daylight hours of the 11th; and that night, with other officials, Dr. Allen went to a town on higher ground back of Montreal, which became the self-styled centralization of what had been the government of Quebec.

Still Dr. Allen was the dominant little fighter; inspiring with his tireless effort, his patient application to the new and confusing multiplicity of details. The shrunken Province of Quebec must go on; as few as possible of its people must die; this new tidal lake must be made to yield food; industry must be resumed. If only the water would find and hold a level, whatever that level might be.

Outwardly this was the same Dr. Allen of former times. But there was within his spirit now the sense of a great loneliness. Mary was lost to him now. Like so many others, this flood had claimed his daughter. His wife—passed on ten years ago. Then George mysteriously to vanish. And now Mary . . . Nothing of old Dr. Allen would now remain to hold a place in this new world he was struggling to help.

The manifestations of the menace of the Gians were brought very quickly to

Dr. Allen's attention. Quebec's officials looked to him for guidance; and as the days passed and news of the menace grew and spread to what remained of the world's governments, Dr. Allen headed their inquiry and their efforts to gage this new enemy.

It was at first not recognized for what it proved to be. There must have been strange radiances moving up the hillsides of the Saguenay during the night of the 10th and 11th. But no one reported them. Then, on the 12th, strange lights and things moving upon Capes Eternity and Trinity were seen by many passing air-craft. And there was a police-ship which descended to investigate further. But it must have been wrecked, for it never came back.

By day, nothing was to be seen. But the next night there were lights again. It was said that on the night of the 14th and 15th, strange, weird looking air-cars were seen flying over the Laurentian Mountains, north of the inundated Lake St. Clair region. But no one, except possibly Dr. Allen, could believe it.

After that, Trinity and Eternity were seemingly normal, save for the lashing, rising lake at their feet. On the 15th the Gian encampment was seen and recognized for what it was. Strange humans. Strange mechanisms —dwellings—weapons, whatever they might be. They were strung along a Laurentian mountain range north and west of Lake St. Clair. The normal settlements and refugees which had been there, now were gone. And it was said by those who ought to know, that the configurations of some of the smaller hilltops had been altered.

A stretch of several miles, now so strangely inhabited! A harmless enemy? The government of the Anglo-Saxon Alliance, which had moved from London to the heights of Switzerland, optimistically r e m o t e from Canada, doubted if it was an enemy at all.

A fleet of air-craft went from the Appalachian highlands to investigate. Harmless enemy? Dr. Allen, in a small government air-car, was within telescopic sight. The investigating fleet vanished into a puff of radiant smoke!

HARMLESS enemy? On the 16th, a fleet of strangely fashioned air-craft flew low by night over a section of the crowded Appalachian highlands — came from the north, swiftly descending, wheeling, and rising again. Survivors near by described it clearly. Blurred gray spreading beams of light—like a spreading searchlight fogged by a smoked lens. As though a Titan's blow-torch had seared the mountain-tops, trees and houses and people were gone; the rocky ground itself was scarred and hollowed into fused and blackened trenches.

Rhoa's first attack. A demonstration of her menace, to terrorize this already terror-stricken world. And the world, these days, could do nothing to protect itself. Warcraft of every nature either were wrecked, or disorganized, frantically working individually as carriers of fugitives and food. The region of flood-water, mountains, and the air-lanes around the Gian encampment over a circle of a hundred mile diameter was deserted by the 17th.

This was the night Bat, Mary and George came up with Rhoa. But the world could not know that. It only knew that this diabolical enemy was quiescent now.

Then, two nights later, to Dr. Allen came news of an occurrence more

startling than anything which had preceded it. The menace of Rhoa, to Dr. Allen, and thence immediately to the world governments, now was made plain; the nature of this enemy—this woman ruler—now was told. Impending death and destruction to finish what the flood might leave undone! The diabolic starting of this cataclysm of nature was the work of this human enemy! And mingled with it came a singular joy to Dr. Allen. Mary was alive! George was alive! Prisoners, doubtless, of this gray-skinned, Satanic empress; but probably as yet unharmed. That indeed was something worth fighting for.

The news came, this night of the 19th and 20th, from a settlement in the Laurentian Mountains considerably northeast of Lake St. Clair. A radiance had been seen streaming up from the rocky ground in the outskirts of the town. Then a puff of smoke; and where rocks had been, a jagged, eight-foot wide trench lay smoking. It proved to be the slanting exit of a tunnel; and out of it two human figures presently came climbing. The people who had gathered set upon the figures—might have killed them, for the news of the Gian encampment made every one in Quebec Province fearful of anything they could not understand; but one of the figures shouted in English—then in French.

A man and a girl. Strange wayfarers! The man, young, dark-haired, not very tall; his leather flying garments mud-stained and torn; his shoes ragged and all but falling from his bloody, swollen feet; his black hair, wet and mud-plastered; his face gaunt, hollow-cheeked under a dark stubble of beard. His whole aspect that of exhaustion.

And the girl was in similar plight. And even more strange of aspect. A little, frail thing; ill now, but trying to smile at the jabbering throng around her—shielding her eyes from the torchlights which were not very powerful, but yet seemed to dazzle her.

Joe and Mita. They were very soon taken to Dr. Allen; and he and a dozen officials listened to Joe's amazing words. Things incredible—but not incredible either, for all the events of this world cataclysm proved them true.

FANTASTIC upward journey of Joe and Mita! Down in that castle room they had heard the inrush of water. Into the tunnel which George had started they hastened with the first of the flood bursting through the castle corridors.

To Joe that trip was at once a horror and an amazement. Hooded with air-helmets, he and Mita operated the two projectors—the search-beam flinging ahead over its thousand-foot range to disclose rock strata, empty subterranean grottoes — or flooding water-caverns. And then the melting ray to tunnel in the direction they found best to travel.

Human moles! The compass points of the upper world surface had been given Joe, by George. An instrument, a three-dimensional-style compass, kept Joe oriented. Simple enough! But there was never in his after years a memory of those days without a shudder. The black, eight-foot advancing hole which was their tunnel, up the slope of which they could plod, helmeted, with the gases rushing past them to escape behind them. An hour of this. A rest. Then on again . . .

If it had all been so simple! But there were times when they broke into grottoes; and with a respite from the

projectors and air - helmets, they climbed the natural subterranean passages; trying always to maintain their upward course.

Or again, they struck a grotto which the search-beam had showed to be air-filled; but which, as they trudged it, suddenly inundated with water, so that only by a seeming miracle had they drilled out of it. And once the same thing happened with fire.

A succession of catastrophes, after the first few hours. A rush of oil, unheralded. An avalanche in a great black grotto. An explosion in their tunnel when the rush of gases trapped them and burst the tunnel, burying Joe and Mita so that for hours they must have lain unconscious; and awakened, choked, to find the air helmets needing renewal.

Thirst. The drinking water which George, skilled in this boring, had considered ample to last them to the upper surface, was wholly inadequate. A trip perhaps of ten or fifteen miles. Was it only that far? Had they slanted steep and straight up to the Laurentian range? George said that this Gian city lay surprisingly close under the level of the Saguenay deep—miles eastward, but no more than 50,000 feet lower. But Joe and Mita had wandered and climbed many times ten miles.

Then Mita became ill, exhausted. Through lateral grottoes with the search-beam disclosing water overhead to bar their upward passage, Joe struggled on, carrying the apparatus and all but carrying Mita.

RHOA'S menace now was understood. The world governments listened to Dr. Allen, and decided that forces must be mobilized to attack this irrational enemy. Irrational, indeed! How could a woman, with a force of ten thousand, twenty—a hundred thousand of her kind, think that she could conquer the civilized world! Yet they had seen evidence of her power; every air-vessel which had ventured into the neighborhood of the Gian encampment had vanished. And her night attack upon the Appalachians! The nature of at least one of her weapons was now known—this Joseph Bautista had brought one up with him. One, undoubtedly very small—and useless, since its stored electronic current was all but exhausted; and no scientist of the civilised world could renew it.

This irrational, diabolic woman! Why, with a weapon like this, a single air-car and a handful of followers, she could devastate the world! And that she might do it, with no logical purpose, no one could doubt.

A man, wracked upon a bed of pain, hardly notices that his head is aching. Under normal circumstances the presence of this dark and sinister enemy would have caused a world apprehension verging upon panic. But this was a flooded world fighting for its life against the wrath of nature. Rhoa's menace was an added disaster, with which it seemed almost impossible to cope; and could add very little to the terror with which the world already was numbed.

And the oceans still were rising. Then came the verified reports that the flood had reached its height and was holding at this new level. The new world. So much less land; so much more water. But every hour, every day now, brought a lessening of the chaos. Millions of plans being executed by millions of people. A new order of everything being established. In a year there would be quietude again. Civilization would march onward.

With optimism came at once a greater fear of Rhoa. But these Gians in their Laurentian stronghold had made no further move. Another week passed, since the arrival of Joe and Mita. Had not some move against this enemy better be made? Should not at least an effort be made to communicate with her? A fleet of surface-vessel warships of ancient design was anchored in the ocean flats near what had been New York City. In the Appalachian highlands, warplanes, armed and ready, now were gathering. In the Andes, and the highlands of Central Europe, others would come if they were needed.

It seemed that Rhoa's inactivity was horribly sinister. The weather from the 20th to the 27th was a succession of gray-dark days. The Gian encampment, surrounded by a wide, inundated area of gray-brown, debris-strewn water, was only dimly visible from the remote distance to which planes dared approach. And by night there was only a glow of lights.

THEN Rhoa made a move! At dawn on the 27th—another gray day, darkly sullen and windless—a ten-foot metal globe was seen bobbing on the turgid surface of the lake. From telescopic distance it was watched. It seemed not to be powered, floating aimlessly in the swirling currents.

And on its top was a small metal mast, flying a white flag. A communication from Rhoa? In a few hours Dr. Allen and other officials came by air to inspect it. The thing had first been seen some ten miles from the inundated forest shore on the slope of the mountains of the Gian encampment. But now it had drifted farther away.

For a time, cautiously distant, Dr. Allen watched it. Was this some diabolic, irrational trick? Would the thing explode and kill him if he approached it? Or would it fling a beam to dissolve him into nothingness? Or would its magnetic beam seize him, in the fashion which Joseph Bautista described the amphibian had been seized?

At last Dr. Allen's plane dared to land on the water near the white-flagged globe. By its interior light through bull's-eye panes, two human figures were visible. One of them gestured, shouted, but the words could not be heard.

Then the globe was seized and opened. Weird figures. A young man, small, clad in grotesque, vivid array, his skin seemingly leprous with patches of gray and normal pink; his hair tousled; his eyebrows, which had been dyed red, wearing off now to their normal color. And a girl, small, brown-haired, dressed in a leather flying costume.

THEY were George and Mary Allen. Unharmed. Emissaries now from Rhoa, they came bringing her commands to the world. And they were to go back the following day—and Dr. Allen must go with them—to discuss the affair with the Great Woman, and to assure her that what she demanded would be done.

"But it's crazy," one of the Quebec officials gasped. "This woman is demented. We will do no such thing."

But her threat: "In a night I will melt the cities and the people of your Rocky Mountain heights into nothingness—"

A Gian air-car, more fleet even than was a stratosphere liner when it tried to fly the heavy lower air-stratas—such a Gian craft, heading west with a spreading beam beneath it, would trail a black and fused and empty mile-wide

trench, like a Titan sword-slash from here to the Pacific; or twisting like a coiled, mammoth python over the thronged Rocky Mountains!

And she would do it, smilingly unemotional; and then calmly ask the world if it had had enough, and now would bend to her will.

Dr. Allen said, "What we need is time. A day or two. Europe must send us aid. A ring of our air forces—her marauding car couldn't break through them. Or a stratosphere liner could keep pace, high above her. Drop bombs upon her."

George protested, "A war like that, father—"

"Or a stratosphere bombing plane, sixty thousand feet over her encampment—"

"She has a beam with a range of more than sixty thousand feet," George said.

"Then let her try it—and see if she could hit us before our bombs fell upon her."

Unthinkable, warfare like this! In his heart Dr. Allen knew it. He said, "What the London government will decide we don't know. We need time—I'll go meet her, George. At least the argument will give us time."

The meeting was to be upon the flood waters, not far from where the white-flagged globe had been picked up. It was late afternoon of the 28th when, in their small sea-flyer, Dr. Allen, George and Mary took the air. Unarmed, as Rhoa had directed. Twenty miles away official craft were gathered, with telescopes trained to watch.

The Allen craft, alone on the débris-strewn water, settled to the surface, waiting — its white flag flying at its peak to identify it. Through the gray haze of the sullen, windless afternoon there were dim spots of radiance showing along the jagged, thousand foot high ridge where for ten miles or so Rhoa's encampment was spread.

And presently her advancing air-car was visible, with a white flag over its forward turret — strangely fashioned flyer, with a pointed, luminous snout dissolving the air; and from the vessel's sides the luminous gas-jets streaming backward.

It came circling high. It passed in a sweeping crescent a thousand feet above the little bobbing Allen sea-car. But why did it not come down? It headed away, pointing back from whence it had come.

What amazing thing was this? Another of Rhoa's weapons. At the opened window of his bobbing little air-car Dr. Allen, with Mary and George clutching at him, stood and gazed upward.

Incredible thing, happening now!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE DEATH.

DR. ALLEN and all his fellow officials had said that Rhoa was demented. But was she? How could a woman like this, even with a hundred thousand of her kind, think to conquer the civilized world? But she had shown how she could do it—bring widespread death before even a concerted effort could be made against her. Demented? What would she do with the world when she had brought it to subjection? But the details of that George had told clearly — so clearly that there could be no mistaking the woman's plans.

From Rhoa herself Bat already had heard what she intended to do with this new world. Demented? That thought came also to Bat as he listened to her

slow, quiet voice, with its lilting twist of English phrase and its habitual ironic tinge. And he had gazed into the dark glowing pools of her eyes and wondered if in truth that was madness he saw lurking there.

But was young Alexander mad, planning what he would do with the vast domain which was to lie at his feet? Was Napoleon a madman? Was the Iron Chancellor, Bismarck, dreaming dreams born only of irrationality when he envisaged his iron heel, stamping?

Was it madness, or greatness? Or both, so that history terms it madness if it fails, and greatness if it succeeds!

And Bat, sitting alone with Rhoa and one other Gian woman in a draped and furnished little cave of the Laurentian mountain top, listened to her plans.

"I shall order them first to take all their people from the Rocky Mountain heights so that I may move my Gians in there."

She had before her a crude map of the Department of the United States, which George had drawn a year ago. "I shall take possession first of this region—" She indicated Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and westward. "This, of course, Bat Frane, will be free of the flood waters. The beginning of my new Gian empire. I want none of your upper world races anywhere near it. George has told me what sort of land is there. Fertile plains to grow my food. You have enough industrial cities there—and mines. I will use at the start a very small portion of them—the others can rot. I shall not need them."

Madness? But she had all the fundamental details so clearly envisaged! She sat toying with her jewels; her perfume enveloping Bat; her darkly smiling gaze upon him. And her voice was so calmly confident.

In this evacuation of all the Western United States which she ordered, at a single specified point twenty thousand men were to remain.

"Men like you, Bat Frane. Are there indeed twenty thousand to be had? Or, if not, then those of a tallness and strength as great as can be found."

The beginning of a new empire—a new race—the Upper World Gians. These puffed and sullen Gian men could be taught as workers in the fields, or in the mines. A new stock, from twenty thousand tall and strong, pink-skinned men to join with these gray giant matriarchs in the creation of a new race. A few generations and they would spread gradually over all the Earth surface.

Rhoa said, "The weaker, smaller people of your races gradually I will kill." Her smile still held. "No need now to tell them that. They will discover it later. The Gian race only to remain! The new giants, Bat Frane. George, years ago, created the word Gian to term us, because it sounds like giant. A giant new race. That is something to work for, not so? And you and I will live over many generations to see it."

BAT now found the other Gian woman smiling at him with contemplative gaze. Her name was Ata. She asked permission to speak.

"We bring very few Gian children up here. You notice? Rhoa has this planned so carefully. We bring only large female children."

Amazing plan . . . But that Rhoa and the thousands of Gian women like her would carry it through Bat could not doubt.

The days passed. Rhoa was bringing up the last of her forces, organizing her encampment here, assembling her air-cars and her weapons. Another of the weapons now became familiar to Bat. And then Rhoa calmly told him what she intended for Mary—her final decision. The deaths of Mary and George and Dr. Allen. Why not? It would be amusing. And they would have served their purpose. George and Mary would take the details of Rhoa's commands to the world; and then come back, trustingly, and be killed. Dr. Allen's death also would be a good thing. George had often characterized his father to Rhoa. He was no more than a little fire-fountain, Rhoa felt. But he could be dangerous—leading the world's great officials into a troublesome resistance. His death, and the deaths of Mary and George, would shock the world into realizing that Rhoa would stop at nothing.

Bat listened. Perhaps there was upon his face such a despairing desperation that Rhoa for a moment feared him. She said calmly,

"So? You will not like seeing this? You need not. I will spare you. I shall lock you up until it is over."

The woman Ata led him away, locking him in the cave-cell which some days before had been prepared for him. At intervals Ata came with his food. She was willing to talk, far more so than when in the presence of Rhoa. She told him how the floating globe had by night been launched with George and Mary and its white flag; and how it had been picked up. To-morrow a little trusting air-car would come with George, Mary and Dr. Allen. Rhoa was confident they would not dare disobey her. They expected to meet her; to discuss her further commands. And then they would die, with Rhoa standing here on a peak of her mountain-top watching the comedy. And after that she would reiterate her commands, and no emissaries need come to discuss them with her.

Ata said proudly, "I take the weapon, Bat Frane. I bring death to them, that Rhoa may stand and laugh."

Her inscrutable gaze on Bat seemed abruptly to be predatory. She added, with lowered voice,

"Too bad you here—not to see me do it with such skill that I have."

The words and the woman's look made Bat's heart leap wildly. But he held himself firm. He said, casually, ironically:

"Yes. Too bad, isn't it?"

WILD thoughts leaped at him. But with them was the caution: Take your time . . . Think this over...plan carefully...

Alone in his cell that night he did not sleep—planning with desperate purpose—gaging every word that he would say to Ata, every look that he would give her.

Undoubtedly, when she came to attend him that next morning she suspected nothing of his purpose. Her woman's vanity was blinding her so that she dared to take this chance that she would be discovered and that Rhoa's wrath would fall upon her.

There was a chance of that—but Bat's careful words seemed to minimize it. Ata would be gone hardly an hour. The thing, by all the laws of reason, would not be discovered; Rhoa's mind would not be upon Bat; she would stand, as she said, on the little crag that topped the mountain's summit, watching her macabre comedy.

The long air-car with its gas-streams and its luminous bowsprit left the Gian encampment late that afternoon when

the flat gray daylight was slowly fading into the deeper purpled twilight of the coming night. Far out and down on the surface of the flood-waters was the little blob which was the sea-car bearing Dr. Allen, George and Mary. A crew of five Gian women and several men were in the hull-rooms of the Gian aero; two others, with Ata, were in the turret, with the controls and the weapon which Rhoa had chosen for this mission.

And unseen in the turret, Bat was hidden, smuggled successfully on board by Ata so that only she and her sniveling, frightened brother knew that Bat was here. In the brother's cloak he had come, crouching as he walked, with Ata stalking imperiously beside him; and the little Gian man now was hiding in Bat's cave-cell, praying that discovery and Rhoa's anger would not descend upon him while Bat and Ata were gone.

From where he crouched back of a bank of instruments in the turret, Bat could see the three tall gray women, Ata in a seat at the control levers, peering through the opened forward windows of the turret, the two other women beside her, with hands on her shoulders. This, Bat knew, would not for long be to Ata's liking—these women companions here, and the man forced to remain hidden. She had told Bat that she would contrive to be alone with him in the turret.

The minutes passed. Bat could not see out the vizor openings. He could hear only the throb of the craft's mechanisms and the subdued voices of the women, talking in their own language, so that he could understand none of it. Slightly behind them, and a trifle higher than their heads, a shelf extended the full width of the turret. Ten small projectors were there, ranged side by side, the muzzles of their lenses pointing through the top of the forward window. Wires connected them in series; and other wires crossed the ceiling of the turret to the six-foot transformer and battery which was here beside where Bat was crouching. Gigantic weapon. Ata had explained that only one of the projectors was needed for this mission; she would not fire the others.

Bat waited, breathless. It seemed that Ata would never get rid of the other two women. Every moment now he feared that she might leave the controls and turn to the aiming and firing mechanism of the projectors. What would he do then? Leap upon this transformer and try to wreck it before the women killed him?

But now Ata was gesturing, and frowning, with gruff words. Her two companions seemed not pleased. Whatever argument or command she used Bat never knew; but presently the women turned and left the turret by its single small door, descending an interior companionway into the hull.

ATA and Bat were alone. The woman locked the controls and advanced to Bat's hiding place. And she said softly,

"You come out now, Bat Frane. You sit by me and watch."

He rose to confront her and she put her hands on his shoulders. His heart seemed choking him in his throat. This moment for which he had waited so long, planned so carefully, had come.

Ata was saying, "No man may see the skill of a woman fighting without love for her springing in his heart. You see me now, Bat Frane—Ata the powerful—"

He had backed a little toward the door; she did not notice that with his

hands behind him he had fastened it—a metal, thick-paneled thing; the Gians down below would have trouble breaking it.

He said, breathless, "You have left the ship to guide itself."

Her hands dropped from his shoulders. "For few moments that is all right. Come, look—we are almos' ready."

She turned away from him. Fatuous giantess. But her every instinct, he knew, was clouding her reason. A man daring to be anything but subservient—impossible! He knew that the thought now, in her mood of triumph, never could occur to her. She was moving a foot or two ahead of him, toward the controls.

And Bat leaped. His weight flung her against the wall. There was a moment when she stood limp, with so great an amazement flooding her that all her wits were gone. And then she resisted, for an instant with frowning tolerance; then frenzied anger, then terror.

For a woman she was strong, but no match for the powerful Bat. His hand clapped over her mouth to suppress her angry outcry. From her belt he snatched a long, thin-bladed knife. She twisted around to face him, her breast heaving, her eyes distended now with anger and fear.

He muttered swiftly, "If you cry out I'll kill you. I mean it—you don't know anything about a man like me. Stronger than you are—and just as ready to kill."

Perhaps she had never known real terror before. Bat's brain was telling him: Hurry! Hurry! This craft is flying unguided!

Ata stood panting, still amazed for all her terror. But she did not cry out; and she hardly thought to resist as with a length of wire from his pocket Bat swiftly wrapped her wrists together behind her. And then her ankles; and with an oblong of fabric gagged her mouth. Her eyes were still wide with amazement as he picked her up like a great bundle and laid her on the floor-grid beside the turret wall.

He warned, "Don't move! You may not get killed, Ata! One of the few—"

Through a wall-vent he heard the voices of the crew shouting from below. He sprang to the controls. The air-car was nearly at a thousand foot altitude, but lurching now into a downward, sidewise swing so that the crew below were shouting to Ata in alarm. The little blob of Dr. Allen's car was on the surface almost underneath this Gian aero. To one side, far away, the purpling heights of Rhoa's encampment were etched against the sky.

A wild triumph was upon Bat as he pulled the control levers. A little experimenting; but he had questioned Ata so closely, and this was not so different from the normal flying at which he was skilled.

THE ship leveled and swung. The heights of the Gian encampment were ahead—the vessel flying toward it. A hundred miles an hour? Two hundred? At least that, and every moment those purpling heights were growing in visual size—yielding new details with their nearness. The little blob of the Allen sea-car was gone out of sight behind and underneath . . . They were safe.

The Gians below were shouting again. Let them shout. They probably couldn't alter the vessel's course. Not in these few minutes, anyway. They could shut off the power. Let them. Or try to break down the turret door when finally they realized what was

transpiring. Let them do it. He only needed a minute or two. Nothing could stop him now.

A flood of wild, triumphant thoughts came to Bat as he headed for the Gian encampment; again locked the controls, and turned to the aiming and firing mechanisms at his side, under the projectors over his head.

Ten projectors in series, each with a spreading, invisible beam. Only a minute needed for this! The projectors hummed as the current went into them. So easy to aim them; he recalled Rhoa's proud explanation of this weapon.

The ten projectors were vibrant now; awakened from quiescent sleep into murderous life. They were aimed, eager, ready.

Bat pulled the firing lever. He stood panting, swaying, peering . . . This thing, beginning so vaguely that he was scarce aware of it; but in a few seconds spreading, amazingly diversifying—the purple-gray, sullen scene outside, of flood-waters, mountains and sky so swiftly changing . . . The Gian encampment—stricken . . .

This white death . . . Bat could at first hardly see the ten spreading beams.

There was merely, for the first few seconds, the lateral glow of them as they spread and mingled one with the other and bathed the ten-mile length of the Gian mountains with their dim white radiance.

Bat saw a white film like a mist in the air, swirling, lurching into a giant maelstrom of fog. The windless twilight was springing into life. Air leaped into the turret window—air with a frost-touch, like an icy finger brushing Bat as it passed. The Gian aero lurched a little, but Bat righted it, and again was peering, flinging the ten projectors now to the limit of their power.

The Gian mountains ahead were fairly near now. Hardly a mile away, and every second closer. Through the frosty, swirling air-fog Bat saw the sullen gray flood-surface whitening, crinkling into a spread like broken glass. And he could hear the tinkling, the crackling of it.

But not glass! Ice forming! A film of ice on the surface, congealing water so swiftly expanding that it rose up into myriads of tiny ridges, breaking one over the other—like thin, shattering glass.

A film of ice. But in a few seconds it was thickening—turning from blue-white to the opaque whitness of solid ice-floes, so instantly formed that they rose and tumbled one upon the other, seeking space for their expansion.

CONGEALING flood! It ground and tore, with muffled, rending crashes of upheaving ice-masses, rearing themselves and dropping back like things alive. The air was crackling now; congealing moisture snapping as though with tiny white sparks. Frost swirling in a crazy wind.

The numbed and cold Bat suddenly was aware of his own danger. He flung the vizor planes closed, all but the slit overhead through which the beams of this white death were leaping. And he snapped on the heating mechanism of the turret which Ata had described. The Gians below were shouting and pounding in a frenzy now. Let them shout and pound.

In these additional seconds, what a changed scene was outside now! The nearing mountains were turning white. Great masses of snowflakes whirled in a wild maelstrom, thick almost as a solid white shroud. The snow and frost

and moisture solidified into hail, fell as though dumped from a great trench—and then abruptly ceased. The air clarified, and Bat could see the white mountains much more clearly; and the frozen, tumbled sea at their base, and the sullen, turgid sky overhead.

There had been movement—brief, frenzied, terrified movement—in the Gian encampment. Human figures running. The spreading beams—close perhaps to absolute zero of coldness—had clung steadily to the mountains. Stricken human figures. Some of them perhaps had run and escaped underground. Some stood, congealing into white statues, covered so quickly by the swirling snow.

Others ran, and fell, numbed, dead and buried in the snow-shroud all in an instant.

Encampment now of death. Congealed, transfixed—huge tableau so swiftly stricken that in all its attitudes it still preserved the aspect of action. Figures on the ground, already snow-bloated with little mounds piled upon them. Standing whitened figures; some alone—some in small groups so lifelike that they seemed statues sculptured with an amazing perfection.

Rhoa! Bat saw her suddenly. The gelid shell which had been Rhoa, poised alone on a central pinnacle of the mountain summit. It still stood there. The snow-whitened, gray-marble statue of this Empress Satanic; jeweled; with every ridge and fold of the flowing garments congealed into a simulation of life.

Snow swirled around the statue. Wind plucked at it, but still it stood on its base of ice where the jeweled, sandaled bare feet were planted in a snowdrift. Then Bat saw it sway. So lifelike, as though now at last it were forced to yield to death's frigid, snatching fingers . . . It swayed; toppled; then fell and crashed.

CHAPTER XII.

"YOU SHALL HAVE MOONLIGHT."

THE New Era of the Lesser World. It was popularly termed that when the oceans held level and the death, destruction and chaos gradually subsided. The Lesser World. Less in land, in riches, but not less in its dogged determination to rebuild, to reorganize civilization upon this new basis—to go always forward into greater achievements.

The menace of the flood, by the end of that tumultuous month, was gone. Scientists began to predict that gradually the waters would subside to their former levels. Or perhaps not; what difference, so that they came no higher. There was still land enough—the resourcefulness of science could be very economical with land.

And the menace of the Gians was gone. Science, it seemed, would be thrust onward in many directions by what was learned from the brief contact with this strange underworld race. On the frozen mountain-top, so quickly thawing that gray and sullen afternoon when Bat's weapon was withdrawn, many of the Gian mechanisms were found intact and presently restored to workable condition. Rhoa's melting beam—called now the N-ray—would yield great discoveries in the subterranean world. That world presently would be investigated. Undoubtedly there were many living humans still down there.

And there were a few Gians here in the surface world now. A few who, in tunnels near the mountain-top, had fled downward at the coming of the cold;

met flood and fire, and struggled up again to yield themselves to the people of the world of light.

And there was Ata, and the other Gians upon Bat's aero. In the wind-tossed air he had swung away from the frozen mountain, the congealed, tumbled sea. The ten projectors had exhausted their current; the crew in the hull rooms, one or two of them pounding at the turrent door, had thought that Ata was doing this, stricken with madness. It had happened so quickly that they scarce had time to think of action. Then Bat, coming out with a rush into warmer air and liquid flood-waters, had landed the air-car; dove overboard; swam; until Dr. Allen picked him up; and the distant watching police cars came and captured the Gian aero and its crew.

Gians for scientists to study. They would have eagerly studied Mita also —survivor of still another race, all dead now perhaps in the subterranean cataclysm—she who had lived so long in the dark that daylight blinded her. But there was no law which could force Joseph Bautista to yield her to such an ordeal.

"The sunlight will blind me, Joe."

"Then you shall have moonlight, little Mita. And mountains and a river —whatever you want that I can give, you shall have."

Joe fulfilled that promise. They lived, hidden away from prying, scientific eyes, with only Bat, Mary and George—and occasionally Dr. Allen, when he promised to forget his science —coming to visit them.

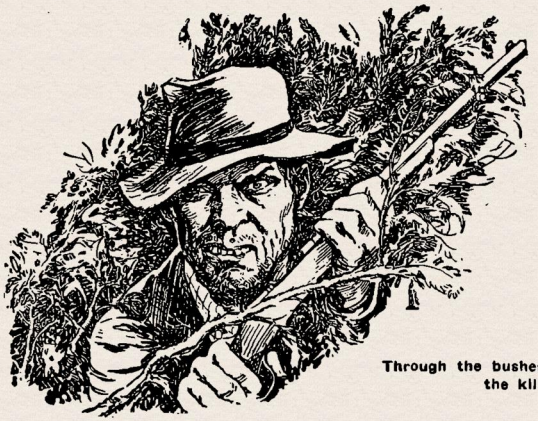
By day Mita was so heavily goggled that one could scarce believe how strangely, wistfully beautiful she was. But at night, like a moonflower, she blossomed.

Occasionally the practical Bat and Mary—so normally cast into the mold of the practical modern world—would sit at a little distance watching Joe and Mita.

There was such a night when Joe sat singing, and, like a little elfin sprite of the woodland, Mita danced around him, her figure edged with moonlight, her long white tresses and filmy draperies flying . . .

The prosaic Bat and Mary, touched with the fairy finger of romance, moved closer together. And the thought came to them that the machine-made world, rolling along the iron rails of progress, might well dally a little like this, by the wayside.

THE END



Through the bushes pushed Ahab the killer

The Tin Watch

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

Mountaineer John Ahab could bully and murder people, but he couldn't bully Fate

THE poster was nailed to a hemlock tree that stood near the confluence of the sparkling little streams, Laurel Fork and Dead Horse Creek, and it was new. One thousand dollars would be paid to the person or persons who furnished information that would lead to the capture of John Ahab, giant mountaineer outlaw. At the bottom of the poster, George Garland, sheriff, had signed his name.

With a snarled oath, John Ahab put up a great hand and tore the sheet off the tree. He crumpled and pocketed it. There were bitter, vengeful shadows in his black eyes. His black-bearded face was granite-hard.

"I'll mebbe have a chanst to cram this yar down that sheriff's throat," he muttered, with another snarled oath.

He turned into the laurels, heading toward the home of the one relative he had in the Smoky Bald Mountain section. Dog-tired was Ahab now. George Garland was determined to rid his county's back half of the robber-killer scourge, and had been on his trail day and night, hadn't even given him a chance to sleep. And yet, his weariness notwithstanding, the giant Ahab walked with a spring to his step, and carried his Winchester rifle as lightly as though it were a straw.

Doodlebug Truby, scraggly-bearded lout, sat in the sunlit doorway of his cabin and whittled lazily on a new ax handle. His barefoot, slatternly wife barked an order to the effect that he'd have to look after the baby for awhile. He drawled over a thin shoulder:

"I air busy yar, Hat. Set the young'un on the flo' and put some m'lasses on hits fingers and give hit a feather to play with."

She did that. Then out of the tail of his eye Truby saw movement in the near-by woods. A ten-year-old boy, barefoot and pitifully ragged, stepped into the open. Adorning the waistband of his trousers was a toy watch and chain, and no king or queen ever prized a royal diadem more than this lad prized that cheap toy. His father, dead some months now, had given it to him. Bill Larmer had tripped and fallen and shot himself accidentally, people said.

Doodlebug Truby laughed when the boy drew up short before him and, placing two fingers across his lips, big-man fashion, spat make-believe tobacco juice. The old keeper of the store down at the crossroads "settlement" was profligate with his penny sticks of licorice, sometimes.

"Hi, Doodle," very soberly piped the youthful newcomer.

"Hi, Little Bit," said Truby, twinkling eyes on the yellowish hair that grew through a hole in the lad's battered straw hat like a tuft of wire-grass. "Whut time air hit by yo' watch and chain?"

Little Bit Larmer did not answer. He blurted: "Mammy whupped me, Doodle! I air mad abouten hit, too, fer bekaze hit warn't right, her a-whuppin' me thataway. But I never bellered none. No sirree. Nary bit, I never."

"Say, looky yar, kid." Doodlebug Truby frowned. "Jane Larmer, yo' mammy, she air a good womern. She wouldn't never whup ye fer jist nothin'. What war hit you done?"

The caller expectorated licorice importantly, and pursed his thin lips. "Yistiddy," he said, "John Ahab he comes along and takes every martal speck o' the eatin's we got. He'd done hit a heap o' times befo', too. I kep' a-thinkin' how mean that war, and so this mawnin' I lit in and cussed, i-god."

Truby scratched a lean jaw and scowled. Robbing the poorest widow on Smoky Bald of food was a thing that stuck in even his craw. Jane Larmer was a soldier. She hunted squirrels and wild hogs for her larder, chopped wood and worked her few, steep, cleared acres like a man. Had John Ahab not been his cousin—but Ahab *was* his cousin, and back in the fastness of Tennessee's dim-blue ranges one is slow to turn traitor to his blood, be it that of killer or saint.

THE big, black-bearded outlaw peered above a bushy cedar half a dozen rods away, and called: "Doodle, come yar to me."

The lout recognized the voice of his kinsman instantly. He dropped the ax handle, rose pocketing his knife, and hastened to the cedar. John Ahab spoke in tones so low that Little Bit Larmer could catch no word of it:

"Want ye to do somethin' fer me, Doodle. Hustle down to the crossroads sto' and listen around, and see ef ye can hear anything abouten whar that damned sheriff air at. I'll be a-waitin' fer ye yar."

"Shore, John," Truby quickly said.

He put out through the woods, half running, rusty cowhide boots clattering over the loose stones. Ahab went on to the cabin, and stalked in with scarcely a glance toward the Larmer boy.

"Somethin' to eat, womern," he demanded of Truby's wife. "And be quick, or I might take a notion to drownd yer young'un thar in the creek."

He jerked a thumb toward the round-eyed baby with the sticky fingers and the feather. Hat Truby forced a pale smile and hurried to the wired-together old castiron cook stove.

Little Bit Larmer sat down in the doorway. He eyed the giant in an odd mixture of curiosity and resentment. Ahab dropped into a crude chair at a crude table, with his Winchester across his knees.

Little Bit could see into the muzzle of the rifle. He moved to the other side of the doorway. John Ahab half turned his great, shaggy head and riveted his piercing dark gaze upon the boy. Little Bit returned the stare.

"I reckon you'un 'ud like to c'lect the reward they air out fer me, wouldn't ye?" growled Ahab.

"Yeuh," frankly said Jane Larmer's son, "I reckon I would. Hit'd pay we'uns back fer all o' them eatin's you stole offen me and mammy."

Ahab laughed. In his laughter there was both ridicule and desperation. His gaze snapped back to Hat Truby. "Hustle, womern! I got to sleep some whilst I'm yar. I air a-cravin' sleep awful, nigh dead fer hit, i-god."

The baby on the floor, weary of everlastingly transferring the feather from one set of molasses-coated fingers to the other, began to cry. Truby's wife appealed to the boy: "Sonny, see cain't you ca'm Elihu. Please!"

The lad took away the pestiferous feather, dug a shiny old suspenders buckle from a trousers pocket and gave it to the baby. Delighted cooing brought a smile to the mother's worn face. Little Bit said:

"I reckon I bettern be a-gettin' back to'rds home now, Hat. Mammy she air lonesome now, i-gonnies, I bet."

"I reckon you'll stay right yar fer awhile," flatly stated John Ahab.

He was taking no chances. The Larmer kid was only a kid, but he had a tongue in his head, and he could talk. The hole in the rifle's barrel seemed very large to the ragged, barefoot boy. He swallowed his treasured cud of licorice, scowled at a stubbed toe, and sank down in the doorway.

The slatternly woman fried out a few slices of salt pork in half frantic haste, and set them, with a whole corn pone and a pitcher of molasses, on the table before the outlaw. The coffee would soon be ready, she told Ahab. The big hillman wolfed the food, demanded more, and got it.

DOODLEBUG TRUBY returned. He was red-faced and panting from a long, hard run. He called Ahab to the stony yard, and spoke fast in a subdued voice. Little Bit, curious, strained his ears in vain.

"I shore found out somethin'," Truby said to Ahab. "I sneaked up to a back window o' the settlement sto', and peeped in keerful. Sheriff George Garland and some depities war inside, and they'uns war a-talkin' all het up to beat thunner. Garland had sent fer mo' depities yit, which he espected in a hour er so. He'd figgered hit out that you'un war headed fer my cabin yar, John, me a-bein' yo' kinfolks, and him and all o' that thar pack o' depities air to close in on you yar from all d'rections at ezzackly fo' o'clock!"

John Ahab swore a string of choice red oaths.

"Well, they'uns won't never ketch me. When they'uns gits yar at fo' o'clock, I'll be hid in the Dead Hoss Creek lorrels. Doodle, I got to sleep some er go plum' bathouse. Wake me up at three o'clock. That'll gimme a hour to git hid in them Dead Hoss Creek lorrels, and hit'll be plenty o' time."

"Might meet a depity on the way," hazarded Truby.

"Ef I do, I'll take keer of him."

Ahab bared his tobacco-yellowed teeth in a wolfish snarl, and indicated the Winchester that he carried as lightly as though it were a straw.

The two went toward the cabin. The Larmer boy rose from the doorway, stepped to the yard, and turned homeward. Ahab spat an order. Truby sprang after Little Bit and caught him.

"I ain't mad at mammy no mo', Doodle," said the lad, soberly. "She'un air lonesome now, I bet."

In response to a little kindly persuasion from Truby, whom he liked, the boy gave in. Ahab stalked into the small back room, flung himself heavily upon a built-in pole bed and soon was asleep and snoring loudly. Doodlebug looked for food then, and found none. He whispered to his wife:

"Take the young 'un with ye, Hat, and go over to Sary Ensley's and ax her to loan us some bacon. I air a-goin' to be hongry, come suppertime. Keep yo' mouth shet tight, rickollect, abouten John Ahab."

"I unnerstan'," muttered his wife. She picked up her offspring, put it astride one hip and left the cabin with relief mirrored in her prematurely old face. Truby gave the boy an ancient cap-and-ball pistol to play with, and the boy, much interested, sat down beside the hearth. Doodlebug dropped lazily to the sunlit doorway, his favorite loungin' place.

All was still now, save for the snoring of John Ahab in the back room and the monotonous droning of mudwasps about the smoke-blackened rafters above. The afternoon wore on, dragging heavily to the lout. He dozed, but it could hardly be said that he fell asleep.

At last Doodlebug Truby got to his feet in the doorway, which now was shaded, and called, not loudly:

"All right, John. Hit air time fer ye to go."

AHAB was wide awake in an instant. He sat up on the bed, yawned and stretched his mighty arms, swore and got to his feet. Just as he reached for his Winchester, the barrel of another Winchester appeared in a small window at his left—and from the other end of the weapon there came sharply the voice of Sheriff George Garland.

"Put your hands up, Ahab!"

The giant outlaw glared. He'd slept too long. The hand nearest the window went upward obediently, but the other hand darted inside his shirt and came back gripping a revolver.

Barely in time the officer pressed the trigger.

Deputies were swarming about the place now. Two of them followed Garland into the cabin and to the door of the small back room.

Little Bit Larmer stood with ashen-faced Doodlebug Truby beside the fireplace in the larger room, and stared wonderingly.

"Air he dead, sheriff?" Truby asked.

Garland faced about. "Yes, he's dead. Lived by the rifle, and died the same way. He was a relative of yours, Truby, and you were afraid of him, so we'll give you no trouble for harboring him."

Just as he finished speaking, Jane Larmer hurried in. She dropped to her knees before her lone, little son and put her arms around him. "I war afeared you'un had runned away," she half wept. "You'll come home wi' mammy now, won't ye? Honey, I hated I had to whup ye!"

Truby's gaze was hard upon Jane Larmer, the soldier woman, whose

poor dress had been patched so much that it resembled a Joseph's coat, so much that little of the original dress remained. Lout that he was, Truby was human. John Ahab, his blood cousin, was dead. He couldn't help John Ahab now. But he could help Jane Larmer, perhaps. He went clumping across the room to the high sheriff, and began to whisper jerkily.

"I war to wake John at three o'clock, so's he'd have a hour to 'scape in. He war dead fer sleep. I 'cided to wake him a little befo' three, and—"

He went on with it. When he was through, George Garland stepped toward Little Bit Larmer and his mother.

"If Truby's suspicions are correct, Mrs. Larmer," said he, "the reward money goes to you. You needn't mind taking it. I never believed your husband shot himself accidentally, as was claimed. Always thought John Ahab did it, but I never could get any proof. I happen to know that Ahab and Bill Larmer didn't like each other."

Jane Larmer blinked. A thousand dollars on Smoky Bald Mountain was the equivalent of millions on Wall Street. Sheriff Garland continued:

"Doodlebug Truby thinks Ahab made a mistake when he wouldn't let Little Bit go home, Mrs. Larmer. You see, the boy didn't know anything at all about Ahab's three-o'clock plan, or my four-o'clock plan. Now, Little Bit, I want to ask you a question, and I'm sure you'll tell me the truth. Did you do anything to the clock while Truby was half asleep in the doorway?"

Bravely the lad admitted that which to him was guilt. As Truby had suspected, he'd turned the clock back, had set the hands of the clock by those of the little tin watch his father had given him.

THE END.

Accident!

SOME of the accident cases which insurance companies have listed seem to prove that life is a dangerous adventure, no matter where you are; and staying at home is apparently more dangerous than flying. Take the case of a man who had an explosion in his office, in which flying glass nearly cost him the sight of one eye. Sunlight streaming through a window had heated an ink bottle and caused it to blow up.

A schoolboy in Georgia had something tickling his ear, and put a pencil in to scratch it. The pencil point broke off and a doctor, probing in an effort to save the ear, found not only the bit of lead, but a large and gaudy butterfly. A girl danced with a young man and a pin in her hair pierced his ear drum, making him deaf.

Scores of people trip over rugs and break their necks; still more fall in bathtubs. Quite a few die of gas or electrocution, especially people who use electric appliances in bathtubs. There is actually a case on record in which a man in a tub received such a shock from a wire that he fell out of the window.

Aviators have been bitten by rattlesnakes on several occasions, while one man was said to have been struck by lightning five times. He died of pneumonia.

Ralph Grant.

Men of Daring

A SELF MADE PRINCE

Sir Gregor MacGregor had truly a kaleidoscopic career--Scottish laird, British General, Venezuelan rebel, sea raider, and founder and ruler of a Central American Kingdom.

SIR GREGOR MAC GREGOR

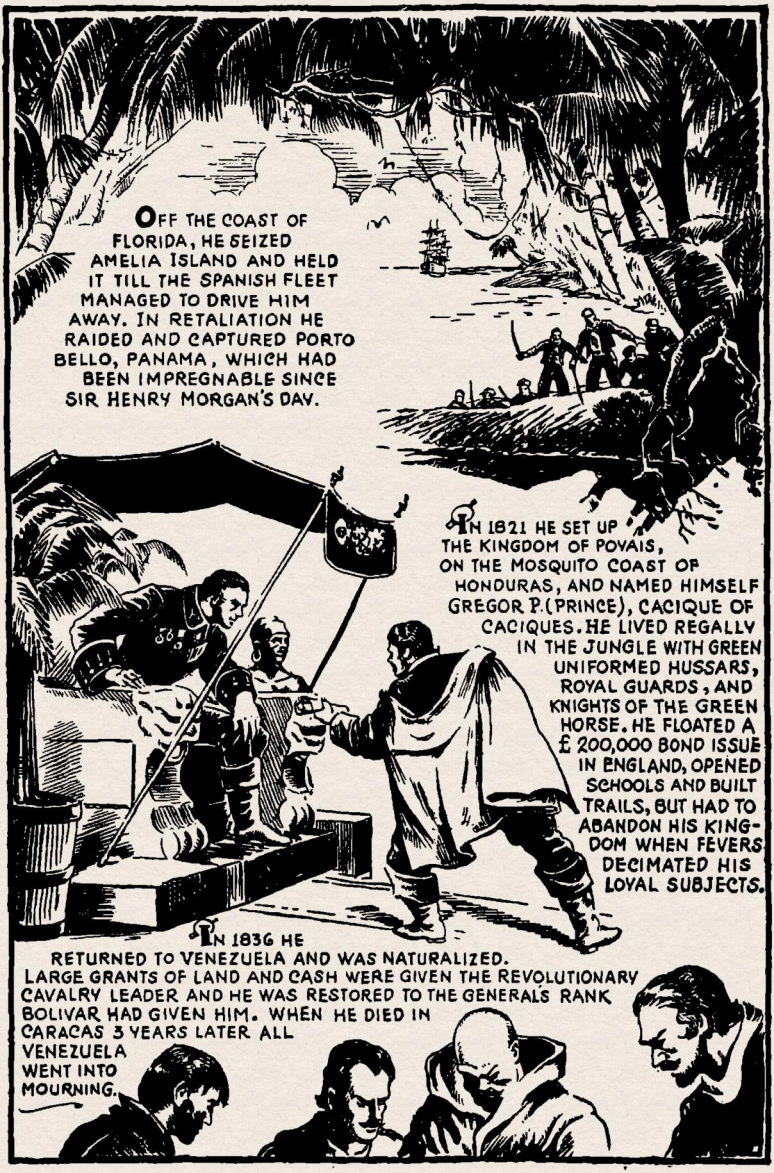
BORN IN 1780 OF A LONG LINE OF MILITARY LEADERS, THIS LAIRD OF INVERARDINE, BREADALBANE, ENTERED THE BRITISH ARMY IN 1800. HE SAW SO MUCH ACTIVE SERVICE THAT HE WAS A GENERAL AT 30.

GOING TO VENEZUELA IN 1811, HE MARRIED THE REIGNING BEAUTY OF CARACAS, JOSEFA LOVERA. THE EARTHQUAKE OF CARACAS IN 1812 DESTROYED THE CITY AND THEIR FORTUNE. TO ESCAPE POVERTY, HE BECAME COLONEL AND ADJUTANT-GENERAL TO THE VENEZUELAN PATRIOT, GEN. MIRANDA.

MAC GREGOR CAMPAIGNED AGAINST THE SPANISH UNDER SIMON BOLIVAR, LIBERATOR OF SOUTH AMERICA. HIS LOYAL WIFE ACCOMPANIED HIM IN THE FIELD AND AT ONE TIME COMMANDED A REGIMENT OF CAVALRY UNDER HER LAIRD. AT JUNCAL HE WON A VICTORY OVER ROYALISTS WHO OUTNUMBERED HIM 5 TO 1.

TAKING A HANDFUL OF MEN TO JOIN REINFORCEMENTS, HE ENCOUNTERED THE MAIN ARMY OF THE ROYALISTS. HE RETREATED TO BARCELONA, BUT INFLICTED SUCH TERRIFIC LOSSES ON HIS FOES THAT VENEZUELA RANG WITH HIS NAME. HE WAS MADE COMMANDING GENERAL OF CAVALRY. BOLIVAR CONFERRED ON HIM THE ORDER LIBERADORES.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week



Next Week: Robert Rockwell, Sky Warrior

The Hated Man

By HULBERT FOOTNER
Author of "Pink-Eye," "The Kidnaping of Mme. Storey," etc.

Mme. Storey's millionaire client was America's most hated man—but who hated him enough to commit murder?

Slowly the body rose to the surface

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

MME. STOREY, detective of international fame, realized she had a dangerous assignment when Horace Laghet, one of the richest and most hated men in America, asked her to board his palatial yacht as he was about to set out on a six months' cruise from New York. Threats had been made against Laghet's life, and he thought that some member of the cruise party was responsible for the plot against him.

Also on the yacht, the Buccaneer, were Mme. Storey's secretary, Bella Brickley; Horace's brother, Adrian; Mrs. Adele Holder; Martin Coade, Horace's secretary; Celia Dale, Horace's young fiancée; Sophie Dale, her mother; Emil Herbert, a young pianist, in love with Celia; and Dr. Frank

This story began in the Argosy for July 14

Tanner, who paid close attention to Mrs. Holder.

Harry Holder, husband of Mrs. Holder, had signed on the ship as a sailor. When he ran amuck one night and tried to kill Horace, the latter threw him overboard. When the crew started to mutiny, Mme. Storey halted the uprising, aided by Les Farman, a member of the crew. Captain Grober and the other officers, suspected by Mme. Storey of planning to take Horace's life, were put in irons, and Farman was put in charge of the ship. Mme. Storey learned that Horace had been using his secretary, Martin Coade, to smuggle diamonds into the country. After several days' cruising in the Caribbean, Horace had succeeded in making practically everybody aboard hate him. The Buccaneer started back toward New York. Bella is telling the story.

CHAPTER XIX *(Continued)*.

THE SECRET OF THE POOL.

MME. STOREY slipped her arm through Horace's and said quietly: "It isn't worth it."

He passed a hand over his face and looked at her stupidly. The spell of his rage was broken. He allowed her to lead him toward the door. As they turned away together, Adele laughed.

Unfortunately, they had to pass Emil to gain the door. The young man's blue eyes were blazing. Horace stopped. "What's biting *you?*" he growled.

"Why don't you hit a man your size?" said Emil.

"By God . . . !" Horace began, doubling his fist.

But Sophie and Celia screamed and, getting in front of Emil, thrust him back violently into a chair. Horace, with a harsh laugh, went out on deck.

Martin, Mme. Storey and I accompanied him down to his own suite. Martin didn't say anything, but waited on him kindly and thoughtfully. In his own sitting room Horace dropped into a chair and pressed his head between his hands. As usual, after his rage had passed, he felt sick.

"Lord!" he groaned. "A little more of this and I'll go stark, staring crazy! There's a conspiracy aboard this ship to drive me mad! I spend my money on these people; I entertain them like princes; and they turn on me and show their teeth like rats!"

Martin fetched him a drink. Mme. Storey stood looking down at him inscrutably. I could guess what her thoughts were. She said:

"You've had a lot to bear. But there's only one day more. Why don't you keep out of the way of these people to-morrow? Stay in your own quarters. As soon as we reach port we'll get a fresh deal all around."

"I believe that's good advice," he muttered. "I'll do it"—he raised dog's eyes to her face—"if you'll come and spend part of the day with me, Rosy."

"Surely," she said. "I'll be glad to."

We left him.

WHEN I awoke next morning the sea was calm and bright. The cold air that blew in through the open port was perfectly delicious. The tropics might be all very well in their way, but I realized that I was a child of the North. A wonderful lightness of heart filled me! The hag-ridden voyage was almost over. To-night I'd sleep at home!

I drew on my bathing suit and threw a dressing gown around me. It was a few minutes before eight. No sound from Mme. Storey's room yet. I ran down the corridor. Only a few steps to the forward companionway, and down two flights to the pool.

My morning swim was the one thing that I completely enjoyed aboard the

Buccaneer. I was always alone at that hour and could make believe that the marvelous pool was truly mine. The black basin with its greenish water lazily following the movement of the ship.

I dipped my toe in the water to test the temperature. It had been warmed; just right. I ran around to the forward end where the springboard was. There was a splash of water on the marble pavement indicating that Horace, as usual, had had his swim before me. I walked out on the springboard, steadied myself, sprang, and went in.

My hands, cleaving the water in front of me, collided with something. I got the sickening feel of cold flesh and my senses reeled. I came to the top gasping and fought my way out of the water. Rolling out on the marble, I stared in horror at the spot where I had gone in. A head slowly rose to the surface, the gray-streaked hair stirring in the water. A contorted face appeared; a limp, naked arm.

Snatching up my dressing gown, I ran. I flew up the two flights of stairs without the least consciousness of any exertion. I made no sound, but it was not because I had self-control. I wanted to scream; my throat ached with the desire to scream; but no sound would come. I banged open the door of our sitting room and fell sprawling on the floor.

"Horace!" I gasped. "Horace! Drowned in the pool!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE AUTOPSY.

HALF an hour later seven of us were gathered at the side of the pool: Mme. Storey, Les Farman, Martin, Sophie, Celia, Emil and I. It took a powerful effort of the will on my part to force me back to that dreadful place, but I knew my employer would need me. I had got a grip on myself by this time. It was only the ghastly shock of colliding with the dead body under water that had knocked me off my balance.

Mme. Storey had spent the intervening time in examining the place alone. I did not know what she might have discovered. Les, aided by a sailor, had drawn the body out of the water and laid it on the marble floor to the left. It was covered with a sheet. Little runnels of water trickled from under the sheet and found their way to the pool. Martin appeared to be a little dazed with shock.

Of all those aboard the yacht, he seemed to be Horace's only sincere mourner.

We huddled around the foot of the stairway as if afraid to venture farther into the place. Adele was not present, which was natural enough, but the absence of Frank Tanner, the ship's doctor, was peculiar. My employer had just sent a steward for the second time to ask him to come.

She and Les were examining the dressing boxes at the far end of the pool. In one of them Horace's dressing gown and slippers had been found. This in itself was noteworthy, because none of us ever troubled to use the boxes, but dropped our things on the nearest bench.

Frank Tanner finally came down the stairs. I don't think the others were aware of it, but Adele was with him. I caught a glimpse of her standing on the stairs above the landing where she could hear all that went on without showing herself.

Tanner was an unpleasant looking young man. He took no trouble to con-

ceal his feelings, but glanced at the sheeted form with a dull malignancy in his protuberant eyes. One almost expected him to kick it.

Mme. Storey came to meet him.

"Doctor," she said, "we must have an autopsy."

"Can't see the necessity," he answered. "The man is obviously drowned. Very likely he was insane. It's the kindest thing you can say about him now."

"A strong swimmer can't drown himself unless he ties his own arms and legs," she answered mildly. "However much he might want to die, his limbs would strike out involuntarily."

"Perhaps Horace had a stroke while he was in the water," ventured Celia timidly.

Everybody welcomed this suggestion.

We had had enough of murder.

"It is possible," said Mme. Storey. "We must have an autopsy to find out."

"I never conducted an autopsy," said Tanner sullenly.

"You must have assisted at many during your student days."

"No," he said sullenly. "Wouldn't know how to begin."

She was patient with him. "I have been present at autopsies, and I can direct you. We must find out if there is water in the lungs."

"I don't recognize your right to give me orders," said Tanner insolently. "You say you had a certain agreement with Horace Laghet. Well, he's dead and that cancels it. I won't touch the body without the authorization of the nearest relative."

Mme. Storey turned to Les. "Has Adrian been notified of what has happened?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"He should be brought here."

LES ran up the stairs. The rest of us waited with fast-beating hearts for the next scene. The room where Adrian was confined was only a few steps from the top of the first flight of stairs, and he presently came running down with a wild expression. Les followed more soberly.

Adrian thrust us violently out of his way and ran to the body. Dropping to his knees beside it, he tenderly drew down the sheet a little way. "Oh, Horace! Horace!" he mourned. "Oh, my brother!" Kneeling there, he covered his face with his hands. It looked rather theatrical to me. His eyes were dry.

Mme. Storey gave him full time to recover himself. "Adrian," she said, "it is obvious that there must be an autopsy to determine the cause of death. The doctor requires your authorization before performing it."

He sprang to his feet. "Autopsy!" he gasped in real or simulated horror. "You mean—cut him up! No!"

"As soon as we reach port there will have to be an autopsy," she said patiently. "The law will require it."

"Well, if they make me consent, I can't help myself!" cried Adrian. "But I will never consent voluntarily. No! No! No!"

"But if there has to be an autopsy anyway, it should be held now," she persisted. "Within the next few hours there will be all sorts of chemical changes within the body. If the truth is to be revealed it must be done now!"

"No!" cried Adrian. "I couldn't bear it! As his nearest relative and his heir, I refuse!"

That little word sent the investigation flying off at a new tangent.

"You're not his heir," said Sophie sharply.

"What do you mean?" demanded Adrian.

"A week ago Horace made a will leaving his residual estate to Celia unconditionally."

There was an astonished cry from the girl: "What! Mother! To *me!* No! No!"

"I can't believe it!" said Adrian.

He was surprised, but less surprised than you might have expected, considering that his whole future depended on Horace's will.

"In other words, I'm a liar!" snarled Sophie. "Well, I'll show you!"

She ran up the stairs, and there was another ghastly pause in the proceedings. Nobody wanted to look at anybody else. Celia was crying in dismay.

"I didn't know anything about this! I don't want his money! I won't take it!...We won't take it, will we, Emil?"

"No!" said Emil stoutly.

Mme. Storey smiled at them fondly. Experience had taught her that this violent antipathy to taking money would be modified later.

"Don't worry about it now," she said. "That can all be arranged."

Presently Sophie came running and stumbling down the stairs with a face of horror. She caught her heel on a step and pitched forward into Les's arms.

"I've been robbed!" she gasped. "The will...it's gone!...Robbed!"

ADRIAN smiled disagreeably. We were all aware of something new in him. All his life he had lived in fear of Horace. Now that Horace was gone, a confidence in himself was beginning to appear. But this did not necessarily prove that he had brought about Horace's death.

"Where was it?" asked Mme. Storey.

"In a drawer of the desk, the safest place I had. The key in my handbag—" Sophie caught sight of Adrian's smile. "You needn't smile like that!" she cried. "You know I'm speaking the truth! You stole the will!"

"How could I steal what I didn't even know existed?" demanded Adrian indignantly.

"I don't know how you knew, but you knew!"

"Funny that the expected beneficiary didn't know," sneered Adrian.

"You pretended to be my friend!" cried Sophie. "You were continually in my room. You had the opportunity! You stole it!"

Mme. Storey looked at me, and held out a little key. I knew what she wanted, and ran upstairs. I heard her saying:

"As it happens, I know what Horace's wishes were, and I can show you all."

I got the copy of the will out of her dispatch case and carried it back to her. When he saw the typewritten paper, Adrian turned a sickly clay color. I judged that he was familiar with the contents because he scarcely listened to the reading. Scowling and biting his fingers, he was planning how to meet this setback. The others listened tensely.

"To my brother, Adrian Barnes Laghet," read Mme. Storey, "I give and bequeath the sum of five hundred thousand dollars. If he has any sense he will create a living trust with this sum in order to prevent himself from squandering his principal."

One could hear Horace's own surly voice in this paragraph. I glanced at

the sheeted form in a kind of terror.

"To my friend, Adele Holder, the sum of fifty thousand dollars." The names of several other ladies followed with varying amounts to each; then: "After deducting the above bequests I hereby devise and bequeath any and all property that I may die possessed of to my fiancée, Celia Dale, provided that the engagement is still in effect at the time of my death. Should the engagement have been broken, the residue of my estate is to go to my said brother, Adrian Laghet."

In the final paragraph Horace directed that Martin Coade and a certain New York trust company were to serve jointly and severally as executors and administrators.

The reading was followed by a moment's silence, broken only by the distressed murmuring of Celia: "No! No! No!"

Finally Adrian asked if he might be permitted to see the paper. Mme. Storey turned it around for him to read.

"What's this line that has been crossed out?" he demanded.

"Horace was good enough to include me among his beneficiaries," said Mme. Storey dryly; "but I declined."

"Humph!" said Adrian. "That thing's no good. It's not signed. It's not written in Horace's hand, but on the typewriter. You couldn't prove that Horace ever saw that paper."

"Well, it would depend on how much credence the court was inclined to put in my testimony. I can swear that Horace handed me that paper, expressly stating at the same time what his wishes were in regard to his estate. My secretary was present and can corroborate what Horace said. Perhaps Martin can add further corroboration."

"I never saw that will before," said Martin, blinking. "If Horace made it out he did so without consulting me. I know nothing about it."

This was a lie, because Horace had told us that he had shown both his wills to Martin.

Mme. Storey shrugged. "Anyhow," she said, "I can promise you that this testament will stand up in court. There will be Sophie's testimony, you see, that the original was stolen from her. There are plenty of precedents for such wills."

Adrian turned away with a sick face. Slinging an arm up against the marble wall, he leaned his head against it. There is no doubt but that this gesture was sincere. Whether he was innocent or guilty, it was staggering to have one of the greatest fortunes in the world snatched away like that. I was surprised that he took it standing.

"TO come back to this question of an autopsy—" said Mme. Storey.

Sophie spoke up quickly: "I won't permit it!"

My employer looked at her.

"You said my will was good, didn't you?" Sophie went on volubly. "I guess that puts it up to me!"

"Your will?" said Mme. Storey. She made believe to glance over the paper. "You are not mentioned here. Celia is the heir."

"I'm her mother."

"She's of age."

"She will do what I tell her!"

"Celia," said Mme. Storey, "you have heard all that has been said. In my opinion an autopsy is necessary. What is your wish?"

The girl answered tremulously: "I want you to do whatever you think is best, Rosika."

"Celia!" cried Sophie angrily.

"Would you turn against me? Before all these people! You know nothig about this woman! She may ruin us!"

"How could she ruin us?" asked the girl simply. "She only wants to find out the truth." To Mme. Storey she went on: "If it is really up to me, I want you to act for me."

"In other words, you constitute me your attorney?"

"I do."

"I forbid it! I forbid it! I forbid it!" cried Sophie.

My employer ignored her. She said to Martin: "As Horace's executor, what do you say?"

What Martin's real feelings were I had no means of telling. He merely blinked. He must have known that if he had refused, Mme. Storey would have gone ahead anyway. He said impassively: "I consent."

To Les, Mme. Storey said in a lowered voice: "Have the body carried to Dr. Tanner's surgery on A deck. If Dr. Tanner refuses to go ahead, I will do what is necessary myself."

"Yes, madam," said Les. He spoke as if this were the most ordinary situation. Among those half hysterical people it was wonderfully reassuring.

"Another thing," said Mme. Storey; "I assume that this tank can be pumped out?"

"Yes, madam."

"How long will it take?"

"A couple of hours."

"Please have it done. My secretary will remain here to make sure that nothing is disturbed or removed until I get back."

"How about him?" asked Les, with a jerk of his head in Adrian's direction.

"Ask him to return to his room until we resume our—er—conference."

"It's unjust!" cried Adrian. "To treat me as my brother's murderer! Oh, Horace! Why, I didn't even have anything to gain by his death!"

"You didn't know that! You didn't know that!" cried Sophie viciously.

"Come on, Mr. Laghet," said Les.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEEDLE.

WITHIN an hour or so, we were all gathered at the edge of the pool again. Adele was there now, sitting on a bench a little apart from the others, with Dr. Tanner standing beside her. The water in the basin was slowly going down. Everybody was covertly watching Mme. Storey's pale, inscrutable face, wondering what secrets it hid. She was conferring with Les in a whisper.

Les went up the stairway, and she turned to us. "The investigation reveals that there is no water in Horace's lungs," she said. "Consequently, he had ceased to breathe before his body entered the pool."

She paused, and one could hear a shuddering breath escape her hearers. She went on dryly:

"Owing to my ignorance and Dr. Tanner's unwillingness, it was impossible to carry the autopsy any further. The water splashed on the edge of the pool shows that Horace fell or was thrown into the pool alongside the diving board. Cases of cerebral hemorrhage or 'strokes,' as they are called, are so rare in men of Horace's good condition I think that explanation should be rejected. Moreover, I have found a microscopic puncture in his leg which leads me to believe that he was poisoned."

There was a silence while the ugly

word sank in. None of us liked to look at the others. Suddenly Adrian cried out:

"If he was poisoned, Sophie did it! Look at her face!"

Sophie's face crimsoned, then turned pale as paper again. She could not control the trembling of her lips.

"It's a lie!" she stammered. "Just a clumsy attempt to divert suspicion from himself!"

"Sophie did it! Sophie did it!" he reiterated. "She was terrified Horace would find out how Celia was carrying on with Emil! It nearly came out last night. She had to act quick before Horace got wise and broke the engagement!"

Celia was aghast at this ugly charge.

"It's a lie!" screamed Sophie. "I know nothing about poisons!...Do I have to submit to this man's horrible insults?" she demanded of us generally.

"I believe in the French fashion of letting everybody talk," said Mme. Storey. "The truth will come out!"

Sophie took refuge in noisy tears. Celia undertook to comfort her, staring over her mother's head with a strained white face. It was a terrible initiation for the inexperienced girl.

"Who was the last to see Horace alive?" asked Mme. Storey. She turned to Martin. "We left him with you about half past eleven o'clock last night."

"I left him a few minutes after you did," said Martin. "He repeated his determination not to leave his rooms the next day."

"Did he say anything about taking a swim?"

"No."

Les returned down the stairs, bringing Beaton, Horace Laghet's valet. Beaton was a little man no longer young, with a keen, good-natured face. Suspicion was never directed against him.

"Beaton," said Mme. Storey, "when did you last see your master?"

"Last night when I was helping him dress for dinner, madam."

"Not after that?"

"I never went in to him at night, madam, unless he rang for me."

"How about this morning?"

"I heard him go by my door just before seven o'clock, madam. That was his usual hour. He would take a few turns on deck before going down to the pool. But I did not see him. I went in to lay out his clothes for the day, according to custom..." Beaton hesitated; and Mme. Storey asked:

"Well, what happened then?"

"About half past seven Mrs. Dale came to the door to ask for him."

EVERY eye turned toward Sophie.

"Well, what of it? What of it?" she demanded defiantly. "I asked for Horace; Beaton told me he had gone down to the pool; and I returned to my room, that's all."

Beaton looked rather strange; and Mme. Storey asked: "Beaton, can you confirm the fact that Mrs. Dale returned to her room?"

"No, madam," said Beaton reluctantly. "She didn't go back to her room. At least, not right away."

"What did I tell you?" cried Adrian.

"I thought it strange she should come to see Mr. Laghet at that hour," Beaton went on, "and I opened the door a crack and watched her. She went along the corridor to the forward companionway and turned out

of sight there. I cannot swear that she went down the companionway, but she did not appear again."

"She went down, all right!" cried Adrian. "She was the last to see Horace alive!"

"I didn't see him," retorted Sophie. "It's true I went down to the pool, but he wasn't there. I looked in the gymnasium and he wasn't there. So I went back to my room."

"After Beaton had told you he was in the pool, didn't it strike you as strange that he wasn't there?" asked Mme. Storey.

"No. This is his yacht. He can go where he pleases on it."

"Did any one see you return to your room?"

"No. Celia was still asleep in her room."

"What was it that you wanted to see Horace about so urgently?" asked Mme. Storey mildly.

"None of your business," retorted Sophie.

"Oh, mother!" murmured Celia, in distress. "We have nothing to hide!"

"Certainly I have nothing to hide! But that woman has no authority over me!"

Mme. Storey glanced at Les Farman. He said calmly:

"Mrs. Dale, I am the master of this ship, and as long as we are at sea I have absolute authority over everybody on board. I am supporting Mme. Storey in this investigation, and I direct you to answer her questions."

"And what if I defy you, too?" snapped Sophie.

He coolly faced her out. "I will lock you up and turn you over to the police when we reach port."

Sophie wilted somewhat. "I don't mind answering any proper question, but I won't be browbeaten!...It's no great matter anyhow. After that ugly scene in the lounge last night, I just wanted to find out how Horace was. It was just a friendly impulse."

"Friendly!" cried Adrian with a wild laugh. "Oh, my God!"

Mme. Storey said to Sophie: "I have one more question to ask you. When Celia told you that she was in love with Emil, why did you tell her that if she kept it secret for a little while everything would come out all right?"

Sophie was taken by surprise. Her eyes rolled in a terrified fashion.

"I didn't...I didn't..." she stammered.

"It is useless to lie," said Mme. Storey deprecatingly. "For Celia told me at the time, and I'm sure you don't want to force her to lie now."

"I was only thinking of her happiness," faltered Sophie. "I would never force my child into a loveless marriage."

Adrian laughed again.

"You and Celia are practically without means, I understand," said Mme. Storey relentlessly. "Emil has made a reputation artistically, but he is far from reaching the point where he can cash in on it. How did you think they were going to live?"

Sophie was stumped.

"That's nobody's business," she muttered.

"Believe me," said Mme. Storey mildly, "it is easier to answer such questions here than it will be in court. For your own sake and for Celia's, I advise you to speak frankly."

SOPHIE appeared to come to a sudden resolution.

"Well, I will!" she said hardily. "When I heard of the plot against Horace's life, and when I saw how he

acted on board, raising up enemies in everybody, I thought it quite unlikely that he would live long. That's why I held him to his promise to make a will in Celia's favor. And that's the sole reason why I told her that if she waited things would probably come out all right."

Celia was shocked by this admission. "Oh, mother!" she murmured.

"From the moment she got that will out of him, Horace was doomed!" cried Adrian. "She was here when he died! I demand that she be locked up!"

Things looked bad for Sophie. She had been caught in several lies. Her nerve failed her. She looked around in a terrified fashion and began to weep helplessly.

"I didn't! I didn't!" she faltered. "Everybody is against me."

"Look at her!" cried Adrian. "She's found out! Lock her up!"

"One moment," said Mme. Storey dryly. "Let us go a little further into this." She turned to me. "Bella, as I understand it, you got down here about ten minutes to eight, or say, a quarter of an hour after Sophie says she left. Did you see any water on the floor except the one splash that you have described?"

"No."

"You told me that you dived into the water. Was the diving board wet?"

I shivered at the thought of that dive.

"No, it was dry," I said.

"That bears out Mrs. Dale's story," she said coolly. "Horace had been in the pool for half an hour before she got here. It is not conceivable that he sat here doing nothing. It was his custom, as you all know, to dive repeatedly from the board. He climbed out by the ladder to the right of the board. Well, if there was no water on that side, and if the board itself was dry, it proves that he never entered the water until he fell, or was pushed in, dead, to the left of the board. That must have been before Sophie got here."

What a change in Adrian's and in Sophie's face when they heard this. Sophie began to weep afresh, but these were tears of relief.

"Oh, Rosika!" she sobbed. "I thought you were against me!"

"I am neither for nor against anybody here," said Mme. Storey mildly. "I just want to get to the bottom of this business."

Sophie quickly dried her tears, and turned to Adrian truculently. "What I'd like to know is," she said, "how you knew I was down here this morning unless you were here yourself!"

"Nothing to it!" retorted Adrian. "You know very well that I was locked up!"

"So you say!"

"We will go into that later," put in Mme. Storey. "Just now I want to examine the floor of the pool."

This called our attention to the fact that it was almost empty. It had a sloping bottom and the water had receded to the deepest part under the diving board. Mme. Storey walked around the edge, keenly searching over the black tiles that lined it, and we followed her, unable to contain our curiosity.

Not until the water had been completely drawn off did she find what she was looking for. Then, with a slight exclamation, she pointed to a small bright object shining against its black background. It lay below the spot where I had found the water splashed on the floor.

We went down our knees to get a

closer view. Everybody simultaneously recognized what it was, and a horrified whisper went around:

"A hypodermic needle!"

Mme. Storey went down the ladder to the bottom of the pool.

"Before I touch this thing," she said, "I want you to notice that the plunger is pressed all the way down. Whatever poison this needle may have contained was discharged before it was thrown into the water."

CHAPTER XXII.

PROBING.

WE all stood close around Mme. Storey at the edge of the empty pool. On her palm lay the sinister little nickeled instrument.

"Can any of you tell me anything about this?" she asked.

There was no answer.

"Has any one here used a hypodermic needle during the voyage, or do you know of one having been used?"

No answer.

She singled out Tanner. "Doctor, you have such needles among your equipment on board."

"Surely," he answered sullenly.

"How many have you?"

His pop-eyes rolled like those of a frightened horse.

"I don't know; I'll have to look," he muttered.

She bent a searching glance on him, and he blurted out: "Three."

"How do you keep them?"

"In a cardboard box on a shelf in my surgery."

"Have you had occasion to use them during the voyage?"

"I have used one of them."

"Then the other two are still in their antiseptic envelopes."

"So far as I know, they are."

"Is this one of your needles?"

"How can I tell? They all look alike."

Mme. Storey undid the handbag she carried under her arm, and took a cardboard box from it. "I picked this up in your surgery a while ago," she said, "thinking I might use it. Can you identify it?"

"It may be the one," he said with a frightened sneer.

"If you doubt it, go and see if yours is there," she said blandly.

He made no move to go.

Mme. Storey lifted the cover from the little box and we all saw the two needles in their unbroken cellophane wrappers with a vacant space between them for the third.

"You can't prove that that needle came out of there," he snarled. "They all look alike. There may be a dozen such needles aboard this vessel."

"Possibly," she said dryly, "but not likely. Of course, if you can produce the needle that belongs in this box that will automatically let you out."

"My shelves are not locked," he said. "Anybody could have picked it up—just like you did!"

"But the door of the surgery is always locked when you are not there," she said. "I am told that you had the lock changed, so that no steward or other servant of the ship could ever enter."

He was silenced.

"Perhaps I can help you to trace the missing needle," she said mildly. "When did you use it last?"

"Yesterday morning."

"For what purpose?"

"I decline to answer."

"On what grounds do you decline?"

"Professional privilege."

"Very proper," she said dryly.

"Perhaps your patient will release you." She looked around from face to face. "Adele," she said in the gentle voice that can presage so much trouble, "will you permit the doctor to answer my question?"

ADELE stared and reddened. "Why do you pick on me?" she snapped.

"Well, I have noticed on several occasions during the last few days that you were under the influence of a narcotic."

"Well, why shouldn't I be, if I feel like it?"

"No reason whatever. All I want to know is, did the doctor administer it hypodermically?"

"Yes," muttered Adele. "My nerves were shot to pieces."

"Oh, quite! When did you receive your last treatment from him?"

"Yesterday morning about ten."

"Ah, during the storm. Did the doctor give you the needle then?"

"No," said Adele, startled. "Why should he?"

"So you could treat yourself if necessary."

"Well, he didn't. I never had the thing in my hand."

Mme. Storey spoke a word or two in Les Farman's ear, and the skipper went up the stairs again. Adele and Frank glanced at each other apprehensively.

My employer turned to the doctor.

"After you treated Adele, you washed the needle, put it in its box and returned the box to the shelf, I assume."

"I suppose so," he answered sullenly. "Those are automatic actions. You do them without thinking."

"You had no occasion to use the needle after that?"

"No."

"Did Adele leave the surgery immediately?"

"No. She stayed for a while, talking."

"Then it is possible that she may have taken the needle without your knowledge?"

His eyes bulged out. "No!" he cried.

"But you cannot swear that it was there after she left."

He saw that he had been led into a trap. He bit his lip and breathed hard.

Mme. Storey transferred her attention to Adele.

"Did you, in fact, take the needle when the doctor wasn't looking?"

"No!" cried Adele. "I told you I had never had it in my hand."

"Where were you at a few minutes before seven this morning?"

"In bed and asleep," said Adele, staring.

Mme. Storey appeared to forget them. She tapped a cigarette on the back of her hand and walked away, lighting it, and studying deeply. Adele and Tanner were badly shaken. In fact, we all watched her apprehensively, wondering what she was going to spring.

Presently Les Farman came down the stairway bringing two additional witnesses: Jepson, one of the dining room stewards, and Hankley, a steward on A deck.

Mme. Storey said, without looking at them:

"Jepson, please repeat the story you told the captain a while ago."

The steward, a brisk and good looking young fellow, clearly enjoyed taking the center of the stage.

"Yes, madam," he said. "Shortly before seven this morning—"

"Wait a minute," she interrupted. "How can you fix the time so exactly?"

"Because Mr. Laghet was walking the deck, ma'am. Every morning he comes up—I mean he used to come up—for half a dozen turns around the promenade, just as regular as a clock."

"What were you doing?"

"Working in the dining saloon, rubbing down the furniture."

"Well, go on."

"I hears somebody coming up the companionway. The saloon doors are closed, but I peep out between the sash curtains. It is Mrs. Holder. She has a funny look, so I watch her. She could not see me.

"She waits just inside the door until Mr. Laghet comes around the deck and pops out on him. They stand there talking."

"Could you hear what they said?"

"No, madam. That is, just a word or two."

Adele was listening to Jepson with a kind of stony terror.

"THE boss is mad," Jepson went on, "and Mrs. Holder is sort of crying. I mean her face is all twisted up, but I don't see no tears. He wants to get away from her, but she holds on to him, talking fast. They are just outside the door into the lobby."

"You told the captain what they said?"

"Yes, madam, they get excited, and then I begin to hear. The boss keeps saying, 'Not a cent! Not a cent!' She says something I can't hear, and he comes back with, 'That's no romantic memory!' She says, 'Horace, our child! Our child!' And he says, 'So you say!' She is crying and hanging on to him; he gives her a shove and she falls down.

"He comes into the lobby cursing," Jepson went on. "He turns his head and says to her, 'It's nothing to me whether he marries you or not! Why don't you cash in on the diamond?' Then he ran down the stairs."

"He is lying," said Adele in a husky voice.

"It sounds like Horace," remarked Mme. Storey dryly. "Isn't it true that you met him on deck this morning?"

"Yes, but it was just an ordinary meeting. This man is making up a sensational story about it."

"What did you talk to Horace about?"

"About Frank Tanner. Frank said it would ruin him if Horace discharged him without cause. I was just trying to persuade Horace to give Frank a letter stating that his professional services had been satisfactory."

"Crying?" asked Mme. Storey dryly.

Adele was near tears then. "I was not crying!"

Mme. Storey turned back to Jepson. "What happened after Mr. Laghet went down the stairway?"

"Mrs. Holder comes in from the deck, and Dr. Tanner shows himself in the doorway of the library opposite me. He is hiding in there, but I didn't see him before. They don't speak to each other. Mrs. Holder, she just shakes her head at the doctor and goes on down the stairway. The doctor, he goes aft through the library. That's all I see."

Mme. Storey said to Adele: "Where did you go?"

"To my room!" she cried hysterically.

"Hankley," Mme. Storey asked of

the other steward, "did you see Mrs. Holder early this morning?"

Hankley was our steward, a little, dry man with a face like a mask. "Yes, madam."

"Please describe the circumstances."

"Well, madam, as I was coming forward through the starboard corridor on A deck I seen her coming up the forward companionway—"

"No!" cried Adele in wild terror.

"You can swear that it was Mrs. Holder?"

"Oh, yes, madam. She had on the pink lounging pajamas with a red girdle that I have often seen her wearing."

"You are certain that she was coming *up?*"

"Yes, madam. As she turned to the port side her back was toward me. She didn't see me."

"What time was this? Be careful how you answer."

"Somewhere around seven, madam. I didn't take no precise notice of the time. Somewhere around seven."

"It's a lie!" cried Adele. "I never went below A deck. I never saw Horace again. I swear it!"

Mme. Storey merely smoked and looked at her inscrutably.

"If I did go below," cried Adele, "it was only because I was so agitated I went beyond my deck and had to come back again."

Mme. Storey said nothing.

"Frank!" cried Adele, beside herself with terror, "tell her that I couldn't have done it!"

TANNER'S face was ghastly. He moistened his lips. "It's true," he said. "Adele never had the needle."

"You cannot swear that she didn't have it."

"Yes, I can! At three o'clock yesterday afternoon it was in its place in the box with the others. I saw it there."

"Why didn't you say so when I first questioned you?"

"I had forgotten."

"Your sudden recollection is not very convincing."

"I'll swear it!" he cried. "I'll swear to it in court or anywhere else!"

"How did you come to lock in the box at three o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

"No particular reason. My eye happened to fall on it. I couldn't remember putting it back in its place, and I looked to see if it was there . . . Adele was not in the surgery at any time after that, and the door was locked when I was not there myself."

"I see," said Mme. Storey dryly. "Then how did the needle that was locked up in your surgery get into the pool here?"

He saw that he was getting in deeper, and his eyes rolled. "You haven't proved that it is the same needle!"

"Well, let's put it in another way. What has become of the needle that *was* in this box at three o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

He had no answer to that. We could all see that he was near the breaking point.

"Did you take it out yourself?" she asked softly.

"No!"

My employer suddenly took a new line. "Do you expect to marry Mrs. Holder when we get ashore?" she asked.

"No," mumbled Tanner. "I couldn't presume to look so high."

Mme. Storey smiled dryly. "Then how does she come to be wearing the ring with the bloodstone that used to

decorate your little finger? It is rather noticeable because Mrs. Holder has so many more valuable rings."

"Just a friendly keepsake," he muttered.

"Ah!" Mme Storey's face suddenly became rather terrible. "I suggest that you and Mrs. Holder staged that scene on deck early this morning for the purpose of getting money out of Horace that would enable you to marry!"

"No! . . . No!" they murmured.

"It is evident from Jepson's testimony that Mrs. Holder worked an ancient and well-known trick for that purpose. It failed; and I suggest that you and she then determined to put Horace out of the way in order to make sure of the money that was coming to her under his will!"

"No!" they whispered abjectly.

"After the scene on deck where did you go?" she asked him.

"To my room."

"You weren't headed in that direction. You are familiar with every corner of this ship. I suggest that you went down the after companionway and made your way forward through B deck to the door that opens on this stairway just above us."

"No!"

Mme. Storey turned to Les Farman. "Captain, I recommend that you lock the doctor up. It is certain that he killed Horace Laghet, or has guilty knowledge of who did. We can wireless for the New York police to meet us at quarantine."

Tanner broke then. "No! No!" he cried. "I didn't do it! I'll tell all! That needle passed out of my hands yesterday!"

"Who got it?"

"Adrian!"

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey. "That's what I was trying to get at!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Nine Thousand Islands

IF any other nation chooses to snap up the Philippine Islands when they have been freed, or any other time, that nation will have a job on its hands. Merely to survey the islands would take years, as there are about eight thousand of them. Only a fourth of the lot even have names. Less than five hundred are as large as one square mile—the rest are mere fragments of rock or half-submerged marshes. Altogether they have about the area of England and Scotland. Just east of the Philippines is the deepest hole in the ocean, seven miles to bottom.

Uncle Sam has about a thousand other islands. The Hawaiian group is fairly large and actually spreads out over an area as long and as wide as the United States itself. There are also a large number of Aleutian Islands stretching away from Alaska—unnamed, unexplored. Even the Geodetic Survey does not know exactly how many of them there are, and has been using airplanes to find out. Even less known are seventy or so "guano" islands in the Pacific, which may or may not actually be there. Our government gives protection to companies going to them for bird fertilizer, but does not definitely own the islands. Neither does any one else.

Delos White.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

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After reading ARGOSY for some six years I'd like to say a few words about it. All in all, ARGOSY is the best dime's worth of reading matter I've ever seen. Though I don't generally like Westerns, the ones ARGOSY publishes are appealing.

My favorite form of literature is the fantastic. It is for that, more than anything else, that I get ARGOSY. Though you have all too few fantasies to please me, I won't kick, because the ones you do have are far above the average fantasy story found in magazines which specialize in that form of fiction. And I need hardly add that A. Merritt is your star attraction in that field.

I've printed several thousand copies of a pamphlet containing A. Merritt's first *Allstory* fantasy, the short story, "Through the Dragon Glass," and I'll give a copy to every one of his admirers who sends me a three-cent stamp, to cover mailing costs.

CONRAD H. RUPPERT.

NO fair comparison:

Tempe, Ariz.

That's not fair, trying to compare other fiction magazines with the 144 pages of ARGOSY! You know very well that it is a most embarrassing moment for the other mags when such a comparison is made. A glance at the contents of ARGOSY will convince the most skeptical of its superiority, quality and price considered.

You really have an all-star cast of writers, but personally I am rather partial to the stories written by W. C. Tuttle, Erle Stanley Gardner and William Edward Hayes, as they are always good in their respective lines. I occasionally read stories of my favorite three in other magazines, but it seems to me that they are always at their best when writing for ARGOSY.

RALPH F. BASSETT.

NOW you see him, now you don't:

Huntsville, Ala.

After reading letters in the April 14th issue, criticizing Ray Cummings' invisible men, I had to write you that in the April issue of the *Popular Mechanics Magazine* is an article explaining and illustrating how a certain inventor in England makes himself invisible. I should like to advise these unimaginative readers to read this article, in order to realize that what man can imagine he can accomplish.

LAURENCE J. BLAIS.

MORE like it:

San Antonio, Texas.

In my family every one looks forward as to who will get to read ARGOSY first. I have just finished reading "The Fatal Alarm," by Karl Detzer, and enjoyed it every minute.

I believe "Montana Rides Again" is going to be hard to beat; MacIsaac's stories are always good. Also let us have more like "The White Indian."

MRS. J. H. PRIDE.

THOSE radio ears:

Wildwood, N. J.

Concerning the Brazilian gentleman with the radio ears, I would like to put in a word or two about the scientific end of the argument.

Both Mr. Stuart and Mr. Sourwine say that it is impossible to hear radio waves and that they (radio freq. waves) are entirely different from audible waves. But the difference between rf. and aud. waves is not an actual difference but a conditional difference. For instance, in radio the carrier waves of high frequency (radio frequency) are not the waves heard to emit from a speaker but the means by which the carried waves (audio freq.) are transported through the space between origin and destination. For instance again, radio waves carrying audible waves may be transported through space from origin to destination through a light beam. There we have an instance of two carrier waves and one carried.

The ear may be compared to the detector tube of a radio receiving set in that they both eliminate the carrier wave and leave the audible sound. It is possible to "hear" without the ears through the nerves. Remove the plate lead of the second rf. stage of any t. r. f. radio and adjust the current to be as powerful as can be stood. Then by holding the plate lead in one hand and grounding the other broadcast programs can be "heard." This is probable because the body acts as the radio detector and the nerves directly carry the impulses to the brain where it is heard or rather felt. Though the effect is not ordinarily dangerous, great care should be taken or anything could happen.

This should prove to Mr. Sourwine that radio frequency carried sounds can be made directly audible, though. Radio waves and sound waves are closely comparable by sine wave, proportions of power and harmonics.

N. VAX.

READERS "down under" in Australia:

Flat Rocks, Western Australia.

Our family unanimously agree that the serial, "The Purple Ball," by Frank L. Packard is the best we have yet read. Our mailman travels sixty miles every Friday with our mail and it is the one who meets him that has first reading of the ARGOSY.

I also wish to congratulate Ellis Parker Butler, Ray Cummings, Walt Coburn's "Sons of Gun Fighters," R. M. Farley's "Golden City," and the word-pictures, "Men of Daring."

W. T. JOYNES.

FIVE in ten:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

This is my way of celebrating my tenth anniversary of ARGOSY. In my opinion, here are your five best stories in that period of time: "Seven Footprints to Satan," by Merritt; "He Rules Who Can," by Brodeur; "The Prophet of Death," by Elston; "Burn, Witch, Burn!" by Merritt; "Far Gold," by Chute.

Honorable mentions go in the following order: Leinster, Roscoe, Worts, Brent, Brand, Gardner, Adams, MacIsaac.

Burroughs, Kline, and Cummings fall into the same class—the kindergarten.

Your general run of shorts are not worth the paper they are occupying.

DAVID S. UDELL.

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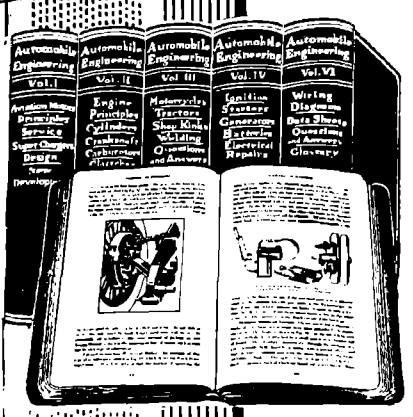

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