10¢ PER COPY SATURDAY SEPT. 1 BY THE YEAR $4

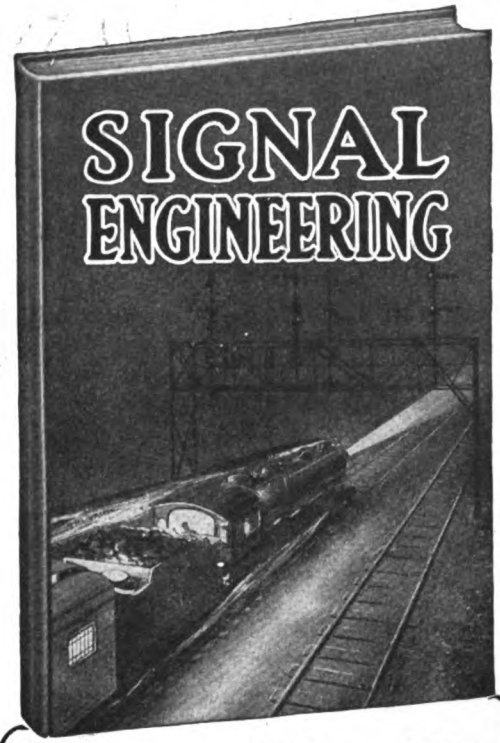
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Beginning

The Devil's Own

by Randall Parrish

Author of A Gripping Roman



Free Book

On Signal Engineering

THERE are thousands of miles of railroad that must be equipped with block signal systems. To superintend these installations and to maintain the systems now in use thousands of men are necessary. *Golden opportunities are offered.* Every ambitious man in America should write for the free book on Signal Engineering. It will be sent to you prepaid—without obligation.

Men Are Needed to Accept High Salaried Positions

When you stop to consider that, at the present time, less than one-fourth of the passenger lines in this country are equipped with automatic block signal systems—and when you read that the day is fast coming when the law will compel railroads to install them, you will realize what remarkable opportunities are offered to ambitious men in the profession of Signal Engineering. The work is big—broad—high salaries are paid. $250.00 a month is an ordinary salary for a Signal Engineer.

Send the Coupon

Put your name and address in the coupon, or a letter or post card *Now* and get the free book about Signal Engineering. Too, we will tell you how you can get the training that you need in order to become a Signal Engineer. You will be under no obligation by writing for this free book. Do it *Now.*

Department of Signaling
Dept. 1088
1810 Wilson Av.
Ravenswood Sta., Chicago

Department of Signaling
Dept. 1088 1810 Wilson Ave. Ravenswood Station, Chicago

Gentlemen: — Please send me absolutely free and prepaid your big new book on Signal Engineering. Also full particulars about your great special free outfit offer. It is distinctly understood that I assume no obligations of any kind.

Name.....

Address.....

Age.....*Occupation*.....

"I Would Not Part with it for $10,000"

So writes an enthusiastic, grateful customer. "Worth more than a farm," says another. In like manner testify over 100,000 people who have worn it.

The Natural Body Brace

Overcomes WEAKNESS and ORGANIC AILMENTS of WOMEN AND MEN. Develops erect, graceful figure.

Brings restful relief, comfort, ability to do things, health and strength.

For Children Also

See What It Will Do For You

Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs, chest and bust; relieves backache and nervousness. Comfortable and easy to wear.

Wear It 30 Days Free at Our Expense

Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

HOWARD C. RASH, Pres. Natural Body Brace Co.
227 Rash Building **SALINA, KANSAS**

ANY WATCH YOU WANT on CREDIT

FREE Examination

Smashing terms on watches, diamonds and jewelry. I demand no references, no notes, no red tape. This new kind of credit brings any watch—

WALTHAM—ELGIN—HOWARD —HAMILTON—HAMPDEN —SOUTH BEND

Pay No Money until you see the watch; then, if satisfied, only small first payment of liberal terms.

30 Days Trial to finally decide. Send name today for **FREE BOOK**—a gem showing watches, diamonds and jewelry in vast assortments at lowest prices and most liberal terms.

Square Deal Miller, Pres. Miller-Hoefer Co.
33 State St. Dept. 896, **Detroit, Mich.**

LE PAGE'S GLUE

HANDY TUBES

STRONGER THAN NAILS 10¢

Mr. Edison's Wonderful Phonograph

Only $1.00 *After* Free Trial

Yes, you may keep this New Edison —Thomas A. Edison's great phonograph with the diamond stylus—and your choice of records, too, for only $1. Pay the balance at rate of only a few cents a day. Try the New Edison in your own home before you decide to buy. Send no money down. Entertain your friends with your favorite records. Then return it if you wish.

Write Today For Our New Edison Book. Send your name and address for our new book and pictures of the new Edison phonograph. No obligations—write now *while this offer lasts.*

F. K. BABSON, *Edison Phonograph Distributors*
1086 Edison Block, **Chicago, Illinois**

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXV — NUMBER 1

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 1, 1917

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

ISSUED WEEKLY.

ENTERED AT THE NEW YORK POST-OFFICE AS SECOND CLASS MAIL MATTER—COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXV — SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1917 — NUMBER 1

The Devil's Own

by Randall Parrish

Author of "Contraband," "When Wilderness Was King," "The Red Mist," etc.

WHEN, almost a year ago, we gave you that remarkable adventure story, "Contraband" (ALL-STORY, September 30 to October 28, 1916), we told you that we were doing something that had never been done before; that for the first time a Parrish novel was to appear serially *prior* to publication in book form. It was considerable of an achievement; but as an achievement, no matter how big, that isn't followed by others of equal importance, misses its chief function, which is to inspire emulation, we have gone right ahead and *done it again*. "Contraband" was a story of the sea; this one is of the Mississippi River and the wild forests of Missouri and Illinois in 1832—the days when slavery was in the height of its power; when the Indians were still a very active menace and the Mississippi River was practically the outermost frontier of civilization.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

AT OLD FORT ARMSTRONG.

IT was the early spring-time, and my history tells me the year was 1832, although now that seems so far away I almost hesitate to write the date. It appears surprising that through the haze of all those intervening years—intensely active years with me—I should now be able to recall so clearly the scene of that far-off morning of my youth, and depict in memory each minor detail. Yet, as you read on, and realize yourself the stirring events resulting from that idle moment, you may be able to comprehend the deep impression left upon my mind, which no cycle of time could ever erase.

I was barely twenty then; a strong, almost headstrong boy, and the far wilderness was still very new to me, although for two years I had held an army commission and been assigned to duty in frontier forts. Yet never previously had I been stationed at quite so isolated an outpost of civilization as was this combination of rock and log defense, erected at the southern extremity of Rock Island, marooned amid the sweep of the great river, with Indian-haunted land stretching leagues on every side.

A mere handful of troops were quartered there, technically two companies of infantry, yet numbering barely enough for one; and this in spite of rumors daily drifting to us that the Sacs and Foxes, with their main village just below, were already become restless and warlike, enflamed by the slow approach of settlers into the valley of the Rock. Indeed, so short was the garrison of officers, the harassed commander had ventured to retain me for field service, in spite of the fact that I was detailed to staff duty, had borne despatches up the Mississippi from General Gaines, and expected to return again by the first boat.

The morning was one of deep-blue sky and bright sunshine, the soft spring air vocal with the song of birds. As soon as early drill ended I had left the fort enclosure, and sought lonely perch on the great rock above the mouth of the cave. It was a spot I loved. Below extended a magnificent vista of the river, fully a mile wide from shore to shore, spreading out in a sheet of glittering silver, unbroken in its vast sweep toward the sea, except for a few small, willow-studded islands a mile or two away, with here and there the black dot of an Indian canoe gliding across the surface.

I had been told of a fight amid those islands in 1814, a desperate, savage battle off the mouth of the Rock, and the memory of this was in my mind as my eyes searched those distant shores, silent now in their drapery of fresh, green foliage, yet appearing strangely desolate and forlorn, as they merged into the gray tint of distance. Well I realized that they only served to screen savage activity beyond, a covert amid which lurked danger and death, for over there, in the near shadow of the Rock valley, was where Black Hawk, dissatisfied, revengeful, dwelt with his band, gathering swiftly about him the younger, fighting warriors of every tribe his influence could reach.

He had been at the fort but two days before, a tall, straight, taciturn Indian—no chief by birth, yet a born leader of men—defiant in speech and insolent of demeanor, in spite of the presence, also, at the council of his people's true representative, the silent, cautious Keokuk. Even with my small knowledge of such things, it was plain enough to be seen there existed deadly hatred between these two, and that Keokuk's desire for peace with the whites alone postponed an outbreak.

I knew then but little of the cause. The Indian tongue was strange to me, and the interpreter failed to make clear the underlying motive; yet I managed to gather this—that, in spite of treaty, Black Hawk refused to leave his old-time hunting grounds to the east of the river, and openly threatened war. The commandant trusted Keokuk, with faith that his peaceful counsels would prevail, but when Black Hawk angrily left the chamber, my eyes followed him to his waiting canoe, my mind convinced that this was not destined to be the end; that only force of arms would ever tame his savage spirit.

This all came back to me in memory as I sat there, searching out that distant shore-line and picturing in imagination the restless Indian camp concealed from view beyond those tree-crowned bluffs. Already tales reached us of encroaching settlers advancing along the valley, and of savage, retaliating raids which could only terminate in armed encounters. Even already crops had been destroyed and isolated cabins fired, the work as yet of prowling, irresponsible bands, yet always traced in their origin to Black Hawk's village.

That Keokuk could continue to control his people no longer seemed probable to me, for the Hawk was evidently the stronger character of the two, possessed the larger following, and made no attempt to conceal the depth of his hatred for all things American.

Yet, to my view, all appeared peaceful enough; the silent, deserted shores, the desolate sweep of the broad river, the green-crowned bluffs, the quiet log fort behind me, its stockaded gates wide open, with not even a sentry visible, a flag flapping idly at the summit of a high pole, and down below where I sat a little river steamboat tied to the wharf, a dingy stern-wheeler, with the word Warrior painted across the pilot-house. My eyes and thoughts turned that way wonderingly.

The boat had tied up the previous evening, having just descended from Prairie du Chien, and, it was rumored at that time, intended to depart down river for St. Louis at daybreak. Yet even now I could perceive no sign of departure. There was but the thinnest suggestion of smoke from the single stack, no loading or unloading, and the few members of the crew visible were idling on the wharf or grouped upon the forward deck, a nondescript bunch of river boatmen, with an occasional black face among them, their voices reaching me, every sentence punctuated by oaths.

Above, either seated on deck stools or moving restlessly about, peering over the low rail at the shore, were a few passengers, all men roughly dressed—miners from Fever River likely, with here and there perchance an adventurer from farther above—impatient of delay. I was attracted to but two of any interest. These were standing alone together near the stern, a heavily built man with white hair and beard, and a younger, rather slender fellow with clipped black mustache.

Both were unusually well dressed, the latter exceedingly natty and fashionable in attire, rather overly so, I thought, while the former wore long coat and high, white stock. Involuntarily I had placed them in my mind as river gamblers, but was still observing their movements with some curiosity when Captain Thockmorton crossed the gangplank and began ascending the steep bluff. The path to be followed led directly past where I was sitting, and recognizing me, he stopped to exchange greeting.

"What—have you finished your day's work already, lieutenant?" he exclaimed pleasantly. "Mine has only just begun."

"So I observe. It was garrison talk last night that the Warrior was to depart at daylight."

"That was the plan. However, the Wanderer went north during the night," he explained, "and brought mail from below, so we are being held for the return letters. I am going up to the office now."

My eyes returned to the scene below.

"You have some passengers aboard?"

"A few; picked up several at the lead-mines, besides those aboard from Prairie du Chien. No soldiers this trip, though. They haven't men enough at Fort Crawford to patrol the walls."

"So I'm told; and only the merest handful here. Frankly, captain, I do not know what they can be thinking about down below, with this Indian uprising threatened. The situation is more serious than they imagine. In my judgment, Black Hawk means to fight."

"I fully agree with you," he replied soberly. "But Governor Clark is the only one who senses the situation. However, I learned last night from the commander of the Wanderer that troops were being gathered at Jefferson Barracks. I'll probably get a load of them coming back. What is your regiment, Knox?"

"The Fifth Infantry."

"The Fifth. Then you do not belong here?"

"No; I came up with despatches, but have not been permitted to return. What troops are now at Jefferson—did you learn?"

"Mostly from the First, with two companies of the Sixth, Watson told me—only about four hundred altogether. How many warriors has Black Hawk?"

"No one knows; they say his emissaries are circulating among the Wyandottes and Pottawottomies, and that he has received encouragement from the Prophet, which makes him bold."

"The Prophet! Oh, you mean Wabokieshiek? I know that old devil, a Winnebago; and if Black Hawk is in his hands, he will not listen very long even to White Beaver. General Atkinson passed through here lately—what does he think?"

I shook my head doubtfully.

"No one can tell, captain; at least none of the officers here seem in his confidence. I have never met him, but I learn this: he trusts the promises of Keokuk, and continues to hold parley. Under his orders a council was held here three days since, which ended in a quarrel between the two chiefs. However, there is a rumor that despatches have already been sent to Governors Clark and Reynolds suggesting a

call for volunteers, yet I cannot vouch for the truth of the tale."

"White Beaver generally keeps his own counsel, yet he knows Indians, and might trust me with his decision, for we are old friends. If you can furnish me with a light, I'll start this pipe of mine going."

I watched the weather-beaten face of the old riverman as he puffed away in evident satisfaction. I had chanced to meet him only twice before, yet he was a well-known character between St. Louis and Prairie du Chien — rough enough, to be sure, from the very nature of his calling, but generous and straightforward.

"Evidently all of your passengers are not miners, captain," I ventured, for want of something better to say. "Those two men standing there at the stern, for instance."

He turned and looked, shading his eyes, the smoking pipe in one hand.

"No," he said. "That big man is Judge Beaucaire, from Missouri. He has a plantation just above St. Louis, an old French grant. He went up with me about a month ago — my first trip this season — to look after some investment on the Fever, which, I judge, hasn't turned out very well, and has been waiting to go back with me. Of course, you know the younger one."

"Never saw him before."

"Then you have never traveled much on the lower river. That's Joe Kirby."

"Joe Kirby?"

"Certainly; you must have heard of him. First time I ever knew of his drifting so far north, as there are not many pickings up here. Have rather suspected he might be laying for Beaucaire, but the two haven't touched a card coming down."

"He is a gambler, then?"

"A thoroughbred; works between St. Louis and New Orleans. I can't just figure out yet what he is doing up here. I asked him flat out, but he only laughed; and he isn't the sort of man you get very friendly with — some say he has Indian blood in him—so I dropped it. He and the judge seem pretty thick, and they may be playing in their rooms."

"Have you ever told the planter who the other man is?"

"What, me—told him? Well, hardly; I've got troubles enough of my own. Beaucaire is of age, I reckon, and they tell me he is some poker player himself. The chances are he knows Kirby better than I do; besides, I've run this river too long to interfere with my passengers. See you again before we leave; am going up now to have a talk with the major."

My eyes followed as he disappeared within the open gates, a squatty, strongly built figure, the blue smoke from his pipe circling in a cloud above his head. Then I turned idly to gaze once again down the river, and observe the groups loitering below. I felt but slight interest in the conversation just exchanged, nor did the memory of it abide for long in my mind. I had not been close enough to observe Beaucaire, or glimpse his character, while the presence of a gambler on the boat was no such novelty in those days as to chain my attention. Indeed these individuals were everywhere, a recognized institution, and, as Thockmorton had intimated, the planter himself was fully conversant with the game, and quite able to protect himself. Assuredly it was none of my affair, and yet a certain curiosity caused me to observe the movements of the two so long as they remained on deck. However, it was but a short while before both retired to the cabin, and then my gaze returned once more to the sullen sweep of water, while my thoughts drifted far away.

The soldier was within a few feet of me, and had spoken, before I was even aware of his approach.

"Lieutenant Knox?"

I looked about quickly, recognizing the major's orderly.

"Yes, Sanders; what is it?"

"Major Bliss requests, sir, that you report at his office at once."

"Very well. Is he with Captain Thockmorton?"

"Not at present, sir; the captain has gone to the post-sutler's."

Wondering what might be desired of me, yet with no conception of the reality, I followed after the orderly through the stockade gate and across the small parade ground toward the more pretentious struc-

ture occupied by the officers of the garrison.

CHAPTER II.

ON FURLOUGH.

A NUMBER of soldiers off duty were loitering in front of the barracks, while a small group of officers occupied chairs on the log porch of their quarters, enjoying the warmth of the sun. I greeted these as I passed, conscious that their eyes followed me curiously as I approached the closed door of the commandant's office. The sentry without brought his rifle to a salute, but permitted my passage without challenge. A voice within answered my knock, and I entered, closing the door behind me.

The room was familiar; plain, almost shabbily furnished, the walls decorated only by the skins of wild beasts, and holding merely a few rudely constructed chairs and a long pine table. Major Bliss glanced up at my entrance with deep-set eyes hidden beneath bushy, gray eyebrows, his smooth-shaven face appearing almost youthful in contrast to a wealth of gray hair. A veteran of the old war, and a strict disciplinarian, inclined to be austere, his smile of welcome gave me instantly a distinct feeling of relief.

"How long have you been here at Armstrong, lieutenant?" he questioned, toying with an official-looking paper in his hands.

"Only about three weeks, sir. I came north on the Enterprise with despatches from General Gaines."

"I remember; you belong to the Fifth, and, without orders, I promptly dragooned you into garrison service." His eyes laughed. "Only sorry I cannot hold you any longer."

"I do not understand, sir."

"Yet I presume you have learned that the Wanderer stopped here for an hour last night on its way north to Prairie du Chien?"

"Captain Thockmorton just informed me."

"But you received no mail?"

"No, sir—er, rather, I have not been at the office to inquire. Was there mail for me?"

"That I do not know; only I have received a communication relating to you. It seems you have an application pending for a furlough."

"Yes, sir."

"It is my pleasure to inform you that it has been granted — sixty days, with permission to proceed east. There has been considerable delay, evidently, in locating you."

A sudden vision arose before me of my mother's face, and of the old home among the hills, but I took the paper from his extended hands, and glanced at the printed and written lines.

"The date is a month ago."

"That need not trouble you, Knox. The furlough begins with this delivery. However, as I shall require your services as far as St. Louis, I shall date its acceptance from the time of your arrival there."

"Which is very kind, sir."

"Not at all. You have proven of considerable assistance here, and I shall part with you with regret. I have letters for Governor Clark, of Missouri, and Governor Reynolds, of Illinois; also one to General Atkinson, at Jefferson Barracks, detailing my views on the present Indian situation. These are confidential, and I hesitate to entrust them to the regular mail service. I had intended sending them down river in charge of a non-commissioned officer, but shall now utilize your services instead—that is, if you are willing to assume their care?"

"Very gladly, of course."

"I thought as much. Each of these is to be delivered in person. Captain Thockmorton informs me that he will be prepared to depart within an hour. You can be ready in that time?"

I smiled. "In much less. I have little with me but a field kit, sir. It will not require long to pack that."

"Then return here at the first whistle, and the letters will be ready for you. That will be all now."

I turned toward the door, but paused irresolutely. The major was already bent over his task, and writing rapidly,

"I beg your pardon, sir, but as I am still to remain on duty, I presume I must travel in uniform?"

He glanced up, his eyes quizzical, the pen still grasped in his fingers.

"I could never quite understand the eagerness of young officers to get into civilian clothing," he confessed reflectively. "Why, I haven't even had a suit for ten years. However, I can see no necessity for your proclaiming your identity on the trip down. Indeed, it may prove the safer course, and, technically, I presume you may be considered as on furlough. Travel as you please, lieutenant, but I suggest it will be well to wear the uniform of your rank when you deliver the letters. Is that all?"

"I think of nothing more."

Fifteen minutes sufficed to gather together all my belongings and change from blue into gray, and as I emerged from quarters the officers of the garrison flocked about me with words of congratulation and innumerable questions. Universal envy of my good fortune was evident, but this assumed no unpleasant form, although much was said to express their belief in my early return.

"Anyway, you are bound to wish you were back!" exclaimed Hartley, the senior captain earnestly. "For we are going to be in the thick of it here in less than a month, unless all signs fail. I was at that last council, and I tell you that Sac devil means to fight."

"You may be certain I shall be back if he does," I answered; "but the major seems to believe that peace is still possible."

"No one really knows what he believes," insisted Hartley soberly. "Those letters you carry south may contain the truth, but if I was in command here we would never take the chances we do now. Look at those stockade gates standing wide open, and only one sentry posted. Ye gods! Who would ever suppose by appearances we were just a handful of men in hostile Indian territory?"

His voice increased in earnestness, his eyes sweeping the group of faces. "I've been on this frontier for fourteen years," he continued, "and visited in Black Hawk's camp a dozen times. He's a British Indian, and hates everything American. Ask Forsyth."

"The Indian agent?"

"Yes; he knows. He's already written Governor Reynolds, and I saw the letter. His word is that Keokuk is powerless to hold back an explosion; he and the Hawk are open enemies, and with the first advance of settlers along the Rock River valley, this whole border is going to be bathed in blood. And look what we've got to fight it with!"

"Thockmorton told me," I explained, "that Atkinson is preparing to send in more troops; he expects to bring a load north with him on his next trip."

"From Jefferson?"

"Yes; they are concentrating there."

"How many regulars are there?"

"About four hundred from the First and Sixth regiments."

He laughed scornfully.

"I thought so. That means that Atkinson may send two or three hundred men, half of them recruits, to be scattered between Madison, Armstrong, and Crawford. Say we are lucky enough to get a hundred or a hundred and fifty of them stationed here. Why, man, there are five hundred warriors in Black Hawk's camp at this minute, and that is only fifteen miles away. Within ten days he could rally to him Kickapoos, Pottawottomies, and Winnebagoes in sufficient force to crush us like an egg-shell. Why, Gaines ought to be here himself, with a thousand regulars behind him."

"Surely we can defend Armstrong," broke in a confident voice. "The savages would have to attack in canoes."

Hartley turned and confronted the speaker.

"In canoes!" he exclaimed. "Why, may I ask? With three hundred men here in garrison, how many could we spare to patrol the island? Not a corporal's guard, if we retained enough to prevent an open assault on the fort. On any dark night they could land every warrior unknown to us. The Hawk knows that."

His voice had scarcely ceased when the

boat whistle sounded hoarsely from the landing below. Grasping my kit, I shook hands all around and left them, hastening across the parade ground to the office. Ten minutes later I crossed the gangplank and put foot for the first time on the deck of the Warrior. Evidently the crew had been waiting my arrival to push off, for instantly the whistle shrieked again, and immediately after the boat began to churn its way out into the river current, with bow pointing down-stream.

Little groups of officers and enlisted men gathered high up on the rocky headland to watch us getting under way, and I lingered beside the rail, waving to them, as the struggling boat swept down, constantly increasing its speed. Even when the last of those black spots had vanished in the far distance, the flag on the high staff remained clearly outlined against the sky, a symbol of civilization in the midst of that vast, savage wilderness. Thockmorton leaned out from the open window of the pilot-house, and hailed me:

"Put your dunnage in the third cabin, Knox! Here, you, Sam — lay hold and help!"

It was nothing to boast off, that third cabin, being a mere hole, measuring possibly about four feet by seven, but sufficed for sleeping quarters, and was reasonably clean. It failed, however, in attractiveness sufficient to keep me below, and as soon as I had deposited my bag and indulged in a somewhat captious scrutiny of the bedding, I very willingly returned to the outside and clambered up a steep ladder to the upper deck.

The view from this point was a most attractive one. The little steamer struggled forward through the swift, swirling water, keeping nearly in the center of the broad stream, the white spray flung high by her churning wheel, and sparkling like diamonds in the sunshine. Lightly loaded, a mere chip on the mighty current, she seemed to fly like a bird, impelled not only by the force of her own engines, but swept irresistibly on by the grasp of the waters.

We were already skirting the willow-clad islands, green and dense with foliage to the river's edge; and beyond these, could gain tantalizing glimpses of the mouth of the Rock, its waters gleaming like silver between grassy banks. The opposite shore appeared dark and gloomy in comparison, with great rock-crowned bluffs outlined against the sky, occasionally assuming grotesque forms, which the boatmen pointed out as familiar landmarks.

Once we narrowly escaped collision with a speeding Indian canoe containing two frightened occupants so intent upon saving themselves they never even glanced up until we had swept by. Thockmorton laughed heartily at their desperate struggle in the swell, and several of the crew ran to the stern to watch the little cockleshell toss about in the waves. It was when I turned also, the better to assure myself of their safety, that I discovered Judge Beaucaire standing close beside me at the low rail. Our eyes met inquiringly, and he bowed with all the ceremony of the old school.

"A new passenger on board, I think, sir," and his deep, resonant voice left a pleasant impression. "You must have joined our company at Fort Armstrong."

"Your supposition is correct," I answered, some peculiar constraint preventing me from referring to my military rank. "My name is Knox, and I have been about the island for a few weeks. I believe you are Judge Beaucaire, of Missouri."

He was a splendidly proportioned man, with deep chest, great breadth of shoulders, and strong individual face, yet bearing unmistakable signs of dissipation, together with numerous marks of both care and age.

"I feel the honor of your recognition, sir," he said with dignity. "Knox, I believe you said? Of the Knox family at Cape Garadeau, may I inquire?"

"No connection, to my knowledge. My home was at Wheeling."

"Ah, I have never been so far east. Indeed, the extent of my travels along the beautiful Ohio has only been to the Falls. The Beaucaires were originally from Louisiana."

"You must have been among the earlier settlers of Missouri."

"Before the Americans came, sir,"

proudly. "My grandfather arrived at Beaucaire Landing during the old French régime; but doubtless you know all this."

"No, judge," I answered, recognizing the egotism of the man, but believing frankness to be the best policy. "This happens to be my first trip on the upper river, and I merely chanced to know your name because you had been pointed out to me by Captain Thockmorton. I understood from him that you represented one of the oldest families of that section."

"There were but very few here before us," he answered with undisguised pride, "mostly wilderness outcasts, voyageurs, *couriers de bois;* but my grandfather's grant of land was from the king. Alphonse de Beaucaire, sir, was the trusted lieutenant of D'Iberville—a soldier and a gentleman."

I bowed in acknowledgment, the family arrogance of the man interesting me deeply. So evident was this pride of ancestry that a sudden suspicion flared into my mind that this might be all the man had left—this memory of the past.

"The history of those early days is not altogether familiar to me," I admitted regretfully. "But surely D'Iberville must have ruled in Louisiana more than one hundred years ago?"

The judge smiled.

"Quite true. This grant of ours was practically his last official act. Alphonse de Beaucaire took possession in 1712, one hundred and twenty years ago, sir. I was myself born at Beaucaire, sixty-eight years ago."

"I should have guessed you as ten years younger. And the estate still remains in its original grant?"

The smile of condescension deserted his eyes, and his thin lips pressed tightly together.

"I—I regret not; many of the later years have proved disastrous in the extreme," he admitted hesitatingly. "You will pardon me, sir, if I decline to discuss misfortune. Ah, M. Kirby, I have been waiting you. Have you met with this young man who came aboard at Fort Armstrong? I—I am unable to recall the name."

"Steven Knox."

I felt the firm, strong grip of the other's hand, and looked straight into his dark eyes. They were like a mask. While, indeed, they seemed to smile in friendly greeting, they yet remained expressionless, and I was glad when the gripping fingers released mine. The face into which I looked was long, firm-jawed, slightly swarthy, a tightly clipped black mustache shadowing the upper lip. It was a reckless face, yet appeared carved from marble.

"Exceedingly pleased to meet you," he said carelessly. "Rather a dull lot on board — miners, and such cattle. Bound for St. Louis?"

"Yes—and beyond."

"Shall see more of you, then. Well, judge, how do you feel? Carver and McAfee are waiting for us down below."

The two disappeared together down the ladder, and I was again left alone in my occupancy of the upper deck.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY OF THE BEAUCAIRES.

THE first two days and nights of the journey southward were devoid of any special interest or adventure. The lonely river, wrapped in the silence of the wilderness, brought to me many a picture of loveliness, yet finally the monotony of it all left the mind drowsy with repetition. Around each tree-crowned bend we swept, skirting shores so similar as to scarcely enable us to realize our progress. In spite of the fact that the stanch little Warrior was proceeding down-stream, progress was slow because of the unmarked channel and the ever-present danger of encountering snags. The intense darkness and fog of the first night compelled tying up for several hours.

The banks were low, densely covered with shrubbery, and nothing broke the sameness of the river scene except the occasional sight of an Indian canoe skimming across its surface. Towns there were none, and seldom even a sign of settlement greeted the eye on either shore. The only landings were made at Yellow Banks,

where there was a squalid group of log huts, and Fort Madison, where I spent a pleasant hour with the officers of the garrison.

Occasionally the boat warped in against the bank to replenish its exhausted supply of wood, the crew attacking the surrounding trees with axes, while the wearied passengers exercised their cramped limbs ashore. Once, with some hours at our disposal, we organized a hunt, returning with a variety of wild game. But most of the time I idled the hours away alone.

No one aboard really attracted my companionship. The lead miners were a rough set, boasting and quarrelsome, spending the greater part of their time at the bar. They had several fights, in one of which a man was seriously stabbed, so that he had to be left in care of the post-surgeon at Madison. After the first day Kirby withdrew all attention from me, and ceased in his endeavor to cultivate my acquaintance, convinced of my disinclination to indulge in cards. This I did not regret, although Beaucaire rather interested me; but as the gambler seldom permitted the judge out of his sight, our intimacy grew very slowly.

Thockmorton, being his own pilot, seldom left the wheel-house, and consequently I passed many hours on the bench beside him, gazing out on the wide expanse of river and listening to his reminiscences of early steamboating days. He was an intelligent man, with a fund of anecdote, acquainted with every landmark, every whispered tale of the great stream from New Orleans to Prairie du Chien. At one time or another he had met the famous characters along the river-banks, and through continual questioning I thus finally became possessed of the story of the house of Beaucaire.

In the main, it contained no unusual features. Through the personal influence of D'Iberville at Louis's court, Alphonse de Beaucaire had originally received a royal grant of ten thousand acres of land bordering the west bank of the Mississippi, a few miles above St. Louis. When his master returned to France, leaving him unemployed, Beaucaire, possessing ample means of his own, had preferred to remain in America.

In flatboats, propelled by voyageurs, and accompanied by a considerable retinue of slaves, he, with his family, had ascended the river, and finally settled on his princely estate. Here he erected what for those early days was a stately mansion, and devoted himself to cultivating the land. Twenty years later, when his death occurred, he possessed the finest property along the upper river, was shipping heavily to the New Orleans market, and was probably the most influential man in all that section.

His home was considered a palace, always open to frontier hospitality; the number of his slaves had increased; a large proportion of his land was utilized, and his name a familiar one the length of the river.

His only son, Felipe, succeeded him, but was not so successful in administration, seriously lacking in business judgment, and being decidedly indolent by nature. The latter married into one of the oldest and most respectable families of St. Louis, and as a result of that union had one son, Lucius, who grew up reckless of restraint, and preferred to spend his time in New Orleans rather than upon the plantation.

Lucius was a young man of twenty-six, unsettled in habits, when the father died, and, against his inclination, was compelled to return to Missouri and assume control of the property. He found matters in rather bad condition, and his was not at all the type of mind to remedy them. Much of the land had been already irretrievably lost through speculation, and when his father's obligations had been met, and his own gambling debts paid, the estate, once so princely and magnificent, was reduced to barely five hundred acres, together with a comparatively small amount of cash.

This condition sufficed to sober Lucius for a few years, and he married a Menard, of Cape Garadeau, of excellent family, but not great wealth, and earnestly endeavored to rebuild his fortunes. Unfortunately his reform did not last. The evil influences of the past soon proved too strong for one of

his temperament. A small town, redolent of all the vices of the river, grew up about the Landing, while friends of other days sought his hospitality. The plantation house became in time a rendezvous for all the wild spirits of that neighborhood, and stories of fierce drinking bouts and mad gambling were current in St. Louis.

Common as such tales as these were in those early days of the West, I still remained boy enough in heart to feel a fascination in Thockmorton's narrative. Besides, there was at the time so little else to occupy my mind, it inevitably drifted back to the same topic.

"Have you ever been at Beaucaire, captain?" I asked, eager for more intimate details.

"We always stop at the Landing, but I have only been up the bluff to where the house stands once. It must have been a beautiful place in its day; it is imposing even now, but showing signs of neglect and abuse. The judge was away from home—in St. Louis, I believe—the day of my visit. He had sold me some timber, and I went out with the family lawyer, a man named Haines living at the Landing, to look it over."

"The house was closed?"

"No; it is never closed. The housekeeper was there, and also the two daughters."

"Daughters?"

"Certainly. Hadn't I told you about them? Both girls are accepted as his daughters; but if all I have heard is true, one must be a granddaughter." He paused reminiscently, his eyes on the river. "To all appearances they are about of the same age, but differing rather widely in looks and character. Both are attractive girls, I judge, although I only had a glimpse of them, and at the time knew nothing of the difference in relationship. I naturally supposed them to be sisters, until Haines and I got to talking about the matter on the way back. Pshaw! Knox, you've got me gossiping like an old woman."

I glanced aside at his face.

"This, then, is not common river talk? The truth is not generally known?"

"No; I have never heard it mentioned elsewhere, nor have I previously repeated the story. However, now that the suggestion has slipped out, perhaps I had better go ahead and explain."

He puffed at his pipe, and I waited, seemingly intent on the scene without. The captain was a minute or two in deciding how far he would venture.

"Haines told me a number of strange things about that family I had never heard before," he admitted at last. "You see, he has known them for years, and attended to most of Beaucaire's legal business. I don't know why he chanced to take me into his confidence, only he had been drinking some, and, I reckon, was a bit lonely for companionship; then those two girls interested me, and I asked quite a few questions about them. At first Haines was close as a clam, but finally loosened up, and this is about how the story runs, as he told it:

"It wasn't generally known, but it seems that Lucius Beaucaire has been married twice—the first time to a Creole girl in New Orleans when he was scarcely more than a boy. Nobody now living probably knows whatever became of her, but likely she died early; anyway, she never came north, or has since been heard from. The important part is that she gave birth to a son, who remained in New Orleans, probably in her care, until he was fourteen or fifteen years old. Then some occurrence, possibly his mother's death, caused the judge to send for the lad, whose name was Adelbert, and have him brought to Missouri. All this happened before Haines settled at the Landing, and previous to Beaucaire's second marriage to Mlle. Menard. Bert, as the boy was called, grew up wild, and father and son quarreled so continuously that finally, and before he was twenty, the latter ran away, and has never been heard of since. All they ever learned was that he drifted down the river on a flatboat."

"And he never came back?"

"Not even a letter. He simply disappeared, and no one knows to this day whether he is alive or dead. At least, if Judge Beaucaire ever received any word from him, he never confessed as much to

Haines. However, the boy left behind tangible evidence of his existence."

"You mean—"

"In the form of a child born to a quadroon slave girl named Delia. The mother, it seems, was able in some way to convince the judge of the child's parentage. All this happened shortly before Beaucaire's second marriage, and previous to the time when Haines came to the Landing. Exactly what occurred is not clear, or what explanation was made to the bride. The affair must have cut Beaucaire's pride deeply, but he had to face the conditions. It ended in his making the girl Delia his housekeeper, while her child—the offspring of Adelbert Beaucaire—was brought up as a daughter. A year or so later the second wife gave birth to a female child, and those two girls have grown up together exactly as though they were sisters. Haines insists that neither of them know to this day otherwise."

"But that would be simply impossible," I insisted. "The mother would never permit—"

"The mother! Which mother? The slave mother could gain nothing by confession; and the judge's wife died when her baby was less than two years old. Delia practically mothered the both of them, and is still in complete charge of the house."

"You met her?"

"She was pointed out to me—a gray-haired, dignified woman, so nearly white as to scarcely be suspected of negro blood."

"Yet still a slave?"

"I cannot answer that. Haines himself did not know. If manumission papers had ever been executed, it was done early, before he took charge of Beaucaire's legal affairs. The matter never came to his attention."

"But surely he must at some time have discussed this with the judge?"

"No; at least not directly. Beaucaire is not a man to approach easily. He is excessively proud, and possesses a fiery temper. Once, Haines told me, he ventured a hint, but was rebuffed so fiercely as never to make a second attempt. It was his opinion the judge actually hated the sight of his son's child, and only harbored her in the house because he was compelled to do so. All Haines really knew about these conditions had been told him secretly by an old negro slave — probably the only one left on the estate knowing the facts."

"But, captain," I exclaimed, "do you realize what this might mean? If Judge Beaucaire has not issued papers of freedom, this woman Delia is still a slave."

"Certainly."

"And under the law, her child was born into slavery?"

"No doubt of that."

"But the unspeakable horror of it—this young woman, brought up as free, educated, and refined, to suddenly discover herself to be a negro under the law, and a slave. Why, suppose Beaucaire should die or lose his property suddenly, she could be sold to the cotton-fields, into bondage to any one who would pay the price for her."

Thockmorton knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Of course," he admitted slowly. "There is no question as to the law, but I have little doubt but what Beaucaire has attended to this matter long ago. If he dies, the papers will be found hidden away somewhere. It is beyond conception that he could ever leave the girl to such a fate."

I shook my head, obsessed with a shadow of doubt.

"A mistake men often make—the putting off to the last moment doing the disagreeable task. How many, expecting to live, delay the making of a will until too late. In this case I am unable to conceive why, if Beaucaire has ever signed papers of freedom for these two, the fact remains unknown even to his lawyer. One fact is certain: nothing bearing upon the case has been recorded, or Haines would know of it."

"There is nothing of record. Haines assured himself as to that some years ago. The fact is, Knox, that while I hope this provision has been made, there remains a doubt in my mind. Beaucaire has traveled on my boat several times, but he's an unsociable fellow; I don't like him; he's not

my kind. If he still harbors hatred toward that runaway son—and, to my notion, he is exactly that sort—he will never feel any too kindly toward Delia or her child. If he has not freed them, that will be the reason—no neglect, but a contemptible revenge."

"What are the two girls named?"

"Rene and Eloise."

"Which one is the daughter?"

"Really, lieutenant, I do not know. You see, I was never introduced, but merely gained a glimpse of them in the garden. I doubt if I would recognize the one from the other now. You see, all this story was told me later."

I sat there a long while after he had gone below, the taciturn mate at the wheel. The low, wooded shores swept past in changing panorama, yet I could not divorce my mind from this perplexing problem. Totally unknown to me, as these two mysterious girls were, their strange story fascinated my imagination.

What possible tragedy lay before them in the years; what horrible revelation to wrench them asunder, to change, in a single instant, the quiet current of their lives? About them, unseen as yet, lurked a grim specter, waiting only the opportunity to grip them both in the fingers of disgrace and make instant mock of all their plans. In spite of every effort, every lurking hope, some way I could not rid myself of the thought that Beaucaire — either through sheer neglect, or some instinct of bitter hatred — had failed to meet the requirements of his duty.

Even as I sat there, struggling vainly against this suspicion, the judge himself came forth upon the lower deck, and began pacing back and forth restlessly beside the rail. It was a struggle for me not to join him; the impetuosity of youth urging me to even brave his anger in my eagerness to ascertain the whole truth. Yet I possessed sense enough, or discretion, to refrain, realizing dimly that not even in the remotest degree had I any excuse for such action. This was no affair of mine. Nor, indeed, would I have found much opportunity for private conversation, for only a moment or two later Kirby joined him, and the two remained together, talking earnestly, until the gong called us all to supper.

Across the long table, bare of cloth, the coarse food served in pewter dishes, I was struck by the drawn, ghastly look in Beaucaire's face. He had aged perceptibly in the last few hours, and during the meal scarcely exchanged a word with any one, eating silently, his eyes downcast.

Kirby, however, was the life of the company, and the miners roared at his humorous stories and anecdotes of adventure; while outside it grew dark, and the little Warrior struggled cautiously through the waters, seeking the channel in the gloom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE END OF THE GAME.

UNCONSCIOUS that the stage had thus been set for a great life drama, a drama in which, through strange circumstances, I was destined to play my part amid stirring scenes, and in surroundings that would test my courage and manhood to the uttermost. Yet, although I heard it not, the hour had already struck, and I stood on the brink of a tragedy beyond my power to avert.

I left the others still seated about the table and returned alone to the outer deck. I had no plans for the evening, and retain now only slight recollection as to the happenings of the next few hours, which I passed largely quietly smoking in the darkened pilot-house, conversing occasionally with Thockmorton, who clung to the wheel, carefully guiding his struggling boat through the night-draped waters. The skill with which he found passage through the enshrouding gloom, guided by signs invisible to my eyes, aided only by a fellow busily casting a lead-line in the bows and chanting the depth of water, was amazing. Seemingly every flitting shadow brought its message, every faint glimmer of starlight pointed the way to safety.

It must have been nearly midnight before I finally wearied of this, and decided to seek a few hours' rest below, descending the short ladder and walking forward

along the open deck for one last glance ahead. Some time the next day we were to be in St. Louis, and this expectation served to brighten my thoughts. It was a dark night, but with a clear sky, the myriad of stars overhead reflecting their lights along the river surface, and bringing into bold relief the dense shadows of the shores on either side.

The boat, using barely enough of power to afford steering way, swept majestically down-stream, borne by the force of the current, which veered from bank to bank. We were moving scarcely swifter than from eight to ten miles an hour, and the monotonous voice of the man casting the lead-line arose continuous through the brooding silence. The only other perceptible sounds were the exhaust of the steam-pipes and the plash of running water. Thockmorton had told me we were already approaching the mouth of the Illinois, and I lingered against the rail, straining my eyes through the gloom, hoping to gain a distant glimpse of that beautiful stream. We were skirting the eastern shore, the wooded bank rising almost as high as our smoking stack and completely shutting off all view of the horizon.

As I stood there, gripping the rail, half fearful lest we strike, the furnace doors below were suddenly flung open for a fresh feeding of the fire, and the red glare of fire lit up the scene. Close in against the shore nestled a flatboat, evidently tied up for the night, and I had swift glimpse as we shot by of a startled man waving his arms, and behind him a wildly barking dog. An instant more and the vision had vanished as quickly as it had appeared; even the dog's sharp bark dying away in the distance. The furnace doors banged shut, and all was again darkness and silence.

I turned back along the deserted deck, only pausing a moment to glance carelessly in through the front windows of the main cabin. The forward portion was wrapped in darkness, and unoccupied; but beyond, toward the rear of the long saloon, a considerable group of men were gathered closely about a small table, above which a swinging lamp burned brightly, the rays of light illuminating the various faces. I recognized several, and they were apparently a deeply interested group, for even at that distance I could plainly note the excitement stamped upon their countenances and the nervousness with which they moved about seeking clearer view.

There were so many closely wedged together as to obstruct my vision of what was occurring, yet I felt no doubt but what they watched a game of cards—a desperate struggle of chance, involving no small sum to account for such intense feeling on the part of mere onlookers. Gambling was no novelty on the great river in those days, gambling for high stakes, and surely no ordinary game, involving a small sum, would ever arouse the depth of interest displayed by these men. Some instinct told me that the chief players would be Kirby and Beaucaire, and with quickening pulse I opened the cabin door and entered.

No one noted my approach, or so much as glanced up, the attention of the crowd riveted upon the players. There were four holding cards—the judge, Kirby, Carver, and McAfee; but I judged at a glance that the latter two were merely in the game as a pretense, the betting having already gone far beyond the limit of their resources. Without a thought as to the cards they held, my eyes sought the faces of the two chief players, and then visioned the stakes displayed on the table before them.

McAfee and Carter were clearly enough out of it, their cards still gripped in their fingers, as they leaned breathlessly forward to observe more closely the play. The judge sat upright, his attitude strained, staring down at his hand, his face white, and eyes burning feverishly. That he had been drinking heavily was evident, but Kirby fronted him in apparent cold indifference, his feelings completely masked, with the cards he held bunched in his hands, and entirely concealed from view. No twitch of an eyelash, no quiver of a muscle revealed his knowledge; his expressionless face might have been carved out of stone.

Between the two rested a stack of gold coin, a roll of crunched bills, and a legal paper of some kind, the exact nature of which I could not determine. I leaned forward, but could only perceive that it bore the official

stamp of some recording office—a deed, perhaps, to some of the remaining acres of Beaucaire. It was evident that a fortune already rested on that table, awaiting the flip of a card. The silence, the breathless attention, convinced me that the crisis had been reached—it was the judge's move; he must cover the last bet, or throw down his hand a loser.

Perspiration beaded his forehead, and he crunched the cards savagely in his hands. His glance swept past the crowd as though he saw nothing of their faces.

"Another drink, Sam," he called, the voice trembling. He tossed down the glass of liquor as though it was so much water, but made no other effort to speak. You could hear the strained breathing of the men.

"Well," said Kirby sneeringly, his cold gaze surveying his motionless opponent. "You seem to be taking your time. Do you cover my bet?"

Some one laughed nervously, and a voice sung out over my shoulder:

"You might as well go the whole hog, judge. The niggers won't be no good without the land ter work 'em on. Fling 'em into the pot—they're as good as money."

Beaucaire looked up red-eyed into the impassive countenance opposite. His lips twitched, yet managed to make words issue between them.

"How about that, Kirby?" he asked hoarsely. "Will you accept a bill of sale?"

Kirby grinned, shuffling his hand carelessly.

"Why not! 'Twon't be the first time I've played for niggers. They are worth so much gold down the river. What have you got?"

"I can't tell that off-hand," sullenly. "About twenty field hands."

"And house servants?"

"Three, or four."

The gambler's lips set more tightly, a dull gleam creeping into his eyes.

"See here, Beaucaire," he hissed sharply. "This is my game, and I never squeal, and play square. I know about what you've got, for I've looked them over. Thought we might get down to this some time. I can make a pretty fair guess as to what your niggers are worth. That's why I just raised you ten thousand, and put up the money. Now, if you think this is a bluff, call me."

"What do you mean?"

"That I will accept your niggers as covering my bet."

"The field hands?"

Kirby smiled broadly.

"The whole bunch — field hands and house-servants. Most of them are old; I doubt if altogether they will bring that amount, but I'll take the risk. Throw in a blanket bill of sale, and we'll turn up our cards. If you won't do that, the pile is mine as it stands."

Beaucaire again wet his lips, staring at the uncovered cards in his hands. He could not lose; with what he held no combination was possible which could beat him. Yet, in spite of this knowledge, the cold, sneering confidence of Kirby brought with it a strange fear. The man was a professional gambler. What gave him such recklessness? Why should he be so eager to risk such a sum on an inferior hand? McAfee, sitting next him, leaned over, managed to gain swift glimpse at what he held, and eagerly whispered to him a word of encouragement. The judge straightened up in his chair, grasped a filled glass some one had placed at his elbow, and gulped down the contents as though it was so much water. The whispered words, coupled with the fiery liquor, gave him fresh courage.

"By God, Kirby, I'll do it!" he blurted out. "You can't bluff me on the hand I've got. Give me a sheet of paper, somebody—yes, that will do."

He scrawled a half dozen lines, fairly digging the pen into the sheet in his fierce eagerness, and then signed the document, flinging the paper across toward Kirby.

"There, you blood-sucker," he cried insolently. "Is that all right? Will that do?"

The imperturbable gambler read it over slowly, carefully deciphering each word, his thin lips tightly compressed.

"You might add the words: 'This includes every chattel slave legally belonging to me,'" he said grimly.

"That is practically what I did say."

"Then you can certainly have no objection to putting it in the exact words I choose," calmly. "I intend to have what is coming to me if I win, and I know the law."

Beaucaire angrily wrote in the required extra line.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Let McAfee there sign it as a witness, and then toss it over into the pile." He smiled, showing a line of white teeth beneath his mustache. "Nice little pot, gentlemen—the judge must hold some cards to take a chance like that," the words uttered with a sneer. "Fours, at least, or maybe he has had the luck to pick a straight flush."

Beaucaire's face reddened, and his eyes grew hard.

"That's my business," he said tersely. "Sign it, McAfee, and I'll call this crowing cockerel. You young fool, I played poker before you were born. There now, Kirby, I've covered your bet."

"Perhaps you would prefer to raise it?"

"You hell-hound — no! That is my limit, and you know it. Don't crawl, now, or do any more bluffing. Show your hand —I've called you."

Kirby sat absolutely motionless, his cards lying face down upon the table, the white fingers of one hand resting lightly upon them, the other arm concealed. He never once removed his gaze from Beaucaire's face, and his expression did not change, except for the almost insulting sneer on his lips. The silence was profound, the deeply interested men leaning forward, even holding their breath in intense eagerness. Each realized that a fortune lay on the table; knew that the old judge had madly staked his all on the value of those five unseen cards gripped in his fingers. Again, as though to bolster up his shaken courage, he stared at the face of each, then lifted his blood-shot eyes to the impassive face opposite.

"Beaucaire drew two kayards," whispered an excited voice near me.

"Hell! So did Kirby!" replied another. "They're both of 'em old hands."

The sharp exhaust of a distant steam-pipe below punctuated the silence, and several glanced about apprehensively. As this noise ceased, Beaucaire lost all control over his nerves.

"Come on, play your hand," he demanded, "or I'll throw my cards in your face."

The insinuating sneer on Kirby's lips changed into the semblance of a smile. Slowly, deliberately, never once glancing down at the face of his cards, he turned them up one by one with his white fingers, his challenging eyes on the judge—but the others saw what was revealed—a ten-spot, a knave, a queen, a king, and an ace of hearts.

"Good God! a royal straight flush!" some one yelled excitedly. "Damned if I ever saw one before."

For an instant Beaucaire never moved, never uttered a sound. He seemed to doubt the evidence of his own eyes, and to have lost the power of speech. Then from nerveless hands his own cards fell face downward, still unrevealed, upon the table. The next moment he was on his feet, the chair in which he had been seated flung crashing behind him on the deck.

"You thief!" he roared. "You dirty, low-down thief; I held four aces—where did you get the fifth one?"

Kirby did not so much as move, nor betray even by a change of expression his sense of the situation. Perhaps he anticipated just such an explosion, and was fully prepared to meet it. One hand still rested easily on the table, the other remaining hidden.

"So you claim to have held four aces," he said coldly. "Where are they?"

McAfee swept the discarded hand face upward, and the crowd bending forward to look saw four aces and a king.

"That was the judge's hand," he declared soberly. "I saw it myself before he called you, and told him to stay."

Kirby laughed an ugly laugh, showing his white teeth.

"The hell you did. Thought you knew a good poker hand, I reckon. Well, you see I knew a better one, and it strikes me I am the one to ask questions," he sneered. "Look here, you men; I held one ace from the shuffle. Now what I want to know is, where Beaucaire ever got his four? Pleas-

ant little trick of you two—only this time it failed to work."

Beaucaire uttered one mad oath, and I endeavored to grasp him, but missed my clutch. The force of his lurching body as he sprang forward upturned the table, the stakes jingling to the deck, but Kirby reached his feet in time to avoid the shock. His hand, which had been hidden, shot out suddenly, the fingers grasping a revolver, but he did not fire. Before the judge had gone half the distance, he stopped, reeled suddenly, clutching at his throat, and plunged sidewise. His body struck the upturned table, and McAfee and I grasped him, lowering the stricken man gently to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

KIRBY SHOWS HIS HAND.

THAT scene, with all its surroundings, remains indelibly impressed upon my memory. It will never fade while I live. The long, narrow, dingy cabin of the little Warrior, its forward end unlighted and in shadow, the single swinging lamp, suspended to a blackened beam above where the table had stood, barely revealing through its smoky chimney the after portion, showing a row of stateroom doors on either side, some standing ajar, and that crowd of excited men surging about the fallen body of Judge Beaucaire, unable as yet to fully realize the exact nature of what had occurred, but conscious of impending tragedy.

The air was thick and stifling with tobacco smoke, redolent of the sickening fumes of alcohol, and noisy with questioning voices, while above every other sound might be distinguished the sharp pulsations of the laboring engine just beneath our feet, the deck planks trembling to the continuous throbbing. The overturned table and chairs, the motionless body of the fallen man, with Kirby standing erect just beyond, his face as clear-cut under the glare of light as a cameo, the revolver yet glistening in extended hand, all composed a picture not easily forgotten.

Still this impression was only that of a brief instant. With the next I was upon my knees, lifting the fallen head, and seeking eagerly to discern some lingering evidence of life in the inert body. There were none, not so much as the faint flutter of a pulse, or suggestion of a heart throb. The man was already dead before he fell, dead before he struck the overturned table. Nothing any human effort might do would help him now. My eyes lifting from the white, ghastly face encountered those of McAfee, and, without the utterance of a word, I read the miner's verdict, and arose again to my feet.

"Judge Beaucaire is dead," I announced gravely. "Nothing more can be done for him now."

The pressing circle of men hemming us in fell back silently, reverently, the sound of their voices sinking into a subdued murmur. It had all occurred so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that even these witnesses could scarcely grasp the truth. They were dazed, leaderless, struggling to restrain themselves. As I stood there, almost unconscious of their presence, still staring down at that upturned face, now appearing manly and patrician in the strange dignity of its death mask, a mad burst of anger swept me, a fierce yearning for revenge—a feeling that this was no less a murder because nature had struck the blow. With hot words of reproach upon my lips I gazed across toward where Kirby had been standing a moment before. The gambler was no longer there—his place was vacant.

"Where is Kirby?" I asked, incredulous of his sudden disappearance.

For a moment no one answered; then a voice in the crowd croaked hoarsely:

"He just slipped out through that after door to the deck—him and Bill Carver."

"And the stakes?"

Another answered in a thin, piping treble.

"I reckon them two cusses took along the most ov it. Enyhow 'tain't yere, 'cept maybe a few coins what rolled under the table. It wasn't Joe Kirby who picked up the swag, fer I was a watchin' him, an' he never wunst let go ov his gun. Thet damn sneak Carver must 'a' did it, an' then the two ov 'em just sorter nat'rally faded away through that door thar."

McAfee swore through his black beard, the full truth swiftly dawning upon him.

"Hell!" he exploded. "So that's the way of it. Then them two wus in cahoots frum the beginnin'. That's what I told the jedge last night, but he said he didn't give a whoop; that he knew more poker than both ov 'em put tergether. I tell yer them fellers stole that money, an' they killed Beaucaire—"

"Hold on a minute," I broke in, my mind cleared of its first passion, and realizing the necessity of control. "Let's keep cool, and go slow. While I believe McAfee is right, we are not going to bring the judge back to life by turning into a mob. There is no proof of cheating, and Kirby has the law behind him. Let me talk to the captain about what had best be done."

"Who—Thockmorton?"

"Yes; he'll know the better action for us to take. He's level-headed, and an old friend of Beaucaire's."

"I'm fer swingin' that damn gambler up, without askin' nobody," shouted a fellow fiercely. "He's bin raisin' hell frum one end o' this river ter the other fer ten years. A rope is whut he needs."

"What good would that do in this case," I questioned before any one else could chime in, "either to the dead man or his family? That's what I am thinking about, men. Suppose you strung him up, that money, the plantation, and those slaves would still belong to him, or his heirs. I'm for getting all these back, if there is any way of accomplishing it. See here, men," I pleaded earnestly. "This affair doesn't necessarily end here on board the Warrior, and if you were to kill Kirby it wouldn't benefit matters any."

"I would get rid ov a skunk."

"Yes, but he is only one of a hundred between here and New Orleans. Look at the other side a minute. Beaucaire bet everything he possessed—everything—land, niggers, and money. Kirby sneered him on to it, and saw that he had the kind of a hand that would do the business right. When the judge died he didn't own enough to pay his funeral expenses. Now see here; I happen to know that he left two young daughters. Just stop and think of them. We saw this game played, and there isn't a man here who believes it was played on the square—that two such hands were ever dealt or drawn in poker. We can't prove that Kirby manipulated things to that end; not one of us saw how he worked the trick. There is no chance to get him that way. Then what is it we ought to do? Why I say make the thief disgorge—and hanging won't do the business."

"Well then, what will?"

"I confess I do not know yet. I want to talk with Thockmorton first. He may know something."

There was a moment's silence, then a suspicious voice:

"Who the hell are you? How do we know you ain't in on this yerself?"

"Listen, men," and I fronted them, looking straight into their eyes. "You have a right to ask that question, and I'll tell you who I am. I am not here in uniform, but I am an officer of the United States army. Captain Thockmorton will vouch for that. I pledge you my word that this affair does not end here. I never met any of these men until I came on board the boat at Fort Armstrong, but I have letters with me for Governor Clark of Missouri, and Governor Reynolds of Illinois. Either man will accept my statement regarding this matter, and I promise you that either Kirby and Carver will return the papers and money before we reach St. Louis, or I'll swear out a warrant for their arrest. If you boys will stay with me we'll scare it out of them for the sake of those girls. What do you say?"

No one spoke immediately, although there was a muttering of voices, sounding antagonistic, and sprinkled with oaths. It was, indeed, a poor time and place in which to appeal to the law, nor were these men accustomed to the pleadings of mercy. I glanced across Beaucaire's extended body and caught the eyes of McAfee. The man lifted his hand.

"The leftenant has got this thing sized up about proper," he said gruffly. "He's an army officer all right, fer I saw him back thar on the island when we wus tied up at the dock. Now look yere, boys, I'm fer hangin' both ov them cusses just as much as eny ov the rest ov yer—a bit more, I

reckon, for they stripped me ov my pile along with Beaucaire, only I was easier ter strip—but, as the leftenant says, that ain't the pint now. What we want ter do is get back them bills o' sale, so them two young women won't be left with nuthin' ter live on. Let's make the fellers cough up furst, an' then, if we think best, we kin hang 'em afterwards. It's my vote we let the leftenant tackle the job—what do yer say?"

The rise and fall of voices, although puncuated by oaths, and indistinct in expression, seemed generally to signify assent. The faces of the men, as they pushed and crowded about us, remained angry and resentful. Clearly enough prompt action alone would carry the day.

"Very well, then, boys," I broke in sharply. "You agree to leave this settlement with me. Then I'll go at it. Two or three of you pick up the body and carry it to Beaucaire's stateroom — forward there. The rest of you better straighten up the cabin, while I go up and talk with Thockmorton a moment. After that I may want a few of you to go along when I hunt up Kirby. If he proves ugly we'll know how to handle him. McAfee."

"I'm over here."

"I was just going to say that you better stay here and keep the fellows all quiet in the cabin. We don't want our plan to leak out, and it will be best to let Kirby and Carver think that everything is all right—that nothing is going to be done."

I waited while several of them gently picked up the body and bore it forward into the shadows. Others busied themselves in straightening overturned furniture, and gathered into a small pile those few scattered coins which had fallen to the deck and been overlooked by the two gamblers in their eagerness to escape. No one attempted to appropriate any of these. McAfee apparently knew most of the fellows intimately, calling them by name, and seemed to be recognized as a leader among them. This fact was encouraging, as to all appearance they were a rough set, unaccustomed to law of any kind, and to be controlled only by physical strength, and some one of their own sort.

In spite of my position and rank, I was far too young in appearance to exercise much weight of authority over such bordermen, but fortunately I possessed sufficient good sense to rely now in this emergency upon the black-bearded McAfee, who served well. His voice, strongly resembling a fog-horn, arose in threat and expostulation unceasingly, and the miners, who evidently knew him well, and perhaps had previously tested the weight of his fist, were lamblike and obedient to his control.

"They'll be quiet enough fer a while, leftenant," he managed to whisper hoarsely to me. "But they is jest boys growed up, an' if eny one o' them should really take a notion ter raise hell, all the cussin' I might do wouldn't make no diff'rance. Whatever yer aim at, better be done right off, while I kin sorter keep 'em busy down yere—wunst they git loose on the deck the devil himself couldn't stop 'em frum startin' a row."

This advice was so good that I slipped instantly away, silently gained the door, and, unobserved, emerged on to the deserted deck without. The sudden change in environment sobered me, and caused me to pause and seriously consider the importance of my mission. Through the thin walls of the cabin the murmurous voices of those within became indistinct, except as an occasional loudly spoken oath, or call, might be distinguished. The struggling Warrior was close within the looming shadows of the western shore, and seemed to be moving downward more swiftly with the current, as though the controlling mind in the darkened wheelhouse felt confident of clear water ahead. The decks throbbed to the increased pulsation of the engine, and I could plainly hear the continuous splash of the great stern-wheel as it flung spray high into the air.

I paused a moment, hand gripping the rail, and eyes seeking vainly to peer across the wide expanse of river, really fronting the situation for the first time, and endeavoring to think out calmly some definite course of action. Thus far, spurred only by necessity, and a sense of obligation, I had merely been blindly grasping at the first suggestion which had occurred to mind. The emergency had demanded action rather

than reflection. But now, on cooler consideration, and alone, the result I sought did not appear so apparent, nor so easily attained.

Hitherto, in the midst of the excitement occasioned by Beaucaire's tragic death, my mind had grasped but one idea clearly—if I permitted Kirby to be mobbed and killed by those enraged men, his death would benefit no one; would remedy no wrong. That mad mob spirit must be fought down, conquered. Yet now, when I had actually accomplished this, what must be my next step? Nothing less potent than either fear, or force, would ever make Kirby disgorge. Quite evidently the gambler had deliberately set out to ruin the planter, to rob him of every dollar. Even at the last moment he had coldly insisted on receiving a bill of sale so worded as to leave no possible loophole. He demanded all.

The death of the judge, of course, had not been contemplated, but this in no way changed the result. That was an accident, yet, I imagined, might not be altogether unwelcome, and I could not rid my memory of that shining weapon in Kirby's hand, or the thought that he would have used it had the need arose. Would he not then fight just as fiercely to keep as he had to gain? Indeed, I had but one fact upon which I might hope to base action; every watcher believed those cards had been stacked, and that Beaucaire was robbed by means of a trick. Yet, could this be proven? Would any one of those men actually swear that he had seen a suspicious move? If not, then what was there left me except a mere bluff? Absolutely nothing.

Gambling was a recognized institution, with which even the law did not interfere. Of course there were statutes in both Missouri and Illinois, but no enforcement. Indeed, the gambling fraternity was so firmly intrenched, through wealth and influence, that no steamer captain even, autocratic as they often were, would dare encroach on their prerogatives. Interested as Thockmorton would be in serving Beaucaire's dependents, and as much as he cordially disliked Kirby, all I could rely upon from him in this emergency would be a certain moral support, and possibly some advice.

He would never dare ally himself openly, for the cost of such action would be too high. On the other hand, from my knowledge of Kirby's desperate character, and previous exploits, I seriously doubted the efficacy of threatening him with lynch law. He would be far more liable to defy a mob than yield to its demands. Yet memory of those two helpless girls—more particularly that one over whose unconsciousness there hung the possibility of slavery—urged me strongly to attempt even the apparently impossible.

I fully had it in my mind to fight the man personally if, in no other way, I could attain my end—at least I would face him with every power and authority I could bring to bear.

With no other object in mind, and unarmed, never once dreaming of attack, I advanced alone along the dark, narrow strip of deck, leading toward the ladder which mounted to the wheel-house. There were no lights, and I was practically compelled to feel my way by keeping one hand upon the rail. The steamer was sweeping about a great bend, and a leadsman forward was calling the depth of water, his monotonous voice chanting out strange river terms of guidance.

I had reached the foot of the ladder, my fingers blindly seeking the iron rungs in the gloom, when a figure, vague, indistinct, suddenly emerged from some denser shadow and confronted me. Indeed, the earliest realization I had of any other presence was a sharp pressure against my breast, and a low voice breathing a menacing threat in my ear.

"I advise you not to move, you young fool. This is a cocked pistol tickling your ribs. Where were you going?"

The black night veiled his face, but language and voice, in spite of its low grumble, told me the speaker was Kirby. The very coldness of his tone served to send a chill through me.

"To have a word with Thockmorton," I answered, angered at my own fear, and rendered reckless by that burst of passion. "What do you mean by your threat? Haven't you robbed enough men already with cards without resorting to a gun?"

"This is no robbery," and I knew by the sharpness of his reply my words had stung; "and it might be well for you to keep a civil tongue in your head. I overhead what you said to those men in the cabin. So you are going to take care of me, are you?" There was a touch of steel in the low voice. "Now listen, you brainless meddler. Joe Kirby knows exactly what he is doing when he plays any game. I had nothing to do with Beaucaire's death, but those stakes are mine. I hold them, and I will kill any man who dares to interfere with me."

"You mean you refuse to return any of this property?"

"Every cent, every nigger, every acre—that's my business. Beaucaire was no child; he knew what he was betting, and he lost."

"But," I insisted almost hopelessly, "perhaps you do not wholly understand this matter — the entire situation. Judge Beaucaire risked every penny he possessed in the world."

"I suppose he did; but he expected to gain it all back again with as much more of mine."

"That may be true, Kirby. I am not defending his action, but surely this is no reason, now that he is dead, why you should not show some degree of mercy to others totally innocent of any wrong. The man left two daughters, both young girls, who will now be homeless and penniless."

He laughed, and the sound of that laugh was more cruel than the accompanying words.

"*Two* daughters!" he sneered. "According to my information that strains the relationship a trifle, friend Knox—at least the late judge never took the trouble to acknowledge the fact. Permit me to correct your statement. I happen to know more about Beaucaire's private affairs than you do. He leaves one daughter only. I have never met the young lady, but I understand from excellent authority that she possesses independent means through the death some years ago of her mother. I shall therefore not worry about her loss—and, indeed, she need meet with none, for if she only prove equal to all I have heard, I may yet be induced to make her a proposition."

"A proposition?"

"To remain on the plantation as its mistress—plainly an offer of marriage, if you please. Not such a bad idea, is it?"

I stood speechless, held motionless only by the pressing muzzle of his pistol, the cold-blooded villainy of the man striking me dumb. This, then, had probably been his real purpose from the start. He had followed Beaucaire deliberately with this final end in view—of ruining him, and thus compelling the daughter to yield herself. He had egged the man on, playing on the weakness of his nature, baiting him to finally risk all on a game of chance, the real stake not the money on the table, but the future of this young girl.

"You—you have never seen her?"

"No, but I have met those who have. She is reported to be beautiful, and, better still, worth fifty thousand dollars."

"And you actually mean that you propose now to force Judge Beaucaire's daughter to marry you?"

"Well, hardly that, although I shall use whatever means I possess. I intend to win her if I can, fair means, or foul."

I drew a deep breath, comprehending now the full iniquity of his plot, and bracing myself to fight it.

"And what about the other girl, Kirby? for there is another girl."

"Yes," rather indifferently; "there is another?"

"Of course you know who she is?"

"Certainly — a nigger, a white nigger; the supposed illegitimate daughter of Adelbert Beaucaire, and a slave woman. There is no reason why I should fret about her, is there? She is my property already by law." He laughed again, the same ugly, sneering laugh of triumph. "That was why I was so particular about the wording of that bill of sale—I would rather have her than the whole bunch of field hands."

"You believe, then, the girl has never been freed—either she or her mother?" I asked.

"Believe? I know. I tell you I never play any game with my eyes shut."

"And you actually intend to—to hold her as a slave?"

"Well, I'll look her over first before I de-

cide—she would be worth a pot full of money down the river."

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE BLACK WATER.

THE contemptuous, utterly indifferent manner in which he voiced his villainous purpose would have crazed any man. Perhaps he intended that it should, although it was my belief that he merely expressed himself naturally, and with no thought of consequences. The man was so steeped in crime as to be ignorant of all sense of honor, all conception of true manhood. But to me this utterance was the last straw, breaking down every restraint, and leaving me hot and furious with anger.

I forgot the muzzle of the pistol pressed against my side and the menacing threat in Kirby's low voice. The face of the man was indistinct, a mere outline, but the swift impulse to strike at it was irresistible, and I let him have the blow—a straight-arm jab to the jaw. My clenched knuckles crunched against the flesh, and he reeled back, kept from falling only by the support of the deck-house. There was no report of a weapon, no outcry; yet, before I could strike again, I was suddenly gripped from behind by a pair of arms which closed about my throat like a vise, throttling me instantly into silent helplessness.

I struggled madly to break free, straining with all the art of a wrestler, exerting every ounce of strength, but the grasp which held me was unyielding, robbing me of breath, and defeating every effort to call for help. Kirby, dazed yet by my sudden blow, and eager to take a hand in the affray, struck me a cowardly blow in the face, and swung his undischarged pistol to a level with my eyes.

"Damn you!" he ejaculated, and for the first time his voice really exhibited temper. "I'd kill you with this, but for the noise. No, by God! There is a safer way than that to settle with you. Have you got the skunk, Carver?"

"You can bet I have, Joe. I kin choke the life out o' him—shall I?"

"No; let up a bit—just enough so he can answer me first. I want to find out what all this means. Now, look here, Knox, you're an army officer, are you?"

"Yes," I managed to gasp, sobbing in an effort to catch breath as the iron fingers at my throat relaxed slightly.

"Well, then, what is all this to you? Why are you butting in on my game? Was Beaucaire a friend of yours?"

"I can hardly claim that," I admitted. "We never met until I came aboard this steamer. All I am interested in is justice to others."

"To others? Oh, I suppose you mean those girls—you know them, then?"

"I have never even seen them," I said, now speaking more easily. "Thockmorton chanced to tell me about them yesterday, and their condition appealed to me, just as it naturally would to any true man. I thought probably you did not understand the situation, and hoped that if I told you the truth you might respond."

"Oh, you did, did you? You must have figured me as being pretty soft. Well, what do you think now?"

His tone so completely ended my hope of compromise that I replied hotly:

"That you are a dirty, piratical cur. I may have doubted your purpose at first, for I am not used to your kind, but this is so no longer. You deliberately ruined and robbed Beaucaire in order to gain possession of these two girls. You have admitted as much."

He laughed, in no way angered by my plain speech; indeed, it almost seemed as though he felt complimented.

"Hardly admit, my friend, for that is not my style. I let others do the guessing. What do you think of that, Carver? It seems we rang rather high in the estimation of the young man." His eyes again centered on me. "And you are really not acquainted with either of the ladies?"

"No."

"I see; a self-appointed squire of dames; actuated merely by a romantic desire to serve beauty in distress. Extremely interesting, my dear boy. But, see here, Knox," and his tone changed to seriousness. "Let the romance go, and talk sense a min-

ute. You are not going to get very far fighting me alone. You haven't even got the law with you. Even if I cheated Beaucaire, which I do not for a moment admit, there is no proof. The money is mine, and so is the land, and the niggers. You can be ugly, of course, but you cannot overturn the facts.

"Now I don't care a whoop in hell for that bunch of miners back there in the cabin. If left alone they will forget all about this affair in an hour. It's nothing to them, and they are no angels if it was. But, in a way, it is different with you. I understand that, and also that you are in a position where you might make me some trouble. People would listen to what you had to say—and some of them might believe you. Now you acknowledge that what has occurred is personally nothing to you; Beaucaire was no special friend, and you don't even know the two girls — all right, then, drop the whole matter. I hold no grudge on account of your striking me, and am even willing to share up with you to avoid trouble."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then, of course, we shall be compelled to shut your mouth for you. Self-preservation is the first law."

"Which simply means that you intend to go on, and yield nothing."

"That is about right. We'll hold tight to what we've got—hey, Carver?"

"That's allers bin my way o' doin' business," chimed in the other brutally. "An' we've sure got you, mister soldier-man, where we kin handle yer, I reckon."

I looked about at them both, scarcely able to distinguish clearly even their outlines in the dense gloom. The seriousness of my situation, coupled with my helplessness and inability to achieve the object proposed, was very evident. These men were reckless and determined, unable to even grasp my point of view. It might, under these circumstances, have been the part of wisdom for me to have sought some means of compromise; but I was young, and hot, fiery blood swept through by veins. The words of Kirby stung me with their breath of insult—his sneering, insolent offer to pay me to remain still.

"You must rank me as one of your own kind," I burst forth. "Now you listen to a plain word from me. If that was intended as an offer, I refuse it. When I first left the cabin and came here on deck, I honestly believed I could talk with you, Kirby; appeal to your better nature, and gain some consideration for those two girls. Now I know better. From the start this has been the working out of a deliberately planned plot. You and your confederate have coolly robbed Beaucaire, and propose to get away with the spoils. Perhaps you will, but that end will not be accomplished through any assistance of mine. At first I only felt a slight interest in the affair, but from now on I am going to fight you fellows with every weapon I possess."

Kirby chuckled, apparently greatly amused.

"Quite glad, I am sure, for the declaration of war. Fighting has always agreed with me. Might I ask the nature of those weapons?"

"That remains for you to discover," exasperated by his evident contempt. "Carver, take your dirty hands off of me."

In spite of the fact of their threat, the ready pistol pressing against my ribs, the grip of Carver's fingers at my throat, I did not anticipate any actual assault. That either would really dare injure me seemed preposterous. Indeed, my impression was, that Kirby felt such indifference toward my attempt to block his plan that he would permit me to pass without opposition—certainly without the slightest resort to violence. The action of the two was so swift, so concerted, as though to some secret signal that almost before I realized their purpose they held me helplessly struggling, and had forced me back against the low rail.

Here I endeavored to break away, to shout an alarm, but was already too late. Carver's hands closed remorselessly on my throat, and, when I managed to strike out madly with one free fist, the butt of Kirby's pistol descended on my head, so lacerating my scalp the dripping blood blinded my eyes. The blow partially stunned me, and I half fell, clutching at the rail, yet dimly conscious that the two straining men were

uplifting my useless body, Carver swearing viciously as he helped to thrust me outward over the wooden bar. The next instant I fell, the sneering cackle of Kirby's laugh of triumph echoing in my ears until drowned in the splash as I struck the black water below.

I came back to the surface dazed and weakened, yet sufficiently conscious to make an intelligent struggle for life. The overhang of the rapidly passing boat still concealed me form the observation of those above on deck, and the advantage of permitting them to believe that the blow on my head had resulted in drowning, together with the knowledge that I must swiftly get beyond the stroke of the deadly wheel, flashed instantly through my brain. It was like a tonic, reviving every energy. Waiting only to inhale one deep breath of air, I plunged back once more into the depths, and swam strongly under water.

The effort proved successful, for when I again ventured to emerge, gasping and exhausted, the little Warrior had swept past and become merely a shapeless outline, barely visible over the surface of the river. Even if the two men had rushed to the stern, seeking to thus ascertain what had happened to their victim, they could not have detected my presence in that darkness, or determine whether or not I had met death in the depths, or been crushed lifeless by those revolving paddles.

Slowly treading water, my lips held barely above the surface, I drew in deep drafts of cool night air, my mind becoming more active as hope returned. The blow I had received was a savage one, and pained dully, but the cold water in which I had been immersed had caused the bleeding to cease, and likewise revived all my faculties. The water was so icy, still fed by the winter snow of the North, as to make me conscious of chill, and awaken within me a fear of cramps. The steamer melted swiftly away into nothingness, the last indication of its presence in the distance the faint gleam of a stern-light piercing the night shadows.

The very fact that no effort was made to stop was sufficient proof that Thockmorton, in the wheel-house, remained unconscious of what had occurred on the deck below. My fate might never be discovered or suspected. I was alone, submerged in the great river, the stars overhead alone piercing the night shadows. They seemed cold, and far away, their dull glow barely sufficient to reveal the dim outline of the western shore; and even this would have remained invisible except for the trees lining the higher bank beyond, and silhouetted against the slightly lighter background of sky. In the other direction all was apparently water, a turbulent waste, and one glance deciding my action, I quickly struck out, partially breasting the downward sweep of the current, in a desperate struggle to attain land.

I discovered this to be no easy task, as the swirl of the river bore strongly toward the oposite shore; yet I had always been a powerful swimmer, and, although now seriously hampered by boots and heavy, sodden clothing, succeeded in making steady progress. A log swept by me, white bursts of spray illuminating its sides, and I grappled it gratefully, my fingers finding grip on the sodden bark. Using this for partial support, and ceasing to battle so desperately against the downsweep of the current, I managed to finally work my way into an eddy, struggling onward until my feet at last touched bottom at the end of a low, outcropping point of sand. This proved to be a mere spit, but I wandered ashore, water streaming from my clothing, conscious now of such complete exhaustion that I sank instantly outstretched upon the sand, gasping painfully for breath, every muscle and nerve throbbing.

The night was intensely still, black, impenetrable. It seemed as though no human being could inhabit that desolate region. I lifted my head to listen for the slightest sound of life, and strained my eyes to detect the distant glimmer of a light in any direction. Nothing rewarded the effort. Yet surely along here on this long-settled west bank of the Mississippi I could not be far removed from those of my race, for I knew that all along this river-shore were cultivated plantations, and little frontier towns irregularly served by passing steamboats.

We had not been far to the northward

of St. Louis at midnight, and Thockmorton confidently expected to tie up the Warrior at the wharf-boat before that city early the next morning. So, surely, somewhere near at hand, concealed amid the gloom, would be discovered the habitation of men —either the pretentious mansion of some prosperous planter, or the humble huts of his black slaves. Could I attain to either one, I would be certain of welcome, for hospitality without questioning was the code of the frontier.

The night air increased in chilliness as the hours approached dawn, and I shivered in my wet clothes, although this only served to arouse me into immediate action. Realizing more than ever, as I again attempted to move, my weakness and exhaustion from struggle, I succeeded in gaining my feet, and stumbled forward along the narrow spit of sand, until I attained a bank of firm earth, up which I crept painfully, emerging at last upon a fairly level spot, softly carpeted with grass, and surrounded by a grove of forest trees. The shadows here were dense, but my feet encountered a depression in the soil, which I soon identified as a rather well-defined path leading inland. Assured that this must point the way to some door, as it was evidently no wild animal trail, I felt my way forward cautiously, eager to attain shelter and the comfort of a fire.

The grove was of limited extent, and as I emerged from beneath its shadow I came suddenly to a patch of cultivated land, bisected by a small stream, the path I was following leading along its bank. Holding to this for guidance, within less than a hundred yards I came to the house I was seeking, a small, log structure, overshadowed by a gigantic oak, and standing isolated and alone. It appeared dark and silent, although evidently inhabited, as an ax stood leaning against the jam of the door, while a variety of utensils were scattered about. Believing the place to be occupied by a slave, or possibly some white squatter, I advanced directly to the door and called loudly to whoever might be within.

There was no response, and, believing the occupant asleep, I used the ax-handle, rapping sharply. Still no voice answered, although I felt convinced of some movement inside, leading me to believe that the sleeper had slipped from his bed and was aproaching the door. Again I rapped, this time with greater impatience over the delay, but not the slightest sound rewarded the effort. Shivering there in my wet clothes, the stubborn obduracy of the fellow awakened my anger.

"Open up, there!" I called commandeeringly. "Or else I'll take this ax and break down your door."

In the darkness I had been unobservant of a narrow slide in the upper panel, but had scarcely uttered these words of threat when a flare of discharge almost in my very face fairly blinded me, and I fell backward, aware of a burning sensation in one shoulder. The next instant I lay outstretched on the ground, and it seemed to me that life was fast ebbing from my body. Twice I endeavored vainly to rise, but at the second attempt my brain reeled dizzily, and I sank back unconscious.

CHAPTER VII.

PICKING UP THE THREADS.

I TURNED my head slightly on the hard shuck pillow and gazed curiously about. When my eyes had first opened, all I could perceive was the section of log wall against which I rested; but now, after painfully turning over, the entire interior of the single-room cabin was revealed. It was humble enough in all its appointments, the walls quite bare, the few chairs fashioned from half-barrels, a packing-box for a table, and the narrow bed on which I lay constructed from saplings lashed together, covered with a coarse ticking, packed with straw. The floor was of hard, dry clay; a few live coals remained, smoking, in the open fireplace, while a number of garments, among them to be recognized my own clothing, dangled from wooden pegs driven into the chinks of the farther wall.

I surveyed the entire circuit of the room wonderingly, a vague momery of what had lately occurred returning slowly to mind. To all appearances, I was there alone, although close beside me stood a low stool,

supporting a tin basin partially filled with water. As I moved, I became conscious of a dull pain in my left shoulder, which I also discovered to be tightly bandaged. It was late in the day, for the rays of the sun streamed in through the single window and lay a pool of gold along the center of the floor.

I presume it was not long, yet my thoughts were so busy it seemed as if I must have been lying there undisturbed for some time, before the door opened quietly, and I became aware of another occupant of the room. Paying no attention to me, he crossed to the fireplace, stirred the few smoldering embers into flame, placing upon these some dried wood, and then idly watched as they caught fire. The newcomer was a negro, gray-haired, but still vigorous, evidently a powerful follow, judging from his breadth of shoulder, and possessing a face denoting considerable intelligence. Finally he straightened up, and faced me, his eyes widening with interest as he caught mine fastened upon him, his thick lips instantly parting in a good-natured grin.

"De good Lord be praised!" he ejaculated in undisguised delight. "Is yer really awake ag'in, honey? De docthar say he done thought ye'd cum round by terday, sah. Enyhow I's almighty glad fer ter see yer wid dem eyes open wunst mor'—yas, sah, I shure am."

"The doctor?" I questioned in surprise, my voice sounding strange and far away. "Have I been here long?"

"Goin' on 'bout ten days, sah. You was powerful bad hurt, an' out o' yer head, I reckon."

"What was it that happened? Did some one shoot me?"

The negro scratched his head, shuffling his bare feet uneasily on the dirt floor.

"Yas, sah, Mister Knox," he admitted with reluctance. "I's sure powerful sorry, sah, but I wus de boy what plugged yer. Yer see, sah, it done happened dis-a-way," and his black face registered genuine distress. "Thar's a mean gang o' white folks 'round yere thet's took it inter their heads ter lick every free nigger, an' when you done come up ter my door in de middle ob de night, a cussin' an' a threatenin' fer ter break in, I just nat'arly didn't wanter be licked, an'—an' so I blazed away. I's powerful sorry 'bout it now, sah."

"No doubt, it was more my fault than yours. You are a free negro, then?"

"Yas, sah. I done belong wunst ter Colonul Silas Carlton, sah, but afore he died, just because I done saved his boy frum drownin' in de ribber, de ol' colonul he set me free, and give me a patch o' lan' ter raise corn on."

"What is your name?"

"Pete, sah. Free Pete is whut mostly de white folks call me." He laughed, with teeth showing, and the whites of his eyes. "Yer see, thar am a powerful lot o' Petes round 'bout yere, sah."

I drew a deep breath, conscious of weakness as I endeavored to change position.

"All right, Pete; now, I want to understand things clearly. You shot me, supposing I was making an assault on you. Your bullet lodged in my shoulder. What happened then?"

"Well, after a while, sah, thar wan't no mor' noise, an' I reckoned I'd either done hit yer, er else ye'd run away. An' thar ye wus, sah, a lyin' on yer back like ye wus dead. Just as soon as I saw ye, I knowed as how ye never wus no nigger-hunter, but a stranger in dese yere parts. So I dragged ye inside de cabin, an' washed up yer hurts. But ye never got no bettah, so I got skeered, an' went hoofin' it down fer de docthar at Beauclair Landin', sah, an' when he cum back along wid me, he dug de bullet outer yer shoulder, an' left sum truck fer me ter giv' yer. He's done been yere three times, sah."

"From Beauclair Landing—is that a town?"

"A sorter a town, sah; 'bout four miles down ribber."

The mentioning of this familiar word brought back instantly to my darkened understanding all those main events leading up to my presence in this neighborhood. Complete memory returned, every separate incident sweeping through my brain—Kirby, Carver, the fateful game of cards in the cabin of the Warrior, the sudden death of the judge, the mob anger which I sought to curb, the struggle on deck, my being

thrown overboard, and the danger threatening the two innocent daughters of Beaucaire. And I had actually been lying in this negro hut, burning up with fever, helplessly delirious, for ten days. What had occurred already in that space of time? What villainy had been concocted and carried out? What more did the negro know? Something, surely, for now I remembered he had addressed me by name.

"Now, see here, Pete," I began earnestly, "how did you learn what my name was?"

"De docthar he foun' dat out, sah. I reckon he thought maybe he ought ter kno', fearin' as how ye might die. He done looked though yer pockets, sah, an' he took two papers what he foun' dar away with him. He done tol' me as how you wus an offercer in de army—a leftenant, er sumthin'—an' thet dem papers ought ter be sint ter de Gov'ner et wunst. De las' time he wus yere he tol' me thet he wint down ter Saint Louie hisself, an' done gif both dem papers ter Gov'ner Clark. So yer don't need worry none 'bout dem no mor'."

I sank back onto the hard pillow, greatly relieved by this information. The burden of official duty had been taken from me. I was now on furlough, and free to act as I pleased. I suddenly became conscious that I was hungry. I expressed this desire for food, and the negro instantly busied himself over the fire. I watched his movements with interest, although my thoughts quickly drifted to other matters.

"Have you picked up any news lately from the Beaucaire plantation?" I asked at last.

He twisted his head about at sound of my voice.

"I heerd said they done brought de body ob de ol' jedge home, sah—he died mighty sudden sumwhar up de ribber. Thet's 'bout all I know."

"When was this?"

"'Bout a week—maybe mor'n that ago. The Warrior brought de body down, sah."

"The Warrior? Did any one go ashore with it?"

"'Pears like thar wus two men stopped off at de landin'. I disremember de names, but one ob 'em wus an ol' friend ob de jedge's."

I turned my head away silently, but only for a moment. The two men would, in all probability, be Kirby and his satellite Carver. Evidently they intended to lose no time. The accident, the period of my unconsciousness, had left the villains ample opportunity in which to carry out the details of their devilish plot. The silence had convinced them of my death, leaving them nothing to fear, no opposition to guard against. Doubtless the Beaucaire property was already legally in Kirby's possession, and any possible chance I might have once had to foil him in his nefarious purpose had now completely vanished.

To be sure, I had reasoned out no definite means whereby I could circumvent his theft, except to take legal advice, confer with Governor Clark, and warn those threatened girls of their danger. But now it was too late even to do this. And yet it might not be. If Kirby and his confederate believed that I was dead, were convinced that I had perished beneath the waters of the river, they might feel safe in taking time to strengthen their position; might delay final action, hoping thus to make their case seem more plausible.

If Kirby was really serious in his intention of marrying Beaucaire's daughter, he would naturally hesitate to immediately acknowledge winning the property at cards, and thus indirectly being the cause of her father's death. He would be quite likely to keep this hidden from the girl for a while, until he tried his luck at love. If love failed, then the disclosure might be made to drive the young woman to him; a threat to render her complacent. The negro evidently knew very little as to what had occurred, merely the floating gossip of the slave quarters, and some few things the doctor had mentioned. But there was a man living at the Landing who would be informed as to all the facts.

"I believe the judge left two daughters, did he not?"

"Yes, sah—mighty pretty gals they am, too."

"And they still remain in possession of the house?"

"I reckon they do, sah. 'Pears like the docthar sed sumthin' 'bout treating one ob

'em—Miss Eloise—one time he wus ober yere. Sure, dey's dere all right."

"Do you know a lawyer named Haines?"

"Livin' down at the Landin'? Yas, sah, I knows him."

I lifted myself up in the bed, too deeply interested to lie still any longer.

"Now listen, Pete," I explained earnestly. "I've got sufficient money to pay you well for all you do, and, just as soon as you get me something to eat, I want you to go down to the Landing, and bring Lawyer Haines back here with you. Just tell him a sick white man wants to see him at once, and not a word to any one else. You might tell Haines this is a private matter—you understand?"

"Yas, sah," the whites of his eyes rolling. "He done know ol' Pete, an' I'll sure bring him back yere."

It was dark when they came, the fire alone lighting up the interior of the dingy cabin with a fitful glow of red flames. I had managed to get out of bed, and partially dress myself, feeling stronger and in less pain as I exercised my muscles. They found me seated before the fireplace, indulging in a fresh pot of coffee. Haines was a small, sandy-complexioned man, with a straggling beard and light-blue eyes. He appeared competent enough, a bundle of nervous energy, and yet there was something about the fellow which instantly impressed me unfavorably — probably his short, jerky manner of speech, and his inability to look straight at you.

"Pete has been telling me who you are, lieutenant," he said, as we shook hands, "and, putting some other things together, I can guess the rest. You came South on the Warrior?"

"From Fort Armstrong—yes; who told you this?"

"Captain Thockmorton. I saw him in St. Louis, and he seemed deeply grieved by your sudden disappearance. No one on board was able to explain what had occurred."

"Yet there were two men on the boat who could have explained, if they had cared to do so," I answered dryly. "I mean Kirby and Carver; they were the ones who threw me overboard."

He dropped into a chair, his keen, ferret eyes on my face.

"Kirby and Carver? They went ashore with the judge's body at the Landing. So there is a story back of all this," he exclaimed jerkily. "Damn it, I thought as much. Was Beaucaire killed?"

"No—not at least by and violence. No doubt the shock of his loss hastened his death. Surely you must know that he risked all he possessed on a game of cards, and lost?"

"Thockmorton knew something about it, and there were other rumors floating about the Landing, but I have heard no details."

"You did not see the two men, then?"

"No, I was not at home, and they went on down the river the next day on a keelboat. You saw the play?"

"I saw the last part of the game, and was convinced, as all the others present were, that the judge was deliberately ruined for a purpose. I believe it was all planned beforehand, but of this we have no tangible proof."

"His opponent was Joe Kirby?"

"And a fellow named Carver, a mere hanger-on."

Haines wet his lips, his eyes narrowing to mere slits, his professional nature coming to the front.

"First, let me ask you why you believe Beaucaire was cheated?" he piped. "I know Joe Kirby, and consider him quite capable of such a trick, but we shall need more than suspicion to circumvent his scheme."

"I have every reason, Haines, to feel convinced that both Kirby and Carver trailed Beaucaire up the river with the intention of plucking him. Kirby practically confessed this to me, boastingly, afterward. All the way down he was bantering the judge to play. That last night he so manipulated the cards—or rather Carver did, for it was his deal—as to deceive Beaucaire into firmly believing that he held an absolutely unbeatable hand—he was dealt four aces and a king."

The lawyer leaned forward, breathing heavily.

"Four aces! Only one hand is better

than that, and it would be impossible to get such a hand out of one pack."

"That is exactly true, Haines. I am no card-player, but I do know that much about the game. Yet Kirby took the pot with a royal straight flush. Now, either he or Carver slipped an extra ace into the pack, or else Beaucaire did. In my opinion the judge had no chance to work such a trick. And that's the case, as it stands."

Haines jumped to his feet, and began pacing the dirt floor excitedly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"By God, man!" he cried, pausing suddenly. "Even if he did have a chance, the judge never did it—never. He was a good sport, and always played a straight game. You say he bet everything he had?"

"To the last dollar—Kirby egged him on. Besides the money, a deed to his land and a bill of sale for his negroes were on the table."

"The field-hands, you mean?"

"Yes, and the house-servants. Kirby insisted that he write these words: 'This includes every chattel slave legally belonging to me,' and made Beaucaire sign it in that form."

Haines's face was white, his eyes staring at me incredulously.

"God help us, man! Do you know what that means?" he gasped.

"I am almost afraid I do," I answered, yet startled by his manner. "That was why I sent for you. Would that include his son's daughter?"

He buried his face in his hands.

"Yes," he confessed, brokenly. "To the best of my knowledge, Rene Beaucaire is a slave."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

DON'T KID YOURSELF

BY WILL THOMAS WITHROW

IF the "big head" were a fatal malady, we'd all be dead; for we're all, at times, afflicted with inflation of the head, and I guess it's mighty lucky that it acts as its own cure, which I reckon if it didn't—well, we'd all be corpses, sure!

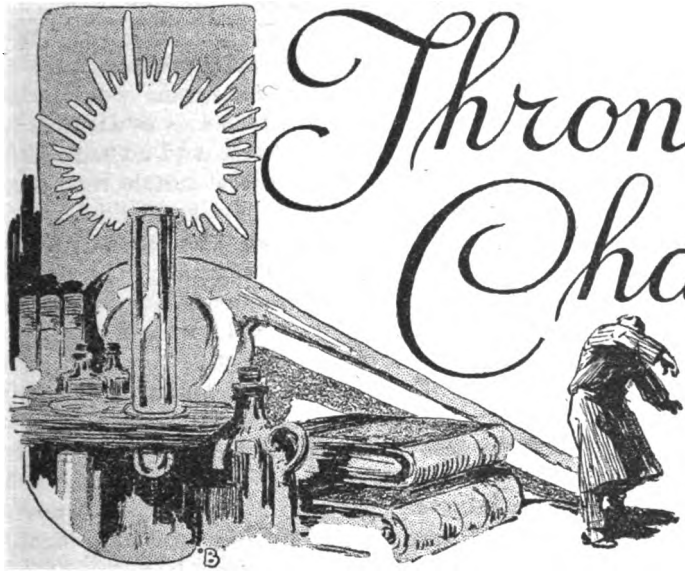
Every fellow, when he's making his try-out in life's big game, thinks the world should be congratulated that *he's* in the same, for he's full of youthful ego, and it sets his brain abuzz, so he thinks he hits the line a good deal harder than he does!

He's dead sure *he'll* make a touch-down, every time he gets the ball, but the interference stops him, and he gets a bruising fall, and he sees some other fellow forge ahead and make the goal, and his head shrinks several inches — but it's healthy for his soul!

Many a man has thought that when *he'd* run his final mortal sands, this old world would next day surely be in a receiver's hands, but the world's "big" men are dying every day, and when they fall, it goes right on doing business—scarcely misses them at all!

Men who yesterday were reckoned "indispensable," are dead, and the world, not even pausing, marches steadily ahead; marches, and will go on marching, as the race forever must: trampling under foot the "great" ones who have crumbled into dust!

For the stuff that men call greatness, after all, is mostly bunk; it intoxicates and dazzles men; it makes the spirit drunk; but it burns the soul to ashes in the fierce heat of its flame, to illuminate with glory the swift passing of a name!



Throne of Chaos

by J. F. B.

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

WHETHER or no I am doing wisely in giving to the world a full and true account of the mysterious death of Fred Ryder may be open to question, but having given the subject the most careful consideration of which I am capable, and being sustained by the opinion of the dead man's wife, I am moved to reveal the stupendous facts of the immediate circumstances of the tragedy.

Fred Ryder was my brother-in-law and my closest friend. We had known each other from early boyhood, and, as the years sped, our friendship waxed to the full development of a complete understanding.

Ten years ago he married my only sister, Alice, and the bond of their mutual love had been tightened by the advent of their two children—John, now eight years old, and Annie, six. My brother-in-law had an income from real estate sufficient to provide him with all the necessities and most of the luxuries of life.

Alice, too, has an independent income of her own, so Fred was wholly free to devote all his time to the study of applied science, particularly chemistry, which was his pet subject.

Shortly after the birth of Annie the family went to reside in a house which had been built to Fred's specifications on a little estate he owned on the slope of Overlook Mountain in the Catskills. There was nothing remarkable about the house except in its prevailing feature of comfort, the work of housekeeping being reduced to a minimum by a host of electrical appliances installed by Fred.

The power for these was supplied from an immense turbine on a mountain river a few hundred yards away which operated a powerful dynamo, and this also furnished electrical energy in Fred's laboratory, which was located conveniently at the end of the garden in the rear of the house.

Situated as it was, the place, of course, was a little lonely, but the solitude appealed to Fred, for it insured freedom from interruption in his work. My sister, however, felt the lack of human companionship; and it was this, I believe, which actuated her and her husband in giving me a pressing invitation to come and live with them, an invitation of which I was glad to avail myself.

I speak, therefore, with intimate knowledge when I say that the family life of my brother-in-law and sister—of all of us, in fact—was one of almost unmitigated felicity. Up till that day, now nearly two

months ago, when the dreadful blow fell, not a cloud bigger than a man's hand had appeared in that domestic heaven.

For a few months before the catastrophe we had observed that Fred became more and more absorbed in his work. Day after day he would spend all his time in the laboratory, remaining there until far into the night. My sister would have been alarmed at his complete absorption had I not reassured her.

I knew Fred well, with the less intimate, more detached, but more observant knowledge of a lifelong friend. I believed I saw in the abstracted eagerness of his manner that he was on the trail of some discovery. I did not pretend to him that I noticed anything unusual in his conduct, nor did I question him.

Often before I had observed him in moods of exaltation only a little less lofty than the one in which he was now soaring, and I knew that at such times he hated interference. So now, though he told me nothing—indeed, he rarely even spoke to me—I was not surprised, for I was well aware that I was quite unable to follow him into the intricate recesses of science where he stepped with confidence.

And then suddenly his manner changed. One morning he came down to breakfast, and was again to all of us the same unabstracted, normal Fred as of old. He looked haggard and wan, but he was in high spirits as he joked and laughed about commonplace things.

But though his manner was superficially the same, yet it seemed to me that there was a subtle, an indefinable, difference. To me he was more companionable than ever; to his wife and children he was even more tender than usual, with now and then an unwonted wistfulness in his affection.

After breakfast he took John and Annie out with him to the garden, and Alice seized the opportunity to tell me she was very much worried about him. The night before, she said, he had left the laboratory and gone to bed much earlier than had been his custom of late. She could not tell the exact time, for she had been asleep, but she thought it was before eleven o'clock.

At midnight he had wakened her by rising in a state of excitement which he endeavored vainly to subdue, and as he dressed he had explained that there was an important phase of the work he was engaged on which he had overlooked, and that he could not rest until he had satisfied himself of the result of certain reactions.

She did not see him again till nearly six in the morning, and then he had returned cold, fatigued, and dejected. He had come and put his arm around her, sitting beside her on the bed, and kissed her with profound—almost solemn—devotion.

She had simply urged him to come to bed and snatch a few hours of sleep to relieve his nervous emotion. He had got into bed, and, although he could not sleep, he had grown gradually calmer, and when the first gong sounded for breakfast in the morning he had insisted on rising to join the family.

Looking out of the dining-room window which gave on the garden, we could now see Fred and the two children enjoying themselves in boisterous amusement around a bonfire he had built under the copper beeches near the laboratory.

He had gathered a great heap of dead leaves and twigs and set fire to it. As we watched, we were surprised to see him enter his workshop and emerge a moment later with an armful of scientific instruments, which he threw recklessly on the pile.

Several times he reentered the laboratory and came out again with his arms full of books, papers, and instruments which he heaped upon the blaze, to the shrieking glee of John and little Annie.

We attached no special significance to his action, he having many times recently referred to the antiquity and inefficiency of his scientific outfit, and we were satisfied that he was simply cleaning house in preparation for a more modern equipment.

During the next six days Fred retained his accustomed manner; he was himself again. Only one thing did we notice that struck us as a little strange, which was that after the morning of the bonfire he never again entered the laboratory. Most of the day he spent in his smoking-den, and after dinner, in the evenings, he would sit with me before the open fireplace in the dining-room, a baize-covered table between us, on

which were a tantalus, a box of cigars, and a chess-board. Happy evenings they were to me, and I know they were happy, too, for Fred.

On the night of the sixth day, after he had checkmated me in the most brilliant game I had ever seen him play, he remarked casually to Alice and me that he thought he would go out for a tramp in the moonlight.

Alice did not oppose him, although I knew she always held such expeditions dangerous. As for me, I felt a bit chagrined that he did not ask me to go with him, but, feeling that he might want to be alone for a quiet meditation, I said nothing about it.

The following morning, as I was taking a pipe in the garden after breakfast, Peter, our chauffeur and coachman, brought me my letters. The superscription of one of these, I observed with a shock, was in Fred's handwriting.

I felt immediately that something was wrong; many little things in Fred's conduct which I had only half observed, or to which I had attached no importance, came crowding on my memory.

In trepidation I tore open the letter, and this was what I read:

I know that the very receipt of this note from me will, to some extent, have prepared you for a shock. You may, indeed I know you will, believe me when I say that the only regret I have in doing what I am about to do is the grief it will bring to Alice and you. As for my children, they are fortunately as yet too young to be affected by this trouble, and there is none else for whom I care.

When you are reading this I will be dead. You will find my body lying beside the black pool over Echo Lake, near the summit of Indian Head Mountain. Break the news gently to my wife, and, when you have done this, give her the enclosed note.

All my affairs are in order. I have made you executor of my estate. You will find my will in the safe. I need not admonish you to take care of Alice and my children, you would do that in any case.

I enclose also two sealed copies of a memorandum—one for Alice and one for you—in which I set forth the awful, the sublimely horrible experience which befel me, and which has driven me to self-destruction. These are not to be opened until a week after the inquest, when my fate will have been forgotten by the gossips. I leave to Alice's judgment and to yours the question of making known the contents.

Remember me always as your affectionate brother, FRED.

There is no need to intrude on the grief-stricken privacy of my sister. Peter and I went to the place indicated in Fred's letter. It was a small pool of semi-stagnant water. I knew the spot well, and often had admired the thick profusion of its broad fringe of sedge.

As we approached it now we were mystified to observe that the pool had dried up and that all around it the sedge and grass had been burned up and scorched for a distance of many yards. At another time this would have aroused in us the most profound astonishment, but our thoughts were diverted by the sight of Fred's body lying at the edge of the scorched zone.

The head had been almost torn from the trunk by some disruptive force applied, apparently, within the mouth. But the extraordinary fact was that expert medical testimony at the subsequent inquest declared that the disruptive force had been produced by *no known human agency*.

I believe I have now told all the salient incidents in this case as they were observable to us who were so closely in touch with the central figure, and, having in mind the grave possibility, if not likelihood, of error creeping into the record were I to continue the narrative in my own words, I think it best to produce here the memorandum left by Fred exactly as he wrote it:

. . . the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our wo.

And it came to pass that I, too, did eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree—the Tree of Knowledge—and the veil was lifted from the mystery of this world's destiny, and I saw death and destruction. I have stumbled, or I have been led, into the hideous arcanum of nature, which is chaos.

It is difficult for me, almost impossible, for I am but mortal, to tell you my story. An experience which transcends all human experiences defies description. But I will try. I must, however, disclose only so much as will set up the truth of what I re-

late. I may not be too precise, for that would be to defeat the very object for which I am about to immolate myself.

For months past I have been engaged on many scientific problems, chiefly of a chemical nature. The exigency of the times led me to conceive the possibility of being able to provide for the safety of our United States by presenting her with a potent instrument of defense. The object I had in view was to produce an explosive substance which would be at the same time abundant, easy of production, altogether safe to handle, and available for all purposes.

You know that the prices of the ingredients of every known explosive have increased enormously since the outbreak of the European war. Some chemicals necessary to the manufacture of explosives, hitherto commonplace, are almost unobtainable, and others, being mineral derivatives, are monopolized by the countries in which these mineral deposits occur. But in any event, even in normal times, the manufacture or production of explosives is always costly.

The first object I had in mind was an explosive compound, the component parts of which would exist in superabundance, and the production of which would be cheap. My second object was safety—both before and after explosion. It is a point generally overlooked in discussing the ethics of the use of poisonous gas, that all explosives in common use give off gases which are either highly deleterious or poisonous.

In this sense they are all dangerous *after* use. Before use, they are all dangerous because there is none of them proof against either the fool or the foolhardy. To overcome this I aimed at producing an explosive which would give off no poisonous gases, and which would respond neither to severe shock nor to direct inflammation.

Finally, I wanted to make an explosive in which I could regulate both the rate and the resultant force of the explosion, so as to make it usable for every purpose.

All explosions may be regarded as processes of quick combustion, in which the residual gases are hundreds of times greater in volume than the original explosive. The only difference between combustion and explosion is in the length of time occupied in the disintegration.

When an explosive action has begun in any substance, the phenomenon is propagated throughout the whole mass by being reproduced from molecule to molecule. It is the rapidity with which this propagation proceeds that determines the nature of the consequent reaction, and it may vary from the rate of ordinary combustion to the inconceivably high velocity of detonation.

Roux and Sarrau were, I think, the first to differentiate between explosives and to divide them into two classes. These they called explosions of the first order, or detonations, and explosives of the second order, to which ordinary explosions belong. The detonation of an explosive, such as nitroglycerin, guncotton, or picric acid, is obtained by exploding with fulminate of mercury; and in this case the explosive substance is disintegrated almost instantaneously.

Ordinary explosions may be produced either by direct application of fire, or sufficient heat, or by a small quantity of gunpowder. It is this kind of explosion which takes place in firing a projectile from a rifle or cannon. In fact, such an explosion is the only suitable one for the purpose because detonating explosion would probably burst the breech.

The phenomenon of varying rates of combustion or disintegration may be observed sometimes in the same substance. You can, for instance, burn a stick of dynamite; you can also burn a bit of celluloid, but if you heat it and strike it with a hammer it will explode.

Guncotton, however, affords about the best example: When wet and closely compressed, guncotton burns slowly; if loose and uncompressed, it will flash off; if spun in threads, it can be used as a quick fuse; and dry guncotton can be exploded by a fulminate.

Many mixtures and compounds which are capable of explosion are less sensitive than those I have just mentioned, and require a very powerful initial impulse to cause them to explode. Some of these substances, such as ammonium nitrate, trini-

tronaphthalene, and potassium chlorate, were until recently regarded as non-explosive, because the method of exploding them had not been discovered. The explosiveness of potassium chlorate was, I think, first discovered at the fire which took place at the Kurtz works, St. Helens, in May, 1899, when 156,000 kilograms of the chlorate, which up till then had been regarded as a combustible merely, exploded with terrific force, bringing death to unwitting bystanders.

Many years ago, acting on the assumption of the universal applicability of the hypothesis of evolution, I had begun to study the chemical elements with a view to finding out the nature and course of the evolution taking place in these elements themselves. Collaterally with this there was another problem which I regarded as the main object of my investigations. It is not necessary, nor is it advisable, for me to do more than outline this problem.

It was suggested to me a long time ago by an address delivered by Ramsay, and it had to do with the discovery or isolation of the primal or fundamental element in all matter. I do not know whether I have actually succeeded in doing this, for my experiments have come to an abrupt, a terrible, ending; but a few days ago I did finally succeed in breaking up one of the most familiar elements into two more fundamental than itself, and it was this discovery which laid open for me, and for all of us, the path of absolute ruin. But I anticipate.

Meanwhile, I had synthesized a great number of unstable chemical compounds composed of elements readily obtainable. These, from their very nature, were, I knew, readily capable of disintegration, but I had hitherto failed to find a suitable impulse, or an impulse sufficiently strong to effect the disintegration of any of them with explosive violence.

When, however, I did finally succeed in breaking up the element of which I have spoken into two more fundamental than itself, I found that one of these two, which I have named *mortifier*, effected the result at which I had aimed on some of the compounds I had synthesized, and on further investigation I discovered that this was due to the extraordinary affinity of *mortifier* for the hydrogen elements in those compounds. Its affinity for the hydrogen atom was so intense, so powerful, that the disruption of the whole mass took place with detonating violence.

Satisfied at last that I was on the right track, that I had practically achieved the object I had set out to achieve, I decided that night, not yet a week ago, to make this a pausing place in my labor.

For many weeks day and night had ceased to have any special meaning for me. I had prosecuted my research restlessly, relentlessly, snatching now and then an hour or two of fitful sleep. I had felt, I had known, I was on the right trail. As game is to the pointer, so had my quarry been to the distended nostrils of my intellectual being.

As a weasel pursues the hapless rabbit, so had I followed fast and ever faster the elusive object of my chase, until at last I had caught up with it, grappled with it, and beaten it to subjection. I felt the fierce, primitive, passionate triumph of the hunter. But, over and above all, I felt the intense pleasure which attends alone the fruitful exercise of the rational faculty.

Yes, to-night I would go to bed early. Although it was not yet eleven o'clock, I had become quite drowsy, which was not to be wondered at, I reflected, considering the severe strain to which I had been subjected for so long. So I wrote down rapidly a few notes in a manner unintelligible to any one but myself. These I locked carefully in my bureau, and then, as a final precaution, I double-locked the door of my laboratory, and stepped out into the garden.

The night was chill and clear, and a million eyes of heaven peered down upon me with the calm serenity of infinite mystery, as if to chide me for the pride I had taken in wresting one little secret from reluctant nature. Chastened by this thought, I entered my house, went up straight to my room, and crept into bed beside my wife, who was already asleep.

For a moment I thought of waking her to tell her of my discovery, but she being

so sound asleep, and I being so jaded in mind and body, I postponed that sweet pleasure till the morning.

And now, how can I, who am no writer—I, who am ever conscious of the clumsy awkwardness of my literary expression—hope to tell you through the medium of the written word the infinite horror of the tragedy which befell me that night?

On going to bed I had fallen quietly asleep, but my mind could not detach itself from the problems on which it had labored so long and actively. I know that I dreamed long and wearily, but I remember definitely only the final portion of my dream.

I seemed to have marched in a long night tediously over an arid desert until I came to the edge of a precipice whose depth my vision could not penetrate. Still as I stood gazing out over the void, it seemed to me that I saw a little star shoot forth from its celestial setting and approach me; and as it came nearer it grew into a huge, blue ball of intense brilliance, becoming bigger and bigger until at last it burst into a glorious spray of surpassing splendor, illuminating by its glittering refulgence the surrounding waste. In an instant I saw that I stood at the edge of the earth beyond which there was naught.

I awoke. Calmly I awoke, and my opening eyes again met the cold, mysterious scrutiny of the unlidded eyes of heaven.

And, as I looked, there came to me as if from an immeasurable distance a wail of infinite pathos—such a wail as might arise from the souls of a myriad unconceived babies sighing for existence. Whence and from what the wail came I do not know. I heard it only for a moment, and then it was lost in the slow and churchyard tones of the great hall-clock striking the hour of midnight.

Suddenly I sat upright as if electrified, every nerve and muscle in my body racked and taut in a paroxysm of terror. I felt—I could almost see—the hideous specter of an infinite, black doom crowding in on me as if to overwhelm me. Choking with dread, I craned forward eagerly to clutch at something—anything—to take hold of an object fixed and tangible. For a thought—Oh, God, what a thought!—had seared itself into my soul and left me numb with horror!

Many a time before in a dreary vigil of the night had I been stricken with a vague, an indefinable, terror. This I remembered now; and I remembered, too how the first glimpse of russet dawn had soothed my weary spirit, and with the remembrance I felt a little easier.

The thought I had conceived, I argued, was monstrous, impossible. Such a thing could not be. Yet, I could not remain one moment longer abed. I felt I could not put off for a minute the absolute proof to myself that my thought was nothing but an hallucination.

I arose, therefore, at once. And as I did so, my wife awoke, and, while I dressed, I explained to her, in as quiet a manner as I could assume, that I wished to test the effect of a reaction which I had overlooked in my researches.

My heart bled for her, my darling Alice, in pity for the extreme worry which I knew my ill-concealed excitement and unusual conduct would arouse in her, and I felt inexpressibly grateful to her for the implicit trust she had always placed in me, no matter how eccentric my actions might appear.

Fully dressed, I left the house, and, walking down the garden, the bracing, nipping air of early winter whipped me into renewed vigor. Collected now in mind, and refreshed in body, I entered the laboratory, turning on the switch as I closed the door carefully behind me.

Taking up a test tube, I walked over to a water-faucet and allowed a few drops to trickle into it. Under the full light of a Tungsten lamp I dropped carefully an infinitesimal quantity of *mortifier* into the water in the tube, and the water flashed off almost instantaneously!

Repeating the experiment, this time with a few drops of water of normal salinity, I introduced once more a particle of *mortifier* into the water; and the result was, as I had anticipated, not a flash but an explosion, which shattered the test tube in my trembling fingers!

To describe my sensations at this mo-

ment would be wholly impossible. There are no words in any language to describe them, for no man had yet conceived the infinite import of my experience.

Rooted in sublime dismay, I stood there in horrid contemplation of the destiny of the world as revealed in the fragment of broken glass gripped tightly in the fingers of my outstretched hand.

I do not know whether I have yet made clear to you the reason for my utter perturbation. Remember I have told you that I had found that the substance *mortifier* had an extraordinary affinity for hydrogen. Its affinity for this element was so great as to disrupt with extreme violence the water molecule, made up, as it is, of two atoms of hydrogen with one of oxygen, and the violence of this disruption was such as to propagate its influence through the whole mass of the water.

More than this, I knew from the inherent nature of the reaction that its violence was, within certain limits, commensurate with the salinity of the water on account of the sodium element in the salt. In short, I had achieved what I had set out to achieve. I had discovered an explosive, abundant, easy of production, and of such a nature that I could regulate the force of the explosion—and that explosive was water!

How long I stood in contemplation I cannot tell, for the notions of time and of eternity had already blended into each other and become indistinguishable. But as you would measure time, I stood there as if petrified for probably only a few minutes.

And then a faint ray of hope that this chalice might yet be removed from my unwilling lips pierced the blackness that encompassed me. It was possible, I thought, that though an explosive effect had been produced by *mortifier* on a small quantity of water, yet the reaction might not take place where the quantity of water was very great. Urged by this faint glimmer, I resolved to put the question immediately to the test of actual experiment.

Far up on the flank of Indian Head Mountain there was, I remembered, a pool of stagnant water formed by the rain in a cup of the hill. The pool was isolated, and, after the week of drought which we had just had, I knew that the earth all around it would be quite dry. Here, I decided, would be just the ideal place for the momentous experiment.

Taking a minute quantity of *mortifier*, I incased it carefully in a soluble capsule, making the capsule of such thickness that it would take about ten minutes to dissolve in cold water. Then, donning a light overcoat and a cap, I locked the door of my laboratory and went out into the night.

Walking as quickly as I could, running even where the ground permitted, I breasted the slope of the mountain, and, aided by the clear light of a crescent moon, arrived at last, panting, at the side of the pool. It was then two o'clock.

As I stood there for a moment with open mouth to take breath, I could feel and hear in my throat the throbbing of my overstrained heart. Knowing that no living thing, save, perhaps, a few small animals, would be in the vicinity at that hour of the morning, I lost not a moment, but took the capsule of *mortifier* from my pocket and placed it carefully in the water at the edge of the pool.

Then I walked to a knoll a few hundred yards away, from which I could have an unobstructed view of the pool should anything happen.

Nor had I long to wait before something did happen!

From the spot where the pool lay there rose up into the highest heavens a column of blue flame of miraculous volume which almost scorched me with its intense heat, and all around me there were innumerable cracklings and minor explosions; and I felt my face and hands bedewed by a mist of reformed water vapor—produced, as I knew, by the recombination of the dissociated hydrogen and oxygen elements set free by the initial flashing of the water in the pool.

As I have said, the initial effect of the *mortifier* on the water was a flash; there was only wanting the presence of the sodium element to have produced an explosion.

Aghast with terror, I cried aloud in the night and fell upon the ground in a trans-

port of unutterable wo. Who was I, or what was I, that fate should have singled me out from the uncounted human beings of the earth to be the fortunate recipient of a secret so titanic? Blind fool that I was! But a few hours before I had prided myself on "wresting one little secret from reluctant nature." But now I knew that I had been made the luckless victim of a monstrous confidence, thrust on me by a ruthless nature only too terribly eager to impart it.

I, who had believed myself to be a free agent in my investigations, had penetrated a forbidden mystery to my own undoing. I had discovered a substance of such hideous potentiality as to invest me with all the attributes of a malignant god of destruction!

Lying prone upon the ground, my mind grasped gradually more and more fully the vastness of the awful secret, until at last the full truth swept over me with cataclysmal effect. Only to step to the seashore—to cast a particle of *mortifier* on the moving waters—and in a moment the earth would be a nebula. Like Lucifer of old, roaming with his legions through the trackless universe, so, too, could I, in imagination,

> . . . behold the throne
> Of chaos, and his dark pavilion spread
> Wide on the wasteful deep! With him enthroned
> Sat sable-vested night, eldest of things,
> The consort of his reign.

For some reason I now became tranquil. I do not know why or how this was so, but I think it was due to the sublime, if Satanic, grandeur of my reflection. Rising up, I essayed to walk back to the pool, but the ground around it over a wide zone was still so hot that I could not come near it. This did not trouble me, however, for I could realize well enough what there would be to see, so I bent my steps toward home, where I arrived about six o'clock in the morning.

As to the course of action I would follow, my mind was now fully determined. Plainly I could not live. It would be impossible for me to go my accustomed rounds as if nothing had occurred. Such a secret as weighed on me would, I knew, inevitably bear down upon me and crush me with its intolerable burden. I might, of course, for a time preserve my counsel absolutely within myself. But the time would surely come when I would be driven to madness, and, in that condition, what might not I do?

And, even if I were able by superhuman force of will, to preserve my sanity, how could I provide for the possibility of falling sick, or meeting with an accident, and in subsequent delirium blurting out the whole facts of my infernal discovery? No, there is no way out for me, but to die.

But before I should die, it was necessary for me to remove all vestiges of my researches. You remember that morning after breakfast when I brought the children out with me into the garden, and danced with them around a bonfire of my books, instruments, and papers. That was the first part of the holocaust offered up for the safety of the world—a sacrifice that is now complete in my own immolation.

The philosophy, the fundamental knowledge of the world and of the destiny of the human race has been revealed to me. I see now that we are but the playthings of nature—a picture puzzle—a set of blocks, provided for her amusement. Already she has completed one design of which she has become aweary, and, like a wanton child, she is crying to have the blocks jumbled up again to begin another picture. The world is but as a drop of water which condenses in the air, falls to the earth, and, in the passage, becomes tenanted by countless organisms. Then the sun dries up the drop. The organisms are no more. And the eternal cycle goes on forever.

Sometimes I have felt tempted to use my knowledge for my own aggrandizement, to exercise my power, or, rather, to use the threat to exercise it to impose my will upon the world.

Compared with *my* power, what would be the strength of potentates, princes, kings, or emperors? At my word wars would cease, or be enacted with ten-thousandfold ferocity. I had nothing to do but to prove, to demonstrate, the efficacy of my terrible secret, and from a houseboat on the Hudson I could dictate

my pleasure to the world. I could crush the human race in absolute bondage. To hell with the thought!

But this I believe, of this I am fully convinced, that somewhere, soon, some one else, if not many others, will stray along the path which leads to destruction. Man is afflicted with the curse of reason, and many men are using that reason in a manner and in a direction which will lead with certainty to ultimate total disaster.

There are, I know, scores of chemists on the face of the earth who are engaged in just such a pursuit as I followed. It may be a year, it may be a century, but the day of wrath—that dreadful day—is fast approaching.

And now I go from you. To-night I will go up into the mountain beside the pool where the final proof of my damnable experience was established. For a sentimental reason I would like to die there, and, besides, I want to give myself a final demonstration.

I will take with me a small soluble capsule containing the last particle of *mortifier* now in existence. This I will put in my mouth as I sit beside the pool, and I will then fill my mouth from a flask of salt water. That will be the end.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

A SOLDIER'S SWEETHEART

BY MINNA IRVING

YOU'RE welcome to your satin dress,
Your boots of finest kid,
Your sweater from the fashion-shop,
Your nifty little lid;
Your wrist-watch, gold and platinum,
Your classy limousine,
And foreign chauffeur at the wheel
Dolled up in Russian green—
My sweetheart is a soldier!

My shoes are scuffed, my jacket was
In style a year ago;
I hollar "Cash!" all day, until
I'm hoarser than a crow.
A subway ticket is my size,
And glad to get it, too,
But still I am a happier
And prouder girl than you—
My sweetheart is a soldier!

Whenever I look up and see
Old Glory and its stars,
I feel a joy that never comes
With clothes and motor-cars,
Because I've some one brave and true,
And near and dear to me,
Enlisted to defend the flag
That stands for liberty—
My sweetheart is a *soldier!*

The Road to Market

by Stephen Allen Reynolds

Author of "The Frost Wizard," "Mid-Ocean," "The Tri-Colored Tusk," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT.

ROY GAYLORD sauntered aimlessly through Boston Common, glowered at the budding elms, scowled at the waters of the historic Frog Pond glistening brightly under the noon sun of a nearly perfect day in May, and dropped disconsolately onto a convenient park bench unoccupied at the moment.

Though he was young and strong, had money in his pocket, held a steady position which paid him well and promised still better, the young Bostonian was at odds with the world. For his country was at war, and he, the lineal descendant of a family of patriots, had been rejected by the medical sharps of both the army and navy.

They would have none of him in spite of his seeming perfection.

They appreciated his coming around. They admired his rugged physique toughened and tanned by out-of-door work and exercise, found every tooth in his mouth sound and white, and listened through stethoscopes to the beatings of a heart organically and functionally perfect.

But when, at a distance of thirty feet or so, he had faced a linen chart and had been called upon to read the third line of letters from the top, instead of saying "O-C-B-K-D-J-V," he had hesitated and then faltered "O-O-D-H-D-J-U."

"Rest your eyes a few moments," the examining surgeon for the army had suggested, with a kindly smile, "then try again."

But the second reading was worse, likewise his performances before the navy man an hour later, and now noon found the would-be volunteer seated on a park bench listening to sparrows chirping and shrill-voiced urchins hawking New York "evening" war extras.

He had been definitely rejected on account of imperfect eyesight. And, the surgeons had informed him, neither operation nor glasses could make him eligible under the regulations for either branch of the fighting service. It was a cruel check to his ambitious patriotism.

There were other men to carry on the grim work of curbing the predatory Central Powers — plenty of young men who could read the third line on the chart at thirty feet. He would not be needed abroad.

There was work for him at home: tilling the soil, working in a munition plant, or the like. Home was the place for him throughout the war — unless the beast of battle should devour men so quickly that a lowering of the physical standards would be found necessary.

Gaylord wondered what was wrong with his eyes. During the five and twenty years of his existence he had never known them

to fail him, either at school or business. True he had read much and studied hard—sometimes until late at night, but never had his sight failed him. In his present work as demonstrator for the Perfect Six Motor Corporation, keen eyes were required when showing a "prospect" how fast the P. S. could throw gravel—eyes open alike to the perils of the road and the possible intervention of motor-cycle bluecoats.

Gaylord could "spot" a cycle cop as far off almost as he could see one, and never yet had he run back to the Tremont Street salesroom with so much as a scratched mudguard or a dented radiator. And when one stepped hard on the accelerator pedal of a 1917 Perfect Six runabout it required pretty good eyesight to keep out of either the hospital or the law courts.

As the moments passed, and Tremont Street grew black with luncheon-seeking shoppers and clerks, Gaylord found himself wondering whether or not his forbear who had left Braintree in 1776 to fight under General Washington, could shoot straight, and whether he had been called upon to read a line of silly black letters spelling nothing. Then there was a great-grandfather who had served under Scott back in the forties. Gaylord felt quite certain that this ancestor who had won distinction during the storming of Chapultepec had not gone through the preliminaries of having his teeth examined—as if he were a horse for sale—his chest thumped, nor been lined up before a chart with big letters in the top line and ridiculously fine print in the lower one.

And his grandfather — Gaylord's heart thumped quickstep time as he thought of the fine old gentleman who had won a medal of honor at bloody Antietam, and had left an arm on the field at Spottsylvania. John Gaylord, major of cavalry, was well over sixty before he put on glasses to read his evening newspapers. Wasn't it quite possible that at twenty-five, even he might have fallen down if called upon to spell out that hateful third line?

Roy's own father had died about the time the Maine was blown up. The son scarcely remembered him, but he had faint recollections of a toy drum, and older boys charging Spanish box-and-barrel "fortifications" in the backyards of Roxbury. Had he lived, in all probability the elder Gaylord would have been charging the real thing at Santiago.

It was a bitter thought that two wars would pass and no Gaylord of Massachusetts wear honorable khaki from declaration to the end of hostilities—or death.

Then there was the matter of the girl—the soft-spoken, nimble-fingered Mary Grey who alternated between the switchboard and filing cabinets over at the salesroom. How could he go back and face her after his day off, taken avowedly for the purpose of enlisting, and say to her: "They wouldn't take me for either the army or the navy."

The decisions of the surgeons was a reflection on his manhood. Never again could he hope to occupy quite the same spot in the affections of the glossy-haired girl who had given him to understand that there was no one in the world just like him—no one in the world as dear to her as he was. For was he not now a "reject," an imperfect creature incapable of shouldering a Springfield or manning a battery?

Although by no means a "slacker," he was perforce in a class just a grade above one, a private in that army of noncombatants that would hoe potatoes and knit socks for oversea warriors.

Only the evening before, when leaving her at the door of her Dorchester home, Roy had told her of his intentions. And she, the daughter of a captain of marines, bullet-riddled at the head of a landing party in Haiti, had pressed him close to her, and with lips that quivered had told him:

"You're right, Roy, dear. You have no father or mother—no one that you have to support. It's your duty to go. Be among the first. I'll—wait for you."

And later, when his lips were still wet with the tears that stole from her hazel eyes and stained the velvet of her cheeks, she had placed her hands on his shoulders, turned her glowing face up to him and said:

"I'm proud of you. I only wish I were a man!"

And now it seemed that the following morning, instead of marching boldly in and

tendering his resignation, he must crawl back to the office and report for work, a cheapened idol, a god dethroned.

Gaylord swallowed hard and turned his eyes toward the elm branches far overhead. He could see all right. High above him two sparrows were perched on a naked limb, their chirpings answering the twitterings of their mates on the ground.

Roy could distinguish even the bobbing heads of the little creatures. He smiled at the thought that an "eligible" volunteer might possibly be able to pick out the beaks and eyes of the birds, then turned to read the golden letters on a sign over a Tremont Street piano wareroom. Each character seemed clear and distinct to him.

And yet—like a man he faced the bitter fact — those doctors knew their business. They were kind to him. His vision was certainly not up to either military or naval requirements.

Thoughts of the girl surged back to him, and with the memory of her parting kiss and blessing still hot within him, he looked once more into the elm branches and wondered what he could do for his country—what action he could take not only to redeem himself in her eyes, but also to show to his own satisfaction his love for the flag.

And as he looked aloft and turned deaf ears to the hum of Boston town, an idea was born to him—an idea worthy of the best traditions of his family.

Minutes fled. The one o'clock whistles sounded. The sky clouded and a light rain began to fall.

Passers-by under umbrellas gazed curiously at the young man so oblivious to a wetting. Yet it was not until the idea had become a plan, and the plan had taken definite shape, that Gaylord got up from the bench and hurried dripping to his room on the unaristocratic side of Beacon Hill.

Throughout the afternoon he labored with pencil and pad, and as evening came on he fitted and lit a new incandescent mantle to the gas-jet nearest his writing corner, crystallized his thoughts and set down with pen and ink the following:

My dear Mr. President:

I come from a long line of citizen-soldiers, am eager to serve my flag and country in the war at hand, but find that on account of defective eyesight I am not eligible for the army or navy. I have never known until to-day that anything was wrong with my sight; but I suppose the doctors know what they are about. Their refusal to pass me has been my greatest disappointment in life.

But I must do something, Mr. President; so I write you this personal letter hoping that you may bear me in mind in case you need a young man for some extra hazardous service at home or abroad. I don't care what the work is, or whether or not its execution will cost me my life. All I want to do is to make good, and it matters not whether I have one or a hundred chances out of a million of living until the end of the war.

It isn't that I don't place any value on my life and offer you a worthless thing, for I have youth and health and strength and everything to live for. But, on the other hand, I have neither father nor mother or any one to support besides myself, and feel free, therefore, to consecrate my life to our cause.

I have a high-school education, speak no German, some French, am twenty-five years old, sound physically, don't wear glasses, am working every day as an automobile demonstrator, and know how to drive, care for, and repair some thirteen different makes of cars. I have $1,700 in the bank, smoke, but don't drink, am a fair swimmer, and can keep my mouth shut. I enclose a good photograph of myself taken two months ago, and would like to hear from you if you can use me in any capacity.

Very truly yours,
Roy Gaylord.

The letter completed, Roy read it over carefully, added a comma here and there, then placed it in an unsealed envelope and went out for his supper. Almost lightheartedly he ate, his thoughts on the unsealed document in his pocket—what the girl would think of it, and whether or not his whole-souled offer would be appreciated by her and accepted by the President.

Eight o'clock found him on the porch of the little suburban home, and a few moments later Mary's sweet-faced mother showed him into the living-room, and with excellent judgment left the young people alone on the plea of having "beans to put to soak and bread to mix."

After barely a word or two of greeting, without speaking of his disappointments of the day, Roy produced the letter and placed it in the girl's hands.

"If you'll read this," he said simply, "it 'll explain everything."

Wonderingly Mary took the missive and

seated herself at the drop-light on the center table. A preliminary glance at Gaylord, and she went on to read. Roy awaited her opinion—stood nervously resting his weight first on one leg and then on the other, his eyes the meanwhile fastened on a little terra-cotta bust of George Washington which stood on a corner shelf beyond the open piano.

She finished reading. Her big hazel eyes, full of concern and sympathy, sought his. Her lips moved and she said softly:

"I'm sorry—for *you*. I have an idea just how you feel. And you didn't have to write this letter, dear, to show me your patriotism. You'd still have been the same Roy to me."

She drew closer and handed the letter back. Roy placed it in his pocket, then, his eyes still on the bust of the warrior President, he groped for her hands and held them tightly while he asked:

"What do you think of it? Will he give me something to do?"

Mary was silent for some moments, her mind busy with the problem of what action if any the chief executive would take.

"I don't think," she said presently, "that he'll take any notice of it. He's a very busy man—especially during these days. Then again, he's got the Secret Service and Department of Justice for dangerous missions and investigations, to say nothing of thousands of young army officers trained and willing for spy service abroad."

Roy's grasp on her hands tightened. "You think the President will ignore my letter, then?" he asked, a plaintive note in his query. His eyes left the bust and found the parting in the hair of her bowed head.

"N-no," she said, disengaging one of her hands to place it on his shoulder. She smiled up at him and finished: "Maybe you'll get a note from one of his secretaries—a note running: 'The President asks me to thank you for your unselfish offer of the 4th instant, and to say in his behalf that at the present time he has nothing in view for you.'"

Gaylord had no reply to make to this. The thought that the head of a great nation could find no place for a citizen willing to give his very life was an uncongenial one. Frowning, he went on to consider it, until the girl raised herself and kissed him for the first time of her own accord.

"Never mind, dear," she murmured tenderly, "for you offered all you had, and that's all any man can do. You're just the same to me—just as big and fine and brave as though the war were over and you were home again with two legs and two arms and a row of medals across your chest. Mail your letter and come back to work as usual. And when you get a chance you'd better see an oculist. Maybe they'll take you for a motor-truck expert in the quartermaster's department later when they get to sending the troops abroad. Cheer up and saw wood. The war's young yet."

At her optimism and satisfaction with him Roy smiled in spite of himself, and a few minutes later Mother Grey in the kitchen heard Mary's fingers sweeping over the piano keyboard, trying out "something new," while her civilian sweetheart leaned over her and made an effort to turn the music at the proper moments.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANSWER.

A WEEK passed by after the mailing of the letter, and Roy had about decided that there was no place for him in the scheme of national affairs, when he was agreeably surprised one morning to find on the hat-rack of his lodging-house a letter marked "Personal," and bearing the Washington postmark.

Roy's fingers trembled a little as he ripped open the envelope and drew out its contents. And his heart beat a tattoo as he stood in the dim hallway and saw that the typewritten sheet was headed in embossed letters of blue: "*The White House*."

Quickly his eyes flew down the page and absorbed the following, to which the signature of the President was appended:

MY DEAR MR. GAYLORD:

I am deeply touched by your patriotic offer, and make haste to give you a personal reply. I can make use of you very shortly on a mission with considerable danger attendant to it, and will advise you in ample time. In the mean while keep

your own counsel and tell no one of our correspondence. Spies are on every hand. Destroy this, and await orders. Do not, under any pretext, write to me or visit Washington.

Elated, Roy thrust the communication into his pocket and set out for the garage where he was to tune up a Perfect Six touring model preparatory to demonstrating it for a West Newton prospect. In so far as the instructions to keep his own counsel and destroy the note were concerned, he determined to carry them out to the letter—after he had taken Mary Grey into his confidence and had shown her visible proof of the President's need for him.

"Most women can't keep a secret," he mused later as he bent over the sweetly running engine and tested the spark-plugs. "But Mary's different from the majority. She'll keep her lips shut so tight that nobody can pry a word out of 'em. This is too good to keep all to myself."

The West Newton demonstration and two others were over at noon. Roy washed up and hastened with glowing face to where Mary was seated behind the telephone switchboard in the practically deserted salesroom.

"The answer's come," he whispered triumphantly. "The President has accepted me."

In the midst of devouring a chicken sandwich Mary stopped and reached for the letter Gaylord held out to her. Quickly she ran through it, then raised a sober face to his.

"I'm surprised," she breathed gently. She thought for a few moments, then added: "But I don't think it quite fair."

"What d' you mean—'not fair'?" Gaylord scowled his perplexity. He had had an idea that the girl would rejoice with him.

"I mean," she said with considerable emphasis, "that I don't think it fair of the President to take advantage of your offer and send you on a mission with a lot of danger attached to it. Just because you're patriotic is no reason why you should be chosen for extra-hazardous work. If you go as a soldier you take your chances with the rest. It's along the same lines as the question of conscription. Simply because a hundred thousand or so of fine young men volunteer for active service immediately after a declaration of war is no reason why they should all get shot up in France when there are millions of other young men left here whose responsibilities are equally as great. I think if the President needs a man for very dangerous service that it isn't square of him to take the first man brave enough to volunteer."

Tears stood in the hazel eyes as Mary handed the letter back. She turned to plug a connection, "listened in" a moment, then added: "Of course the President is a busy man. He can't possibly look at the matter through my eyes. He's doing the best he knows. Who am I to blame him?"

"I'll bet a dollar he typed this letter himself," Roy said by way of changing the subject. "I've read that he operates his own machine and handles his own personal correspondence."

Mary nodded and forced a smile. Then the simultaneous dropping of two cable indicators called her lips and fingers into play, and Roy left her after a hurried caution to maintain silence. He tore the letter into small bits, scattered these along Tremont Street, and sought his own luncheon.

Meanwhile, the little flurry of calls over, Mary Grey scowled thoughtfully through the big plate-glass windows, considering the latest developments in her little world. Her man was being taken from her—or at least would be very shortly. The mere fact that he had been ordered not to visit Washington indicated to her mind that the President wished to keep Roy inconspicuous—unknown in identity and feature to the nest of spies which undoubtedly infested the national capital.

This meant that he was to be used for spy work himself. Possibly Roy would be sent to Germany, there to perform some act which would cost him his life.

The girl shuddered at the thought. She closed her eyes and pictured her man standing bound and blindfolded in front of a spike-helmeted firing-squad. Should the Germans get him—and they were clever, indeed—they would shoot him without ceremony.

Or, if the mission lay in domestic cen-

ters, and he were discovered, it might involve a knife-thrust in the back, poison in his food, a shot in the night, the splash of a body cast off some lonely pier-head.

Mary wheeled on her stool and ransacked the cabinet at her elbow for plain paper and an envelope. She found both, turned to her typewriter and wrote:

MY DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

I am practically engaged to be married to Mr. Roy Gaylord, of this city, the young man to whom you have written accepting his offer to act for you in any dangerous capacity you may select, and feel bound to protest if the work you have in mind is likely to cost him his life. It's not fair, Mr. President, to take the first volunteer noble enough to make you such an offer, and I ask you, sir, to give him the same chance that at least he'd have on the firing-line.

His disappointment at being refused for the army and navy on account of defective eyesight was a hard blow to him, and I dare say a desire of setting himself right in my eyes (which was unnecessary) had something to do with the spirit which prompted him to make you this offer of his very life if needed. Likewise it prompted him, possibly, to show me the letter he wrote to you, and your acceptance received by him this day.

Forgive him for this breach of your instructions not to take any one into his confidence, and do not let him know that I have written to you and implored you to give him a fighting chance.

Very respectfully yours,

(MISS) MARY GREY.

1434 Linden Avenue,
Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Between telephone calls Mary completed the letter, addressed the envelope, and on her way home after work placed a special-delivery stamp on the missive, and with a little sigh of relief slipped it into a mail-box. She had acted for what she considered the best, and during the days that followed not a word did she breathe on the subject either to her mother or to the person most intimately involved.

There came a morning when another letter bearing the Washington postmark awaited Gaylord on the hat-rack. Nearly a week had elapsed since the receipt of the first communication from the President, and Roy had begun to think that in the pressure of business at hand the chief executive had forgotten him.

Not so, however, for as he crossed the Common and found an unoccupied bench his eager fingers ripped open the plain envelope and his eager eyes encountered a sheet of note-paper bearing the familiar embossed heading: "*The White House.*" And directly under the blue letters was the underscored warning: "*Confidential. Memorize essential part and destroy at once.*"

Roy looked around him, and found no one nearer than a bevy of school children a hundred feet away frolicking along the paths with strapped books and slates. Beyond them a policeman sauntered, juggling his club. The children passed, the policeman turned into a path leading toward the Soldiers' Monument, then Gaylord's eyes leaped back to the letter and read:

I have investigated to my satisfaction the matter of your loyalty, your character, and your antecedents. This accounts for the delay of a week. I am not going to ask you to lay down your life on the altar of patriotism, but I *am* going to ask of you unswerving devotion, unquestioning obedience, and, above all, absolute silence respecting your relations with me.

In asking you to respect my wishes, I am actuated by motives which, for the present, must be kept a secret from you. It is sufficient to say that solely by blind obedience can my object be attained, and only through you as long as you choose to be close-mouthed and subservient. You will take no friend into your confidence—not even the girl you hold dearest and who is employed by the same firm that pays you wages.

These are your orders for the present, and all expenses incurred relative thereto will be refunded duly by means of a Treasury warrant:

Resign your position, and let it be known to your employers and others interested that you are going to France for the purpose of driving an ambulance for a Red Cross unit. Before leaving Boston provide yourself with open letters of recommendation, a birth certificate, and a written statement from the local sales manager of your firm to the effect that you are a skilled driver and repairer of gasoline motor-vehicles.

With these documents in your possession, you will proceed to New York next Wednesday or Thursday, and register under your own name at the Regal Hotel, Broadway, near Eighty-Third Street. There I will communicate with you later and give you additional instructions. In the event that the hotel named has no available accommodations, you will seek some near-by hotel and call for your mail at the Regal, explaining to the room-clerk at the latter place that you had made arrangements for the forwarding of your mail there.

In concluding, I would say that I was favor-

ably impressed by the photograph you enclosed in the letter you sent me, and that I hope one day to be able to greet you personally here in Washington. Hereafter I will address you on plain paper, and will sign simply my initials.

I thank you, my young friend, not only for the service you are about to render your flag and country, but also for the personal favors you are on the point of showing to,

Your most grateful friend,

THE PRESIDENT.

The Frog Pond was near by. There was little to remember aside from the name of the New York hotel.

Roy tore the closely written sheet of paper into fine pieces and scattered them unseen on the breeze-wrinkled surface of the pond. Later he crumpled up the envelope and threw it down a sewer opening near the Boylston Street corner. Not even to Mary would he show the precious letter.

She could guess or surmise the reason for his becoming a Red Cross man. Henceforth he decided to be as close-mouthed as the proverbial clam at high tide. In him the President would find a confidant worthy of absolute trust.

Now he marched to the office and told the immaculate sales manager that within forty-eight hours he must get a new tester from the factory to succeed him as demonstrator. He regretted the short notice given—but he was ineligible for the army and navy, and was going to France to drive a Red Cross ambulance for the Americans, and would the S. M. be good enough to give him a certificate to the effect that he was a young man of good character, as well as a willing and skilled driver and repairer of gasoline-driven motor vehicles?

The sales manager regretted the coming separation, but after all Roy was merely a cog in the big wheel of the Perfect Six. So the S. M. scowled into the transmitter of the telephone, called for Miss Long Distance, and after a brief talk with the factory, dictated a letter to his stenographer, signed it, and handed it to Roy. It was a flattering testimonial to his general character and ability, and as Roy read it his heart swelled big with gratitude for the superior who had raised his salary semiannually for the last five years, and who, though crusty and abrupt at times under the stress of "low peak" sales, had always been "square" with him. He muttered his thanks, fingering the open letter awkwardly, but the S. M. cut him short.

"All I'll ask of you, Gaylord," he snapped, "is to take care of the Waltham lady on that town car proposition in the morning. Give her a smooth ride. Show her all about the electric lights and starter, and explain the changeable limousine body to her. Try hard to land her, for she's got a raft of well-to-do connections that bank high on her judgment. I wish you all kinds of luck abroad. You'll make good. If I were a few years younger and wasn't tied up with a contract I'd be with you myself."

The day passed by with little to do. Roy found time to visit the office of the city registrar and get a certified copy of his birth record. Likewise he found opportunity to visit the offices of several citizens of standing well known to him who vouched in writing for their knowledge of his good qualities and abilities in the motor line. Armed thus, about closing time, he approached Mary.

"I'm off to-morrow night," he said simply. "I'm going to France on Red Cross business."

She looked at him a long while, then asked gently: "On affairs of the President?"

He neither affirmed nor denied it, but with a woman's ready intuition she divined that he was acting under orders. Later, as he called at her home for a farewell visit, she asked him many questions, but he parried them and left her pouting and tearful. All he would admit was that he was going to New York, there to sign up as an ambulance driver with one of the Red Cross units with connections in France.

"They need skilled chauffeurs and mechanics over there," he said, "and they're not so particular about eyesight so long's a fellow can navigate a car. It's a good work, and you ought to be glad I'm going."

And she was, but womanlike was nettled because he withheld his entire confidence and refused to tell her whether or not he had heard from the President again, and whether the "Red Cross work" had been mapped out in Washington.

Morning came. The Waltham lady got a smooth ride through selected streets, a "charming" speed spin along the Mill Dam Road, and was signed up for a Perfect Six chassis and two bodies. Gaylord was free. He drew his pay, found time to exchange a brief word with Mary, and then went to his bank and arranged for a modest letter of credit.

The day wore on. Roy bought and packed a steamer trunk. A few farewell visits paid, a telephonic good-by to Mary's mother, and as evening approached he called for the girl and joined her at an early dinner.

The meal was eaten almost silently, Mary scarcely touching her food or raising her eyes to his, but in the taxicab which bore them to the station in time for him to board the seven-o'clock train, she seemed to awaken to the fact that her man was going from her—quite likely on a dangerous mission.

Now she clung to him, kissed him, and begged him not to leave her.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE HOTEL REGAL.

THE New York train was late, and it was nearly two in the morning before Gaylord reached the hotel he had been told to patronize. A sleepy night clerk spun the register around for him, found the key to a two-dollar room, and a chocolate-colored West Indian ushered him into the elevator and conducted him to his floor.

Morning came, and with it Roy's steamer trunk. But there was no mail for him at the desk, and the Bostonian put in an irksome day of suspense and conjecture.

The second morning, however, brought a Washington letter — a letter replete with definite instructions. Roy read it carefully from beginning to end, then reread it and entered two addresses in a memorandum book.

The communication, signed simply with the well-known initials, was on plain paper.

Gaylord was instructed to present himself to the New York representative of the Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps as a candidate for service in France. He was bidden to make no reference whatever to the real nature of his errand.

Arrived in Paris he was to proceed to the Hôtel Michodière in the Rue de Bourgogne, a place frequented by American ambulance drivers in their passages through the city. At the Hôtel Michodière, the letter advised Gaylord, he would receive further instructions from the President's trusted lieutenant in France.

The letter added the following significant advice:

> Seemingly unimportant letters and circulars may come to you through the mails from time to time. You will read each of them carefully, and any paper containing the printed or written words, "*the road to market*"—no matter what the context—you will consider as a personal order from me, and treat as follows: Saturate such a paper with a weak solution of plain salt and water and hold up to a light. *This must be done privately*. Writing will appear, and will constitute your instructions. Disregard all matter not brought out by the sodium solution, and immediately after memorizing instructions, destroy each communication.
>
> This is the last message you will receive from me until you return to the United States. *Burn this and destroy the ashes.* I thank you, and hope to be able to thank you personally in Washington within a few months.

Murmuring "the road to market," Gaylord tore the closely typed document into two strips and fashioned the latter into spills. He burned these, ground up the ashes and dropped them into a cuspidor. The cleverest spy, he reflected, would be at a loss how to reconstruct and read a letter so treated. The President's instructions carried out so far, Roy pocketed his testimonials and headed for the nearest "L" station.

A kindly old gentleman with a scholarly face surmounted by a halo of white hair met him in the Volunteer Ambulance Corps offices at 8 Rector Street, and after reading the recommendations, shook hands warmly with the new recruit.

"Awfully glad to send you over, Mr. Gaylord," he said, beaming on Roy. "It isn't every day we get men like you who can take a car to pieces and put it together again. I'll see about your passport and will run over to the local bureau and vouch

for you personally. All you need that I can see is a dozen photographs about two by three. You run along and get those this forenoon, and maybe we can get you off on the Touraine next Monday. She's *supposed* to sail Saturday, but I happen to know she won't."

In Wall Street, Roy found an establishment which turned out passport photographs " while you wait," and although the waiting was a matter of nearly two hours, he was back at the Rector Street address in time to have the V. M. A. man take him that same afternoon to both the local passport bureau and the offices of the French consul general.

" I'm oiling the way for you," the old man explained, " so there won't be any delay Monday. I'll have your letters and papers ready for you bright and early. If the U-boats don't get you, you'll be in France within twelve days."

Saturday, the following day, passed quickly, helped along by a shopping expedition during which Roy laid in a few necessities in the shape of driving-gauntlets, shoes, and leggings.

Sunday dragged along. Lonesome and friendless, the Bostonian put in the day letter-writing and wandering through Bronx Park.

Nine o'clock Monday morning found Roy seated in the outer offices of Gordon Elliott, and thirty minutes or so later the old man bustled in and went through his mail. Presently he sent a clerk out and summoned the volunteer.

" Everything's here, Mr. Gaylord," he said with a smile. He held out an official-size envelope plump with folded papers, and continued: " All you have to do now is to slip over to the French consulate for your visé, and then drop in on the steamship people for your ticket. There's plenty of room aboard the Touraine. Meet me here at three o'clock and I'll introduce you to a fine young fellow who's going over to join the corps. I feel certain that Nesbit and you will make a good team. You two are the only recruits we have for this steamer."

Promptly at three o'clock he was on hand in the outer office, and soon Gordon Elliott emerged from the inner room, followed by a keen-eyed man apparently in the early thirties.

" Shake hands with Mr. Nesbit," the Red Cross representative said. " Mr. Nesbit—Mr. Gaylord, of Boston."

Roy gripped the hand of the stranger, and saw a firm chin, a tooth-brush mustache, and a weather-bronzed face lit up by the palest yet deepest blue eyes he had ever seen. There was a military make-up about this erect, deep-chested, and narrow-hipped person in rough but fashionably cut tweeds that awed the man from Boston.

Nesbit, a walking-stick hooked jauntily over one forearm, a rain-coat slung carelessly over the other, appeared to be a man of the world—a man who asked no odds of any one and was accustomed to taking his own part in tight places.

" Glad to know you, Gaylord," the man in tweeds said with a smile. " Mr. Elliott tells me that you're a motor expert. Hope I get assigned to the same section and on the same car with you. I hardly know a spark-plug from a monkey-wrench—but I'm willing to learn."

There was a warmth in the grip of the hand, a spontaneity and sincerity in the wholesome smile, that appealed most strongly to Roy. Heartily he returned the greeting, then muttered a disclaimer as to being in any sense an " expert."

A laugh all around followed, then the old man fished out a box of cigars and telephoned for a taxicab.

The Blue Peter was at the fore-truck of the Touraine as the three men gained the pier, and soon after the two passengers flashed their tickets and passports and crossed the cabin gangplank a hoarse blast of the steamship's siren roused the echoes along the water-front and warned ashore those who had no further business aboard.

Presently the liner tuned up her engines and started slowly astern, and as Nesbit left him to get some " last-minute " letters ready for the pilot, Roy stood on the port side of the boat-deck and watched the unfamiliar faces on the pier slip past. Suddenly the white head of Gordon Elliott bobbed out of the line.

" You tie up with Nesbit," the old man called out. " Good-by and good—"

The freshening breeze from up the North River whipped away the balance of Elliott's farewell, and soon the Touraine was in mid-stream and was being snubbed around by a brace of snorting tugs.

A smooth passage followed, uneventful in any sense save for the dousing of the lights the night previous to approaching the French coast. Neither Zeppelin nor U-boat was sighted, the lower reaches of the Gironde were gained in safety, and Bordeaux was reached.

Roy's heart thumped perceptibly quicker as he stepped for the first time on French soil, and as the Gare St. Jean was reached and he saw the big station crowded with leave-expired *poilus* on their way back to the trenches, he eyed almost reverently the groups of capable-looking fellows in campaign-stained horizon blue.

Now he found Nesbit's services of the greatest value, for his companion not only spoke French like a native, but seemed to know just what to do and where to go for it. In a trice he secured reduced-rate travel orders for them both, exchanged jokes with the one-armed captain of infantry on duty in the capacity of *commissaire militaire*, and almost before Roy realized it their baggage had been "registered" and they were seated in a first-class compartment of the Bordeaux-Paris morning express.

"We're lucky to make this train," Nesbit observed, lighting a cigarette. "Now we'll get to Paris before dark and have time to hunt up decent quarters and get a square meal. The whole town shuts up tight at nine-thirty these days."

"I'd kind of made up my mind," Roy hesitated, "to put up at the Hôtel Michodière in the Rue de Bourgogne. They say some of the American ambulance fellows hang out there."

"Rue de Bourgogne?" Nesbit repeated, a thoughtful frown on his face. "That's not a bad idea. As I remember, it's quite near the station of our arrival—the Quai d'Orsay. I think I'll trail along with you and give it the once-over."

Nesbit's decision pleased Gaylord, for the elder man had proved to be a fine traveling companion and an all-round good fellow who had seemingly voyaged almost everywhere. He spoke four or five languages.

Although rather close-mouthed as to the nature of the business which had taken him over so much of the world, and absolutely reticent concerning his personal connections and resources, Nesbit had won both admiration and respect from the Bostonian and was fast gaining his friendship.

Puzzled at times by Nesbit's reserve, Roy had long since given up guessing the nature of his companion's profession and station in life, and had somehow reached the conclusion that Nesbit was possessed of a considerable amount of means, and that "family trouble" of some sort was responsible for the unfailing reticence.

This much Roy knew: that Nesbit was an expert with firearms, a linguist extraordinary, and that, among other places, he had lived in Mexico, Guatemala, China, and Japan, as well as practically every large city in Europe.

The train left the vineyard-dotted landscape of the Midi, steamed through Old Touraine, and, on time to the dot, pulled into the Paris terminal. Here, while Nesbit attended to the baggage, Roy sat in an open taxicab and stared high over the dome of the Invalides where a double-seated Caudron was buzzing noisily along through the air.

Nattily uniformed and decorated officers strode briskly by, saluted at frequent intervals by stalwart *poilus* with the mud of the trenches still evident on their shoes and spiral puttees. On every hand the Bostonian found something worth looking at. With an effort he brought himself to the realization that at last he was actually in France—and on his way to the fighting front to do something for the President.

Presently Nesbit came along, followed by a porter and a baggage-truck, and after a short drive the Hôtel Michodière was reached and pronounced to be "all right" by a group of young khaki-clad Americans who swarmed around the new arrivals in the lobby and asked for news and papers from home.

There were vacant rooms there—two on the second floor—and soon Roy and Nesbit had registered and had filled out the neces-

sary blanks for the police. They were in ample time for the evening *table d'hôte*, and found on every tongue the same question:

"When will the first expedition sail?"

While Nesbit shrugged his shoulders and went on to explain to the best of his ability, Roy approached the woman in charge and made shift to ask if there was any mail for him.

No, there was nothing yet for *monsieur*. Should any letters arrive, he would find them on the key-rack under the number corresponding to that of his room. Roy was not surprised.

He could scarcely expect as yet to receive orders from the Paris agent of the President.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE HÔTEL MICHODIÈRE.

MORNING came, and after breakfast, the usual repast of coffee, hot milk, and rolls, served in his room, Roy finished dressing, and went down-stairs to find the pigeonholes of the key-rack fairly bristling with letters.

Many of them, he saw at a glance, were addressed to Americans stopping at the hotel, and bore in one corner of the envelopes the imprint of a famous banking-house.

One was addressed to him. He opened it and drew out what was obviously a mimeographed circular inviting him to subscribe for the latest French war loan. It read:

TO ALL GOOD AMERICANS IN FRANCE!

Your own Benjamin Franklin once said: "The road to wealth is as plain as the road to market." Now is your time to subscribe to the War Loan and reap a higher percentage of interest than that which an equal amount will yield invested in American—

Thus far Gaylord had read when over the top of the circular he saw Nesbit approach, yawn, and open an envelope similar to the one he held in his hand. Almost immediately a bored expression passed over his face, and he crumpled both letter and envelope and tossed them airily into a waste-basket.

"Good morning, Gaylord," he said pleasantly, his pale-blue eyes flashing from Roy's face to the open circular in his hand. "I see you've got an invitation to contribute to the war loan, too," he went on after a pause. "These financial sharps are surely on the job. They must have agents going around copying the names from the different hotel registers."

Roy returned the greeting, and was about to consign the circular to the same waste-basket when some subconscious sense came to his rescue and made him remember the phrase "The Road to Market." These words were incorporated in the opening paragraph of the letter. Now it flashed over him that he held in his hands the invisible orders from the President's representative.

He mumbled some response, and, to his immense relief, Nesbit sat down, picked up a morning paper, and turned his back on him. Forthwith Roy slipped the circular and envelope into his pocket and sauntered slowly toward the stairs. As he passed the first landing he quickened his pace, and soon gained his room and locked himself in.

His first act was to place his hat over the keyhole, then he found the paper of table salt he had ready for the emergency, and prepared a solution of it in the enameled wash-basin his bedroom afforded. Now he immersed the circular into the liquid, and, taking no chances, soaked the envelope also.

One by one the gummed flaps of the envelope yielded to the softening influence of the salted water, and presently Roy held it between him and the light that streamed in from the Rue de Bourgogne. There was no result.

His name and address alone appeared on what had constituted the face of the container. Roy laid it aside and held up the saturated sheet of paper.

A grunt of satisfaction came from him as he saw between the mimeographed lines rows of typed characters now scarcely less distinct.

A faint violet at first, with the passing

of the moments they deepened in shade and became a brilliant purple.

Eagerly his eyes drank in the following:

READ THIS AND THEN DESTROY ABSOLUTELY

Henceforth the President desires that you obey orders from me. Your immediate instructions are that you report without delay to Red Cross headquarters, and ask as a favor that you be assigned to American Section No. 21. If you are asked why you prefer that particular section, you may state that you understand that that is the "crack" corps of ambulanciers, and that you want to join it at the front without delay.

By reason of your intimate knowledge of motor-cars it may possibly become the intention of your corps commander to keep you in camp with the repair mechanics. You must stipulate before signing for your six months of service that you must be permitted to drive a car and evacuate the wounded just as the other drivers of limited qualifications are, and have been, doing. You may if you wish consent to the performance of extra work with the repair gang during hours that would otherwise be ones of leisure for you.

You will hear from me again very shortly. Be on the alert for circulars or letters containing the code words agreed upon, and always be in a position to have the necessary solution handy.

There was neither signature nor initials appended to the message, nor did Roy dare hazard a guess as to the identity of the President's agent. He finished reading the communication, then shredded the wet paper into particles. These he rolled into little balls and flipped them through the open window into the street.

Meanwhile he considered the fact that other circulars had arrived, and that Nesbit had received one and had thrown it away.

An idea came to him—a thought which he hastened to put into operation. He locked his door and went down-stairs.

Nesbit sat where Roy had last seen him. He looked up as the Bostonian approached.

"Will we run over to headquarters about ten?" he asked.

Roy nodded. "Might's well, I suppose."

Nesbit consulted his watch, arose, and said he was going out for cigarettes.

To Roy's unspoken delight, the other picked up his hat, seized his stick, and departed. This was Gaylord's chance. He glanced around the deserted lobby. No one was visible, save an old woman polishing silver near the doors communicating with the dining-room.

Roy hitched his chair near the waste-basket and an instant afterward the crumpled circular cast aside by Nesbit was in his possession.

Less than thirty seconds later the letter was smoothed out and thrust into the solution. Eagerly Roy seized it and held it dripping up to the light. But no writing appeared between the typed lines. The particular circular mailed to Nesbit was what it appeared to be—nothing else. Now Roy destroyed it as he had the other, marveling at the cunning displayed by the President's agent.

Again Roy descended to the lobby, where he was joined presently by Nesbit. After a short walk to Red Cross Headquarters, not far from the Chamber of Deputies, the two recruits were welcomed by the khaki-clad man in charge.

"We're mighty lucky to get *you*," he told Roy after looking over his papers and reading Gordon Elliott's letter of introduction. "Hope we can persuade you to stay at our repair base at Bar-le-Duc. We're awfully short of mechanics, and some of these new fellows are devilish hard on cars—let alone the unavoidable smash-ups."

But Roy shook his head smilingly. "I'm sorry to seem unobliging," he said with firmness, "but I came to France to *drive* cars—not to *doctor* 'em. I want to do my bit with Section 21. When I'm not busy driving I'll be only too glad to do what tinkering I can to keep the ambulances in shape."

"I see," the Red Cross official said, disappointment evident in both his manner and tone. "You're just like the rest of 'em; you want all the excitement you can get."

He thought for a moment or two, then continued:

"I guess I can fix both of you men up for Section 21. They moved last week from Dieue quite close to the German stronghold at ——. There's a French attack being planned—you mustn't speak of it to any one—to drive the German artillery back from the heights.

"I think I can get your papers and see you off within four days—and inside of a fortnight"—the speaker smiled grimly—"I can promise you all the excitement you want."

"That suits me," Nesbit declared.

Roy breathed easier. He had complied with the instructions given him so far, and had found it no difficult task.

Three busy days followed. The recruits were measured for uniforms, furnished with rubber boots and kit-bags, and later conducted to the offices of the Board of Military Control in the Rue Pinel, where they were handed the magic *Carnet d'Étrangér*—the sealed and signed and photograph-adorned red book passing one without question to practically any point within the "Zone of the Armies."

Came the morning when Roy went downstairs and found a scrawled invitation for him to visit an antique-shop, where, among other objects for sale, was a painting by Lévy-Croussac entitled "The Road to Market," a "most excellent delineation of sheeps and cows on a beautiful country road."

Gaylord had never heard of Lévy-Croussac, he was not particularly interested in paintings, but the code words drew his attention, and he lost no time in developing the poorly spelled missive, which, he recollected afterward, seemed damp and somewhat stained as he drew it out of its envelope.

After a soaking in the saline solution, the familiar instructions to read and destroy appeared, followed by the orders:

You will leave town within a day or two, and will take a train for ——, from which place you will proceed by auto-ambulance to a point in the vicinity of ——, just west of the German lines. A Frech attack is being planned against the German fortress on the heretofore impregnable Heights of ——, and it is in connection with this that your valuable services are to be employed in a manner which you will understand later.

Immediately after luncheon to-morrow you will retire to your room in the hotel, and as a signal that you are there, *alone*, you will draw your window-shade almost down to the sill. Shortly thereafter you will receive a package enclosed in plain wrapping-paper. You will place it, unopened, in the bottom of your kit-bag. You will show this package to no living person, nor will you speak of it to any one, but will keep it dry and contained within its inner waterproof wrappings until such a time as you may be assigned to your own ambulance and actively engaged in the evacuation of the wounded.

When such a time arrives, and you are familiar with the roads and approaches to ——, you will open the outer jacket covering the apparatus, and will obey to the letter the instructions contained therein in an envelope. *Be sure that you are alone and unobserved when you open the package,* and treat the paper inside the envelope exactly as you have treated this.

And, above all, remember that you are the trusted man and representative of the President, and that you will suffer death rather than betray his plans for an early ending of the war. Never forget that millions of lives hang in the balance, and that a great deal depends on your implicit confidence, obedience, and absolute silence respecting your mission.

"The mystery thickens," Roy mused as he destroyed the lengthy missive and proceeded to flip the rolled-up pellets of saturated paper out onto the asphalt of the Rue de Bourgogne.

What effect on the ending of the world war the mere possession of a package of "apparatus" by an American ambulance-driver at the front could have, was a proposition beyond him. In any event, he decided after a period of fruitless puzzling, it was his duty to go ahead and obey orders without question.

Doubtless, in time, all would be made clear to him. If it were the purpose of the President to have him work in the dark, the Chief Executive must have some very good reason for such action.

The following day Roy ate somewhat hastily, and after luncheon left the table without the usual dalliance over his coffee. He spoke of having some letters to get off, gained his room, and locked the door.

Then, according to instructions, he drew down the window-shade, an act visible plainly to any one standing below in the street.

Now he waited patiently for developments.

They came eventually, but nearly a half an hour elapsed before somebody tapped on his door, and he opened it to find Nesbit standing there with a square parcel in his hand.

"Here's a package for you, old top," he

said lightly. "It's marked 'Personal and important,' and just came by messenger. Thought I'd fetch it up myself."

The eyes of the speaker flashed from Roy to the drawn curtain.

"What's up?" he went on to ask. "Got a headache? Why so dark?"

Roy mumbled something about having had to knock off letter-writing on account of feeling drowsy. He faked a yawn, and announced his intention of taking a nap. He felt disturbed, uneasy, and wished to himself that Nesbit would go away without showing any curiosity about the package he now held in his hand.

Everything happened in accordance with his unspoken wish. Nesbit moved off down the hallway, calling back over his shoulder:

"Have your sleep out. I'll be around all the afternoon, and if the office phones for us I'll wake you up."

With a sigh of relief Roy closed and fastened the door, then gave his attention to the package.

Beyond a typed label bearing his name, hotel address, and the words "Personal and important," the wrappings of the object were plain. The parcel was securely corded, cubical in shape, some nine inches square, and weighed, as Roy estimated, fourteen or fifteen pounds.

Gaylord wasted little time in guesses as to the nature of the "apparatus" contained, but wrapped it up in his raincoat and placed it at the very bottom of his kit-bag. On top of it he piled extra flannel shirts and underwear, wadded in his pair of blankets, and then thrust the handle through the gathering-rings at the top of the bag, and locked it in place. Then he threw himself on the bed and feigned sleep.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE FIGHTING FRONT.

IT was a life strange and new and full of thrills that Roy lived after leaving Paris. An auto-ambulance met his train at ——, took the two recruits and their belongings on board, and bumped its way out of town past ammunition convoys moving slowly toward the fighting front. Columns of troops, mud-stained and haggard from the vigil of the trenches, poured along the highway from the direction of the Verdun sector, out of shell-range at last and on their way to a welcome period of rest.

At a fork of the roads the car bore off to the right and pressed on toward ——. Now no more troops were met, but always ahead of the Red Cross men lay the seemingly endless trains of ammunition wagons.

The driver, a Baltimore man, leaned toward Nesbit and Roy, wedged in with him on the front seat, and in a voice shrill above the sputtering of the exhaust, explained:

"There's a big attack coming off on ——. They've been rushing ammunition up here for the last six weeks. The big stuff comes in on the narrow-gage railroad. Wait till you see the train with the rolling curtain."

The phrase puzzled Roy until thirty minutes later, when, within a short ride of the camp, the Baltimore man pointed to a railroad track bordering the road. No rails were in sight, however, and up the invisible track sped the strangest-looking train the Bostonian had ever seen.

A gasoline-driven locomotive ground its way noisily along at the head of a string of flat cars piled high with solid-looking boxes. Rope beckets for lifting purposes were affixed to the ends of the boxes, and even to Roy's unpractised eyes it was apparent that the cases held ammunition of large caliber.

But the most striking feature about the train was the painted canvas which stretched ahead of it and lay behind it, matching and blending with the landscape, and shielding the glistening face of the rail from the view of enemy aeroplanes. The canvas, mottled with green and brown somewhat like the marbled edges of an unabridged dictionary, was at least double the width of the single line of track.

As the train moved onward a roller arrangement just ahead of the locomotive picked it up, bore it smoothly over the decked-in flat cars, and dropped it behind the last car, where it lay flat and masked the track.

"There's a big ammunition base just ahead," the chauffeur shouted as they passed the train and pulled into a clear stretch of macadam spotted here and there by a shell-car. "The French are planning the biggest offensive since the Douaumont-Vaux attacks last year, and they're piling up ammunition enough to win the heights. There's a double squadrille of planes on hand to keep the German observers back, and even at that they ain't taking any chances of keeping the stuff from being spotted from planes. Look!"

Roy's eyes followed the nod to the right of the Baltimore man, and presently, with its engine throttled low, the ambulance crept by a patch of land covering two acres or a little more, each square foot of the surface of which was stacked high with naked shells of large caliber, and boxed projectiles of lesser diameter and power.

A dozen feet or so above the surface of the earth, this patch of land was roofed over from field to road-edge with a thatch-like covering of greenish brush and straw which, viewed from an aeroplane thousands of feet above, must surely have presented the appearance of being a little field of growing grain — a tiny square of land not unlike adjacent squares of thriving buckwheat and timothy.

A multitude of poles and timbers gave support to the roof of straw and brush, and before the ambulance passed the base Roy could discern where the concealed railway entered the territory. Indeed, he could distinguish the platforms, where gangs of men were grouped awaiting the coming of the train.

Now a hoarse buzzing sound came to the ears of the men on the American car, and Roy and Nesbit looked ahead and upward, and saw, over a patch of woods, a flotilla of aeroplanes cruising in a grand circle, the outer periphery of which brought them, in turn, almost within range of the antiaircraft guns on the gray heights.

Even as they looked, dull reports came from far ahead, and little puffs of dark-colored smoke blotched the blue of the heavens around what appeared, at that distance, to be a pair of swiftly moving specks.

"German shrapnel," the chauffeur explained. "The French antiplane shells show up against the sky like a pure white ball."

They had passed several villages, and now drew near a cantonment of huts bordered by rows of tents. A score or so of auto-ambulances were parked at the far end of the nearest row, and the Stars and Stripes floated proudly from a large tent which, Roy assumed rightly, was the mess-tent of the section.

They pulled up, and, as if to signal the arrival of the strangers, a large shell screamed far overhead and burst several miles within the French lines.

"We're within range," Roy said, surprised.

The Baltimore man explained that they were well within range of the German guns, but hidden by direct fire from —— by an intervening hill. Now a score of seasoned and sun-bronzed Americans came forward, and introductions and hand-shaking was in order.

Later, Roy met the chief of the section, and to his delight was assigned to duty that very night.

"I'll let you ride with one of the boys to-night," the chief said, "so's to have you acquainted with the roads. We have only one advanced post to evacuate here, and there's practically nothing to do but carry a few sick from —— back to ——. Later we'll have lots of wounded to carry. To-morrow night you can drive a car of your own — and I suppose you'd like to have Nesbit put on with you?"

The idea appealed to Roy. He thanked the chief, and so the matter was settled. Then the two recruits were assigned to a tent, and after some unpacking and a wash-up they proceeded to get better acquainted with their fellow members.

Night came, and Roy got his first taste of actual warfare in the shape of a shell which burst in the road ahead of his car and wiped out an artillery supply truck—horses and teamsters and all. There were no wounded to carry, but a badly blocked road resulted, and during the wait Roy and the Baltimore man, to whose car he had been assigned, sat and smoked and talked of home.

Several more shells screamed past before the wreckage was cleared, and Roy breathed easier as they pulled out of the danger zone and sped along a hillside road under dimmed headlights. Soon they reached the *poste de secours*, the field hospital which had been established in a deserted quarry, and found five sick men ready for the first trip to ——.

"This is the easiest place we've ever had," Roy's companion explained. "We have but this one post to evacuate, and it takes but three cars to do the work. When they get the infantry up here and start that attack, we'll be busy enough."

Two round trips were made to the base hospital, and by the time daylight came Roy knew the roads well enough to feel responsible for a car of his own.

He told the chief this at breakfast, and was assigned to a new car. Nesbit was told off to ride with him. Now he remembered the instructions of the President's agent, for he had a car of his own, and knew the —— road and approaches. It was time for him to open the package and receive further instructions.

For a time Roy puzzled over the proposition of how he was going to get rid of his tentmate long enough to "develop" the missive he expected to find in the package. But it seemed as though Nesbit could read his unspoken wish, for shortly after breakfast he slung a pair of field-glasses over his shoulder and picked up his uniform cap.

"You've been up all night, old top," he said with a smile, "and I guess you'll sleep better if I'm not puttering around. I'm going to get the chief's permission to take a little walk. I'll see you later, and help you polish up the car for to-night."

Through the open flap of the tent Roy watched his companion disappear. Immediately he got up from his cot and poured a little water in his wash-basin. To this he added salt, then opened his kit-bag and got out the package. Inside the paper wrapping he found an inner covering of rubberized cloth, laced up at one side, and within this he discovered a plain envelope containing a blank sheet of paper, together with a box which looked as if it were made out of gun-metal. It had a sliding top, notched at one side to facilitate opening, and sealed at the opposite side by a copper wire which pierced the lid and top of the box proper.

It was but a cursory examination that Roy gave the box, for he knew not how long he would remain alone. He laid it aside for the time being, and placed the sheet of paper in the wash-basin. Almost immediately the familiar typewritten characters began to appear. Soon Roy was able to read:

This box contains an apparatus of recent invention, perfected for the purpose of wireless telephony along chosen and prepared "lanes of activity." One of these lanes between our secret agencies in France and Germany passes over the ammunition base near ——, across the —— from ——. It is desired that you make a preliminary test of the instrument, preparatory to important telephonic instructions to be given you later.

On the night of June 23, or on any subsequent night, between the hours of midnight and 2 A.M., provided the weather is clear and that there is not very much wind, you will so arrange your trips with sick or wounded that you will pass the large ammunition base between the hours above mentioned. If a companion is riding with you, make some excuse for getting rid of him for a few minutes. It might be well to drop a wrench or some piece of material in the road, then send the person back to look for it. Obey the following orders down to the smallest detail:

Carry the telephone apparatus in the tool-box of your car, commencing the night mentioned; but do not, under any circumstances, break the seal or disturb the box until you are ready to communicate. Having gotten rid of your companion temporarily, you will halt your car at a point on the roadside nearest the center of the ammunition base. If a sentry proves inquisitive, you will plead motor trouble.

Place the apparatus on the ground, clip the wire, and pull back the lid. The copper grounding plugs will be disclosed. Lay one of these on the roadway in a northeasterly direction, and place the other plug on the naked earth at the opposite point of the compass. Then take out the combined receiver and mouthpiece and keep repeating your name. Speak softly, do not shout, then obey what you are told. Do not forget the dates or the hours; and as the sensitized lanes are necessarily narrow, you will pay strict attention to placing the instrument where you have been told.

In the possible event of failure to make a connection with either of our directing agencies, you will not continue calling for more than three or four minutes, but will close the box and secrete it. Instructions will come to you by mail thenceforth, to be developed in the usual manner. Mem-

orize the essential features of this note, then destroy it.

"What in the world do they expect me to—" Roy began, then gave it up. The future alone would solve the problem.

There was little to commit to memory. He destroyed the letter, replaced the box, and sought the sleep he needed after the night's work.

June 23rd was but three days off, and long before the first of the nights appointed Roy became perfectly familiar with the roads in and about ——, particularly with the main road to ——, which paralleled the canvas-covered munition railroad for quite a distance, and passed close by the thatched-over shell-base.

Roy eyed the spot curiously as he sped by it on his nightly trips, and wondered by what marvelous means a "lane" of electrical activity would be projected above it on and after midnight of the selected date.

In a general way, he knew that American scientists had been busy with U-boat and other problems of the world war, but that secret agencies had been established in Germany, and that a wireless device had been invented to communicate with them, were two facts which Roy found it difficult to grasp.

The work was not difficult, the new car ran smoothly, and Roy got to like Nesbit better and better as the days passed and the nightly work continued. Came the morning of the eventful June 23rd, and Roy chuckled to himself as he viewed the cloudless sky and the promise of a clear, windless night.

He slept but little that day, his mind busy with conjecture as to what the night would bring forth, and as to whether or not he could so time his trips as to be in the vicinity of the ammunition-base within the stipulated hours.

Supper-time came finally, and, watching his opportunity, Roy smuggled out the box and placed it in the big tool-case on the running-board of his car. In one side-pocket he then placed wire-cutting pliers, thrust a flat electric torch into the other, and went in to the evening meal well satisfied with himself.

All was ready so far as humanly possible. Faithfully and conscientiously he had obeyed both the President and his agent in France. Now Roy hoped only for clear weather and good luck with his running schedule.

CHAPTER VI.

HELL'S ACRE.

EVERYTHING went smoothly during the early hours of the evening. Roy and his companion made one round trip to ——, and eleven o'clock found them off again to the base hospital with a small load of sick. Now Roy showed his driving qualities, and put on speed that he estimated would bring them back abreast of the shell-pile shortly after one in the morning.

The weather held clear and fine, and he whistled as he drove.

The hospital was reached without mishap, the sick men borne from the ambulance, and as Roy headed back along the road to —— he began to think up some scheme for getting rid of Nesbit while he obeyed orders regarding the telephone.

At a point which he judged to be at least five minutes' brisk walk from the shell-base he slowed up and came to a stop.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "I hear one o' those rims rattling behind."

He got down and fumbled in the tool-box, telling Nesbit to keep his seat. "It 'll only take a second to tighten up," he explained.

Wrench in hand, he made believe to tighten up some nuts, then purposely left two tools on the turf at the roadside and resumed his seat. "O. K., now," he said, and started off again.

Roy now ran the car swiftly until abreast of the ammunition-piles, and just before he reached a point he determined to be midway he put out his foot stealthily and pushed off the ignition switch. The engine died, but before he braked the wheels of the rolling car, Roy pulled well out of the middle of the road on the side nearest the looming shell-stacks.

"What's up?" Nesbit grunted as Roy

got down from his seat and flashed his pocket lamp under the raised side of the hood.

"Ignition trouble," Roy answered. "It may be a short circuit, or something else. I'll have to run it down."

He puttered around under the hood for several moments, then straightened up. "I'm a stupid dunce, after all," he said disgustedly.

"What's wrong now?" Nesbit asked. He got down from his seat and approached Roy.

"Why," the latter answered, "I was fool enough to leave a wrench and a hammer back there at the side o' the road. D'you mind going back where we stopped and have a look around with your pocket light? If I get the car started I'll pull around and pick you up."

"Sure, I'll go back," Nesbit agreed, and started off at once.

As the sound of his footsteps died away Roy looked cautiously around. There was no moon, but the starlight showed him a sentry some forty yards distant, pacing slowly and unconcernedly up and down before a roadway entrance to the munition-base.

The light gleamed faintly on the long bayonet fixed to his shouldered rifle. Now a convoy of supply camions rattled by, their dimmed headlights passing Roy one by one, until at last the rear car's tail-light waned and disappeared up the road.

Now he was alone, and moved briskly. He drew the cloth covering from the telephone apparatus, and set it flat on the macadam just in front of the radiator of the car.

"One grounding plug northeast," he murmured, felt for his cutting pliers, and went on with the recalling of his instructions. "The other plug in the opposite direction," he mused, and leaned over to snip the wire and draw the lid back.

Came the patter of footsteps, and even as Roy looked up in alarm a whistle shrilled in the night, and from the gloom close at hand a muscular and agile figure leaped and threw him to the roadway.

For a few moments Roy struggled desperately, and tried to loosen the iron clasp of the arms that held his own helplessly at his sides; then he ceased, and thrilled at the voice of his opponent.

"Behave yourself, Gaylord!" came in the well-known tones of his teammate and companion.

"What d'you mean?" Roy asked with considerable heat, although he now lay passive while surprise and anger at the interruption coursed through him.

"You'll see in a moment, old top," Nesbit uttered in friendly fashion. He detached one arm, and once more the shrill sound of a whistle pierced the night.

By this time the sentry had given a separate alarm, and soon an armed guard came up at the double, but halted and stood at a respectable distance as Nesbit barked orders at them in French. An instant later a lighted staff car dashed up, stopped abruptly abreast of them, and out from it piled a graybeard in whom Roy recognized the general commanding the sector, followed by two other officers.

Questions and answers in French followed rapidly, and now Roy saw that one of the officers was the lieutenant attached to his own ambulance section. His mind in a whirl, wondering vaguely if they suspected him of being a spy, Roy struggled to his feet and watched one of the officers pick up the box containing the telephone apparatus.

Now the general glanced at his watch and gave some orders in a low tone. Immediately Nesbit saluted and asked a question—a question that was answered in the affirmative. Still holding the apparatus, one of the officers entered the staff car, and was followed by the others.

Then the car moved slowly off.

"Come on, now," Nesbit said with a chuckle as he turned to Roy. "Forget your 'ignition trouble' and follow that car. You're due to see the sight of your young life. We're going to ride along *The Road to Market*."

Humiliated and tantalized, Roy rained questions on his companion, but all he could draw from him were the words:

"Never mind now. You've done better than you know for the President. I'll explain later. You climb into that seat and

follow the general's car before it gets out of sight."

There was nothing left for Roy but to do as he was told. Dimly he sensed that he was being used as a pawn in some big game. In any event, he reflected, as he threw on the switch and stepped on the starting-pedal, everything was bound to turn out all right as long as a French general and his staff seemed to be in "the know."

It was but a short drive that followed. The red tail-light of the car ahead swung to the left presently, and Roy turned after it into a branch road bordered on both sides with a fenced-in field of plowed land.

There was little to be seen in the starlight that prevailed; but as the general's car came to a halt possibly three-quarters of a mile away from the main road, Roy drew up behind it and saw a man with a lantern standing beside a two-wheeled machine somewhat resembling a hose-cart.

Above its flat body, suspended between two uprights, a reel of wire hung. Roy recognized the cart as being a part of a field telephone outfit in general use on the fighting front.

"Watch," Nesbit cautioned, as Roy threw off his switch and set his hand-brake. "Just keep your eyes on the middle of that field for about five minutes. They're going to make use of your wireless telephone, but they're going to put a wire on it first."

Roy could see but little, although presently he made out the form of the officer bearing his apparatus. Followed closely by a man wheeling the reel of wire, the officer passed down a bridle-path bisecting the plowed field, and running at right angles to the road on which the cars stood.

"We'll wait here with the general," Nesbit said as the men and the reel disappeared. "They're going to take your box a third of a mile out there, attach a wire to the sliding lid, and then wheel that reel back here.

"When the engineers and photographers stationed at certain angles around here get all set, the general's going to let you pull one end of the wire."

Shadowy forms now came and went, and Roy saw that certain of them bore peculiar-looking cameras and tripods. Soon the general gave an order, and the oil lantern left standing in the roadway was extinguished. Nesbit glanced at the luminous hands of his wrist-watch and murmured:

"There's time. It's not yet two."

Roy would have ventured another question—a dozen of them—but now activity prevailed among the group at the entrance of the path, and the reel of wire came slowly into view. At a signal from the general a whistle was sounded, answered by other whistles from points along the roadside. Now the general glanced at his own watch, and then spoke briefly to Nesbit.

"Get hold of that wire," the latter said, turning to Roy. "Get a good grip of it by wrapping it around your hands a couple of turns—then pull like hell!"

Wonderingly Roy did as he was told; but, although he tugged with all his strength, and the wire threatened to cut his hands, no result followed. An officer grunted impatiently and laid hands on the wire ahead of the American. Together they pulled, and instant results followed.

A spot of red appeared in the distant center of the field. It grew larger, and became a tongue of flame which leaped high in the air and lit up the surroundings with a sickly glare of lurid red. Now the column of fire burned steadily, and became a blood-red finger against the night sky.

Roy gasped and stole a glance at Nesbit. But his companion was looking no longer at the pillar of flame.

His eyes were turned on the heights of ——, and as Roy's gaze followed that of the elder man, there came a flash from the hill across the ——, a vivid flash, followed in a few seconds by the sound of a screaming projectile which fell and burst within a hundred yards or so of the signal fire.

A grunt of satisfaction came from the bearded lips of the general, and an instant later twin flashes appeared on the hill held by the Germans, followed by two shells which fell and detonated quite close to the red flame.

"They've got the range," Nesbit muttered, and even as he spoke a series of flashes came from the heights, and present-

ly it seemed to Roy as if a bit of hell had been turned loose on earth.

Shells fell by scores; and as the red light went out, they continued to shriek and detonate over and around the spot where the "telephone" had been placed. Now larger guns of a heavier caliber came into action, and the ground beneath the feet of the observing party trembled as the death-laden missiles buried themselves harmlessly in the earth around the center of the field, a third of a mile away.

Roy's pulses tingled as the big guns roared, their iron throats vomiting shell and flame; then suddenly the American paled as he thought of what would have happened to the ammunition-base had he drawn back the slide of the box.

"Fooled!" he gasped. "But by whom, and for what?"

The gun-flashes grew fewer and became less frequent. Then impulsively Roy turned to Nesbit.

"For God's sake," he pleaded, "tell me what all this is about?"

"In a few minutes, old top," the elder man answered. "Through you we've fooled Fritz, and on the way back to camp I'll try to make it clear to you. If the French night photographs and triangulation schemes work out well, we've put in a good night's work for Uncle Sam."

A few words passed between Nesbit and the general; then the latter chuckled and waved his hand, a motion which Roy interpreted correctly as one of dismissal. He climbed into his seat; Nesbit hopped up beside him, and soon the two Americans were heading back for the main road.

Once behind the protecting hill and Roy turned on his headlights. The engine hummed sweetly, drowning the distant and intermitent grumbling of guns keeping alive somewhere their three-year-old duel. Now Nesbit cleared his throat and began the relation of some facts which opened Roy's eyes, and would have endangered the speeding car had not Roy been a "natural" driver, handling his wheel and throttle subconsciously.

"You remember your letter to the President?" Nesbit began, by way of an opening.

Roy nodded. How could he possibly forget it?

"Well—he never received it. There was a crooked mail-clerk on the Boston-New York run — a naturalized citizen of German birth by the name of Rudolph Groelich. Together with other letters addressed to certain departmental officials, he abstracted your letter, and in the course of a few hours it was in the possession of a New York secret agent of the German govrenment."

A light began to dawn upon Roy—a light that grew stronger as Nesbit continued:

"The New York man—Herr Gutmann by name—conceived the idea of using you as a cat's-paw. He reasoned that you were a young fellow jammed full of a spirit of such intense patriotism that you'd give your very life to further his schemes, provided he could induce you not to write to Washington again. So he wrote you—"

"But the letter was on White House paper," Roy broke in, "and was signed—"

"That's nothing to those cunning devils," Nesbit interrupted in turn. "A little job of embossing or printing, or the forgery of a signature, never stood in their way. He relied upon you, and thought of a way to use you. He didn't want you to write the President again, for he figured that a second letter would probably get through and arouse suspicion. The crooked mail-clerk was only on duty alternate nights, and couldn't very well go through all the Washington pouches. His policy had been to snatch and pocket what Presidential and official mail he could lay his hands on.

"So Gutmann strung you along until he had a plan perfected, and that's where your qualifications as a motor expert came in. For he knew through European connections that an American section of ambulances would be in the vicinity of ——, and it was his aim to get you into that particular section and have you betray unwittingly the big ammunition-base the German aeroplanes had been hunting so long."

In the semidarkness Roy's blushes were hidden, but he offered no excuses at the moment, for Nesbit was saying:

"The Germans knew — as they always know of most important movements—that a big attack on —— was in course of preparation. Their aeroplanes and spy systems tell them that much, in addition to what information leaks across by word of mouth from escaped prisoners. The only policy of the French has been to deceive the enemy as to the location of their artillery, the ammunition-bases, and the railway feeders.

"And so it was that the Germans knew —probably through prisoners working on the roads — that somewhere close to the main road beyond ——, and at a point well within gun range of —— heights, a huge ammunition-base was about complete. It remained only for them to locate it and shell it out of existence.

"The loss to the French would have run into the millions, and would have delayed the attack indefinitely. In the mean while the Germans were laying plans to take advantage of the lack of ammunition. We have no definite knowledge on that point at the present moment.

"*Their* plans worked smoothly; *our* plans worked smoothly; and it became an easy matter for them to have you join Section 21. We saw to all that. The only fault I have to find is that the car following ours to-night—or, at least, this morning—took the wrong turn, and was delayed to such an extent that I had to tackle you to keep you from opening that box of red fire. The mere sliding back of the lid was sufficient to ignite—"

"Then you mean to say," Roy broke in again, "that you knew what my orders were, and that you knew all along that it wasn't a telephone instrument?"

"I mean to say that within forty-eight hours of the time you received your first letter, coming apparently from the President, that I've had you under strict observation right up until the present moment. I was in the Boston post-office, and 'developed' each letter you received there. I sat in the car behind you on the train from Boston to New York. I received and developed your letters hours before you opened them—not only in Boston and New York, but in Paris. Do you remember getting a letter that seemed somewhat damp?"

"Yes." Roy recollected that particular letter.

"Well—that was a time when I had to cut it a little fine. It made no difference, however. And then again, you'll remember my fetching the package up to your room. That package was in my possession long enough to develop the instructions and dry them, and there was a brigadier of judiciary police and several officers from the *Quai des Orfèvres* waiting for the messenger.

"They made him cough up all he knew before they got through with him, and there'll be a little shooting affair within a day or two in Paris at which the chief of the German secret service will take one of the prominent parts. We had to go slow, so's not to alarm our birds.

"Of course you grasp the rest. German artillery observers on —— were to be at their posts, and await the red flare between specified hours on certain clear and windless nights. It was a pretty scheme, cleverly thought out; but, thanks to you, we routed out two dangerous nests of spies and put several kinks in the chain of German secret information. That's about all, I think—and here we are close to camp."

Roy throttled down, and made the turn which brought him close to the parked cars and rows of tents. He brought the car to a stop, then put two questions:

"But how did the President get to know that I'd written him? And who are you?"

Nesbit chuckled. "Let me introduce myself," he said, gripping Roy's hand and shaking it warmly. "I'm Special Agent Nesbit, of the Division of Investigation, Department of Justice, United States of America—and your very good friend.

"As to the other matter: all I'm at liberty to tell you now is that a girl wrote a letter to the President, and asked him not to send you to practically certain death. The President got her letter, and it was turned over to me."

"Mary Grey," Roy breathed gently.

Nesbit leaned toward his companion and spoke in a low tone.

"When?" Roy fairly shouted, squeezing Nesbit's hand with all his power and working his arm pump-fashion.

"The last report I had on the subject," the special agent said evenly, "was that she reached Bordeaux safely on the Rochambeau one day last week. Probably by this time she's hard at work in the American hospital at Neuilly. She won't look half bad in a nurse's costume—"

But Roy made no answer to the sally. He raised his eyes to the stars, thankful that the girl was not too far away, and that through her he had proven to be a useful tool—a valuable, though unwitting, agent of the President.

NOTE: Names of actual places and descriptions of locations behind the French lines have been deleted from Mr. Reynolds's story lest, in any manner, they should be of benefit to the enemy.—THE EDITOR.

(The end.)

OURS!

BY PHILIP A. ORME

LEGIONS, legions, putting out to sea,
Whence come you, whither go you, who are ye?
"Near and far we come, but weary-far we go,
Men of Maine and Texas, Georgia, Idaho."

What word bear you, what message leave?
"'Death' writ on steel; and 'Hope; never grieve.'"

Why sail you solemn, clad in drab and dun?
"We are the World's hope, her last and only one."

Legions, legions, plowing down the bay,
Shall you save the world then, fighting far away?
"God save you, and God take our souls,
If at last the battle o'er our ensign rolls!"

What foe face you, what powers address?
"Powers mad and terrible, dark, and frightfulness."

Why sail you solemn, clad in drab and dun?
"We are the World's hope, her last and only one."

Legions, legions, misty on the main,
When shall you rest you in your homes again?
"Rest shall be for many far from home;
Hope may die of hoping ere again we come."

What is your last word, Death or Love?
"Death and Love are brothers where we shall move."

Why sail you solemn, clad in drab and dun?
"We are the World's hope, her last, her only one."

The Mysterious Millionaire

by George Allan England

DOWN AND OUT.

THE office door was locked—the door bearing on its glass panel the inscription:

J. B. LINWOOD
Broker
INVESTMENT SECURITIES

It resisted the hand of David Forbes. Forbes scowled, more than a little disappointed, for he had particularly wanted to see his friend in this hour of the broker's annihilating downfall. Impatiently he rapped on the glass, and rapped again. No answer from within, and yet the elevator-starter in the hall down-stairs had just now told him Forbes had come in, only a quarter-hour before, and had not gone out again.

"Where the devil can he be, I'd like to know?" growled Forbes, and knocked again, this time insistently. A chair scraped inside the office; a step sounded; the bolt was clicked back and the door swung open.

"Hello, Jim, old man," exclaimed Forbes. "What's the row? Not home to callers?"

"Not at home is right," answered Linwood. His face was startlingly pale, by contrast with his black hair brushed smoothly back; his dark eyes, sunken and hollow, were ringed with the circles painted by disaster and exhaustion. They smoldered dully, as he looked at his friend—the best friend he had in the world, even though their lines of work lay wide apart; for Linwood had been long "in the street," while Forbes was winning spurs as a consulting engineer. "Not at home, Dave — but you're different, of course. Come in. What's up?"

Forbes entered the office, the windows of which overlooked the noisy turmoil and hurry-skurry of the Broad Street "curb." Linwood immediately locked the door again.

"I don't want anybody else butting in," he exclaimed, half-apologetically. "I've let everybody go — both clerks, stenographer, and all. Paid 'em a week's advance, and canned 'em. Had to, of course. Everything's all over. And I don't want any condolences, either. Just want to be let alone. When a man's cleaned out and done for, it's not agreeable to have the crape-hangers' brigade on the job, or see the buzzards roosting on the fence, waiting to pick the bones."

Wearily he lagged back to his desk and slumped into his revolving chair, a used-up,

beaten man. Forbes thrust thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, studied his friend with blue eyes of appraisal for a half-moment, then thrust out a fighting lower lip and ejaculated:

"Jim, you talk like a fish at high tide! I'm ashamed of you!"

"You're welcome, and be damned!" retorted Linwood, his nerves raw. "If you've come here to pull that try-try-again stuff, you'd better blow while the blowing's good. I tell you I'm all through!"

Forbes walked over to his chum, clapped a vigorous hand on the dejected shoulder, and exhorted:

"Chop that, Jim! Take the ax to that rubbish. Just because they've got you to the mat, that don't mean you can't come back. Lots of men have put their coin on the wrong horse, and been cleaned, and then made good after all. Why not you?"

Linwood raised a hand, as if to repel encouragement. Forbes saw new lines in the broker's face; saw that Linwood needed a shave and a fresh collar; saw that his tie was wrinkled, his trousers baggy. Never before had Linwood, the immaculate, thus let himself decline. Wearily he shook his head.

"This is different, Dave," said he. "It's not only that I'm down flat, but I've dragged three or four others down, too—one of 'em a woman. A woman that handed me pretty nearly everything she had, to invest. I ought to have stuck to the legitimate; but I saw a chance to make a killing on that infernal United Aztec proposition, and went to it strong, and—*you* know."

"Yes, I know, Jim. But can't you buck up and get into the game again? You can't be *all* in! Haven't you got a little something to take another flyer with?"

"Not a plugged jitney! Elton, Gregg, and McIntyre and that gang skinned me, first, and tacked my hide on their barn door," answered Linwood wearily. "Then Roberts grabbed off my meat, and Driscoll's got a mortgage on my skeleton. I'm cleaned like a fish, I tell you. Done, all in, wiped out!"

"How about your real-estate holdings in Bay Ridge?"

Linwood reached into a pigeon-hole of his beautiful rosewood desk, drew out a folded paper and handed it to Forbes.

"Take a slant at that, will you?" asked he.

Forbes studied it a moment, then, with an oath, tossed it back on the desk.

"Good *night!*" he exclaimed. "I didn't think they'd do *that* to you!"

"What you think hasn't got anything to do with it," Linwood explained, with the petulance of quivering nerves. "It's what I know that counts. Talk about being thrown to the wolves! Say!"

"Your insurance?"

"Surrendered. All gone."

"H-m!" Forbes grunted. "This *is* bad. Very, very punk, old man. Worse than the boys were telling me, and they made it out pretty raw. But—well, you've still got a lot of friends to depend on, Jim. You ought to be able to get enough credit from them to take another smash at the market and clean up. And then—"

Linwood interrupted with a mocking laugh.

"Give me a smoke, Dave, and can the 'friendship' cheese," said he. "Thanks," as Forbes proffered a box of Turkish. Linwood struck a match and took a lungful of smoke. "Friends!" he gibed. "Not one of 'em—except you, that can't afford it, and that I wouldn't take it from, anyhow—would stake me to a counterfeit penny, Mex. Couple of days ago, everybody's hat came off to me, and it was: 'Hello, old top!' and 'Atta boy!' To-day they don't even know I'm alive. Nine-tenths of 'em are crowing over me, tickled to death I'm in this jam; and the tenth one would run a mile, if I said 'loan' to him."

"I think you've got this thing doped wrong, Jim."

"And I know damn well I haven't! I'm ditched, with all four tires blown and the engine busted. There isn't enough left to pay for towing into the garage. It's the junk-heap for mine, Dave, and the quicker the better."

Dave found nothing to answer. Pensively he lighted a cigarette; his smoke mingled with that of Linwood, in the office once so busy, so vital, so hustling, now seemingly so remote from the rushing tides of busi-

ness, speculation, life; the office now a tomb of hopes and enterprises, where the muted typewriters, the filing-cabinets, the Wall Street publications all mocked Linwood's grievous downfall.

Forbes realized he could not swim against the current of his friend's supreme dejection. Over to the window he walked, and for a moment stood gazing down into Broad Street, watching the active, noisy throng that crowded the "curb"—many of them with strange red, green, or parti-colored caps—the swift play of hands and fingers as signals shot from pavement to windows and back again, the hurrying messenger-boys, the push-cart men lined up to minister to the wants of youths and men too busy plunging after fortune even to take time for a meal.

From a window-ledge, higher up across the street, a strip of ticker-tape depended, wavering in the river breeze. It seemed to wag derisively at him, like a long, mocking tongue. Forbes swore, under his breath, and turned back toward his friend.

Hands thrust deep in pockets, he stood for a moment gazing at the figure of Jim Linwood, sagging there in the big chair at the rosewood desk. Jim glanced up at him, forcing a wry smile.

"No use my trying to kid myself any longer, Dave," said he. "This isn't a temporary embarrassment. I need a loan of at least ten or fifteen thousand to get on my feet again, and I might as well ask for the moon, with trimmings. I've come to my finish. What I've got to do is acknowledge the corn, face it like a game sport, and act accordingly."

"Meaning how? What are you going to do?"

"Do? Why — you know. The only thing I can do — the thing lots of other plungers have done before me, and lots will do after me. When the bloody old candle is burned up at both ends, and even the wick's gone—*you* know—"

"You aren't going to make a damn fool of yourself, are you?" Forbes shot at him, with a quick, troubled look.

"*I* don't call it being a damn fool," retorted Linwood. He picked up a pen, which—its work being nearly at an end—lay on the blotting-pad before him, and began jabbing the sharp point into the paper. "Everything's crabbed; everything's up the flue, that makes life livable for me—coin, real estate, credit, business, apartment, clubs, the whole shooting-match. If you think I'm going to start in, at thirty-four, at the bottom of the ladder, and pull that 'upward-and-onward' stuff — be a hall-room boy, clerk it for somebody else on salary, most likely one of my former competitors, take orders from people I used to boss, and drag down about half enough to pay my Country Club dues, you've got another think coming."

"Why not duck out, go West, and—"

"And leave all these debts behind me? Run away and hide? Nix on that, either!" Linwood's head came up, a little, and his eye grew a trifle clearer. "Nothing like that, Dave. Nothing, a-tall! I'm not the kind of a guy that paws over ruins to save a stove-lid and a flat-iron. It's taken me twelve years to build up what's just slumped to pieces in five days. Of course I admit it's my own fault. You don't have to tell me that. If I'd stuck to the regular brokerage game and not tried to buck the Aztec bunch, I'd have got by all right, same as lots of others. But I didn't. It was double or quits, for mine; and I turned the wrong card, that's all. Now there's just one way out, and I'm going to take it. That's the answer."

Forbes, unable to lay tongue to any argument, for a moment, pushed back his hat and scratched his sandy head.

"Just what's your idea, Jim?" asked he, his voice shaking a bit.

"What's that to you?" Linwood demanded. "Whatever I do, will be done right; you don't need to worry about that. There won't be any gun-play. That makes a mess of things, and goes against my natural ideas of neatness. Gas? Nix on the gas, Dave. It's wasteful of other people's property, and Lord knows I've already wasted enough. Besides, it involves the risk of injuring other people, or even causing a fire or explosion. The river don't appeal to me. Too sloppy. Poison burns and bloats you, too—that is, the ordinary kinds—and then the papers get hold of the remains, and ex-

ploit 'em to beat the band; and the poor guy that sold you the stuff, maybe, goes to jail. No, Dave, I'm just going to disappear. I'll think of some way that won't bother anybody or make any trouble at all."

He drew at his cigarette again, and dropped it, only half-smoked, into the brass tray on the desk.

"I don't want anybody to know what happened, not even you," said he. "Not even my brother out in Akron, Ohio. I'm glad he's all the relatives I've got. If there were more, it might complicate matters."

"And when—when are you planning all this?" asked Forbes, in an abyss of despair, but realizing the entire futility of any further argument.

"Just as quick as I can get a few personal matters cleaned up," said Linwood. "I was writing my brother when you came in." He gestured at the half-finished letter on the desk. "And I've got a nephew in Harvard that I've got to look out for, as far as I can. By selling off the office furniture and everything, I can raise enough to put him through this year, anyhow."

Another silence fell. On the ledge above the window a sparrow was chippering as she built her nest in April sunshine. From the street arose the incessant murmuring of restless life that strives forever toward some goal itself cannot perceive. The dull, far whistle of a ferry-boat mingled with the shriller piping of a tug. Life, everywhere; life, activity, vital forces in play. Everywhere, save in this office, where thoughts and hopes of death had elbowed life away.

"It's a cowardly thing to do!" suddenly cried Forbes, revolting against his friend's cold decision. "It's surrender — it's the white flag over the trenches!"

"Think so?" asked Linwood, smiling oddly.

"Sure I do! Only a quitter pays up that way! Only a quitter dodges things that way!"

"I don't agree with you, Dave," answered the broker. "Now that I'm up against the real proposition, I find it takes a devil of a lot of nerve. It'll take all I've got, and then some, when I get right down to business. But I've got enough to go through with. I've got that, even if I haven't got anything else. This isn't theatrical boasting. It's just a plain statement of fact."

He leaned back in his chair, threw down the jabbing pen, and for a moment seemed studying the ceiling. Forbes stood there scowling at him, seeking some loophole of attack, some way to sting his friend into the rebellion against fate that no argument had availed for. All at once he burst out:

"What an I-told-you-so picnic for your enemies! What a crusher for your friends!"

"Friends!" sneered Linwood. "I've already told you what I think about *them*. I haven't got any real ones. Oh, yes, lots of acquaintances and associates. Fair-weather stuff. You know the gang. But as for being friends, forget that part. With the exception of yourself, there isn't a man in this city that would dig up one buck to keep me from blowing out what I call my brains, right in the middle of Wall Street, and you know it."

"I *don't* know it!" retorted Forbes. "I mean, I know it's a rotten lie. You're crazy in the head, Jim. Inside of an hour I can go out and find a dozen men that would put up a thousand apiece to get you on your feet again."

Linwood laughed rather wildly, with a jangle of raw nerves.

"Great stuff!" mocked he. "Go on, pull some more like that. You're all right, Dave, only you're a nut."

"I'll bet you anything you like I *can* do it!"

"You'd lose, and get cleaned out worse than I am."

"Want to cover my bet?"

"How can I? You've got nothing to bet with, and neither have I."

"I've got my salary, and you've got your life. I'll go you one year's pay against your life—no, damn it, that's nonsense, because if I lose, you'd go out, and then how could I pay up? I tell you what, Jim," the engineer kept on, more and more excitedly, the while he slapped his palm on the desk. "Here's what you do. You bet your life I can't find the money for you — how's that?"

"I bet my life?" repeated Linwood, puzzled. "What the—what do you mean?"

"Mean? Just what I say. Give me—well, twenty-four hours to make good in. Meantime, hands off your life." Forbes drew out his watch and glanced at it. The hour was 10.15. "Give me till quarter past ten, to-morrow. If by that time I haven't raised ten thousand bucks from the fellows you say have all turned you flat, the fellows you claim are gloating over your downfall, the fellows that are only waiting their chance to throw you on the junk-heap, then go ahead and do anything you blamed please. But in the mean time, hold off. Is that a bargain?"

Linwood pondered a moment, then cast a calculating eye on his excited friend.

"It's too long," said he. "I can't stand it another night. This office will close at five. I'll be here till then. You've got to deliver the goods by then, or it's all off."

"Done!" ejaculated Forbes. "I can have the money here by three, on a pinch. I'm morally certain of that. But we'll call it five, to give a couple of hours' leeway. Great! I'll soon show you what a devilish perverted view you've got of your friends, and life, and everything in general."

"You aren't going to slip anything over on me, are you?" demanded the broker, suspiciously.

"What do you mean, slip anything over?"

"I mean, kick in with the coin yourself, and then string me into believing somebody else dug?"

"No, Jim, I'll play straight. If they come across it'll be a bona fide deal. I'll land ten of 'em at a thousand apiece, dead easy."

"And another thing I want understood," continued Linwood.

"What's that?"

"You aren't going to black-jack 'em into giving up. Aren't going to spring it on 'em that if they don't come through I'm going to—you understand—"

"No, I won't say a word about that part of it. I realize it would be using undue pressure, and it would give you a fearful black eye. You'd never get over it. It'll be just a straight loan proposition, with no come-back in case they refuse. A friendship proposition, nothing more."

Linwood thought for the space of fifteen heart-beats, then nodded assent.

"All right, Dave," said he. "It's a go. But I'm not banking on anything. I can hear 'em talking already—I know the line of bull they'll hand out. You're just delaying the obsequies, that's all. But there's no great harm done, anyhow, and you'll learn a valuable lesson on the real inwardness of friendship. You'll hear one grand sermon on the text of: 'When you ain't got no money, well, you needn't come around.'"

To this Forbes made no answer, but held out his hand. Linwood waved it away.

"No sob-stuff, and no good-by-old-pal stuff, here," said he, his voice mocking and a little hard. "Now, I've still got this letter to finish, and the office-furniture to get rid of, so you'd better chase along."

Once more he bent over the desk, drew the half-completed letter toward him and reached for his pen.

Without another word, Forbes walked to the door, paused there a moment, looked back a silent moment at his friend—who now paid him not the least attention—and was gone.

THE BRITTLENESS OF FRIENDSHIP.

WITHOUT delay—for every moment now was precious—Forbes set himself to the task of enlisting financial first-aid for the wrecked broker. First he made out a little penciled list of Linwood's most intimate friends, a dozen names or so. Three or four, he felt positive, would suffice; but he wanted to be sure of having enough.

He glanced over his list to choose the man whose office was nearest at hand. DeWitt, this was.

Straight down Wall Street he made his way, to DeWitt's office. DeWitt was prosperous and human; a big man, physically as well as financially, in a big brokerage business. His offices, leading out of a spacious room where many customers sat in easy-chairs studying the little green quotation-cards deftly put up and taken down

from the long board that covered one end of the place, overlooked the City Bank.

The senses were pleasantly impressed thereby. Mahogany furniture, Bokhara rugs, and the clatter of busy typewriters suggested indefinite opulence. As Forbes sent his card in to the private office, he felt that the matter of a paltry thousand dollars, to tide a lame duck over a storm-wave, would mean no more to DeWitt than the drawing of a single breath. The wager, thought he, was already won.

"Poor fish, to throw his life away like that," thought Forbes with a little contempt, "when it can be saved for the mere asking!"

The clerk who had taken in his card suavely beckoned him. He entered a sumptuous inner lair, heavy with cigar-smoke, and graced with deep-cushioned leather divans and chairs, a glass-topped desk, and a vigorously executed bronze group representing a bear and a bull in mortal conflict.

DeWitt, looking tired and perplexed in spite of his impeccable raiment and his ruddy jowls, gave Forbes his hand and a strong, slim, black cigar.

"Well, what can I do for you, old man?" asked he, striking a match for his visitor. "Something about that San Pablo railroad; or is it the Minas Geraes dock proposition?"

"Neither," answered Forbes, sitting down in one of the chairs that comfortably engulfed him. "It's a purely personal matter. In fact, it's about our mutual friend, Linwood."

"H-m!" said DeWitt, frowning. He passed a hand decked with a gorgeous diamond over his rubicund, troubled face. "What about friend Jim?"

"He's in wrong, and—"

"So am I, Forbes," interrupted DeWitt. "My wife's been raising the blue devil with me. I haven't dared go home in three days. She's got a detective after me, I hear. Alimony, and all that—that's what she's after. Wants a divorce, with whacking alimony. Not married, are you? Lucky dog! I guess I've got about all the hell I want to tackle."

"Sorry to hear it," persisted Forbes; "but this is different. You know, Jim has just been cleaned out, to the eyebrows. He's flat on his anatomy. I'm asking you, among others, to kick in with a little relief-fund. If we can manage to stake him to a thousand apiece, making up a total of ten thousand or so, he can get on his feet again. He can make good, and square up in a week or two, and—"

"My dear Forbes," said the broker, "much as I'd like to help him, I really don't see how I can do it, to-day. Next week I might, but just now it's out of the question." He erupted smoke, at which he peered as if reading dire events impending in the gray-blue cloud that hung on the Crœsan air. "This domestic rough-house I'm having is involving me in some litigation that's going to cost like sixty. And the market's been breaking wrong for me the past ten days. I'm all tied up worse than a pup in a basket of string. If Jim wants a good tip or two, I'll be glad to accommodate him. I can put him next to an A1 buy; but ready cash—no, no, I'm mighty sorry, but—"

"Not even five hundred?"

"Not even one, old man. But why don't you ask Hibbard? He's a very particular friend of Jim's. They play golf together, and all that sort of thing. Hibbard could let you have the whole amount and never wink. He's on the right side of the market, you see. Hibbard's your man. By all means see Hibbard."

Forbes tried to press his argument, even to the point of entreaty, but DeWitt would have none of it. In a few minutes, seeing that he bade fair to make a nuisance of himself, he took his leave, more than a bit dejected.

"Oh, well, I couldn't expect to land anything first crack out of the box," he tried to comfort himself as he went down in the elevator; but none the less he couldn't entirely suppress the sensation of chilling apprehension that this first rebuff had injected into his veins. "Better luck next time," he assured himself as he walked back up Wall Street toward the heaven-pointing spire of old Trinity.

Into Fulton Street he turned, bound for the rear entrance of the Equitable Building. By all means he would visit the offices

of Rineman & Hibbard, where help would certainly be forthcoming.

There he not only caught these two men, but also Deering and Clement, all friends of Linwood. Again he told his tale to the four in conclave in the private office where he gathered them all together.

"Serves him damned well right," commented Rineman, mumbling over his desk as was his habit. "I told him he'd get in a jam if he kept on the way he was doing. Couldn't make him listen to anything. He'll have to get the dough somewhere else than from *me!*"

Hibbard appealed to, launched into an invective against Linwood's business methods and declared that this disaster would teach him a most salutary lesson. Any one with half an eye could see that Hibbard was living up to La Rochefoucauld's maxim: "There is always, in the misfortunes of our friends, something not displeasing to us." Clement and Deering were both very, very sorry their affairs were in such shape that they couldn't spare a nickel.

"Next week, perhaps," Clement added, "I might dig up a few bucks for him, but just now—"

With an oath Forbes grabbed his hat and departed. Not even the door-check could prevent the shivering slam he gave the door by way of emphasizing his opinion.

His next port of call was the office of William J. Herman & Co., on Broad Street. Everybody knew that Herman was "rotten with money," even though his office was cramped and dingy and ill-furnished. He and Linwood had put through many a deal, and had long been accounted on close terms of intimacy. Here, of a certainty, relief was to be found.

Impatiently Forbes waited in the little outer pen of the office, until at last the opulent Herman signified his willingness to be seen. Admitted to the presence, he once more stated his case, this time with growing brevity and more than a touch of impatience. Herman said:

"You won't get a cent out of me. Linwood's getting only what's coming to him. Why didn't he stick to his regular brokerage business?" Herman was thin, nervous, and snappy. "Why didn't he hang to his one-eighth of a per cent, buying and selling only for suckers? No, that wasn't good enough for Linwood. He wanted to try puts and calls, pyramiding, buying on margin, and all that get-rich-quick stuff. Wallingford stuff. The system handed him a bundle, that's all. He got burned. Now he's bellyaching, or you are, for him. Can it, Forbes; can it. You'll never get a nickel for him in the Street. Not in a thousand years!"

Forbes walked out, feeling rather scared and crawly up and down the spine. For the first time he was beginning to doubt his ability to make good; and that meant—no, no, he wouldn't admit it, even to himself. Nevertheless he had to admit it, when he got nothing but rebuffs from three other concerns made up of Linwood's fair-weather friends: Downs & Farr, H. J. Messenger & Co., and Bannard & Truax—the latter firm being Linwood's attorneys.

Bannard, Congressman Bannard, was particularly smooth. He swung his little gold cigar-cutter by its chain as he delivered himself of some moral lucubrations, meanwhile gazing abstractedly out of his window at the East River and the stretched spans of the bridges, all busy and vital under the cheerful spring sunshine.

"I really do not see just how I can contribute anything toward rehabilitating the fortunes of Mr. Linwood, just at the present time," said he. "I like Mr. Linwood, personally, but I distrust his business judgment. He is, I fear, rash and prone to assume excessive risks. I feel that the difficulties in which he finds himself must be solved without my assistance, and—"

His irritation exacerbated to a point of rudeness, Forbes mumbled something about rats deserting a sinking ship, stood up and took his leave without ceremony. The hour was now close on to two o'clock, and Forbes was nervous, shaken, tired and hungry. His dejected feet bore him into a fashionable café and bar, a kind of lunch-club patronized almost exclusively by brokers and bankers. The place was still half-filled, though the rush-hour was over.

Lined up before the bar at one side, Forbes caught sight of three men that both Linwood and he knew well: Traube, Morri-

son, and Hammell. Them he approached with his routine tale, now getting threadbare as a beggar's whine—the tale he found himself growing monstrous sick of—the tale that fairly crossed the grain of him, to tell.

Traube heard him only half-through, then glanced at his watch, murmured a few perfunctory words of regret, and executed a strategic retreat toward the Hindenburg line of the exit. Morrison had a hard-luck story of his own to tell, and told it, ending up with a plea to borrow a little money himself—a plea that Forbes readily penetrated as a ruse to escape the necessity of lending. As for Hammell, he only shook his head and began whistling:

Sorry I ain't got it. If I had you could get it;
But I'm all down and out.

With a curse of angry disappointment Forbes turned away.

"You're a hell of a fine lot of friends, I must say!" he growled. "This Wall Street bunch is worse than a pack of wolves. Let one fall, wounded, and the rest will tear him to pieces. He's a good fellow as long as he can run with the pack, but once he's down, God help him!"

Faint with nerve-strain, exhaustion, and famine, he fronted up to the lunch-counter at the rear of the place, took a cheese sandwich, some olives, and a couple of hard-boiled eggs. He ate with ireful haste, then turned to the bar and ordered a mug of musty. Just as he was blowing back the drift of foam at its lip, he felt a touch on his elbow.

"Beg pardon," said a voice, a thin voice, a bit quavering, but kindly. "What seems to be the trouble? I was just sitting here, having a bit of lunch, and really couldn't help overhearing a little of what was going on. You seem to be in difficulties of some sort. Can I assist you in any way?"

"Why — I don't know," answered Forbes, setting down his mug. "You see, it isn't anything I'm up against, personally. It's—well, a friend of mine that's in a tight box, and—"

He paused, hardly knowing how to continue. Puzzled, he contemplated the man who had thus dropped anchor in the harbor of his perplexity; something of an old-ish man, say between sixty and sixty-five, with a shiny bald-spot ringed by wavy white hair; a ruddy, mild, wrinkled face that somehow reminded one of a withered Baldwin apple, and the most kindly pair of blue eyes that ever peered out through gold spectacles — a shabby-neat old gentleman, whose somewhat faded coat, white tie and round cuffs conveyed the flavor of another era—an old gentleman to whom one felt instinctively like entrusting one's inmost secrets—on the whole, a most extraordinary old gentleman.

"It's a friend of mine," repeated Forbes, somehow feeling his heart expand and open toward this unknown man, whose words rang in so different a chime from the excuses, circumlocutions, and half-malicious banter of all the others. "He's honest; he's tried to do the best he could, but he's been playing into rotten luck, and now he's up against trouble, terrible trouble. I'm trying to help him out, that's all."

"Trouble?" asked the old gentleman. "What kind of trouble? Tell me all about it."

Forbes drank off his ale, to give himself a moment for quick thought. Who could this man be, and what his motive? A little suspicion whispered to be heard; but Forbes suppressed it. No; men like this need not be feared. Forbes decided to answer everything.

"Well, it's this way," said he, shoving his mug back over the bar. "To put it plainly, he's flat-broke, and owes a lot of money. He's wiped out—that's the whole story."

"You call that real trouble?" smiled the old gentleman.

"Why, yes. Of course. It's bad enough for anybody, but *he* makes it ten times worse. It's his idea of ruin. He can't see anything else in life, at all. I'm trying to help him pull through, and everybody I've asked for a loan—all friends of his—has given me the gate. Now you've got the whole thing in a nutshell."

The white-haired old man studied over this a moment, then, with a look of great wisdom and understanding, nodded.

"I see," he said, in that quiet, tolerant voice. "He's a young man, you say?"

"Yes. Thirty-four."

"I might have known. 'Youth must be served.' That's an impatient age. Must have its own way, or won't play at all. Can't see life as a give-and-take, with the take often predominating. What's his name? Do I know him?"

"James Linwood—J. B. Linwood. He's a broker, at—but no matter where. On Broad Street; that's enough."

"Ah, yes, I think I've heard of him," said the old gentleman. "Rather a tall, thin fellow? Yes, yes. New England accent. Always flats his 'rs.' From Vermont?"

"New Hampshire. Keene, New Hampshire."

"Correct. I remember, now. Yes, I know him, more or less indirectly. And you say he thinks he's ruined?"

"He's positive of it," answered Forbes. "It's a fact that he's cleaned out like a split herring."

"What of that?" asked the old gentleman. "Only a young man calls that fatal. Only a young man sets his heart so very firmly on money that he can't see anything else. A young man simply doesn't understand life, that's all." He gestured toward the window, where the passing tides of life flowed to and fro, unceasingly. "I wonder if he ever stood in this window and watched the contrasts, and analyzed and grasped them?"

"Contrasts?" repeated Forbes, rather mystified. Truly, this old gentleman spoke strangely and in a manner rather hard to follow. "Just what do you mean by contrasts?"

"Why, poverty and wealth in this case. There, see there, for instance. See that man with the silk hat, just coming out of that doorway? Take a good look at his face. Does he look happy, to you?"

"No," answered Forbes, shaking his head. "I can't say that he does. Why?"

"Well, that's Dudley K. Parsons, Jr. He's worth between nine and ten millions—some say twelve to fifteen. Think of having all that on one's shoulders to carry round, will you? He's one of the most unhappy men I know. His burden is simply killing him. He's only forty-six, but he looks a good ten years older, as you see. And there's that other one—that thin man with the light overcoat, trying to read those legal papers as he elbows his way along, as if every moment was his last."

"I know *him*," put in Forbes. "That's Stevens—E. Howard Stevens, of the Consolidated Corporations Company. What does Bradstreet rate him at—twenty million?"

"Something like that. And there—look at old 'Tiger' Caldwell! Just coming past that truck, there. Doesn't seem to have an ounce of fat or a drop of blood in his body. Dried up, withered, done for, heart and soul. Three hundred and fifty million, at the inside. Ever see a more miserable face? Stand here an hour, and you'll catch a dozen or two of 'em, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Forbes. David Forbes."

"Mr. Forbes. Glad to know you." The old gentleman's hand, slim but vitally warm, grasped the engineer's. "By the way, my name is Harknes. Joel Harknes."

"Oh!" exclaimed Forbes, tightening his grasp. "You don't mean to say—you're not *the* Joel Harknes, are you?"

The old gentleman smiled cheerful assent.

"The same," said he. "But never mind about that. As I was saying, there's not one of these 'fortunate ones,' whether they've got one million or five hundred, but looks overdriven, harassed, miserable, slavish. Of course the reason for it is—"

Forbes did not hear him. The unbounded astonishment of this meeting had quite robbed him of the power to listen. How then could this thing have happened? Who but had heard, for years, of old Joel Harknes, without contest the most mysterious, erratic, lovable old figure on the Street? And who, after all, knew anything definite about him? No financial register had ever been able to make him give his rating; no data whatsoever existed as to his wealth—reputed to be enormous; no facts were discoverable about his operations. Rumor had it that he bought, sold, traded, financed and took his profits all through channels that completely hid his connection with the business. Rumor told a hundred odd,

whimsical tales of him—but what the facts were, who could say?

And still old Joel Harknes kept on philosophizing, as he stood there in the window of the lunch-club with his new acquaintance. Forbes constrained himself to quell his astonishment and to give ear.

"But now, on the contrary," Harknes was saying, "now see that messenger-boy? Hear him whistle?"

"Yes."

"Where can you find a 'shining morning face' like that among the millionaires? Where can you find a smile like that?"

"Nowhere, in the vicinity of money, I guess," admitted Forbes.

"Look at those two youngsters in that doorway, pitching pennies," continued the mysterious millionaire. "Happy? Bet your life they're happy—and I don't believe either of 'em is worth a dime, all told. See that teamster, with the cob pipe. No frown on *that* face, eh? And—"

"Yes, but pardon the personal question," interrupted Forbes; "how does it come that *you* aren't—well, all the things that other millionaires are? *You* look happy enough, and healthy enough, and all that."

"Ah, my dear sir," smiled Harknes, his eyes very kindly through his spectacles, "I happen to be a philosopher. I recognize money as the servant of man, not his master. I have preserved my sense of values, my just discrimination between ruling my business and letting my business rule me. Not every man can do that thing. I happen to be the exception. All I'm laying down is a general principle. If your friend Linwood could do the same—"

"But it isn't all money with him, at that," Forbes came to Linwood's defense. "It's partly money, and partly his friends—or rather the idea he's got that, now he's in trouble, he hasn't any. The fact is, Mr. Harknes, they *are* acting rather rotten. Most of them *are* deserting him. I may say, all of them, so far, that I've interviewed. But I still believe he's got a few that will stick."

"Friends?" queried the old gentleman. "And he's only thirty-four? Why, he's not entitled to any, at that age. Acquaintances, yes, if you please; but no real honest-to-God friends. When he gets to be sixty-seven, like me, he'll have the right to expect 'em—a few. A few, mind, only a few, tried by the *sturm und drang* of long experience. But at thirty-four, pshaw! So that's what he's grieving his heart out, over, is it? Why, he's only a boy, after all. No, no, sir, his reasons aren't valid. No money and no friends, at thirty-four, and he's discouraged! Why, life has hardly begun for him, yet. Tut, tut—nonsense, sir—nonsense!"

"That may all be, Mr. Harknes, from your viewpoint," answered the engineer; "but all this is very real and very serious, to him. I've volunteered to help him, and I can't go back with just a bundle of maxims and a little philosophy. I started out, a while ago, to test his theory by trying to raise some money for him, and I must confess that, so far, his diagnosis is pretty nearly correct. So far, though I've asked ten or a dozen men that he's always counted friends, not one of 'em has been willing to chip in a penny."

"'Straightway with one accord they all began to make excuse,'" quoted the old gentleman, "or words to that effect. Is that the idea?"

"Yes, that's it. So you see—"

"I admit it's bound to trouble him, when he knows it," mused Mr. Harknes. "And that will be a pity—a real pity. Let me see; now; let me see—"

For a moment the old gentleman remained sunk in thought, his mild eyes peering out at the busy, moving mass in Wall Street, as if seeking inspiration there. Then all at once, with a quick, jovial, upward glance—a shrewd, penetrant glance, too—he said:

"Would you be willing to follow a little plan I might suggest?"

"Why, certainly. That would be fine! I—I don't think I ought to impose on you—"

"Sh! The leprechauns might hear you! If you'll come with me, sir, it's quite possible I may evolve some solution for your difficulty and his."

"A solution? You mean—"

"I mean that I invite you to accompany me to my office, where we'll take a very

practical step toward putting Mr. Linwood on his feet again. You accept?"

"*Do* I? Lord, yes!"

"All right, then, that's settled," decided the old gentleman with a smile. "Come along, sir; let's be going to my office—let's see what can be done for this friend of ours."

A SAMARITAN IN WALL STREET.

SOMEWHAT dazed by this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs, Forbes made way down Wall Street with Joel Harknes, who now said never a word as they elbowed through the hurrying press. Three or four minutes' walk and a swift upward flight in an elevator brought them to a small, well-lighted office high up above the turmoil of the money-plexus of the world.

The old gentleman methodically hung up his hat and coat, slipped into thin office-coat of black mohair, and set a black skull-cap on his bald-spot, while Forbes, with a glance or two, was sweeping up the office into his consciousness—a plain, simple office, with neither clerk nor stenographer—an office of the old style, with an ancient safe of the variety that yeggs boast they can crack with a can-opener, a lot of dusty file-boxes, and quantities of neatly folded newspapers piled in one corner.

"As eccentric a place as the old man himself," thought Forbes, as Harknes sat down in the antique swivel-chair padded with a red cushion, in front of the desk which had grown in the crop of 1848 or earlier.

"Be seated, sir," invited the mysterious millionaire, with a smile of pure hospitality as he extended his hand toward the only other chair in the place. "Sit down, now, and let me think a minute. Let me see what can be done. Let me see—let me see—"

Forbes's sense of delicacy dictated that he should proffer no suggestion. Even keeping silence, he felt an odd little half-sense of shame—something as if he had been a beggar about to receive a "hand-out" of cold victuals, or a blind man waiting for a nickel to fall into his palm. But thoughts of Linwood and his dire need suppressed these unpleasant sensations. Patiently he waited, while the old gentleman, head resting on hand, eyes half closed, immersed in deep cogitation. There was something calm almost to the point of the patriarchal in the mild benevolence of that pensive face, lined by long years of thought and insight and the wisdom of life.

Why had this sphinxlike financier, almost a total stranger to Linwood, shown an interest where all the others had turned aside with a jest, a sneer, an excuse? What might be his inner motive? Forbes could not plumb it; but he had very little time to whip the trout-brook of speculation with the fly of interrogation, for already Harknes had ceased his pondering and was beginning to take action.

With a thrill of that eager expectancy we all feel when we realize we are certainly going to get something we want—as, for example, when the distant uncle's will assures us of a liberal bequest—Forbes saw the old gentleman reach into a pigeon-hole of the desk and draw out a pocket-size check-book.

Opening this at the first check, Joel Harknes dipped pen in ink-bottle and boldly signed it. Forbes's gratification turned to a kind of dull wonder, and this to an astonishment ever more and more acute, as he watched the old financier keep turning check after check, and—as calmly as if he had been addressing envelopes—sign them all, every one, to the very last.

Not one date did Harknes write, nor one amount. Nothing but a signature on each, leaving everything else entirely blank, making each little slip of paper valuable to whomsoever should hold it, to a degree that Forbes could only estimate as overwhelming.

This extraordinary task consumed perhaps five or six minutes, for every name was written with great care and duly blotted. When the book was at an end, Harknes smiled at the staring Forbes, closed the book, and extended it to his visitor.

"Here, my dear sir," said he, "is a little something which may perhaps help our friend to recoup himself and get on his feet

again. Will you be so very kind as to hand it to him, with my regards, and tell him to make such use of it as his best judgment may dictate? Beyond this, I need say nothing."

Stupefied by this perfectly incredible happening, Forbes accepted the book. One by one he flipped over the checks. Each one bore the signature, in a precise and old-fashioned hand:

JOEL K. HARKNESS

Just that alone; nothing more.

"Good Lord!" thought Forbes, in a daze—a daze through which temptation seemed to nod and beckon, though futilely—"this gives the holder of this book *carte blanche* with the millionaire's account in the Manhattan National Bank! It's an unheard-of thing—it's incredible—it can't be true!"

The old gentleman, still smiling, drummed on the desk with gnarled fingers.

"I trust," said he, "that this will sufficiently relieve Mr. Linwood. I hope his difficulties will be entirely overcome by what I consider it a pleasure and an honor to hand him."

For a moment Forbes could lay tongue to no answer; then, pulling himself together, he made shift to stammer:

"My dear sir, are you—are you quite aware of—pardon me for asking, but do you realize what you have given me?"

"Perfectly."

"You are turning over to me, without any receipt or guarantee—"

The mysterious millionaire raised his hand in an eloquent gesture of assurance that all was well; that all was as it should be.

"Pray accept what I have offered," said he, in his quiet, measured tones. "Let there be no conditions, no limitations or restrictions whatsoever. Your friend—rather let us say, our mutual friend—is in difficulties. He believes that money will solve his problem. I wish to relieve his anxiety. My action, I trust, will bear good fruit."

"Yes, yes, of course; but you haven't specified any amount, at all, in any of these checks!"

"Mr. Linwood, himself, should be the best judge of what he needs."

"This is most astonishing! It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of in all my life!"

"Mr. Linwood's need also seems to be extraordinary, from what you tell me—need not only of money, but also of the knowledge that friendship, trust and faith still survive in the world. I am merely matching my resources against his necessities."

Forbes could utter no reply, but sat there staring first at the amazing old gentleman and then at the Aladdin's lamp of a check-book—a very Fortunatus's purse of a check-book, indeed—as if a miracle from the Arabian Nights had just been wrought before his dazzled eyes.

Then, suddenly catching the magnitude and inspiration of the moment, he stood up, took a step or two, extended his hand, and seized that of the old gentleman in a strong clasp.

"I—I don't know how I'm going to thank you," he began, lamely enough. "Any words of mine will be—"

"Quite unnecessary," the mysterious millionaire finished the sentence for him. "The very best thanks I can have—and really, I'm not asking any at all—will be to know I've put a good chap on his feet again. That's quite enough.

"And now," he added in a little different tone, "I really beg you to spare me any further discussion. I've got a lot of important little things to attend to—important to me, that is, though really, nothing is more important in this world than anything else, just as nothing is any more wonderful than anything else, if you know how to understand things. Pray don't misunderstand me when I beg you to excuse me from any more conversation."

All but speechless, Forbes let go the old gentleman's hand. For a moment he stood there, half-dazed, hardly knowing what to do. But the financier, drawing some papers toward him on the desk, was already beginning to busy himself with his own affairs. Forbes moved toward the door.

With his hand on the knob he turned for a last few words.

"My dear sir," he began, "in all my experience I have never got up against any-

thing like this, in the way of generosity. It quite reverses my idea that the world of business is nothing but a bunch of grafters, every one trying to do all the rest, and—"

"Good day, sir; good day," the old gentleman closured his remarks with just a tinge of asperity. "If I have rendered you any service, I beg you will reciprocate by taking up no more of my time. Good day!"

Forbes put his best foot forward to run straightway back to the office of Linwood. At the locked door he banged imperatively. Fevered at any delay, he rattled the knob thereto. Linwood opened, his face a gray mask of weariness, disillusion, and the hate of life.

"Back again?" asked he, in flat tones. "It didn't take you long to find out there was nothing doing, and—"

"Nothing *do*-ing?" shouted Forbes. "My God, man, I've got a million for you! You were talking ten thousand, and I've raised a million, cold!"

"A — *what?*" demanded Linwood, his eyes widening, his jaw dropping. "Say, what kind of hop have you been smoking, now? You're nutty!"

"Nutty, am I?" exulted Forbes, hauling out the check-book. "Hop-head, am I? Ring off on that stuff, and look at this, will you?"

Into Linwood's hand he thrust the book.

"Talk about your talk-abouts!" cried he. "Can you beat *that?*"

Understanding not, frowning in the effort to comprehend, Linwood stared at the book a moment; then, holding it by the binding, ran over the checks, flipping them one by one to view.

"What the devil is all this?" he demanded, ugly and suspicious. "What are you trying to slip over on me, now? Some bunk proposition? I'm over seven, you know. What's the idea, handing me a book of blank checks on the Manhattan National?"

"Blank nothing!" retorted Forbes, keyed up to a quivering intensity of nerves. "They're all signed, every last one of them. Can't you read? Look there, and there, and there!" He stabbed an excited forefinger at the checks as they passed in review. "Signed by a millionaire! He's turned over God knows how much cash to you—no receipt, no restrictions as to amount or use, no interest—"

"What are you handing me?" interrupted Linwood, going a shade paler. "What are these things, anyhow? Forgeries?"

"Forgeries, nothing!" snapped Forbes, in anger at the other's persistent skepticism. "I saw him write the signatures, myself, every blamed one of 'em. He insisted on my taking the book—said you had *carte blanche*—said you were the best judge of how much you'd need, to come back on. With backing like that, you can make a clean-up in no time, such as the Street never saw. Everybody thinks you're down and out. You can just simply wade right through 'em, before they begin to tumble. It'll be a slaughter—a regular Battle of the Marne! You can turn the trick on all of 'em, especially the gang that threw you!"

In his haste and eagerness the words fairly tumbled over each other, cascading from his lips; while Linwood, reft of speech, stood staring first at him, then at the check-book, as if at some miraculous thing that had swooped in upon him from the Fourth Dimension.

"I braced a dozen of your friends," continued Forbes, at a great rate. "They all turned me flat, gave you the merry ha-ha, and said it served you right for trying to tip the market upside-down. Said you were only getting what was coming to you, and wished everybody like you would get theirs, too. You had your bet won, that far, anyhow. I thought it was all off — thought you'd won. Then the old man overheard me talking, in a café, and volunteered. I never asked him for a red. It's all his own doing. Can you beat it? *Can* you beat it?"

Linwood made no answer, but stood there trembling a little, his lips beginning to quiver.

All at once he threw the check-book on his desk, and sat down heavily in his chair, overcome by the swift force of the reaction sweeping over him.

"Clear out, Dave," said he, huskily. "Get out — blow — I'm going to make a

damn fool of myself. I'll thank you later, when I'm myself again. But for God's sake, man, get out of here at once, now. *Get out!*"

ARMORED IN PERFECT FAITH.

FORTY-EIGHT hours from that time, in answer to a call of: "Come in!" Linwood entered the archaic little office of the mysterious millionaire. The old gentleman looked up, smiling very amiably, as he turned in his swivel-chair and fixed those mild blue eyes of his on the visitor.

"Good day, sir," said he. "What can I do for you?"

Linwood held out his hand; a hand that did not tremble now; a hand firm and strong as his face, which had recovered its former self-reliant, wide-awake confidence and strength.

"My dear sir," said he, as he warmly shook the old gentleman's hand, "I am Linwood—James B. Linwood. I've come—"

"Yes, yes, I know you," interrupted the old gentleman. "Won't you kindly sit down?"

"I have come," persisted Linwood, taking the other chair, "to return that wonderful check-book of yours and to thank you for the use of it—thank you, that is, so far as any words can possibly serve."

"So you did use it, did you?" queried the financier, smiling a little as he crossed one leg over the other and leaned back in his chair. "Well, well, bless my soul, Mr. Linwood, I'm very glad, indeed, it came in handy. I'm glad it was of service. You really used it, eh?"

"Why, yes. Constructively, that is. It saved the day, for me—saved my fortunes—more than that, my life. I just don't know what to say—how to thank you, or—"

"The fact, alone, that I've been of service to a man in trouble, or a man who thought he was in trouble—it's really quite the same thing—is thanks enough," returned the other, speaking very quietly and gently. "Please don't say more. I understand. We all need a boost, once in a while. I'm interested, however, to know just what use you made of the checks. Just how much you had to draw, to rehabilitate yourself. Not that I care for the money, at all, you understand. That's quite immaterial. My curiosity springs from a totally different source." His eyes twinkled just a little, behind their lenses. "You don't mind telling me, do you?"

"Why, no," answered Linwood, drawing the check-book from his pocket and laying it on the desk. "Though I confess it's rather odd. The curious part of the whole affair is that I—I really didn't touch a penny of it, or need to. Just the credit you established for me, the knowledge that, if driven too hard, I had your funds back of me, turned the trick. I won't bother you with details. All I need say is that I got a fresh grip on myself, took a couple of long shots and—well, won out. I'm clear of debt, this minute; I've squared every last red cent, and I'm seventy-six thousand ahead of the game. If that wouldn't make a story, what would?"

The old gentleman pondered a moment, then smiled again and nodded his black-capped head, patriarchal with white hair.

"Very good, sir, very good indeed," he approved. "You've demonstrated the stuff you're made of. You've tested your mettle. More, you've done almost exactly what I counted on your doing. A very pretty experiment, sir. Admirable! I don't know when anything has given me greater satisfaction. You've not only got yourself on your feet, but you've helped confirm my faith in human nature, especially American human nature. I'm truly delighted, Mr. Linwood. Let me congratulate you, and myself, too. It's really come out very well indeed. You say you—you haven't touched a single one of those checks?"

"Not one."

"That's most fortunate, sir," said the old gentleman, "because, you see, they weren't good. Weren't worth the paper they were printed on."

"*What?* What's that you say?"

"Fact, sir. Not worth a tinker's dam, the whole bunch of 'em. The entire process of rehabilitation, therefore, rested with yourself. Your renewed self-confidence turned the trick; nothing else. Just that,

Mr. Linwood, not another blessed thing. You could have done it just as well without those foolish little pieces of paper, as with them. Lots of banking and business is carried on the same way. Confidence is the key-note. Your confidence grew from a few worthless bits of paper. Purely psychological, my dear sir. Psychological, nothing more."

"What do you mean?" demanded Linwood, gaping with acute astonishment. "Your checks—no good?"

"Not the slightest in the world, in this particular bank. I haven't a penny on deposit there. And very little anywhere else. In the first place, I'm not a millionaire at all. People think I am, though, and that does just as well. *Entre nous,* that's an illusion. I'm not even actively in the market. I have an annuity or two, that quite suffices for my needs. I do a little business, once in a while, and sometimes lend a bit of money, which I usually lose, in the pursuit of my social researches. But it's nothing, nothing. I'm winnow among whales. All this, of course, is strictly confidential. If it got past you it would very seriously interfere with my real business."

"Which is—"

"Merely to play the rôle of spectator in the greatest theater of human activities, life and passions in the world — Wall Street," explained the old gentleman, smiling again. "I've got a box-seat at the world-drama, Mr. Linwood. That's all. But as for being an actor, no, no, not at all. I'm so glad you didn't uncover my innocent little diversion by trying to cash a check. It would have made no end of trouble for both of us."

"And you risked all that for me?" asked Linwood, amazed. "You took all that chance, for me?"

"Why, yes. Yes, of course."

"How did you know I wouldn't—"

"I trusted you, that's all. I know something of human nature," answered the old gentleman calmly. "I figured it all out, pro and con, and felt morally certain you'd do just as you have done. You're of good New England stock, sir. Revolutionary, fighting stock. You ran true to form, just as I knew you would. The checks were merely intended as mental and moral stimuli. Even if I'd had a million in that bank, you couldn't have cashed one for five cents."

"Why not?"

"Why not? That's simple. The name I used, to sign them, wasn't even my own name. It's nobody's name—it's a pure invention."

"Not your name?" demanded Linwood, more and more involved in puzzlement. "You're Mr. Harkness, aren't you? Joel K. Harkness?"

"No, sir. There *is* no Joel K. Harkness. Not as I wrote it. I'm Joel Harknes—no middle name, and only one 'ess' at the end of the name. Joel K. Harkness, with two 'esses' is a mere abstraction. He doesn't exist. I made him up, for the occasion, to test you. Quite an experiment, eh? And it succeeded so wonderfully well! In my life-occupation of sitting here in this private box, looking down at the *comédie humaine,* I don't know when I've witnessed a more enjoyable bit of action. Don't talk to me about going to the theater. Life itself is vastly bigger—it's a million times more of a drama than anything ever staged on the boards. And this little act I've just put on—admirable, sir; admirable!"

Struck dumb for the moment, Linwood could only sit there gazing at the kindly old philosopher—taking him all in, with a sort of cosmic wonder, black cap, silver hair, spectacled blue eyes, ruddy face, and all. Then suddenly he ejaculated:

"My God, can this be possible?"

"Not only possible, but true. Though you didn't know it, Mr. Linwood, what I really gave you was a book of sermons."

"Sermons?"

"Yes, sermons. One lay hidden under each check. And all with the selfsame texts of self-reliance, courage, determination, faith. I needn't say more. I know you understand me, now—don't you?"

Linwood's hand went out to the old gentleman again. Harknes grasped it warmly.

"Good luck to you," said he, with a look of the most profound and heartfelt benevolence. "If you've learned a lesson, all I ask is that you won't forget it. Remember it, especially, next time things look black,

if they ever do again. As for the check-book, I'm going to keep that as a souvenir of one of the very prettiest experiments I've ever conducted.

"And now, Mr. Linwood," he added, "if you'll pardon me, I'm so very, very busy—"

Linwood released the philosopher's hand.

"I—I was going to offer you something, by way of interest," he began. "If you'll—"

"Quite useless," smiled the old gentleman, picking up his pen and casting an eye at a half-written letter. "I couldn't think of accepting a penny. Not one." Emphatically he shook his venerable head. "I've already been repaid, a thousandfold—and, after all, I didn't do anything but write a supposititious name a few times. No, no—no payment, Mr. Linwood. And now, good day—good luck to you—good-by!"

When Linwood, still in considerable of a mental fog, had departed, and the door had closed after him, Harknes laid down his pen, took up the check-book, and for a moment or two thumbed it over, smiling very gently and wisely to himself.

"A sermon under every check," said he. "The best kind of a sermon—not a metaphysical, up-in-the-clouds sermon, but a practical, useful, every-day, God-helps-them-that-help-themselves sermon. I wish everybody in the world could have a sermon driven home to them like that. I wish everybody could understand that no man can ever help any other man, save as he shows him how to help himself. What a different world this would be—how much finer, and truer, and better, in a thousand, thousand ways!"

For a silent moment or two he pondered. Then, carefully putting the check-book into one of the pigeon-holes of the old-fashioned desk—still smiling with an inner warmth of happiness too deep for words—he picked up his pen and bent more to his unfinished labor.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

A WAR-TIME PORTRAIT

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

HIS hair was golden as a girl's; his cheeks were pink and white;
His hands were delicate and soft; he hated men who fight.
He never argued, never raised his gentle voice a bit;
If anything, he was *too* fine; he was *too* exquisite.
But when they needed youngsters, those early days in France,
Young Rupert packed his grip and went to drive an ambulance.

He had a soft, bland way with him; he passed the drinks and smokes;
He hated ribald stories, he detested filthy jokes.
He loved the lovely things of life; he played—ah, what a touch!
Some said he was effeminate—men didn't like him much.
But when the Allies needed help, young Rupert seized his chance;
He didn't balk; he didn't talk; he simply sailed for France.

His light companions loitered here—the chaps who laughed at him
Because he was too "precious," and because his waist was slim.
They're guzzling beer in dim cafés, they're smoking strong cigars;
They're telling you what *they* would do with Kaisers, kings, and Czars.
But Rupert's on the firing-line; he's helping all he can.
Effeminate? Not on your life! He's every inch a man!

The Unknown Quantity

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

Authors of "The Killer," "Box 991," "Snared," "The Web of Destiny," etc., etc.

A SEMI-DUAL STORY

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CARL HOFFMAN, a wealthy old recluse and inventor, was found murdered in his study; the safe was open, but nothing was missing but some plans of a very important war invention, and suspicion pointed about equally to two men, Count Michael Missadoyeff, a Russian, who had been trying to buy the patent and incidentally marry Hoffman's beautiful ward, Marya Townsend, and been turned down on both propositions; and Robert Harding, supposed to be an English secret agent, who was also in love with Marya. The housekeeper, the hostler, and the secretary, Herbert Saxe, also came in for a certain amount of questioning. Bryce and Glace, private investigators, took the matter up, assisted by Semi-Dual, a mystic and astrologer from Persia, and the facts unearthed seemed to point to the Russian, until Harding mysteriously disappeared; later they discovered that the latter instead of being an Englishman was a member of the American secret service set to guard the invention, and the mystery deepened. Dual, under his real name, Prince Abdul, took a house near the Russian and engaged Saxe as his secretary; the latter, of course, did not know that his employer was interested in any way in the murder case. Moved by Dual, Bryce somewhat baffled, suggested to Glace that they call upon Missadoyeff.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLUE.

I CONSIDERED Bryce's suggestion briefly, and assented: "All right. Working with Johnson, as we are, there's no reason why we should not go ask the count some questions. We can at least get a line on the man."

And right there fate took a hand in the tangle again, as we were to learn, though we did not know it as we walked the few blocks to the Missadoyeff house.

It stood huge and dark save for two lights which glowed on either side of the door as we went up the steps.

A moment later we confronted a factotum in livery who politely inquired our business, and to whom I presented our cards. He gave us seats in the hall itself, departed to announce our presence and bring us Missadoyeff's reply.

As it chanced, it was the count himself, however, who returned to us in person. Six feet two he was, if an inch, and built to correspond. Clad in evening-dress, with a red ribbon across his bosom; masssive of head, his lower face slightly bearded, with dark eyes looking out from under bushy brows, he was a man to command attention as he paused in a door near the side and rear of the hall.

"If you will step in here, gentlemen," he invited, as we rose.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for August 25.

We passed into a room evidently used as a workroom by our host. There was a grate with a fire, a huge table with a great lamp, massive chairs, dull pictures in shadowed frames, the remains of what appeared to have been a supper not yet cleared from one end of the table, and an ash-tray on which fumed a cigarette some six inches long, and a half-emptied glass. Besides the door through which we entered, and another at the rear, there was no break in the walls, other than narrow windows set above a dark paneled wainscoting some six feet high. The place, except for its sumptuous furniture, was almost a cell.

"Sit down, please," Missadoyeff requested, smiling without any lighting of the eyes. "You police agents here are almost as active as those of my own land, it seems. One of you, named Johnson, was here a few moments ago, and now you appear."

That was a surprise in its way, but I met the count's eyes without letting mine waver. "We do not desire to cause you annoyance," I said in reply, "but we are trying very hard to gain all possible information concerning the Hoffman murder case."

The count lifted his cigarette. "I am afraid my information is limited in that quarter. I told Johnson as much."

"Yet your pencil was found in the dead man's hand," I told him quickly.

He nodded in a careless way. "Where it was doubtless placed. I inadvertently left it in Hoffman's house at the time of my last call."

"When was your last call? We ain't doubtin' you didn't mean to leave it." Bryce made a tactless growl.

Missadoyeff eyed him calmly, however, before he spoke: "Mr. Glace, your companion has execrable manners. Ignoring them, however, I last called on Mr. Hoffman on the forenoon of the day before yesterday, as I think you say. I can incidentally verify that."

"You left the pencil there at that time?" I asked.

"Yes," said the count. "I have a habit at times of taking a little thing like that and tapping when talking. I did so that day. I forgot to replace the pencil. I can understand your suspicion, of course."

I had been looking about. Now my eyes came back to the table and the remains of the supper. It seemed to me there had been service for two. As the count paused, I once more spoke:

"It appears we have rather taken off the gloves in our questions and answers, count. Can you account for your time last night between, say, eight and ten?" I watched him closely, in the hope of surprising some fleeting expression, but was not repaid.

For he laughed. "My dear man, of course I can. I was in the company of one of our most charming women."

Something contracted within me. "Miss Townsend?" I questioned quickly, and kept my eyes on his face.

He nodded and blew smoke. "Ah! I see you know she is my dear friend."

"I thought Hoffman told you to keep off the grass up there?" Bryce once more broke in.

Missadoyeff bared his teeth slightly rather than smiled. "Many have told me to do things, my man, and few been obeyed."

"What time did you leave Miss Townsend?" I inquired.

Missadoyeff shook his head. "I hardly know. In pleasant company time means little. Somewhere before ten, though, I think."

His words gave me a shock. In every way they appeared to me an evasion, an endeavor to convey a meaning other than the truth. They were in accord with his story of the pencil, which, while plausible enough, as far as it went, made no real explanation as to who had placed it in Hoffman's hand, or why. And now the count was quibbling over the time he had left Marya last night. Why?

Had he in reality left her later?—been in Hoffman's house with her? Had they gone there together, and had there been a struggle in which the count had struck the old inventor with the well of ink, and had Hoffman, clutching frantically as he fell, caught the pencil from the count unheeded by the latter? Yet, what, then, of Harding? I could not have been mistaken in the agony my words about him had aroused in Marya Townsend's eyes.

I sat silent while all this passed through my mind, and my attitude appeared to afford the count some amusement, for he smiled the least bit and drew a kerchief with which he wiped his hands, his lips and mustache.

"Well, Mr. Glace, was my answer not what you expected?" he remarked.

But now I was all attention again, because, as he had finished his use of the kerchief and returned it with a sort of flick to his pocket, my nostrils once more filled with a subtle, penetrating scent. It was the odor of attar of roses, and it floated from Count Michael to me.

"No," I said frankly in answer, noting Bryce all alertness now, too. "You see, we have positive proof that Marya Townsend was in the Hoffman house some time after ten last night."

That time I shook his pose. Suddenly his eyes burned as he turned them full on me.

"You have *positive* proof?" he repeated in a voice of deliberate control. "That is a very definite statement, Mr. Glace."

"It is one we can back with definite proof," I maintained.

"What proof?" he asked, after a momentary pause of consideration.

"A kerchief of fine linen, smeared with ink—a kerchief bearing an 'M' in one corner—a kerchief the exact duplicate of which we later obtained in a way to leave no doubt of its ownership—and one scented with the same perfume which you yourself affect."

I gave it to him straight. I could not see how it could do harm, and I hoped it might produce some additional information in return.

But it did not, in the way I expected, for at the finish Missadoyeff laughed—actually laughed.

"You police," he cried. "Pardon me, but I fear I must smash your irrefutable proof. Some time ago—just before your Christmas—I gave a good-sized reception and dance in honor of Miss Townsend, as you may have heard. Among the favors were boxes of handkerchiefs—for the ladies, you know—made from very fine linen from my own land, embroidered with various initials. As I recall it, there were several of each letter in the alphabet, as it was a large party I gave. Also with each box was a small bottle of this scent, which is genuine attar of roses. There were over a hundred young women present, so you see it would be so hard to pick definitely on a single one whose name may begin with an 'M.'"

"Damn it!" Bryce exploded.

Missadoyeff turned toward him. "I perceive that to you, Mr. Bryce, the inference is plain."

"Oh, it's plain enough," said Jim. "It's one of the few things in this mix-up that is."

Suddenly the count seemed to adopt a lighter humor. He leaned back in his chair.

"Just why should you men suspect me of destroying old Carl Hoffman?" he asked. "It would be a foolish action for a man here in your country as the agent of a friendly nation, to buy munitions and supplies. Why should I be committing midnight murders? Let's be sensible."

"Let's quit fencing, count," I returned. "International friendship is well enough to prate of, but—would that friendship prevent your laying hands on a thing which would be worth all the munitions in the world to your country, if you had a chance?"

Missadoyeff narrowed his eyes. "Mr. Glace, you appear to have a definite conception in your brain. Give it a name."

I bowed. "We know you had positive knowledge of such an invention on which Hoffman was at work. We even know you tried to purchase the same. We know Hoffman refused to sell. We know the nature of the invention, and also that since last night the plans have been missing from Hoffman's safe. Am I plain?"

While I spoke, the count's face darkened. "Indeed, yes," he said, when I paused. "You might as well accuse me of murder. But—are you sufficiently imbecilic as well as to suppose I took Marya Townsend with me as a witness of my crime? I admit, I tried to gain those plans by honorable purchase, and that he refused, as you say. If there is a means to prove that I went further in the matter, it is for you to find it. I shall not help you, be sure. I should ad-

vise you, however, to give over the attempt, which will fail, and devote your energies to regaining the plans. There are other agents of other nations abroad in your land, beside myself. Do not forget that while you follow the trail of a scented handkerchief."

"What other agents?" Bryce spoke again.

Missadoyeff shrugged. "Any other agent," he returned.

Once more I changed my tactics. "Were you acquainted with a man by the name of Harding, count?" I asked.

He gave a satiric smile. "The blundering young American who attempted to perform a mission of espionage on myself? Oh, yes."

"Through Miss Townsend?"

For an instant the man's eyelids quivered, and then: "Mr. Glace, it is said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. You appear to have gained a trifle here and there. Do not, pray—trifle—too far."

"Meaning?" I challenged what seemed almost a threat.

"That we will discuss the young woman no further, nor the attempts of this Harding in her direction—nor insult her by the insinuation that she was a talebearer in either direction. That is clear and comprehensive, I hope."

Despite my suspicions, I had to admire the man's stand. I began to suspect that his interest in Marya had been due to the girl herself—her beauty and youth, and sweetness. At least, sincerity had rung in his tones.

"How much do you know of Harding?" I resumed.

"Dear me," said the count. "Johnson, too, wanted to know that. Let me be brief. I know he was a conceited young cub, who fancied I did not know he was watching my movements in connection with this Hoffman invention. I know he had the egotism to seek to ingratiate himself with a woman as far above him as the stars. I know he has disappeared since last night, setting all you people by the ears, since coincident with his disappearance Hoffman was found dead and the plans of his invention missing. That is all, I think."

I decided to be as bold as the man before me. "What you don't appear to know is that Harding is under suspicion," I observed.

Missadoyeff lifted his bushy brows. "Indeed," he accepted. "I must revise my opinion of you police."

"He will be welcome when found," I said.

Missadoyeff smiled. "Ah! You appear to have a sense of humor, Mr. Glace," he replied.

I answered his smile. "A sense of humor lightens a task, don't you think, count?" I said, hitching my chair nearer the table. For some time I had been eying something lying in the shadow cast by the top of the table on the floor. But I couldn't make it out, and I didn't dare study it long at a time without running a risk of attracting attention. Yet some way the thing beckoned my inspection, and I wanted to know what it was. It seemed to lie just where it would have dropped from the person of one occupying one of the two places laid for that still unremoved supper.

"Indeed, yes," Missadoyeff returned. "After a verbal fencing bout we threaten to part in amicable fashion, with honors even."

"Not quite," I returned. "You've completely demolished a cherished clue for us."

I was getting a better view of the thing on the floor. So far as I could see, it appeared a small oblong of some glazed material, in shape not unlike a tiny envelope. I put a hand in my pocket and drew out a case of cigarettes.

The count held up a hand quickly. "Oh, but you must try one of mine," he proffered, shoving a tiny box across the table in my direction. "They are my own blend, and, believe me, your country made me pay a duty—they did, indeed."

"Thank you," I accepted. I had planned the thing, and it worked. I put out a hand and took one of the long paper rolls, and at the same time I dropped my own case. Stooping instantly, with a purposely stifled exclamation, I regained it, and also I gained that little oblong something I had eyed and schemed to obtain. I got it, palmed it quickly, and rose. Missadoyeff struck a

match and extended it to me. I lighted my cigarette.

For a few minutes we sat chatting and smoking before I turned the conversation back to the pencil. "You do not intend trying to explain its presence, then?" I asked.

Missadoyeff shrugged. *"Nichevo,"* he rejoined. "That is to say, there is no need for me to bother. It is fate. How it came there I do not know. How, then, can I explain?"

I nodded and rose. "There is no need for us to take up more of your time," I suggested. "Pray pardon the intrusion in the first place, count."

He got to his feet and accompanied us to the door. "Some other time, on some other mission, we might prove better companions," he said, as the servant gave us our coats and hats.

"When I am older and have learned a greater finesse in verbal fencing," I laughed. "I have time—you are older than I."

Missadoyeff nodded. "As it happens, to-day is my birthday, according to the Russian calendar. I am fifty-nine, Mr. Glace. Good night."

The footman held open the door. We went out and down to the street. And there I turned in the direction of the Polk Street house. My heart was singing with elation at what I had done.

"What are we heading this way for?" Bryce cut into my mood.

"To see Semi," I told him, "and show him what I found."

"You found? Where?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Back there." I took out what I had picked from Missadoyeff's floor. It was a small bag of fine glazed fabric, water-proof, in fact. It was about two and a half inches long by two wide. I held it toward him under the corner arc lamp as we neared a crossing. "Do you know what that is, Jim?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Then," I went on quickly, "I'll tell you. It's the sort of cover a secret agent of this country uses to carry his identification card about in. It's clear proof that Harding was in that room with Missadoyeff not later than this evening, or that's how it looks to me."

CHAPTER VIII.

DUAL TAKES COMMAND.

"IN there?" Bryce stammered. "As his prisoner—or his pal, do you mean?"

"As his prisoner, I think," I replied. "You know the count said Johnson had been there. There were two places laid for supper. He had Harding with him when Johnson was announced. He's holding him for some purpose of his own. When Johnson came, Harding took a chance. He dropped this little bag, hoping the visitor might be some one who would know what it was. Well—one visitor did."

"Granny!" said Bryce. "We'll tell Semi—put Mulkins and Jenkins wise, and then watch the wheels go round."

I nodded. "One thing's certain. Missadoyeff didn't get the plans, and I'll bet he thinks Harding knows where they are, and is trying to make him give up."

"I gotcha," said Jim. "Come along."

We quickened our steps to avoid all possible delay. My elation still clung to me. I had gone into the very lion's den and picked up my clue under his eyes. Even now I could imagine Missadoyeff laughing to himself at how he had added confusion to my former doubts and sent me forth no wiser than I came. Well, let him laugh. Inside a short time there might be a laugh coming to me, if my suspicions proved correct. At least, if they were right, it would serve a further purpose still. It would indicate that Harding had been in Hoffman's house—that in all probability it was his footprints Johnson had found at the foot of those vines—that he had dropped there; and also, that the Russian believed that Harding had either gained the plans, or knew where they were—therefore, that the count had fallen short in his intent of gaining them for himself.

I began to picture a provisional scene as I walked, Missadoyeff and Marya Townsend going to that house and coming inside it at a time when Harding had about completed his task after killing the old inventor

—whether in cold blood or in a desperate endeavor to escape detection or detention himself. Surprised, Harding would have taken the only means of escape open to him—down the vines—and so away from the scene, leaving Missadoyeff to come up and discover the body—Marya to scream with horrified realization, bend to examine the body and smudge her fingers with ink—because, despite Missadoyeff's clever explanation about those kerchiefs, I had watched him too closely to quite miss the fact that he was very ready about giving that explanation. Too ready, I thought now, in the enthusiasm of my latest find in the case.

To support that again was the passionate anxiety, the terror of anxiety, in Marya Townsend's face that afternoon, when she learned that Harding was missing. I smiled to myself as I walked. It was all coming out so very nicely—each piece of the puzzle fitting in so exactly. And then suddenly my smile died. If I was right, who put that pencil in Carl Hoffman's dead hand? If Missadoyeff came *after* Harding, why, in Heaven's name, had he left the pencil there? Surely he would have examined the body of the dead inventor, and found that pencil as quickly as the less astute Johnson had done. My carefully built-up fabric having reached the keystone upon which its perfect arch depended, found no keystone and came tumbling down about my ears. I swore into the night.

"What's the matter?" said Bryce.

"I thought I saw the whole thing for a minute," I told him. "But there's something missing."

He chuckled. "That's the unknown quantity Dual was talking about, I guess. I've seen it all from start to finish about a hundred times to-day. I've even started to explain it to you once or twice, because it's easiest for me to think out loud, and talk what seems like fool rot, just sorter arguin' along with myself. An' every time I had that unknown quantity by the tail, it wiggled away and crawled back into its hole. But we're coming on, old boy. Every time we do something, we get something more. We're a jolly lot of little retrievers who go get 'em and carry 'em back to the man who can fit 'em all together, like we're doing now. Cheer up. I guess the man who knew the unknown quantity was there this mornin' and will know about what it looks like when he lamps it at least."

That was a pretty long speech for Jim, who generally grunted or puffed or snorted a few words and subsided. It showed how deeply he was moved by this little thing which held us in its tangled coils. And his words gave me fresh courage. They held a truth incontestable in the face of all I had seen Dual do in the past. They were the most logical thing Jim had said all day.

Most surely, Semi had said this morning that there remained a certain element to be discovered. To that end he had taken his usual step of removing his field of operations to the place where we now were aproaching. Why should I worry or torture my brain to understand? Why not do as in the past, when I had gone where Dual commanded, and done what he said, and seen him bring order out of chaos, and certain, swift justice in the end, where others had been baffled by the things he so certainly unveiled.

We had reached the pavement in front of 919 Polk. I turned toward its door. And once more Bryce halted in his tracks. "Holy smoke!" he exclaimed.

This time I asked: "What's the matter?"

"See here," he said. "Speaking of unknown quantities, there's one bet we've all been overlooking to-day. Hoffman's hostler and the old woman living there with him. They say they were asleep last night while Saxe was out of the house. But how do we know what they was doin'? Maybe—"

"For Heaven's sake, don't put any more kinks in this, Jim," I interrupted, not without a peculiar feeling that he was right. We had not suspected. Why should we not have suspected? Saxe had been gone when the crime was committed. Why should they not have known on what Hoffman worked? Why should they not have known that Missadoyeff was after those plans? Why should they not have been as likely to seek to come by things as any other member of any other nation? Had Keating, say, seeing the fruits of Hoffman's brain about to be given elsewhere, sought to forestall action and

taken them either for some country or for the selfish gain—Dual had spoken of that morning. Had he meant something like that?

We went up and rang the bell. Henri opened to us almost at once. He waved us toward the door of the reception-parlor.

"The master is in his study," he said softly.

Without other explanation he turned back to a smaller hall I had seen earlier in the evening, and seated himself on a chair beside the little door which gave upon it from Dual's own private room.

That in itself was surprising, but there were more surprises in store, because as we entered the blue-draped room we found the door of the room beyond it open, and there drifted out the sound of voices to our ears.

Beyond doubt some one else was with Semi-Dual. Henri had told me to go in, however, and I advanced toward the door, to see that Dual sat in the presence of two men, one of them short and stocky and one lean and tall.

I stopped and stared. They were the men I had seen in our own office not over two and a half hours before. So Dual was in touch with the secret-service agents? He certainly was moving, it would seem; had certainly made quick use of that number I had given him when I was here before.

There was other evidence of his work spread out before me in a mass of papers which nearly covered the desk—papers themselves covered with circles and symbols of astrological computations.

Yet rather than seeming exhausted by all his labors, Dual never looked better than he did that night. His work seemed to have sent a slight flush into his olive cheeks. He glanced up as Bryce and I paused in the door and smiled his welcome.

"Ah, Gordon," he said quickly, "you have sought, it seems, and found. You know Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Mulkins. Come in."

"I have not only sought and found," I returned as I entered, "but I intended seeking farther for Messrs. Jenkins and Mulkins after I had seen you, and lo, they are here. That should shorten the steps of my mission greatly. I have been to the house of Missadoyeff. Gentlemen, do you know what this is?"

I produced the little, glazed cover and laid it in Mulkins's hands.

He stiffened as though some one had driven a fist against his jaw. His eyes met mine swiftly, sharply.

"Never mind that; where did you find it?" he demanded almost bruskly.

"In the house of Count Michael Missadoyeff," I declared, and waited for the effect.

Jenkins had risen and come over by Mulkins's side. The two men looked now at one another rather than at me. I let my eyes wander to Dual. He was eying the little envelope with a slight smile. His eyes shifted to mine with a look of complete comprehension—complete understanding. His smile deepened.

"Missadoyeff was born fifty-nine years ago to-day by the Russian calendar," I said.

Dual nodded. He waved a hand slightly to indicate the papers on his desk, as one who would say that he was already in possession of the information.

Mulkins's voice interrupted. "Prince, let me use that phone. This looks like that Russian had our man in his grip. Just let me borrow a coupla men from Johnson for an hour, and we'll see if he keeps up that sort of thing around here."

Then Dual did one of those peculiar things which marked him as a man apart from all others and his courses as different from those of ordinary men.

"Before you do so, Mr. Mulkins, permit me to ask Mr. Glace a few questions," he said.

"But we're losing time. That rascal may kill Harding before we get at him, for all we know," Mulkins protested with something like heat.

Dual turned his eyes upon him. "Mr. Mulkins," he returned, "I believe it was upon my request that you came here. I think it was upon my initiative that I have interested myself in this matter from the first. I have assured you that if I might be granted your cooperation I would show you definite results.

"I am seeking not to do you a favor,

nor to come at your missing associate indeed, but to clear up the entire circumstance, and thereby, in all seeming, protect the lives and freedom of millions of people —and in the end permit justice to be performed upon the person of that one who is guilty of this attempt upon life as embodied in the person not only of Hoffman but in the nation as well—in the world perhaps. Are you aware, sir, that to-night the world is in danger?"

There could be no doubting his words. Truth rang in their accents. Mulkins seemed suddenly shaken out of all definite ability to respond to the question.

It was Jenkins who spoke. "Do what he says, Bill—do what he says."

Semi appeared to take it for granted. For once he questioned me in public. "Gordon, what did you learn from Missadoyeff?"

I told him briefly, and he bent his head to consider.

In the end it was Mulkins to whom he spoke. "I would suggest now, sir, that you use the telephone to call a guard and set it about the house of this Missadoyeff, for the safety of this nation which you serve."

"But Harding—" Mulkins began once more in excited protest.

Dual lifted a hand. "Mr. Harding is not with Count Missadoyeff, nor in his house at this moment," he said.

"What?" Mulkins stared. "What about this thing Glace brought back with him, then?"

"Mr. Glace, my very good friend, found that some time ago, Mr. Mulkins," said Dual.

"You mean the Russian's sprung him?" Mulkins got to his feet and faced Dual direct.

"Unless my judgment is utterly at fault from the beginning," said Semi-Dual. "Mr. Mulkins, will you order that guard about his place? Time is pressing."

"Don't be a mule, Bill." That was Jenkins.

Mulkins scowled. He was far from convinced. But he sat down, and picked up the instrument in one hand.

"What shall I tell 'em to do beside stand around?" he inquired gruffly and with rather bad grace.

In a way I couldn't blame him. Myself I was totally in the dark, but I knew Dual too well to doubt that he knew—that at last *he knew*. This was the sort of work he did when certain—when his labors had brought results. Suddenly my whole mood lightened. I looked at Jenkins and smiled. And Jenkins shook his head and made a grimace which said he was baffled; that, like Mulkins, he was in the presence of what he did not understand.

Dual answered the question. "Tell them to watch—to follow any soul which leaves that house after they arrive near it —see where they go, and do what the occasion requires when once they find out that destination."

Mulkins spoke into the phone, hung up the receiver, and set the instrument down. "Well, that's done," he growled. "What now?"

"An explanation," said Semi-Dual. "Mr. Mulkins, if you and I are to work together, I perceive that something like that must follow. I cannot have our endeavors run at cross-purpose, as they threaten to do. I can appreciate how peculiar the things I have asked you to do must seem. I can appreciate your natural desire to rush to your friend's assistance. But—it would have availed nothing more. You would not have found him had you sought."

Mulkins shook his head. "I can't see how you make that out," he made answer.

Dual smiled. "I have the fact that Glace very cleverly told the count that Harding was under suspicion. And I have more—much more. It is of that I wish to speak."

Mulkins shrugged. "Oh, all right."

"Mr. Mulkins," Dual went on, "I have told you I was a man half Persian, half Russian—a mixture of both Occident and Orient—capable of understanding the motives of each section and race. Why do you suppose I came to this nation to live?

"It is because it is here that the nearest approach to the highest ideals of nations, of life, may be found—the nearest approach to man's divine right to be born and live out his life as an untrammeled

individual exists. I have lived here, and lived my own life in my own way.

" To-day I stepped out of my life into the cosmic life of man for a time, for a purpose, because to-day this nation stands threatened with the most terrible calamity which could befall her at this time. That calamity I desire to prevent. For that purpose I am here; for that purpose I have kept my finger on the pulse of this matter all day long in so far as I could."

" You mean them plans?" said Mulkins.

Dual bowed his head.

Mulkins's face lightened with a sudden conception. " You think he believes Harding knows where they are? He's sprung Bob so he can follow him to 'em and grab them when he goes."

" Harding will be followed," said Dual. " I think the count is assured that Harding knows where they are."

" Then for God's sake, why didn't you let us go get him before he was started off, instead of sending a guard?" the secret agent demanded.

" Because," said Semi, " Harding was released before you even knew he had been in the count's power."

" Before Glace brought back the envelope, you mean?" Mulkins stared.

Again Dual bowed. " Yes."

" But—" stammered Mulkins. " Good Lord, man, how do you know?"

Dual gestured toward the paper-covered desk. " By these pages of calculations which I have made to-day."

" You mean you've figured it out?" Mulkins mouthed.

" Exactly."

" From what?"

" From astrology, Mr. Mulkins—the science of the planetary control of mundane life."

I heard Jenkins gasp. Mulkins grew slowly red. He appeared to believe himself being made a butt of.

" Rot!" he exclaimed. " That bunk was exploded a long time ago. Most of their guesses missed fire."

" Because," said Dual calmly, " most of the predictions may have been said to have been guesses. Because in their readings most of the readers failed to take into account some unknown quantity which influenced the whole result."

I stiffened slightly and waited, while Mulkins considered.

" Well," he said slowly, " there's something in that."

" Mr. Mulkins," Semi went on, " did you study algebra in school?"

Mulkins nodded.

" You know what the unknown quantity is—something not determined, yet depending for its finding on the known elements of the equation, and not found correctly unless each step is properly performed."

Mulkins nodded again.

" Did you study geometry and trigonometry perhaps?"

" Sure. I had a fair education."

" They are the mathematics of angles, are they not?"

" Oh, yes," said Mulkins. " Sure!"

" And a mistake in an angulation makes a woful error in the result?"

Mulkins grinned. " Rather."

" Mr. Mulkins," said Semi-Dual, " astrology is the mathematics of the angulation of the planetary influences governing earth life. Given the quality of each planet, and their positions at a given time, one may certainly predicate their mean influence on any point of the earth's surface. A mistake will change the reading and the predicted result either in character or time.

" The angulation of the major influences may even be correct and the reader may fail to take into account some minor influence which will still throw out the whole—some unknown or unsensed quantity again. Mr. Mulkins "—his voice dropped, rounded, became rich and splendidly full—" man is a finite creature and prone to err. God, be He that of the Christians, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Allah of the Moslems, or the Oom of the Buddhist, is infinite, at One with His creations, and makes no mistakes; nor do the stars He has placed in His heavens lie. It is finite man who errs in reading the influences at work in the universe."

This was the old Dual I had known so long and loved. I thrilled to him in response. I looked at Jenkins. His expression was one of interest intense. But

Mulkins still appeared unconvinced. He shifted in his chair and frowned.

"An' yet you claim to do it correctly—ain't that flying pretty high? Ain't you a man?"

Dual smiled slightly. "Yes, I am a man. But I do not read these signs for personal gain nor self-aggrandizement nor fame. When I read, I read only to gain knowledge.

"There is truth in the saying, 'Knock and it shall be opened to ye, seek and ye shall find.' I read, Mr. Mulkins, not only with the eyes of the mind, but as well with the eyes of the soul."

Mulkins was plainly puzzled. "But—" he began.

Jenkins spoke for the first time to cut him short. "Oh, shut up, Bill, and let the man talk. A good many people have believed the thing for a mighty long time, I'm not sure that I don't believe it myself."

CHAPTER IX.

DUAL EXPOUNDS THE LAW.

DUAL resumed. "It is all a science of angles, to speak broadly, and the determination of those angles—their direction of operation—and hence the result of that operation. There are, too, many ways of calculating those directions. Yet the two methods most commonly used are the primary and secondary determinations.

"You have charged error. Bear with me while I show you how easily error may creep in.

"In the primary determination of directions, one degree of space, or four minutes of time, stands for one year of mundane life. To calculate by this method *exactly*, the exact time of a person's life must be known—or if it is not, it must be obtained by methods of rectification, many of which to the mere commercial astrologer are unknown.

"The true believer will use them to gain true results—the dabbler will not. With the exact time obtained, allowance is made for the revolution of the earth on its axis. Every four minutes of this, each degree of revolution, contains the events of one year of life. You can see how important the exact time becomes. The error of *one minute* will throw the final result *three months* from the proper point where it should fall.

"Can you see, Mr. Mulkins, why unthinking people should blame the error on astrology, and not upon the wrong premise, upon which the whole fabric of an astrological figure was erected? Yet to so damn it were as reasonable as to expect a right mathematical answer to a sum in which the wrong numerals were set down at the start.

"With the correct data it becomes possible, however, to determine exactly at what angle the light of the various planets strikes upon the earth's surface at that time, and thereby to predict a definite result."

Mulkins nodded slowly. "Well," he admitted, "I suppose you might say it would—but that's astronomy, I guess."

"Astronomy is founded on astrology," Dual said quickly. "Let us go on. In the secondary method, most useful in most cases because of the uncertainty of the time when a thing actually does occur, each day succeeding a happening, or while the sun travels one degree of the three-hundred-and-sixty-degree arc of the zodiacal circle, is taken to correspond to a year of life.

"Hence each two hours would equal a month—four minutes would equal a day. As most births are recorded within a half-hour or so of the time they occur, a secondary direction will, you see, generally fall within a few days of the time forecasted, despite the variation in clocks and the conflicting statements of people.

"Where the correct time is given, a secondary direction will *always*, if properly calculated, fall within five days of the predicted time—and as a rule on the exact date itself. The position of the moon in the zodiac at the date when the direction should fall will, in fact, govern the result and determine if it fall five days before or after the calculated time, or at what point in between.

"That being the case, the careful man

can take the time his direction cites as a basis for further calculation, and by balancing the moon's influence and ascertaining when it will be exerted upon the indicated time, or withdrawn from it, predicate exactly at what time the predicted event will actually fall out."

"You mean that you've been applying those rules to this Hoffman affair?" Mulkins asked rather thickly.

I noticed that he eyed the many sheets of paper on the desk with something like respect.

"Precisely," said Dual. "To continue with the moon: she is the main factor in calculating earth results, because of her swift motion. She is also the main source of error. The larger planets change their positions far more slowly and hence their angles.

"Let me explain. You can see that as the earth revolves, and the moon, the sun, and the various other planets advance in that orbit which constitutes the zodiacal circle or elipse, they, since their rate of advance varies, will come to certain and varying angles from time to time, both as to themselves and the earth, and to the position they occupied at the time of any event.

"Depending upon those angles, their influence will be good or the reverse. Angles of one hundred and twenty degrees are favorable; angles of sixty degrees are also good. On the other hand, an angle of ninety degrees is bad; so is an angle of one hundred and eighty degrees."

He paused again and glanced at Mulkins. The man sat bolt upright in his chair, his attention apparently fixed, but he said no word of comment, and once more Dual resumed.

"You see, Mr. Mulkins, it is all a matter of angles. When a certain planet arrives at a certain angle from another planet in the chart of any life, or any event, or at a certain angle from a certain point where another planet was at the moment an event occurred, it brings about other events which will happen on the date when such an angulation occurs, provided there are no other influences operating to change that effect.

"And in accordance with the character of those planets entering into the angulation, and the angle produced, those events will be good or bad, as the case may be. Yet we must take into account the character of the planet aspecting, and the planet it aspects, the character of the zodiacal sign in which the planets are found, and the nature of the astrological house or houses in which the planets are placed."

"Th' what?" said Mulkins. "I don't get that last."

"I should mention," Dual explained, "that in casting a horoscope the supposed heavens are divided into twelve divisions denominated houses — six masculine, six feminine, in their influence, alternately arranged. Each house has rulership over certain affairs of a man or a nation, the weather, or horary questions. There are also twelve signs of the zodiac so called, alternately masculine and feminine, but divided into four trinities, the fiery, the earthy, the airy, and the watery signs.

"Having told you that, let me go a step farther and explain that as light, heat, sound are but forms of force, planetary influences or light are but force refractions. The zodiac is a prism through which universal force refracts. The sun throws its rays to all planets. It is the same. But each planet is different. It absorbs a part of the sun's ray and refracts it transformed toward the earth. One planet absorbs a preponderance of red—Mars, let us say; one a preponderance of blue—Saturn; and these transformed rays have different effects.

"When two rays meet at an angle, they either harmoniously blend or antagonize one another. If their angle is good, the result is good. If it is bad, the result is evil, and the earth reaction is good or bad as the case may be. If the rays of light are in themselves antagonistic, the evil will be intensified where the aspect is evil, and the good will be more or less neutralized where the aspect is good; and, where the rays of light are in themselves harmonious, the evil produced by an evil aspect will be materially lessened, while the good produced by a good aspect will be augmented. This fact most astrologers have completely

overlooked. And now, if perhaps I have made myself clear in the main, do you see how easy it must be for error to creep in?"

Mulkins drew a kerchief and mopped his neck.

"Good Lord, yes," he admitted without hesitation. "What I can't see is how it could be kept out."

Semi-Dual relaxed slightly from the pose he had held and smiled. "The answer to that is extreme care, plus what I termed some time ago reading not merely of cold figures by the mind, but reading as well the deeper meaning with the soul. The man who hopes to learn truly the great truths of life must come seeking with unselfish purpose and a clean mind."

Jenkins cleared his throat. "But see here, prince, you keep emphasizing the importance of getting the exact time when a thing occurred, and nobody knows the exact time when Hoffman was murdered."

Dual turned slightly toward him. "Your point, Mr. Jenkins, is very well taken. If there were no way around it, it would brand my claims as false. True I *did* not know the time of Mr. Hoffman's death. I do now. It occurred at seventeen minutes after ten last night. What I did ascertain, however, was the time when the murder was *reported,* and upon that I erected at first a *horary* figure covering the general conditions surrounding his death, from which figure I was enabled to ascertain the true time of death by calculating when the aspect was in force which *produced* death.

"Having done this, and later being placed in possession of the information as to when and where Mr. Hoffman was born, I was enabled to erect his horoscope (along with the horoscopes of several others under consideration) and ascertain the *exact* time of his birth by a number of methods known to the scientific, esoteric astrologer.

"One of those methods is the checking, from a provisional birth time, of directions which are known to have fallen out. Another is the correction, by means of the prenatal epoch system, the rule for which may be briefly stated:

"When at birth the moon is *decreasing* in light, at the prenatal period it will be in the zodiacal sign *setting* at birth, and at the moment of the period the longitude of the moon at birth will be *setting.*

"When at birth the moon is *increasing* in light, at the prenatal period it will be in the zodiacal sign *rising* at birth, and at the moment of the period the longitude of the moon at birth will be *rising.*

"Calculate the degree on the ascendant.

"Calculate the moon's longitude.

"Subtract the nine calendar months from the date of birth.

"Ascertain the date *nearest* to the estimated period on which the moon is in the sign required and transiting the degree of the estimate ascendant or descendant at birth. Assume this to be the exact day of the period and calculate the moon's longitude for that time, which longitude should be the true ascendant or descendant at birth, according as the moon is decreasing or increasing in light at birth.

"The various methods of correction should always be used, that the result may be proved beyond doubt. You will admit, Mr. Jenkins, that it is a law of mathematics that a result, to be correct, must work both ways. It is a poor rule which does not do the same."

Jenkins smiled slightly. "You used a sort of process of exclusion, elimination, and comparison," he declared.

"You must remember that besides being a student of astrology, I have applied myself to an understanding in part of those higher forces of life so many people call occult, because they are beyond the realms of ordinary comprehension, rather than because there is any controversion of universal law in their operation.

"This morning I erected my first figure. My friend Glace here came with Mr. Bryce and they gave me the fact that two men and a woman appeared more or less involved in the affair, and that one of these men was the Missadoyeff, whose house your men now are watching; also that some plans of a potential invention had been stolen. I was then in a position to assign provisionally at least to some of my symbols certain characters in the probable events of last night. Later still the same source of information gave me the day and year of birth of at least three of these persons, which my figure held; the dead man, Harding, and the woman. I then began a series of corrections based upon the significators of those persons and their posi-

tion at the time when the murder was reported, to find in what way their several stations compared with definitely known events."

"But what a task—what a labor?" Jenkins exclaimed.

Dual again waved his hand toward the table. He smiled. "A labor, yes. A task, no. I hoped to serve—perhaps a world."

"But still I don't see the need of furnishing this place and moving in," said Jenkins. "I don't follow you there."

"Not now," said Dual. "Later you will. At present let me say only that even before Glace came to me this morning with Mr. Bryce, my first indefinite figure had shown me a situation of peril for some power, and a significator for whom my friends' story up to that time, as they told it, gave no defiite place."

"That was th' unknown quantity you spoke of?" Bryce declared with some excitement showing in his tones.

Dual bowed toward him. "Yes, Mr. Bryce. As I have said before, an unknown quantity may sometimes throw an entire calculation or situation completely out."

"And you finally made these corrections, I suppose?" Jenkins resumed.

"Yes," said Dual. "With the provisional birth dates, it was easy enough to erect a figure of each of the three concerning whom I had that data, and compare the results one with the other—and from that, by harmonizing each with the other, to arrive at the time of birth which would bring each into the position he or she held last night."

"Yep," Mulkins burst forth, "I see that. Then what?"

"Let me ask another question before you answer, prince," Jenkins put in. "You explain very succinctly about the harmonizing of the Harding, Hoffman, and the woman's significators, as I think you call them. But it is merely a few moments since Glace, in my hearing, gave you the provisional time of Missadoyeff's birth, yet you claim to have known that Harding had left him before Glace arrived with the information."

"Once more you take good ground, Mr. Jenkins," Dual said. "Were the final solution of this matter to have rested upon the birth-date of the Russian, it would necessarily have been delayed some hours. I have just told you I was a student of all higher universal forces, and all force is the same, refracted through the media of universal creation in various forms. By my knowledge of racial psychology, of the Russian's position in this city, of his ends and objects, I was able to pick out the significator in my *horary* figure which must be his. Such significator, in the case of the Russian, shows from its place in the *horary* figure the part which the Russian has played and is to play in this affair, and it was not necessary for me to verify or disprove his part in the transaction by recourse to a figure erected for the time and place of his birth. Had there been doubt as to his standing, it would have necessitated my checking from his birth-date, which, however, in pursuance of my custom, I will do at the first opportunity, now that I have the data requisite for so doing.

"His significator primarily overshadows those of the other participants in this tragic intrigue. In the *horary* figure Harding's significator is separating from that of the Russian, shortly after forming a conjunction therewith, and the full bearing of one upon the other can be read by the nature of the aspecting and aspected planets, the quality of the aspect operating between them, and the nature of the house within which they are placed."

Jenkins nodded. "It was from this I presume that you determined that Harding had left Missadoyeff's house?"

"Exactly, Mr. Jenkins. By means of that computation I had learned that Harding had left before Glace arrived here, simply because at a time antedating my friend's arrival, the significators of Harding and the Russian began an angulation which would inevitably take them apart."

"Good Lord!" Mulkins gave vent to the ejaculation. "Why are we sitting here instead of doing something ourselves, if you know all about it?"

Dual smiled at his outburst. "Because, Mr. Mulkins, the time when my directions indicate the termination of this affair, has

not yet arrived. Moreover, with all my endeavors, my figures still contain a certain quantity, not as yet definitely known."

"You mean that after all this you ain't sure?" Mulkins said, in something approaching sudden disgusted anger.

"Not at all. I mean that the time is not at hand to strike—that the evidence, as even you yourself should know, is not all at hand. Think, Mr. Mulkins. Why did I call you and your companion here in the first place? I mean that this morning I realized the unknown factor in this whole affair—that all day the unknown quantity has remained—the same—and that it is the quantity which, when determined and placed in proper position, will terminate this affair, and place the answer in your hands."

"In my hands?" Mulkins questioned, drawing back.

"In yours," said Dual. "In this case the unknown is the cause of all which has happened. Shall I tell you why? Because it alone can be made so to harmonize with my figure, as to bring all else to pass. Therefore, because of an unknown quantity, Mr. Mulkins, you are here and Mr. Jenkins, Glace, and Mr. Bryce and I. Because of it, I took this house and furnished it forth as a setting for the drama which shall, within its walls, be played out. Because of an unknown quantity, to-night an old man lies dead—the life-work of his hands and brain is missing, two men lie under suspicion by the police, a young girl suffers what torture of unrest she alone knows, another crime will, in my judgment, be attempted, and a nation, a world, still hangs in danger. All this, Mr. Mulkins, has come to pass, because of a quantity, unknown."

Again his voice rose and rang through the room in mellow accents as he spoke. He seemed for the moment inspired. Purpose, knowledge, shone from every line of his face, sounded in every word, overwhelming doubt and commanding belief in his words and himself.

And then his voice softened. "And because of that—because I knew how this thing must baffle, because I desired above all else to see innocence defended, and selfishness punished, and crime atoned, I have taken this matter into my hands, and asked your assistance—that those things might be accomplished, and the welfare of a world which will never know of its peril, preserved—and, in the final end of the equation, immutable justice done."

I thrilled again as he spoke. In the end—I did not doubt—it would all end right. The plans then would be recovered if the peril was to be averted. Never had Dual spoken like this unless certain. Now, then, he was sure, waiting only for the time appointed to arrive. I felt my soul fill with renewed courage, a sort of radiated light of hope.

"What'd I tell you?" Jim whispered hoarsely at my elbow. "He's matched up the pieces. He knows."

Mulkins sat on staring—nonplused.

Jenkins sighed so that it hissed across the room.

Mulkins roused. "You mean you know?" he demanded. "You know who killed Hoffman—who stole them plans?"

Dual smiled. "They were not the same."

"What?" The stout man seemed on the verge of apoplexy, to me. His eyes were popping. He breathed in harsh rasps.

I gasped. Great God, then some one had killed in vain—a futile, fruitless slaughter. Missadoyeff! The name flashed before me. He had killed and been foiled on the verge of success. That explained the pencil. He had had no time to remove it.

"The two acts were committed by different people," said Dual.

"You dope that out by means of them figures of yours?" Mulkins challenged, and sat waiting, puffing, his face a purple red.

Dual bowed his head. "Yes. I will go farther, Mr. Mulkins, and predict that before long you will have word of Harding, in proof of my prediction that he is at liberty again."

"If I do—if I do," Mulkins declared between gulps of astonished perception of the gauntlet thrown down, "darned if I don't believe all you've said and throw in with you at the end."

"That is what I desire," said Semi-Dual.

And shrill through the room, the bell of

the telephone rang, setting our nerves aquiver, bringing us all figuratively up on our toes.

Dual glanced in my direction. "Gordon—if you please."

I rose and went to the desk, took up the standard, placed the receiver to my ear and mumbled a rather unsteady, "Hello."

"Who's that?" barked Johnson's voice.

"Glace," I said.

"Oh, hello, you up there," he spoke quickly. "Say, I'm hunting Jenkins and Mulkins. They there, too?"

"Yes," I replied. "They're here."

"Well, tell 'em," said Johnson, in what sounded like some excitement at his end of the wire also. "Say, Glace, tell 'em their man Harding is down here in his room at the Kenton. I guess they'd better come down. I'll keep tabs on him till they do."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE KENTON.

I SET down the phone on the desk. "Johnson on the wire," I informed my companions. "He says Harding is down at the Kenton."

"Gawd!" exclaimed Mulkins, as he came to his feet. "I—I guess we'd better be going down there then," he continued rather weakly, after a moment's pause. "Come along, Jenkins. Prince Abdul seems to win."

I laughed. Not very polite, but I was swept out of myself into something for the moment like to a very hysteria of elation; and Bryce was grinning, and Jenkins was quietly rising with the air of a man not as much surprised as he had expected to be.

Mulkins eyed me dully. Then his glance went to Semi.

"Prince," he mumbled. "I said if you won I was with you. That goes. Will you come along with Tom and me and see this thing through?"

"With pleasure," Dual rose. "Also I would ask that my friends here be as well included in the invitation. Their interest is no less than yours or mine."

Mulkins nodded. "Sure," he assented. "Well, let's get on."

We passed out of the inner room, in Dual's lead. Henri still sat on his chair.

We were a silent party as we took a car and were carried down-town. We spoke but little. I think each of us was too wrapped with his own thoughts and conjectures, too much impressed with the portentous elements abroad to-night—the trend of events. I am sure Jenkins and Mulkins were too deeply affected by the almost explosive manner in which one "direction," such as they had heard Dual speak of, had fallen out. And surely the last thing they could have dreamed of was that the man would be found in that room at the Kenton where he had formerly stayed.

The car bowled along and brought us finally into the down-town districts. We left it and crossed the street to where the wide doors of the hotel itself fronted the pavement. We entered the lobby and found Johnson pacing back and forward with something of impatience in his stride.

He came toward us quickly, his eyes lighting as he confronted Dual. A queer, quizzical expression passed swiftly over his face. And then Mulkins spoke: "Hello, Johnson. Glace says you've got him treed. I brought Prince Abdul along with me, seeing as he predicted the very thing that's occurred."

"I was speaking with Mr. Johnson by phone earlier this evening," said Semi. "There is no need to explain."

Johnson nodded. "Yep, your man's upstairs. Th' desk says he's been tryin' to get into touch with either Jenkins or you for thirty minutes."

"He has?" Mulkins gasped. "Well, let's go see what he wants, then, 'stead of standin' around."

A cage lifted us to the fifth floor. We turned down the corridor with Mulkins and Jenkins now in the lead, walking with the assurance of direction gained only by definite knowledge. They had been here before. They paused after a bit and Jenkins tapped softly on the panels of a door.

Footsteps came quickly from within. The door was jerked open. A somewhat disheveled man, with dark auburn hair in abundance and a well-shaped jaw and chin, now shot out at an angle, appeared.

"Hello, boys," he said on the instant. "I've been trying to get you on the phone. Who told you I was here?"

Mulkins made answer. "City Detective Johnson found it out and phoned us a message. Here, Johnson, this is Harding."

"Oh, I know him by sight," said the detective, as we entered the room. "And I've been trying to get a sight of him all day." He thrust a hand into his vest-pocket. "Glad to meet you, though, Harding. Have a smoke." I saw that his fingers held a cigar.

"Thanks." Harding took the proffered weed. "Sit down, boys, if you can find chairs." His eyes turned toward Dual and Bryce and myself, and at once Johnson made us acquainted. We found chairs. Johnson passed around more cigars, and we lighted up. One might have thought us the best of friends, save that Dual himself did not chose to smoke and sat, rather far back, beyond Johnson, more like a spectator than a participant.

"Bob," Mulkins opened, "where on earth have you been?"

Harding shook his head. "I've been rather up against it, Bill," he returned. "As a matter of fact, I began to think I was up against it, and if somebody hadn't played me a good turn I don't just know where I would or would not be right now."

"Come clear," Mulkins said. "You kin spill all you know in this bunch, Bob."

Harding seemed to accept the assurance. "It's a rather queer story," he began. "You know the man I was set to watch?"

"Missadoyeff?" Jenkins spoke. "Yes, go on." I saw his eyes dart toward Semi as though saying that he admitted the correctness of what had been said in that orange-draped room.

"Yes, Missadoyeff," Harding resumed. "It looks a little like a case of the biter, bitten. Last night I was walking along Park Drive because I knew Missadoyeff was spending the evening with Miss Townsend, and I wanted to see where he went after he left there. He has a penchant for doing his work, not only under cover, but under cover of darkness as well, as I've found out. Well, I was walking along the street not far from the Townsend house—"

"Sure it wasn't the Hoffman house, Harding?" Johnson opened a flank attack. Harding's story was not opening at all in the fashion his suspicions would demand if they were to gain support.

And Harding paused in his narrative like a man stricken by a sudden shot. I saw that the question took him completely by surprise. I saw the fingers which held Johnson's cigar contract till they threatened to crush the tobacco into fragments.

"The Hoffman house—you mean old Carl Hoffman's place?" he inquired in a quick rasp.

Johnson smiled. "Go on," he directed, and began puffing on his own cigar.

"I was walking near the *Townsend* house," Harding resumed, with a decided emphasis on the personal name; "when without warning I was attacked from behind. I was taken at a total disadvantage and then something struck me back of the ear—you can see the bruise, I guess; look and see."

Mulkins got up and complied. "Yep," he assented after a moment, "you was beaned, all right."

"I went down and out," Harding continued. "When I came to I was in a strange room, with my feet locked into a manacle and my hands cuffed. I was lying on a bed, and the first thing I did was to roll off onto the floor. That brought a heavy-set fellow, who picked me up and told me to behave, if I didn't want to be hurt."

"What time?" said Jenkins with a peculiar look.

Harding considered. "Between ten and eleven," he replied.

"I reckon that's right," Johnson chimed in. "Go on." His lips twisted in something like a satisfied grin.

"After a time Missadoyeff came in," Harding resumed. "He said something about Hoffman being dead. He seemed to think I had some knowledge as to where the plans of Hoffman's invention had gone, and I saw he had taken me prisoner in order to learn what I knew. Well, that was pretty bad for me, but I was glad that he didn't know where they were. I laughed in his face. We talked a while, and he

went off and left me, and I didn't see him any more last night."

"Bob," said Mulkins as he paused, "didn't you know Hoffman was dead last night?"

Harding turned his eyes toward him. "No, I didn't," he declared quickly. I noted his jaw shoot forward as he said it. "Why, I was even thinking of going up there and telling him who and what I was and asking him to give the U. S. first chance at his invention to make sure—coming out in the open, you know."

"You was thinkin' about it?" Johnson spoke again.

"Yes. Then I was knocked out."

"An' Hoffman was, too—before the time you say you got yours," the city detective rejoined.

Harding's eyebrows went up. "That's why Missadoyeff thought I might know something about the plans."

"You didn't see him leave the Townsend house?"

"No."

"He says he left before ten. Where was you?"

Harding's jaw set defiantly, I thought. "Mr. Johnson," he retorted, "it is his word against mine."

Johnson nodded.

"Uh-uh. I reckon that's so. Well, how did you get loose?"

"Missadoyeff turned me loose this evening," Harding made reply. "To-night, after he'd come to see me a couple of times to-day, demanding information, he suddenly changed tactics and had me up to a little supper. While we were eating and he was questioning me again, a servant came in and said there was an agent of the police calling to see the count. He had me taken out at once, but I had an idea that Bill and Tom here would find I had dropped out and would be on my trail. So I slipped the cover off my identification card and dropped it beside my chair without Missadoyeff seeing me do it. I knew if anybody who knew what it was should find it, the count would find himself in a pickle. Who did? I know when I came back after a long time, it was gone, because I looked."

Mulkins jerked a heavy thumb in my direction. "Glace here found it and brought it to us."

Harding looked at me and smiled. He had a nice smile, too, when one met it like that. "Thanks, Mr. Glace," he remarked, and went on with his tale. "Missadoyeff had me back again in something like an hour. He started in again only with threats if I didn't answer at once. Well, I couldn't, so I played my card blind. I told him what I'd done with the cover and called his attention to the fact that it was gone. Ten minutes later I walked out of his house and came down here, and I've been trying to get in touch with you boys ever since I could wash my face and get into a fresh suit of clothes."

"You didn't know about Hoffman's death until Missadoyeff told you?" Johnson inquired.

"Good Lord, no! How could I?" Harding demanded.

"Then you wouldn't have known that the old man had a pencil, belonging to the Russian, held fast in his hand when he was found, would you?"

Harding seemed shaken as he turned to face the detective. To my watching eyes his face lost some of its color and grew almost strained. I saw his eyes flicker the least bit as he brought them up in an almost pugnacious stare to confront Johnson. "A pencil belonging—to—Missadoyeff?" he said thickly. "You mean—"

"I mean that Hoffman had the count's gold-headed pencil shut up in his fingers when he was found."

"But—" The word leaped involuntarily from Harding's lips.

"But what?" Johnson shot out his jaw as he spoke.

"I was going to say, how could Missadoyeff have been there when I didn't see him leave the Townsend house."

I glanced at Dual. He was sitting quietly in his place, with arms folded, his eyes fastened on the face of the young man whom the others questioned, watching his every movement, his very expression, and recording them, I knew, toward a final judgment. And I wondered. With all the evidence pointing to the likelihood that he had certain knowledge of the Hoffman

affair prior to his seizure by Missadoyeff, which I did not doubt had occurred, he was defiantly denying all such knowledge. If innocent of all guilt, why should he; and if he persisted, was he then not innocent, but guilty? Yet, if guilty, why the pencil in old Carl's hand? It was still a tangle—still held its concealed element of the unknown.

And Johnson was baring his teeth in a grin. "That's a blamed good question at this time, Harding," he returned. "I guess you must have been asleep when you thought you was watching that Townsend house. Count Mike did leave there, and I ain't sure he left alone. He had company maybe, because we know that Miss Townsend was in Hoffman's house last night, right after he was killed."

Harding's eyes widened swiftly, like those of one who sees a sudden horror, held before the view. This time the cigar did crush in his fingers and drop to the floor seemingly beyond his notice. And then his lips parted. "You know that?" he cried hoarsely. "You say you know that Marya Townsend was in that house at that time—last night?"

"I don't just say so—I know it," Johnson returned.

"How?'

"Well, I got it straight."

I glanced at Bryce. I recalled that I had noticed him holding Johnson in hurried conversation while we ran up in the cage to this floor. And now, as I met his eyes, he nodded. He had put Johnson in touch with what we had learned that afternoon.

Then I looked at Mulkins and Jenkins. How much they knew; how much Dual might have told them, and Johnson before that, I did not know, but I found them frowning as they regarded the younger man.

Johnson was speaking once more. "If that ain't enough to convince you, I found a handkerchief of hers in the front hall of Hoffman's house last night, and it was smeared with ink."

"And I found its mate in her own house this afternoon—the two are dead ringers for each other," Bryce suddenly broke in.

"But—" Harding began as with an effort, and paused.

"But what?" Once more Johnson snapped up the single word and added another to it.

Harding did not answer quickly. "Nothing," he said in a dry, lifeless tone.

Johnson laughed shortly — a hard, unpleasant sound. "Say — Harding, where are those plans?"

"The plans? Why ask me?" It was almost as though the man turned to meet a new attack, so abruptly did he speak.

"Because you know," Johnson made answer; "and because we want to know quick. Come across. Where are they?" Triumph, success, rang in his voice. I knew at that minute he thought he had won.

But once more Harding faced him in sullen defiance.

"Bob—come clear." It was Mulkins who spoke.

Harding whirled toward him. "Bill—" There was pain, surprise, in the word.

"Come through." That was how Mulkins met it.

"And do it now. Where are those plans?" Once more Johnson made insistent demand.

Harding's jaw set till its muscles knotted. "I don't know," he said fiercely. "I told Missadoyeff the same thing, and now I'm telling you. I don't know. Make the best of it."

Johnson turned his eyes toward Mulkins and on to Jenkins. "Well?" was all he said.

Jenkins answered the monosyllabic question. "This evening, up in their office with Glace and Bryce, Bryce was sayin' that Harding might be open to suspicion, and both Bill and I told him he was way off the track. We told him Bob was straight. And what we said we meant. That was before he showed up here with the cock-and-bull story he's just pulled. Of course, parts of that are true. We know it; but what I can't see is where there's any sense in his letting on that he didn't know Hoffman was dead before he was grabbed by the count. Honest, Johnson, I don't know."

"Well, I guess I do, then," Johnson said.

"What?" Abruptly Harding sat up and leaned toward him. His face was set and rigid in its every line.

And Johnson leaned back—and grinned into his face—the grin of a wolf.

"Well, for one thing, I know you wear a No. 7 shoe," he remarked. "They told me at the shop where you buy 'em. And I know somebody wearing that size left some footprints up under a side window of Hoffman's house last night. I know that when I come into this room I handed you a cigar. And I know that you took it with your left hand. And then you shifted it and struck a match with your left hand again before you lighted the thing. And whoever killed Carl Hoffman was left-handed, because Hoffman's right temple was smashed—or else he was struck from behind. And that's enough. I don't care whether you're a secret agent or not. I want you for the murder of Hoffman, Bob Harding, and I guess that's all."

Harding sat back and sighed. For a moment his face relaxed and became boyishly wistful, I thought, and then once more it was hard. He got to his feet. "Johnson," he said in a manner almost flippant, "you certainly are some detective." And he smiled.

Silence held the room for a minute. No one spoke. Then it was Harding who broke it. By impulse pure and simple, as it seemed, he turned toward Jenkins and Mulkins.

"Tom," he said thickly, his voice choked now by emotion. "Bill."

Jenkins swore. He got to his feet.

"Take him away!" he flung out gruffly to Johnson and then walked off across the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FUNERAL.

"GORDON," said Connie, my wife, the next morning, coming in with the paper, "see here!"

I hastened to bend over the printed sheet, and read where she pointed. That was enough. I grabbed the paper and finished the account:

ATTEMPTED BURGLARY AT TOWNSEND HOUSE.

About one o'clock this morning a ragamuffin was led into the Central Station and booked on a burglary charge. He was a man of villainous appearance, in old clothes and heavily bearded, who refused to answer any questions regarding why he came to be trying to enter the house of Miss Marya Townsend by means of a pass-key when taken in charge.

Since the murder of Carl Hoffman, executor of the Townsend estate, night before last, both the Hoffman and Townsend houses have been under guard. The arrest of the unknown man, who maintains a stoical silence and professes not to understand English, would make it appear that some connection exists between the principals of the former crime and himself.

Detectives have taken the matter up as an additional item in the murder case, and developments are expected at any time. Meanwhile the unidentified stranger is held on the blotter charge.

I looked at Connie after I had read it aloud. "That's why Dual wanted those men on guard at Missadoyeff's," I declared.

She frowned. I had told her about the case. "But this was at Miss Townsend's," she returned.

I nodded. "Yes. But this man went there from the count's. That's where he got his pass-key, of course. Mulkins's men followed him and grabbed him. They've told the papers just what they pleased and no more, and they've kept out the story about Harding. Probably the poor devil doesn't understand English. He's one of Count Mike's men, and was doing what he was told. Dual expected something like it, too. Good Lord!"

I felt a sense of elation. Score two for Semi-Dual. As always, he was beginning to draw in his threads, and as each came in it brought its result to be added into the whole at the last. A sudden urge to get back into the action seized upon me. Harding was in jail—so, too, if I was correct, was one of Missadoyeff's men. Mulkins and Jenkins, Johnson and Dual, were working together. So were Bryce and I—working with Dual. I hurried through my breakfast and set off for the Polk Street

house, after phoning my destination to Bryce.

Saxe opened the door for me himself. I asked for Semi, and he told me "Prince Abdul" was not yet down, but would be shortly. I said I would wait his coming, and divested myself of hat and coat.

Saxe waited until that was done, and then led me quite into the orange-draped room. "If you don't mind," he began, as I found a seat, "I would like to ask you a few more questions about my employer. I can't make him out at all."

"It takes time to understand him," I rejoined with an inward chuckle, as I imagined Semi's effect on this young man.

Saxe nodded. "As to this claim of his to—er—occult powers. You and I do not believe in such superstition, but—does he really fancy he has such ability as he says? Last night he was at work on the most elaborate series of calculations I have ever seen. Does he believe in himself—or is the thing all a pose for effect?"

"Why do you ask?" I inquired.

He fidgeted a bit. "Hang it, Mr. Glace," he replied at length, "it's all balderdash, of course, but he makes me feel that he's sincere. Why, do you know last night he told me he would undertake to solve the mystery of poor old Carl's death by these computations of his—and he asked me a lot of questions—about everything imaginable, even down to the ages of Keating and Mrs. Bauerman. That was after you left. Is it pretense, or what?"

His words gave me food for thought. "It isn't pretense, Mr. Saxe," I affirmed. "It is real. I have seen it proved. I used to scoff myself, but I do so no longer. Prince Abdul told you the truth."

He sat there and stared when I had finished. "But—but, good Heavens, Mr. Glace!" he said at length. "He told me he could read minds, send and receive telepathic messages — sense character and psychic emanations — tell who had possessed a thing by reading some sort of vibrations they had left impressed upon it. My dear sir, that's magic, and this is the twentieth century—an age of knowledge."

"Wouldn't you call that knowledge of a sort?" I inquired.

Short, sharp, the door-bell stabbed the echoes. Saxe rose. "Excuse me, I'll have to answer. That serving man of his went up-stairs a bit ago."

He left the room to return shortly, carrying a huge paper-wrapped parcel.

"Flowers," he explained as he laid it on the couch. "Looks like a funeral bouquet."

"Which it is," Dual said as he opened the little door and came in. "I was expecting it, Saxe. Ah — good morning, Glace."

He looked as fresh, as bouyant, as I had ever seen him, despite the task he had handled the day before—a task involving so much of importance—as he turned again to Saxe.

"I think you know where Miss Townsend lives, Mr. Saxe?"

Saxe bowed. His face, as he did so, showed fresh surprise.

"If you will be so kind as to take these flowers there at once," Dual went on, "I shall be obliged. "Ask for Miss Townsend, and say Prince Abdul sends his offering to the *manes* of an excellent man. As you know, the funeral of your late employer is this afternoon. Should you desire to attend, you may take the afternoon for the purpose when this errand is done."

"Thank you," Saxe accepted, as he bent to lift the paper-wrapped bouquet. "I intended to ask your permission. I think Mrs. Bauerman and I will get Keating to drive us from the church in Mr. Hoffman's coach." He straightened and left the room.

Dual threw himself into a chair and smiled at me as soon as we were alone.

"You were right about Missadoyeff last night," I said.

He nodded. "Yes—he will try again."

"To enter the Townsend house?"

"Exactly, my friend."

"Then he must think Marya has the plans," I exclaimed, "or knows where they are."

Semi-Dual smiled. "You planted that belief in his brain last night when you told him she was at the Hoffman house."

"I did?" I faltered, and then I laughed. "Oh, Dual, I give it up. I'm lost in the maze."

"Patience," he said. "Will you go to this funeral of Hoffman's with me this afternoon?"

"You are going to attend?"

"Yes. Will you bear me company, my friend?"

"If you wish it," I assented.

"I do. It is at two o'clock from the First Lutheran Church, of which he was a member. I shall meet you at the door. And now go. Do nothing, say little, until the time of our appointment; in that do not fail."

I shook my head and rose. "Dual," I said, "unknown quantities are terrible things. I hope I never meet another."

"But you will," he told me. "Life is filled with such things. Last night, when I spoke to Mulkins and Jenkins, I might have mentioned that there are even unknown planets in our universe itself—not yet properly located or charted, though their position is theoretically known by reason of their influence thrown through our astrological equations. We know they are there, although their presence is not yet unveiled to the sight. And as you say, an unknown quantity may indeed be a terrible thing, potent to work most terrible effects. And, now, no more."

I went back to the office and found Jim hanging around. He was full of the attempted burglary of Marya Townsend's house. I told him I was going to the funeral with Semi, and he burst out into questions as to the purpose involved in that.

I mussed about the office the rest of the morning, went out and got lunch, and showed up at the Lutheran Church a little before the appointed time.

It was a cloudy afternoon, with a chill wind; but despite that, it became evident to me as I stood to one side and watched, that Hoffman was to be accorded a large attendance at the last rites above his body. The audience streamed in through the church doors in a steady force. The man must have had a large number of friends and acquaintances; and then, too, there would, of course, be the always morbidly curious who would be attracted by the tragic elements surrounding his death.

I stood there and moralized a bit to myself while I waited and watched for Semi. Almost on the hour a taxicab stopped in front of the church, and he descended, spoke to the driver, and came straight across the pavement, looking neither to left nor right.

I placed myself at his side. He gave no sign of recognition as we went up the steps of the church together. Nor did he speak as we entered the edifice of worship and passed down an aisle to seats.

But I saw his eyes roam hither and yon, until they fell upon Marya Townsend approaching, slender and pale in a dark gown, walking between a woman companion also darkly dressed and—yes—Count Missadoyeff bulking large in his frock coat, his glistening top hat held in front of his breast in a grey-gloved hand.

I watched her myself. She was positively haggard, her high color still faded as I had seen it there by the window of her home. Her dark dress accentuated the pallor still more, making her wan in the dim light of the church, and I noted that she walked with a hand on the arm of her woman companion, as though seeking the personal contact for support.

The past night and day had certainly made a woful difference in the woman. Last night Dual had said she was suffering torture. I could not doubt it now that I saw her again. Something had torn and mangled her soul in those hours since I had left her—and brought dark circles to rim her long dark eyes.

The services began almost at once after her arrival, and were not long. The organ throbbed softly, at the end, and the audience rose. They began to stream out as they had streamed in. Dual rose also with a hand on my arm and half pushed me out of the church and down the steps.

By now though I was becoming inured to the unexpected. Without much fresh surprise I entered his cab at his silent direction and found it taking place in the line.

Then we were off, with Dual still silent beside me. Never in all the time I had known him had he been more inscrutable of purpose, less given to explain. He sat

there dumb, and yet as it seemed to me acutely watchful, while we ran to the cemetery and through its gates and up a graveled drive.

But he did not descend from the cab when it stopped. Already several other cabs were halted before us. Looking out, I could see the pall-bearers supporting the coffin from hearse to the grave. Their dark clothes and gray gloves stood out against the skyline in moving silhouette. And I saw a splendid town car from which Marya and her woman companion and Missadoyeff again were descending—to take position beside the grave where already flowers were being piled. I sat and watched a bit affected by it all, as we all are, I think, by this oft-repeated lesson of the evanescence of life.

As at the church, the services were not long. There was a prayer, a song, its soft-voiced hope and faith in a better, a higher existence, borne to my ears on the wings of the wind.

The singing ceased. All save the immediate friends drew back. I saw Marya and her companion, and Missadoyeff—and, yes—Saxe, standing free of the others. Then the attendants went to work. The earth was piled into the grave and heaped above it in a clay-colored mound, on which there suddenly bloomed a wonderful blanket of flowers, things of beauty—the final tribute to the tenantless body of the man who had used it and now had cast it aside.

I glanced from the picture of the grave and the young girl standing beside it, the wind whipping her dark garments about her, to Dual.

He sat as he had sat from the first silent, impassive, expressionless, unless it were for his deep, gray eyes. And as all along—as I had felt all along—they were watching—watching—as for something expected and not yet seen; staring out of the window of the cab, toward the little group by the grave—the two women, and the huge figure of Count Michael, now standing uncovered, the wind rumpling the least bit his heavy, dark mass of hair.

For what was he watching? Why had he come to this service of the dead? Why had he, a man unknown to Marya Townsend, sent flowers to her for use on the grave of a man to him unknown? What was it he expected? What was his purpose? Of all the uncertain elements of this tragic affair, this was the most peculiar action of all on his part, to me. I turned my eyes back to the group by the grave.

Marya had put down her head. Despite the fur coat she wore against the weather—was it the same she had worn the night I had seen her rush in terror-driven haste from the house of the man who lay now here at her feet?—despite that, it seemed to me that her shoulders were heaving—that she was sobbing as she looked upon his grave. And in that moment I think I felt positive—sure—that whatever her knowledge of the tragedy of his death, whatever her reason for being in his house on the night of his murder, she herself had not struck the blow which crushed his temple and brought about this service beneath the gray skies of to-day.

And then, even as such thoughts ran through my brain, I saw Count Missadoyeff touch Marya on the arm—saw him bend and whisper something into her ear as she still shook with shaken shoulders and bowed head.

I saw her straighten as though struck by some sudden and unseen lash. I saw her half turn toward him, throwing up her head in a gesture which spoke almost of defiance. I saw her clench her gloved hand nearest me at her side. And then, without warning, I saw all purpose, all life as it seemed, go out of her figure and posture. I saw her sink forward like one stricken by a mortal hurt and reel into Missadoyeff's suddenly outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XII.

DUAL PLAYS THE PIANO.

THERE followed the most weird of all the strange incidents of the Hoffman affair.

I saw Missadoyeff lift the fanting girl and carry her toward the limousine, the dark figure of her companion at her side,

Then Dual leaned forward and spoke to our driver. Our car swung about and moved off down the drive from the place of death and out of the gates. Once more Dual spoke and demanded haste. The speed of the car increased, while I sat gasping—for Semi had given the address of the Townsend house on the Drive.

I glanced at my companion and found his face immobile, an inscrutable mask once more. But I knew he followed a plan—that the limp fall of Marya's figure into the Russian's arms was the thing for which he had watched and waited. I knew it, felt it now. But I was no nearer understanding as we pulled up at last in front of the Townsend house.

Dual paid the driver and dismissed him. We stood there in the bleak wind in front of Marya's home, seemingly without reason. The girl was back there somewhere. And Missadoyeff was with her. Abruptly I found my breath sticking in my throat at a sudden conjecture. Semi had said the count would try to enter this house again. Was this the time? Was that what we were standing here in front of the mansion to forestall.

Once more Dual's hand fell on my arm. He turned me facing the house. We went up its walk and mounted to its doors.

Dual rang the bell. We stood there and waited, while once more confused lack of comprehension seized upon me.

And then the same maid who had answered my ring the afternoon before set the inner doors open and faced Semi's request for Marya herself.

Yes, he asked the maid for her mistress. More than that, when informed that the one he seemed to seek was not at home, he proclaimed himself Prince Abdul, and extended to the woman inside the scroll-work, his card, replaced the hat he had lifted from his head and turned away.

What was he doing? What did he mean to do? I asked myself those questions again as we went down the steps and slowly toward the street and Semi turned to cast a glance down the Drive in the direction from which we ourselves had come.

I followed his turning eyes with my own. And I saw the town car coming swiftly, not over a block away. It came over me that Dual had merely killed time in a plausible way while he waited its arrival.

The car came on and stopped. It was a handsome thing, as I have said, with a coat of arms on the lower panel of its door—the same which had been on the pencil found in Hoffman's hands. It was the count's own conveyance. He had, then, taken the two women to the services, it would seem. No doubt he had done so as a friend, as an expression of courtesy to Marya herself. And yet he was the man who had last night organized an attempt to break into this girl's house, if I could believe the seeming trend of evidence in the matter and Dual's own prediction of the night past.

The door of the car was swung open. Missadoyeff appeared backward slowly. I saw that he bore a burden. Marya would seem then to have remained unconscious. Then he turned and I saw the girl lying in his great arms where suddenly she seemed small, frail, a crushed thing he might have retrieved from some peril and was bearing back, limp and broken, to her home. After the man and his burden came the other woman, her face troubled and anxious. They paused momentarily on the pavement while Missadoyeff shifted the girl's position in his arms.

Once more Dual acted, stepping forward and lifting his hat. "Your pardon, sir," his voice came to my ears. "May I not render the young lady assistance?"

Missadoyeff seemed to take conscious account of his presence only then. For a moment he stared back into Semi's eyes. Then he spoke almost gruffly. "The young lady has fainted. She requires a physician. She has recently undergone a rather severe strain."

Dual answered at once: "So I perceived. Had I known nothing of the physician's craft, I would scarcely be justified in proffering my service."

For a moment the two men faced each other there on the sidewalk; Missadoyeff holding the girl, Dual waiting, Marya's companion hovering in the background, and I saw in that instant how the count's hand was being forced. In the face of

Miss Townsend's seeming condition, he could scarcely refuse the proffered aid, before this other woman and myself.

And he seemed to sense it, for suddenly he nodded. "That being the case, perhaps you had best accompany us into the house," he said gruffly, and once more advanced, with Dual at his side.

Behind them came the woman. As for myself, without waiting to see more, I ran up the steps and set the bell shrilling to call the maid and open the doors, that there might be no further delay. This time the maid answered quickly, her eyes wide as she recognized her mistress and Missadoyeff. She flung the great scroll barriers open and stood back, while the count carried Marya inside and on into that red room where the day before I had first met her, and laid her down gently on a couch.

Meanwhile the other woman had divested herself of hat and wrap and was coming forward to render assistance. Her face was still anxious but more assured as Dual bent over the form of the girl and began a deft examination.

"Get some water—warm—some whisky or brandy," Dual spoke in direction. "There is no cause for alarm. This syncope will pass."

I had drawn back toward the front windows of the room. Missadoyeff, after a studious inspection of Dual, turned and came over toward me. For the first time that afternoon our eyes met.

Count Michael's brows contracted slightly for an instant. "You here, Mr. Glace?" he said quickly. "You chose a rather inopportune time."

"As you see," I gave back smiling. I was confident now. Dual was here, beside the girl. Dual had said Missadoyeff would try once more to enter this house for a purpose. Who but Dual would have supposed the man would chose this afternoon, immediately after the funeral of Miss Townsend's friend, for the attempt. And who but Semi would have found this means to enter at the same time he did and so block his game, whatever it was?

"You forced your way in, it appears?" he suggested.

"I rang the bell for your admittance," I returned.

"And followed?" His smile was without humor.

I shrugged. "At least I am here."

He nodded. "I remember now. I did not recognize you outside with the doctor. Who is he, may I ask?"

"A friend of mine," I informed him.

The woman came back with the brandy and water, and while Marya's companion lifted her slightly, Semi forced a portion of the mixture between her teeth.

Immediately he seated himself on the edge of the couch beside and facing her, with his back toward Missadoyeff and myself. He sat there for a time in silence, seeming to fasten his gaze on the face of the girl, yet speaking no word, making no motion, just holding his eyes on her closed ones and waiting.

And the girl lay there, pale, quiet, apparently lifeless in all the deep color of the place, her hands white blotches on the dark fabric of her gown, limp, without volition.

Missadoyeff spoke with something like a sneer in his tone. "Has your friend exhausted his efforts. They seem without result. Perhaps—"

"Marya!—Marya!" The words were Dual's. They cut short those of the other. "Marya!—awaken! Open your eyes, my child."

I started forward. The count followed. The woman standing still beside the couch, bent in attention. And very slowly, like a child, indeed, waking, I saw the lids of the girl on the couch flicker and roll up.

"Marya!" Dual spoke again.

"Yes," she said. And swiftly her eyes leaped to his face, hung there for a moment, turned toward the woman, and she smiled. "Jeanne," she faltered; "oh, Jeanne."

Jeanne Munson, as I learned her name, went in answer to that cry, knelt, and took the girl into her arms. Marya struggled to rise, and Jeanne lifted her slightly, holding her pillowed against her own breast.

Again Semi spoke. "And you, Count Michael, I am quite sure the young lady will be all right."

I saw sudden horror leap into Marya Townsend's eyes. Her lips opened.

"Count Michael," she cried in a voice half-scream, "where is he—what has he done?"

In a moment the count was beside her. "I am here, Marya," he said softly.

But she drew back against Jeanne. Once more her eyes wandered and met mine. "Mr. Glace," she faltered. "Mr. Glace—take him away—make him go with you. Oh—at least you love your country—and he—is an enemy to me and to it."

"Marya—" Missadoyeff bent over her.

"One moment, count," Dual interrupted. "A person who has been through such things as Miss Townsend has experienced is in need of no more excitement. Permit me to suggest that this is no time for discussion, or—anything else."

Missadoyeff straightened. He turned toward Semi-Dual. The glances of the two men met and clashed, and it was Missadoyeff's eyes that faltered. "I can scarcely explain the cause of my young friend's words, save that she is yet not fully conscious," he said slowly.

"I know what I am saying," Marya cried out. "I know why you are here. I am fully conscious. Mr. Glace—will you not see that he leaves this house—at once—now?"

I looked the man full in the face. "Count Missadoyeff?" I said.

He bowed. "I regret this deeply," he made answer. "Gentlemen, Miss Townsend, Miss Munson, I bid you good afternoon. If there is anything I can do—" He broke off with the unfinished suggestion, turned abruptly, and left the room. On the whole, he took it pretty gamely, I could not but admit.

As the door closed behind him, Marya spoke to me: "Mr. Glace, answer me a question. Is it true that Mr. Harding has been arrested? It was that man's saying so made me faint."

I bowed my head. "Yes, Miss Townsend—last night."

She turned her head against Jeanne Munson's shoulder and began to sob.

"For the murder of—of Mr. Hoffman?" she asked at last.

"Yes, Miss Townsend." I hated to say it, but what else could I do.

"But he didn't do it—he didn't—didn't. Oh, God, will this nightmare never end?" she burst out with a surprising strength.

There was a movement behind me. Dual appeared beside me. "My dear child, why struggle so against the inevitable turn of the wheel?" he addressed her softly.

She ceased her half-choked panting and looked into his eyes. "Who—who are you?" she faltered, after a moment. "I have seen your face before."

"When you regained consciousness a few moments ago," Dual told her. "I am Prince Abdul."

"Prince Abdul," she repeated, frowned, and went on more quickly; "the man who sent those flowers by Saxe?"

"And of whom Saxe told you some things," Semi answered her, still in a low, soft voice.

"I—I couldn't understand it," she said slowly. "I had never heard of you, and the flowers were so magnificent. I—I asked him about you, of course. He told me the strangest things—that—that you were an—an occult—a man who believed in modern magic."

"He might have said," Dual responded, "that an occult is one who loves his fellowman; one who studies much to learn some little of the great laws of God and his life, that he may use his knowledge to help others struggling along the path of that life."

Marya's dark eyes never left his face while he spoke. "Help," she repeated when he finished. "Would you help me, if you could?"

Suddenly she sat up, freeing herself from Jeanne's arms. "Tell me why Harding was arrested," she burst out. Tell me that, please."

"Because of his acts and his words," said Dual slowly. "Because of what he knew, and did not tell, and because of what he did not know and believed that he did."

"But he did not kill Mr. Hoffman. He did not!" Marya once more cried.

"My child," Dual said softly, "those who seek the truth sometimes learn how to read more than is said, to sense and understand deeper meanings than mere words express."

"Saxe said you read minds," she gasped. "Is that what you mean?"

"Miss Townsend," Dual replied indirectly, "when your father's friend was slain, some plans were taken from the safe. Last night Mr. Harding denied that he knew where they were."

"He denied it—he said that?" she asked quickly. "He said he didn't know?"

Dual bowed, with his eyes on her face. "But others thought he did; the man who placed him under arrest—Missadoyeff also. Last night the count attempted to obtain them, when he endeavored to have an agent burglarize this house."

Some of the color which had crept back into the face of Marya Townsend under excitement drained away. "He thought they were here?" she faltered.

Dual arose and went to the piano, and seating himself ran his fingers swiftly over a scale. And then, while we sat, he began to play, an improvisation as it seemed to me, because I could not name it.

I had never known that he played, though I knew him to be fond of music. I sat and listened while the melody his fingers evoked stole softly through the room, and I thought that the piano itself must have had little use for long, because there were parts of Semi's playing which showed the instrument to be sadly out of tune, the notes flat and muffled in tone.

I half turned my head toward Marya Townsend and held it there, arrested by an expression of something like terror in her parted lips, her quickened breathing, her actually staring eyes. I studied her more closely. There was nothing which I could bring to explain it. Dual's actions seemed to me more like a kindly attempt to terminate a painful conversation, instead it seemed to be driving the girl to the point of distraction.

And then Dual ceased his playing and rose from the bench. He turned and faced us from the front of the piano. "Marya," he said, addressing her directly, "you asked me if I could read minds. Marya, why do some of the notes in my playing fall flat?"

She began to tremble. I saw her clench her hands, her lips quiver. And then she cried out in a voice like the supplication of a soul eternally lost: "Don't; oh, for God's sake, don't."

Dual smiled—not in triumph, nor derision, nor humor. It was the smile of a supreme, a mighty pity.

He turned and lifted the lid of the piano, thrust in an arm, and appeared to grope briefly, withdrew his arm, and showed a heavy manilla envelope in his hands.

I gasped. I knew what he held, even before the girl on the couch leaped to her feet and stood swaying, while her arms came up and stretched toward Dual, and she burst into agonized appeal: "Put them back! For God's sake don't take them! Prince Abdul, you are not a bad man; you are not cruel; you can be kind if you will—not to me, or Harding, or anyone alone—but to my country—my race. For the sake of all the women who will bear men in the future, put those plans back, and leave them where they are!"

And Dual thrust them into his pocket. "Marya," he made answer, "for the sake of all the things you mention; for the sake of all the women who shall come after you, and the children they shall bear; for the sake of the nations and the world; for the sake of God's justice, it is necessary at this time that I take them. It is not yet for you to understand, but you will understand fully when all is finished; and these papers—this potential danger—is laid in a safe place. Until that time, hold your spirit in patience, and await, still in courage, the end.

"Come, Gordon, we shall go."

He had them, had found them, those missing plans. Once more he had proved himself right. The one who had slain had not held the plans of that grim invention old Carl Hoffman had drawn from the storehouse of unseen things.

Yet, as I turned and went with him, there was small elation in my heart. All that was covered, overshadowed, by the final picture I took with me—of a woman, young, slender, a dark figure of tragic defeat, in whose eyes burned the dying embers of a beaten hope.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

Mingled Emotions

by Samuel G. Camp

THEY was a time when I used to feel sorry for these motion-picture actors an' circus acrobats, an' Presidents of the United States an' editors of Democratic newspapers, an' other people which is all the time taking their life in their hand just to get along an' make a livin'. That was before we win the world series an' I begin goin' to them banquets.

Not that these after dinner speakers get any of my sympathy, nor yours neither, because they don't. I don't never expect to commit no murder; but if I ever feel like a homicide is the only thing which will make me happy, I'm goin' out an' get me an after-dinner speaker. Nobody will miss him; an' as for him, he'll thank me for puttin' him out of his misery.

But nobody which possesses a spark of intelligence, which, when sufficiently fanned, will enable him to faintly distinguish the difference between a toastmaster an' an oyster cocktail, is entitled to any sympathy if he goes to work an' deliberately becomes an after-dinner speaker. The same amount of intelligence which is required to become a successful after-dinner speaker will qualify any man to hold down a job in the street cleanin' department, where he can become a positive benefit to his fellow citizens, instead of — an after-dinner speaker.

Not countin' toastmasters' gags—an' I don't wish them nothin' worse nor better, them toastmasters, but that every one of them does it sooner or later—I've listened, this winter, to ninety-eight thousand "A couple of Irishmen" stories, sixty-seven thousand Isaac an' Izzy knock-outs, fifty thousand "good ones about a rube who," an' forty thousand regular screams about —never mind.

Out o' the whole bunch, they was just one speech which I really enjoyed. I only heard, an' remember, four words o' that speech. I enjoyed it because it reminded me of Henery Bingham; an' in recallin' sweet memories of Henery, I forgot all about how here I was at another banquet, an' the speeches just beginnin', an' the Lord have mercy upon us, an' I never realized that banquet again till it was pretty near over—an' so, once more, I was much obliged to Henery.

Like everything else, banquets sometimes goes by contraries. Maybe you've noticed it particularly, oh, say, between one an' two o'clock. Things is apt to be not quite what they seem, or where, or maybe fewer. That is, if you are that kind of a banqueter. Neither am I. Anyways, this was at a banquet of the United Sons of the Sahara. Maybe them United Sons was just back from there. If they was, that would explain it.

An' you can take my word for it, it don't pay a man to travel extensively in no deserts. The after effects is terrible.

At any rate, when it come to a certain kind o' fightin', where you go to the front

through a pair o' swingin' doors, you had to hand it to the United Sons of the Sahara. They had the sand. An' when it come time to break the oratorical ice, the toastmaster introduces the First Grand Exalted Mahout, which proves to be a little man by the name o' Pinkey, an' in a highly inflamed condition.

"Miz' Toas'maz' 'n' fella Sonza Z'ara," says Pinkey, "'s with 'mosh'ns emingled—"

Well, it was easy to see that the F. G. Exalted Mahout had been mingling somethin' besides his emotions; anyway, right there I lost the thread of his discourse—if they was any. That stuff o' Pinkey's took me right back to the time when I an' Henery Bingham an' Butch Randall an' a lady whose stage name was Rue Russell—but I guess I better begin with Henery.

Henery Bingham joined out with us Blue Sox along in midsummer when we was playin' a series in Philly. Henery let his benders go from the port side; still an' all, to look at, it didn't seem like Henery was like most o' these southpaws. He didn't look no crazier than anybody else which dresses in the height o' fashion—an', believe me, Henery wasn't no rube. They wasn't nothin' out o' the ordinary about Henery lessen it was his face. Henery had what you would call a very expressive face, I guess.

When Henery was glad, he didn't have to tell you about it; the merry little sunshine just dripped out o' Henery's face at every pore. An' when Henery was sad—well, one look at Henery an' you wanted to go off by your lone somewhere an' have a good cry.

When Henery was mysterious, right away you could feel the goose pimples breakin' out on you, an' a kind o' cold, clammy thrill along your spine, an' you didn't have to be told they was a spy in the offing, or somethin'. An' when Henery was scared, nobody beat you away from there except the ones which see Henery first.

I never see anybody with a more expressive face than Henery Bingham's—no, nor one-tenth as expressive.

Henery could of drawed down a fortune a year as a movie actor if it hadn't of been for only one thing; an' that wasn't because he couldn't act nor because he wasn't good-lookin' enough. Nothin' like that. You see, Henery was apt to get a little excited; an' then—well, let me tell you.

I guess Henery Bingham was what one o' them highbrow college profs would call an interestin' psychological study. Anyways, the Old Man pitched Henery the second day after he joined us. An' Henery pitched a nice, heady game—an' win it. He had everythin'—which is enough, as Hughie Jennings says.

That night I ast Henery didn't he want to go to a show with I an' Butch Randall. Oh, Butch an' I was good enough friends, except when it come to Rue Russell. But just because you are in there tryin' for the same girl is no reason why a couple of guys should suspend these here diplomatic relations. Come to think of it, maybe I an' Butch's relations wasn't so friendly as they was diplomatic.

Diplomatic relations gives you a better chance to watch the other guy—if you get me. Ask anybody which lives in Washington, D. C.

Anyways, Henery was game for the show.

Now I shouldn't never of left it to Butch to buy the tickets, anyway. Butch is one of them first row fiends where a man has to sit on the back of his neck, gazin' upwards like you was watchin' a flyin' machine, or you don't see anythin'; or if you do see anythin', it's liable to be too much. An', anyhow, you can search me where's the advantage of a first-row seat at a melodrama.

But I guess I must of forgot this Row A habit o' Butch's, because I leave it to Butch to buy the seats for the three of us; an' the first thing I know, I find myself sittin' where I have to dodge every time the bass fiddler reaches for a low one.

Not that it would of made any great difference, our sittin' up there with the students—where did that old "bald-headed row" idea ever come from, anyway?—if it hadn't of been for Henery. But I an' Butch wasn't no seventh son of a seventh

son, an' so how could we know the sort o' stuff Henery was goin' to pull?

Well, it seems this here evenin's entertainment is a kind o' melodrama, like I said; an' the piece was wrote by a guy name of Thomas, an' so the name of it was somethin' geographical, like Arizona, or Idaho, or Cedar Rapids—any place west o' Chicago, because they ain't no romance east o' there, an' so I suppose the line must be drawed just west o' the stockyards. Anyways, I couldn't never see no romance in the meat business.

The play, it's a mighty serious piece o' work, but it's gettin' over big. Big! They's a full house; an' in the pinches, when it looks like the heavy has at last got the hero where he wants him, take it from me, the crowd is so still an' spellbound you couldn't of heard the mercury drop, except for the hissin' in the gallery. Yes, sir; that play sure has the crowd goin' for fair.

An' it's like this: They's a girl — we'll call her Ruth, say—which is in love with the hero, an' take it from the hero, he's more than anxious to marry her any time she's a mind to mention. But Ruth has an idea that she ain't high-born enough for no regular hero like him, or maybe she's half Indian, or they's lunacy in the family, or somethin', though o' course they ain't nothin' o' the sort; or even if they was, you can bet that knowin' for a fact that your mother-in-law is crazy, instead o' just guessin' at it like most people—you can bet that no little thing like that would stop any guy which got one good look at Ruth, not for a minute!

Just the same, Ruth has this idea, an' you can't shake it out of her. She won't listen to no marriage with the hero, not under any circumstances; an' not only that, but the hero is already engaged to another dame, an' so, no, they's nothin' doin', absolutely. An' so, what with one thing an' another, an' tryin' to split his vote between them two dames, an' the villain all the time tryin' to ruin him in his business, an' everythin', you better believe that life for the hero ain't no one bed o' roses after another.

I wouldn't of changed places with him not for nothin'—not even to avoid bein' stabbed in the eye by that bass fiddler. I had a hunch all the time that they was a jinx on Ruthey, an' this hero wasn't never goin' to get her. An' the other girl was one of them tall, tired blondes, an' I didn't have no use for her.

Well, they sawed along for a couple of innin's, with first the hero an' then the villain on top, an' Ruth still holdin' off the hero, though you can see how it hurts her; an' I have found out how, by holdin' my head just so, I ain't runnin' more than a twenty-to-one shot o' gettin' spitted through the eyeball with that fiddle-bow, an' so now I can take a good look at the stage once in a while without worryin', an' then here comes the big scene!

Of course, the en-tire cast is on the stage. If it was East, probably it would be one o' them garden parties; but this is out West, on a ranch, an' so it's a barbecue, or somethin' like that. Anyways, everybody is present except Ruthey an' a gunfighter which the villain has hired to put out the hero. Well, leave it to this Thomas to see to it that Ruthey gets wise to the gun-play just in time, so by hurryin' she can stop the bullet by throwin' herself in front o' the hero. Which she does.

Believe me, it's mighty affectin', that dyin' scene between Ruth an' the hero—accompanied by the orchestra. For a fact, they's so many handkerchiefs in use, it looks like one of them Chatauqua salutes. An' from all over the house comes various sounds o' distress—everythin' from sobs to sniffles.

Darned if it didn't almost get me, too—or it would of if Ruthey, which was slowly passin' away right up next to the footlights, hadn't of happened to look at Henery Bingham. I never see anythin' do anybody so much good as that one look at Henery seemed to do Ruthey.

Because all of a sudden, an' you can believe it or not, an' at the time I can't hardly believe my own eyes—all of a sudden Ruthey, an' her, mind you, with one foot already in the grave, smiles a smile at Henery, which, if it was anybody but her, I would of called a broad grin. Anyways, another quarter of an inch an' that smile would of been positively indecent.

An' so then I took a look at Henery and— Well, you remember what I said about that expressive face o' Henery's, an' how when Henery registers joy, grief, an' so forth, it is pretty sure to be contagious, because Henery sure can put his stuff over, an' so, then, that smile o' Ruthey's, right in the face o' death, an' a five-thousand-dollar house, is explained; it is only a reflection of Henery's.

Well, they's some shows which deserves to be put on the bum, but this ain't one of them, an' so I don't get this stuff o' Henery's a-tall; an' so I tell Henery to lay off it, an' what is he thinking of, an' does he want to get us throwed out? But I'm too late.

Ruthey has got herself under control, an' is once more tendin' right up to the business o' dyin'. An' I guess that fleetin' smile o' hers—though you wouldn't think of a smile o' that size not in terms o' fleetness—hasn't carried over the footlights, because the house is still with her, an' the handkerchief squad workin' overtime.

But the feelin's o' Henery Bingham has reached a point where they can't no longer be controlled. An' believe me, the loud, rude laughter with which Henery greets Ruthey's positively last an' dyin' words come to me as a terrible shock. If somebody had throwed a fit o' merriment like that at a funeral, I wouldn't of been not one bit more shocked an' horrified.

No; nor the rest o' the audience, neither.

Well, leave it to Butch an' I, we see right away where it's a case o' get out before they come for us, because here is all the makin's of a full-growed riot, an' of course I an' Butch hasn't done nothin'; but, still an' all, we're with Henery, an' so o' course we got to stand by him, an' so I an' Butch each grabs an arm an' hustles Henery up the aisle an' out o' there, an' him still laughin' fit to kill—an' that goes as it lays.

In the lobby a cop makes a play for us, but I tell him where our little friend is harmless, an' is only now just hysterical or somethin'; an', no, they hasn't not one o' the three of us had a thing, an' I an' Butch is takin' Henery right home; an' so finally the cop says: All right; maybe so; but believe him, I an' Butch better take Henery somewhere an' have him examined, an' not take no chances, because he may turn homicidal any minute, an' gettell out o' here, anyway.

An' so then I an' Butch walked Henery round a while, an' finally he come out of it.

"Gee," says Henery, after he had got his breath back, "I never had nothin' affect me like that before! Honest, that scene where that girl was dyin'—that was the saddest thing I ever see! Honest, I ain't cried like that since I was a kid!"

I guess I wasn't never nearer takin' the full count than I was right then.

"D'you get that?" I says to Butch. "Henery hasn't cried like that since he was a kid!"

"No," says Butch; "I'm a long ways from gettin' it. Say," he asts Henery, "was you *cryin'* then?"

"Why, sure," says Henery. "What d'you mean?"

"Well," says Butch, "most people would call it laughin'."

"That's funny," says Henery.

Now my idea was that it wasn't so funny as it was queer. Henery sure had I an' Butch guessin', but—well, we let it go at that.

It was too deep for us.

At that, after a while I begin to get a kind o' line on Henery; but it wasn't not till I had had Henery under study an' observation, as you might say, for quite some time. You understand, Henery didn't make no breaks like that except only once in a long while. It seemed to be only when Henery got pretty well excited that—well, for instance, they was that run-in which Henery had with Billy Williams, the time Billy claimed Henery had tried to throw his spikes into him.

The two of them would of fit it out right there on the field if the rest of us hadn't pulled 'em apart; an' then, you might know, when I an' Henery drop into a place after the game, it ain't one minute before in comes Billy Williams.

So then Billy an' Henery resumes hostilities about where they was left off, an' from there it's only a step to sheddin' their coats an' goin' to it. An' I guess this

Williams wouldn't of been so fierce about mixin' things up with Henery, because everybody says Williams ain't nothin' but a big bluff, if it hadn't of been for the way Henery looked. You never see a scareder man in your life. Believe me, when it come to puttin' over the idea o' sheer terror, I never see nothin' to equal that expression o' Henery's.

An' I'm just about to give Henery the credit o' possessin' a yellow streak a mile wide an' no bottom—when he wades in an' puts out Billy with a punch!

So I suppose Henery was registerin' bravery all the time.

An' then they was the time when Miss Rue Russell says wouldn't it be so nice if I an' Butch was to give her an' some of her friends a little dinner party. Well, believe me, these little dinner parties runs into money; but, the way things is, I an' Butch has to fall for it; an' seein' as how Henery is able to wear a full dress suit of evenin' clothes without lookin' like a nigger minstrel doin' a white-face turn, we ast Henery would he care to join us, an' Henery joins.

I an' Butch was so busy jockeyin' for the place next to Miss Rue Russell that we didn't pay no attention to Henery. But at the last minute Butch works the Minnesota shift, or a fake kick, or somethin' on me, an' grabs her off; an' so then, when we have sat down to the table, I have the time to give Henery the north-to-south, when the lady which I'm sittin' next to calls my attention to him.

"Not wishin' to appear too inquisitive," says the lady, indicatin' Henery, with a disgusted look an' a salad fork, "but who brung in the Death's Head?"

Well, they wasn't no doubt but what she had called the turn on Henery. The stuff Henery was registerin' would of made a fortune for an undertaker. For a fact, without no exaggeration, Henery had old John W. Gloom himself lookin' like the original cheerful idiot.

An' so then I an' Butch an' the rest o' the bunch turn in an' try to jolly Henery out of it; but they ain't nothin' doin'. Henery's map refuses to register even one little fleetin' smile. An' as the evenin' wears on Henery's gloom deepens, an' settles down around him an' the rest of us like a shroud.

We broke up early.

I walked home with Henery.

"Gee," says Henery, when we had said good night to the rest o' the people, "some party! Honest, I had the time of my life!"

Can you beat it?

"You don't say," I says. "Everybody happy, an' all this an' that, what? Well, all I got to say is, you took a queer way o' showin' it!"

But, anyways, I guess it was this last little thing which give me the tip-off on Henery Bingham. Henery's was a strange case. It wasn't chronic, as they say, because, like I said before, most o' the time Henery didn't appear no different than I an' you; but, if you get me, they was certainly times when Henery Bingham's emotions was badly mingled, not to say scrambled—an' not no mere figure o' speech, like you hear at a banquet, neither.

Maybe I should ought to put it this way: they was temporary times when, in traveling from the seat o' Henery's emotions, wherever that is, those same emotions of Henery's got switched on to the wrong track and, on reachin' the surface, pulled into the wrong station. In other words, sometimes Henery's emotional gear got throwed out o' mesh an' failed to coordinate. I guess that's as near as I can come to it.

If I was one o' these here professors of psychology, or somethin', maybe I could explain it to you; an' then again maybe I couldn't.

Henery Bingham's was a mighty strange case. I shouldn't wonder but what it would of baffled old Seneca G. Science himself.

Figurin' in that expressive map o' Henery's, too— But maybe I should ought to tell you about I an' Butch an' Miss Rue Russell. Cuttin' out the prelims an' gettin' right down to the finals, along about the time the baseball season is closin', an' the season for a two-a-day bunch is openin' up, I get it hot off the bat, or from Miss Russell's own lips, that Butch Randall is playin' with her in a sketch which they're

goin' to put on at the Palatial at no very distant date.

An' so Butch has put one over on me, an' it looks like this is my finish.

Well, I never see no nicer girl than Rue Russell, an' a perfect lady in each an' every respect, because it ain't so difficult to qualify now as it was when your mother was a lady, an' so I don't wish Rue no manner o' harm a-tall, an' may she live long an' prosper; an' if she prefers Butch Randall to such as I—well, then, all very well an' good; but I admire her taste! But as for Butch Randall—

Still an' all, I'm willin' to let the results speak for theirselves, though I don't admit now, no more than I ever did, that I had anythin' to do with it. Of course, you can't make Butch Randall believe nothin' to the contrary, though since then I an' Butch has went to the mat one dozen times on the subject, an' though I haven't win the decision, not every time, you can bet that they wasn't ary time but what Butch knowed he had been in a fight.

The facts is, an' I got witnesses to prove it, that when I an' Henery started for the Palatial that night, the night Russell an' Randall was openin' there—the facts is, I says to Henery, an' I'm willin' to leave it to as many as three or four people if I didn't—I says to Henery:

"Now, Henery, remember you got to be good, an' don't go puttin' over no such stuff as you did the night we was to that out-West thing, because far be it from us to crab good old Butch's act, an' I can still find much to admire in Miss Rue Russell, though she is now lost to me forever—an' take my word for it, one o' these fine days she'll regret it."

An' so them was my very words, an' I guess as many as fifteen persons heard me say them. An' besides, all of us knowed that this thing of Russell an' Randall's was comedy stuff, an' meant to be funny, an' so the conditions wasn't nothin' like that time Henery made death seem like a kind o' humorous adventure to little Ruth. But if Butch Randall wants to blame it onto me, why, he has that privilege, an' I guess they ain't nobody stoppin' him. Only you would think that Butch would know enough to stop his squawkin', because the more he hollers the worse it looks for him. An' the better for me.

An' as for I an' Henery's occupyin' such a prominent place in the theater—right up in front o' one o' the stage boxes—it wasn't nothing more nor less than an accident, no matter what Butch says. I ain't denyin' that I bought them seats a good week beforehand, an' I an' Henery was there when the doors opened, but somebody else might of beat us to them seats just as easy as not. An' so that is as much truth as they is to what Butch says about my ribbin' it all up for Henery to sit where he did, an' right where everybody in the house could see him. Take it from me, Butch is ravin'. What difference did it make to me where Henery Bingham sat?

An' just to clinch things, an' show you where they couldn't possibly of been no hard feelin's on my part, I'm willin' to say right now that that act o' Rue's an' Butch's went big—that is, it was *goin'* big. Yes, sir; I never see Miss Rue Russell lookin' prettier, an' as for Butch, well, if you knowed Butch like I, you would wonder how he got away with it like he did.

So you hear me handin' it to Rue an' Butch. An' not only that, but that sketch o' theirs was a regular scream. For a fact, they had some o' the funniest lines I ever heard. For instance, where Rue says to Butch—but never mind. Anyways, it was great stuff.

An' so it looks like the sketch is a knock-out, an' Rue an' Butch is slated for an easy winter on the big time, because it's easy to see, an' hear, where the crowd is strong for Russell an' Randall, when all of a sudden a feelin' come over me as if somethin' had went wrong. You know how it is in a theater when somethin' comes off which ain't exactly down on the bills; everybody seems to kind o' get the feelin' of it all at once, though they don't nobody know yet just what's happened—that is, only a few which was the first ones to notice.

So I seem to feel all of a sudden, like I said, that Russell an' Randall has lost their audience. An' so then I look round to see what the trouble is, an', would you believe

it, I find all eyes is turned towards the box where I an' Henery is sittin'. An' it looks like about one-half o' the people is undecided whether to laugh or cry about whatever it is, but the other half has made up their mind and is laughin' fit to bust theirself.

If things had been a little different I guess they wouldn't nobody ever felt more like sinkin' through the floor, or somethin'; but, somehow, I seem to grasp right away where it is Henery Bingham which is the target of all them critical eyes, an' not I. An' so I took a look at Henery.

Of course, Randall an' Russell is still goin' on with the act, though they ain't nobody payin' them the slightest attention —that is, nobody but Henery Bingham.

That look at Henery showed me that Henery was payin' that funny stuff o' Rue's an' Butch's the highest compliment in his power, but I was wise, an' the crowd, which had only Henery Bingham's expressive face to judge by, must of thought different.

Because Henery was cryin' like a child; big, bitter tears was chasin' each other down Henery's cheeks, like the rain tricklin' down a window, an' not no little sprinkle, neither, but more like a cloudburst. Addin' to this the all-round picture of excruciatin' anguish into which Henery's features is twisted, not to say nothin' of his lips tremblin' like a leaf, an' the hysterical workin' of Henery's throat, an'— Well, I guess you couldn't blame them people for misunderstandin' Henery. If I hadn't made Henery a study I would of misunderstood him myself.

But grantin' that them people thought Henery was cryin' instead o' laughin'— which he was, or which he thought he was, or which he started out to do, or somethin' —grantin' that, then the spectacle of all them people laughin' theirself sick over this terrible grief of Henery's was one o' the finest illustrations o' the inborn cruelty o' the human race which I ever hope to see.

Still an' all, maybe they was excusable. Y'see, the way Henery pulled this thing, weepin' a steady stream without never takin' his eyes off the comedy team o' Russell an' Randall—well, it didn't look like this was no private grief o' Henery's which he had brung to the theater with him. No, nothin' like that.

It looked more like it was the performance o' this same comedy team o' Russell an' Randall which was havin' this saddenin' effect on Henery. An' so—

Well, you might say that that little sketch o' Russell an' Randall's opened in August an' closed in January—they was off to a hot start, but finished in a frost. That is, if they did finish; because if they did nobody knew it—an' a shame if there ever was one, because that was a great little act!

Well, I took it just as hard as Rue an' Butch. But, you might know, you can't make them believe it, not with an ax. But let it go. Anyways, after that first performance, it's all off between Butch an' Rue.

Which is about as logical as most women is; because what did Butch have to do with it? Not no more than I—an' Miss Rue Russell, which is still her stage name, won't not even so much as look at me, neither.

But Henery—well, you can take it from me they ain't no smarter girl then Rue. In spite o' what Henery done to her—in fact, even whilst he was doin' it, Rue seen the fortune in that expressive face o' Henery's, an' so now it's Russell an' Bingham. Mr. an' Mrs. Bingham in private life. It don't make no particular difference to the sketch whether Henery now coordinates or not.

In fact, it's Henery's unexpectedness which is his biggest hold on the public. But Henery Bingham wouldn't never do for no screen actor. He couldn't never register no sort of stuff to order. Why, if Henery was a thermometer, he'd be just as liable to register Palm Beach when he meant Nome, Alaska, as not. You couldn't never depend on him to express his right feelings.

So, all in all, I guess you would have to go some to find a queerer case than Henery Bingham's.

At that, seein' the way things turned out, I sometimes wonder—

Voyage of the Nantook

by Robert Ames Bennet

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

BARRY DECATUR steered his flying speed-boat out of New York Harbor in the face of a half-gale, flying from some mystery ashore. At sea, to save his life, he boarded the old whaler Nantook, Captain Converse, and was signed as a member of the crew as far as Colon, Panama. Captain Converse and those aboard the whaler suspected Decatur of being an escaping murderer. On the voyage Decatur was driven almost to madness by the first mate, Jessup. Hope Converse, the captain's daughter, befriended him.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIT FOR TAT.

THE morning had not yet passed before the visitors to Colon were back aboard ship. But Jessup's boat did not come tacking down the bay until mid-afternoon.

When it ran alongside the bark and the mate swung up the ladder, Swansen grinned at sight of the crease between the eyes of his usually placid superior.

Jessup at once went into the cabin and through to the main stateroom at the call of Captain Converse.

"I've returned to report, sir," he said. "It appears that Decatur must have covered his crime very effectually. The Canal authorities have received no charges against him."

Hope came out of her stateroom, heavy-eyed from slumber, but with her sweet lips curved in a happy smile.

"Yes! Aren't you glad, Mr. Jessup?" she exclaimed. "To think we held such thoughts against him! The consul told us he had seen all about it in the papers from New York.

"Some woman persuaded Mr. Decatur to buy stocks. They went down, and he lost all his fortune in a single day. The shock drove him out of his mind. You see how completely that explains everything."

The mate started to draw a frayed newspaper from the inner pocket of his coat, but was checked by a curt query from Captain Converse:

"You of course set the young man adrift?"

"After I had insisted that the authorities cable to the New York police. I waited until the message came back that there was no charge against him."

"Very well. We have done our full duty. No more of him. With regard to our run through the Canal, we cannot get a tug to take us through before to-morrow."

"I noticed a number of steamers being lifted through the locks, sir," remarked Jessup. "There seems to be a rush in the

Canal. Freights must be going still higher."

The little skipper wrinkled his bald forehead. "May be that. Nothing more now, Mr. Jessup."

"You had a pleasant visit ashore, Miss Hope?" asked the mate as he was going out.

"Very, but rather tiring," answered the girl. "I shall rest until sundown."

"That's as well. The moon on the bay will be glorious."

The prediction was not overdrawn. When, after supper, Jessup handed the girl up the aft companion, she cried out with delight over the beauty of the tropical scene in the glamour of the brilliant full moon.

Hardly, however, had they begun to stroll the deck when Jessup halted to fix an annoyed stare upon a small power-launch that was heading down the bay straight for the bark.

Instead of sheering off, as the mate expected, the craft ran in alongside and stopped at the side ladder.

A man in a white-linen suit and Panama hat emerged from under the awning. The moment he swung upon the side ladder the launch thrust off and glided away.

"What's the meaning of this?" muttered Jessup. "Can't be a Canal official, else his boat would have waited."

Hope was no less puzzled. When the visitor started aft she went forward with the mate toward the poop-ladder. The man's face was hidden by the black shadow of his hat-brim as he ran lightly up the steps from the main deck.

But when he reached the top he struck a pose and swept off his hat to the girl with the bow of a Spanish grandee.

"Why—why, Mr. Decatur!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I'm it, Miss Converse," he gaily admitted. "Don't wonder, though, that you're surprised at such a transmogrification. The butterfly from the hairy caterpillar. What?"

The comparison might well have been made in sober earnestness. He had left the bark a shaggy-faced, unkempt beachcomber, only to reappear as nattily dressed and gentlemanly in appearance as the mate. His black eyes and the long scar aslant his clean-shaven cheek alone remained the same.

Jessup quietly placed himself between the smiling visitor and Hope. His look and tone were almost womanly gentle: "I am afraid, Mr. Decatur, I must ask you to go down into the waist."

"My dear Mr. Mate," bantered Decatur, "I regret that I must decline your invitation. Matters are not quite as they were this morning, my good man. If you reported the truth about me to your superior—"

"He did, Mr. Decatur," interposed Hope. "We were so pleased! We had already learned from the consul at Colon."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Miss Hope," said Jessup. "This man has been too smart for the police; but aside from his undetected crime, I happen to know that his relations with the woman for whom he—"

Decatur's calloused, tar-stained hand struck flat across the mate's mouth.

"How's that for a stopper?" he taunted.

A heavy flush darkened Jessup's face, but he spoke as quietly as before:

"You know I cannot thrash you in the presence of Miss Converse. What's more, I would not dirty my hands with such as you, else I'd toss you over the side."

"That's a game two might play at," rallied Decatur.

The mate stepped to the poop-rail and raised his voice in a sharp command:

"Lay aft, a boat's crew."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. But I've no intention of leaving just now," mocked Decatur.

He turned to Hope, his face suddenly sober and earnest.

"I beg your pardon for all this flippancy, Miss Converse. I came aboard for two purposes, one of which was to give your father certain information that I believe he will consider important."

The girl smiled at him and then at the mate.

"You see, Mr. Jessup. May I ask you to call my father?"

"I am very sorry, but—"

"Then I must take Mr. Decatur below, and it is so dreadfully hot and stuffy in the cabin."

Jessup bowed stiffly. "I will call your father."

As he stepped down through the booby-hatch, the visitor turned from him with a chuckle.

"Poor old chappy! Did he get his fur rubbed the wrong way? Too bad!"

Hope did not smile at the banter. Her deep eyes were fixed upon the mocker in a look of grave reproach.

"If we did not owe you an apology, Mr. Decatur, for our unjust suspicions of you—"

"Please, Miss Converse!" he broke in, even more serious than the girl. "Please forget it! I gave you every reason to think the worst of me—the way I came aboard and acted."

"But—but to put you before the mast!"

"Best thing for me. Seemed deuced tough at the time— Just what I needed, though. Knocked some of the nonsense out of me. It already seems like a lark. No joking. In learning to soar aloft I forgot to feel sore."

He glanced up at the great black cob-web of spars and rigging that towered above them in the moon glamour. His bright glance flashed back to the beautiful girl before him.

"Up there in the clear air and sunshine —with the thought of your kindness to the red-handed murderer to help him up out of his hell."

"Oh, Mr. Decatur, I—"

"That's what you thought I was. I had given you reason to believe it. Yet you showed your kindness just the same, patching and mending me. You ought to get a shoe-machine aboard to sew up toughs."

The humorous twist to his seriousness did more than relax the tension between them and bring a smile to Hope's straightened lips.

"Oh," she murmured. "Now I know for certain that you didn't do anything really bad."

All the eager intensity of the young man's face disappeared as if a shadow had fallen across it. His eyes sank before the girl's candid gaze. He tried to stammer a reply, glanced uneasily around, and fell silent at sight of Captain Converse and Jessup swinging up through the booby hatch.

The little skipper lost no time in greetings. "It appears I misjudged you, Mr. Decatur. I am ready to offer a straightforward apology, but not one cent of blackmail."

Decatur drew himself up and stood quivering, as if Captain Converse had struck him as he had struck Jessup. But his gaze turned to the white-faced girl.

His clenching fists relaxed. He replied to the captain no less quietly than Jessup had spoken to him after the slap in the face.

"You would naturally think that of me, sir. I must ask you, however, to believe that my visit is for exactly the opposite purpose. No, it's not money. I swapped my dress-suit for this outfit, and one five paid for the launch trip down."

"Well?" curtly queried the little skipper.

"Swansen told me that if the Canal should be blocked and you had to round the Horn, you stood to forfeit the freights on your cargo, as well as to lose the fall whaling season in the arctics."

"Yes. What of it?"

"The man I swapped clothes with is one of the Canal pilots. I happened to ask why the steamers bound for the Pacific side were crowding through the locks so fast. He tried to stall me off, so I kept at him till he let it out. There's another slide getting ready to let go in Gaillard Cut."

"Very probable story," said Jessup. "I see the point. You want a passage over to Panama."

"Why hasn't the threatened slide been made public?" demanded Captain Converse.

"Because there would have been too great a rush of boats, and the slide may come down any time to-night," said Decatur. "The locks will be closed at midnight. I went to the superintendent at Gatun.

"He happens to be a friend of a friend of mine—met him in New York. I told him

that even if the government pays damages for 'blockade delays, the voyage round the Horn would ruin you."

"Well?"

"He agreed to slip you through the locks, along with a pair of the smaller tramps."

Jessup smiled incredulously. "More probabilities!"

"Yes, and here's another," replied Decatur. "I asked the superintendent how about it, if we couldn't get a tug in time. He said he had yet to meet an old whaleman who couldn't sail his ship up even an irrigation ditch, with the wind dead ahead."

"And we'd have the wind fair nearly all the way across to Panama, father!" exclaimed Hope.

"There are the Canal regulations," objected the captain. "I've no wish to get tangled in red tape."

Decatur drew from his pocket several gold coins. "I sold my watch to the superintendent. Here is the two hundred dollars. I will put them and my rings in the hands of your daughter as pledge that I've told you the truth."

"What's your object in doing all this?" bluntly demanded the little skipper.

"I'll tell you the other side of Culebra, if we get through before the slide."

"It strikes me, sir—" began Jessup.

But Captain Converse cut him short. "Turn out all hands. Run up to Culebra fast as you can drive her."

The mate was too good a seaman to hesitate over a direct order. He stepped to the poop-rail and shouted the command, "All hands on deck!"

Within a minute half the crew were yo-heaving at the capstan, while the rest were scrambling aloft to crack on sail the moment the anchor was broken out.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE AVALANCHE.

OFFICIAL favor is as steam in the cylinders or a fair wind swelling outspread sails. Half an hour before midnight found the old whaler at Gatun, in company with two small tramp steamers, fast by cables between the cañon-like walls of one of the lower twin locks of the great Isthmian Canal.

Behind the three vessels the towering leaves of the inner sea-gate swung together, and under the three keels the waters of Gatun Lake poured down through the great culverts and out from the holes in the bottom of the lock basin.

Rapidly the flood crept up the smooth face of the concrete walls and the bolt-studded steel of the gates, bearing the tramps and the Nantook on its surface, out of the depths toward the glaring search-lights above. In exactly eight minutes they were floating thirty feet above tide.

Once level with the second lock, the gate between swung open, and the electric tractors towed the vessels through from one thousand-foot basin into the no less immense twin of the second water-step.

Another lift to the third lock, and then the three ships had only to be floated up this last step of the greatest ship stairway in the world.

Hardly was the water of the lock level with the great artificial lake, eighty-five feet above the Atlantic, when the last gate was opened. The three vessels were set free in the upper entrance basin.

The tramps, under full head of steam, slipped out into Gatun Lake well ahead of the Nantook. But the bark cleared the wind-blanketing walls of the basin with her jib and foresails already set and the crew mast-heading yards and sheeting home main and mizzen sails as fast as the volleying orders of captain and mates could drive them.

More and more quickly the lockhead and huge dam fell astern as sail after sail was cracked on. The old whaler surged away up the lake in chase of her lock mates, with the fresh northwest wind on her starboard quarter.

Decatur, standing side by side with Hope Converse in the bend of the weather rail, glanced aft at the lengthening wake of foam and then ahead across the moonlit white-caps at the tramp steamers.

"Yumpin' yiminy!" he mimicked his friend Swansen. "Two to one, Miss Converse, we overhaul that rear tramp."

The girl's sea-blue eyes were sparkling; her lovely face was flushed. She smiled with a pride like that of a yacht owner.

"It's not sportsmanlike to bet on a sure thing, Mr. Decatur. You must know before this that the Nantook is clipper built. She'll show her heels to old Rust Funnel before we round those islets. Then we'll take the second leg up the lake with the wind on our port quarter, and we'll walk past that other iron teakettle."

"Won't we, though! There's the call for stuns'l-booms—and what's that they're hoisting to the main truck from the royal-yard?"

Hope's quiet joy changed to amused delight. "Good for Gus! It's his patent royal-lift skys'l. He's been pestering father about it for years. How they've gammed him! But look—it's drawing well, and no need of the skys'l mast and stays that we'd have to rig for a regular skys'l."

"They're setting stuns'ls—*whew!* See the lee rail go down!" cried Decatur as the bark heeled far over under the tremendous spread of canvas and dashed still more swiftly aslant the trough of the whitecaps. "My eye, but we're beginning to move! Look how we're walking up on that tramp. Good thing your father has that pilot on the forecastle head. It's all right out here in the open lake. But think what racing like this will mean when we run into the Cut."

"Surely you can't fancy this canal is anything," replied the girl. "If only you could see Magellan Strait or the narrow, crooked lanes between the ice-floes that we tack through up North. Why, even Murphy, there at the wheel, could run an open waterway like this without a lookout. The only question is, will it stay open till we get through?"

Decatur shrugged. "You heard what the pilot said: Crevasses steadily widening; whole hillside may come down any minute. Your father certainly is losing no time!"

"Thanks to you! Oh, if we do slip through, how shall we able to thank you?"

"Why, I—it's been nothing really, only—"

"Nothing to you, perhaps; but to us it's everything—everything—far more than you know."

"My thought was only to try to repay you in part for your kindness, Miss Converse. That was all. Yet, if we get through—would you have any objection to my asking your father to sign me on for, say, as far as Nome?"

Hope faced the hesitating questioner with candid pleasure in her deep eyes. "For Nome? Why not for the voyage?"

"You mean it? You really would not object?" murmured Decatur, his eyes sparkling like black diamonds. "Miss Converse, if only I felt I could earn my salt! You know, that ten dollars your father gave me was the first money I ever received from my own labor. I must learn to earn my living. I'm stony broke, out in the cold, cold world."

The girl looked approvingly at his tar-blackened hands. "You earned that ten dollars. But I'm afraid you'll find the world a bit colder than this up above Bering Strait."

He wriggled the toes of his canvas shoes. "What matter cold feet, if the heart is warm? D'you know, I've always had a perfect horror of ice—outside a highball glass; but now I'll be able to toss snowballs at Polar bears."

For the first time in his knowledge Hope laughed outright—a low, musical laugh as golden as her sweet voice. "Really, I believe we shall be very good friends, Mr. De—"

"Barry!" he cut in. "Why not make it 'Barry'?"

"You have yet to be signed on, Mr. Decatur," she replied with an almost intangible reserve that was none the less effective in dashing his impetuosity. "Here are father and Mr. Jessup. All set, I see, Mr. Jessup."

"All for the present. We'll shake out the balloon-jib when we come around on the second leg of the up-lake run," said the mate, his brown eyes looking Decatur up and down with seeming indifference.

"The balloon-jib!" exclaimed the girl. "In a wind like this?"

"Yes, daughter. Mr. Jessup thinks she'll stand up under all we can spread,"

said the captain. "Now take a turn with him. I want to talk with Mr. Decatur."

As the mate strolled forward with Hope to the poop-rail, out of ear-shot of the others, he remarked with quiet dignity: "In my three weeks aboard the Nantook, Miss Converse, your acquaintance has been a very great privilege. If I have in some small degree won your friendship—"

"Not in a small degree, Mr. Jessup," the girl interrupted him with cordial warmth.

He bowed a trifle formally. "That makes it harder to go on, yet all the more necessary, Miss Hope. Perhaps the best way is to leave the question of the disclosure to you. What I wish to say is that I happen to know something about this man Decatur—"

"No, no, please—not now," broke in the girl. "At least, wait and see if we get through Culebra. Afterward, if you feel you must speak, let it be before him and father, not me. Look! we're beginning to lap the stern of old Rust Funnel. See her puff."

Jessup quietly acquiesced in the wish of his companion, and turned the talk to a discussion of the run to Pedro Miguel, as the bark swept proudly past the chugging, straining steamer. All too soon his *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the bellow of Swansen on the fore-deck and the nasal shout of Tisdal in the waist, relaying aft the order of the pilot to go about. The bark had cleared the islets that marked the first turn in the course.

Every man of the crew was at his post, on deck or aloft, ready to ease off or haul on sheets and braces. Under the sonorous commands of Captain Converse, repeated by all three mates, the bark's head veered to eastward, with her sails swinging around square to the full drive of the wind while it shifted across her stern to the port quarter.

As she straightened up from her port tilt and heeled over to the starboard, the fluttering spanker and fore-and-aft topsails of the mizzen jibed across the quarter-deck with a tremendous flop and clatter but without damage. The jibs had already been put over.

Promptly the order was given to hoist the huge balloon-jib. This put the old whaler under every stitch of canvas that could be spread—far more than even most whalemen would have ventured to carry in so brisk a wind.

Again heeled over until her lee rail dipped, the heavily laden vessel slanted down the wind at full clipper speed, across the moon-flashing lake toward the dark point of Bohio. Far grander and more beautiful than a racing yacht, she bore down upon the foremost tramp with the feather of spray under her low-driven prow spuming white in the moonlight.

Swiftly she overhauled the steamer and swept past to windward of the smoke-vomiting funnels. The siren of the tramp yelled a shrill salute—the voice of steam blaring out its admiration for the magnificent cloud of canvas that was so swiftly forging ahead in the race.

Captain Converse and Decatur had moved forward along the weather-rail to join Hope and Jessup. The girl waved toward the steamer and called to Decatur:

"What did I tell you? They're saluting the victor!"

"'Rah for the also-rans!" said Decatur. "It takes a real sportsman to be a good loser."

"How about yourself?" asked Jessup.

The younger man's face darkened. "What d'you mean?"

Before the mate could reply, the shouts of Swansen and Tisdal relayed aft a fresh order from the pilot. At a sign from Captain Converse, Jessup sprang around to cry out the necessary commands. After this none of the whaler's officers had leisure to talk.

The Nantook flew past Bohio and through the narrow waters beyond, around the long curve up into the head of the great artificial lake. A third steamer was overhauled and passed by the gallant old bark as she coursed through the straits of the Chagres Valley beyond San Pablo.

Sweeping on around the easterly curve toward Bas Obispo, she met a passenger steamer and two heavily laden tramps coming from Panama. All of these opposite-bound vessels blared their sirens at sight of the whaler's spectacular race.

So far the rush of the bark had been less daring than it appeared. Though at times she careened until her lee rail was awash, her ballast cargo of machinery held her from going on her beam-ends, and the wind remained steady even in the cuts.

Had Captain Converse been certain of a clear run through, he might have sent one of the watches below. But there was the chance that the threatened slide might come down when the bark was entering Gaillard Cut. In such event there would be need to strip to bare poles and let go anchor with the utmost haste.

Moreover, neither officers nor crew relished the thought of being caught below decks if the slide should nip the vessel as she sought to pass the point of danger.

No one aboard was more keenly alive than Hope Converse to the peril that awaited all, around past Gamboa, in the dreaded Cut. Yet while her father and his mates and crew waited with every thought centered upon the trimming of the sails and the danger ahead, the girl stood aft beside Decatur at the weather-rail, drinking in the weird beauty of the moon-shadowed jungles past which they were being swept.

Except when the call of the pilot raised a responsive clamor of commands and echoings, the only sounds aboard the whaler were the creak of blocks, the sigh of the wind through the cordage, and the swirl of water under her bows.

Half-awed by the strangeness of the passing panorama, Hope and Decatur sought to peer into the mysterious depths of the black jungles whence came a medley of tropical night cries—shrill pipings, pig-like squeals, and the menacing roars of giant cats.

In the short period since the order of the government to depopulate the Zone, the shores of the great Canal had fast gone back to the wild. The few jungle paths and roads were already choked with the swift growth of tropical vegetation. Peccaries rooted amid the upspringing brush in former clearings; pumas and jaguars slunk through the doorways of abandoned huts.

All this and more the young man and the girl pictured to one another as they gazed across the narrow strip of water at the liana-festooned wall of impenetrable jungle. Suddenly, out of the wilderness to port, came a peculiar toot. The bark swept past the mouth of a little inlet, up which the watchers glimpsed an engine and train rattling across a long trestle.

"Great Cæsar!" cried Decatur. "What a ghost! 'Aw-l-l abo-a-rd—Chicago, Neuw Yorrk, un Frisco. Change cars at Panama'!"

"But think of us—sailing over the backbone of the Americas!" replied Hope. "That is the real marvel!"

Decatur shifted to an easier loll on the rail. "Poor old hobo Balboa! He had to hike afoot where we glide light as the airy thistledown o'er woodland mere."

"If only we may not pile up against that slide!" whispered the girl. Her voice rose to sudden shrillness. "Look! That must be the Chagres—and those steamers—headed for Panama, yet moored to the bank! Oh, dear! They never would have stopped unless it's too late to pass!"

Hardly less concerned than his companion, Decatur leaned outboard to stare ahead while the Nantook drove past the Chagres River and around the bend into the southeast run to Culebra. Not an inch of canvas was furled on the bark as she flew past Gamboa down the long reach toward the looming mass of Gold Hill and the perilous passage of Gaillard Cut. The crucial moments of the wild night race were at hand.

A few more minutes and close ahead appeared a pair of giant hydraulic dredges, backing from the ditched barrier of the last slide toward the solid rock cliffs of Gold Hill. The siren of the nearest dredge shrieked a signal for the bark to come to. As heedless of the call as the ear-stopped sailors of Ulysses, the old whaler surged past in full flight—a foaming sea-monster winged with ninety-odd feet of towering canvas.

The siren stilled its useless shrieks. But out from the second dredge darted a swift little power-launch that curved around and raced parallel with the bark, close in under her port quarter. A tall man swung up on the bows of the launch, clear of the swing.

"Stop that ship," he shouted. "You heard the signal. Stop and tie up."

"Canal blocked?" queried Captain Converse.

"Not yet. But crevasses are opening fast. She may go any minute."

"Where?"

"Just beyond the last slide. Orders out to stop all craft. I'm in charge here. Come to, or I'll board and arrest you."

The little skipper thrust out his lower lip, tugged at his beard, and calmly decided to defy authority.

"Sorry, Mr. Ditch-Digger, but I'm a leetle near-sighted. I can't read a warrant by moonlight, and I'm rather in a hurry. Any message for San Miguel or Panama?"

The official flung up his hand. "You hairbrained fool! That slide will smash your old tub like an eggshell!"

"Too much chili in your con carne, Uncle Sam," commented the captain. "Take a sip of ice tea. The Nantook is old enough to be your aunt. She has slipped out of a hundred nips in the Polar pack. She'll scrouge through this pinch."

"You whaleman!" cried the official, overcome with amazement at the sailor's daring. "Go to it, if you want the gamble, but spread your napkins. There's a million cubic yards hanging by a thread, and— Good Lord! A girl! Quick— sling her down to me while there's time!"

Hope leaned over the rail beside her father.

"Thank you, sir," she called down. "I'd rather stay aboard."

As the official cried out his dismay, a bareheaded man came racing aft alongside the port bulwarks of the bark. From behind him rang out the angry denunciations of Tisdal.

The man's face showed ghastly white with terror as he bounded out of the shadow of the main course and glared up at the group on the quarter-deck. He was the pilot, and he had fled from the forecastle head when most needed.

"I heard—I heard!" he yelled. "The slide's falling! You crackbrained Yankee, you're running into hell!"

"Back to your post!" roared Captain Converse.

Instead of obeying the command, the panic-stricken man leaped upon the bulwark and dived overboard. As he plunged out and downward a pistol flashed and roared in the black shadow abaft the mainmast. The shriek and convulsive kick of the pilot told that the bullet had struck him in foot or leg.

Captain Converse vaulted clear over the poop-rail down upon the main deck. As he sprinted for the bows he shouted a stern conmand:

"Put up that pistol, Jessup. Go below."

Side by side Hope and Decatur rushed down and forward after the captain. Over the rail they glimpsed the power-launch swinging around to pick up the wounded pilot. They passed Tisdal hurrying aft to take the place of Jessup. Swansen was backing to the main hatchway. The captain had leaped upon the forecastle head to act as pilot.

Decatur and his breathless companion ran up into the weather bow to peer forward past the bellying jibs. The swift-driven whaler was already far along in the great Cut. She had put the titanic, forbidding mass of Gold Hill well astern and was shooting aslant the broad channel toward the narrow opening that had been dredged through the tip of the last slide. Beyond lay the danger, where a section of the hillside rose at a steeper angle.

Coolly the little skipper eyed the hazardous slope and began to call out the quiet orders that should con his ship throughout the passage.

Swift and silent as a monstrous white owl, the bark swooped at and into the narrow opening. Now she was surging through the ditch—the short lane that would be her last chance for safety should the slide come down.

A half minute more, and the daring craft burst clear of the passage, to sweep out along the full-width channel directly under the impending avalanche. Aboard her every soul stood waiting, rigid with suspense, mute, scarce breathing. At any instant the huge mass of loosened hillside might come thundering down to fill the Canal bed and bury the bark under thousands of tons of rock and clay.

Not a man aboard the onrushing vessel stirred or spoke. A shout might have been enough to bring down that hair-hung avalanche.

On the forecastle head Captain Converse poised as if transfixed. At the helm Murphy, the Irish boat-steerer, crouched over the wheel, stiff and motionless, his gray face wet with cold sweat, and his big hands clenched upon the spokes.

But the bark was headed on a long slant out toward the middle of the Cut, and there were no flaws in the wind to throw her off her course.

Foot by foot and yard by yard, the silent, staring watchers marked off the onward sweep of the ship along the section of hillside whose angle offered the menace of the expected down-hurling. Swiftly as the vessel foamed through the placid currentless water, her progress seemed to all aboard little more than a tortoiselike crawl.

Half the length of the danger zone was passed in safety—two-thirds. A few of the least fearful watchers ventured to breathe more freely. Twenty seconds more would see the bark safe. Captain Converse turned to look around at the hillside. Hope laid a quivering hand on Decatur's arm.

In the same instant there came a rumble as deep and vibrant as the tremor of an earthquake.

The rumble dinned into a thunderous roar. The avalanche was falling.

Back along the hillside the immense mass of loosened material came crashing down into a hideous chaos of rock and clay that hurled clear across the Cut. The displaced water splashed high up the opposite bank and spurted sidewise along the channel in a muddy tidal wave.

Warned by the shout of Captain Converse, Decatur was already half-way to the fore-shrouds with Hope. He caught the girl about the knees and flung her up into the ratlines.

As she scrambled to safety the great wave broke over the bark's stern.

Decatur had time only to leap upon the bulwark and start his run up the rigging when the furious flood overwhelmed the ship from taffrail to bowsprit, smashing boats and pouring down the hatchways.

Under the impact of the swirling maelstrom the stern was wrenched to starboard. As the bark pitched in the heave of the billow the compression blast of air from the avalanche rolled her far over to leeward.

But the gust that would have cast her on her beam-ends had she been lightly laden now proved the very means of saving her.

The violent roll and the almost vertical pitch of the decks flung off the ponderous flood of water as the bark struggled up from under the down-thrust of the wave.

CHAPTER X.

CONSEQUENCES.

NO less suddenly than it had thundered out, the crash and roar of the avalanche died away. Silence fell upon the scene of the cataclysm—silence broken only by the swash of waves along the Canal bank and the rattle and clash of loose objects aboard the pitching whaler.

Drenched and spluttering, Captain Converse eased his viselike grip on the forestays and sent a stentorian shout ringing aft: "Hard up on your wheel!"

From the main shrouds the bull bellow of Swansen relayed the command: "Hard up on your wheel!"

Back came a gasping, muffled cry:

"Ha-r-r-d—up—she is—sor!"

Shooting on under full headway through the wild swirl of the beaten waters, the bark had been about to dash into the northeast bank of the Cut. The helm was swung over barely in time to sheer her away from the danger.

As her bows fell off, her forefoot grazed the under slope so closely that the bowsprit overhung the shore. But already the toss and mad whirl of the waves was dying down, and as the bark came back on her course along the mid-channel her rolling fast moderated.

In the fore-shrouds Hope sought to free herself from the arm with which Decatur was still gripping her fast to the ratlines.

"Ease off—let go," she said. "We're safe. Can't you realize? Safe!"

"Safe?" he flung back at her. "Look aft! You mean wrecked!"

"No, no—only a boat or two stove in. But see that frightful ridge—all the way across the Cut and high above water! Oh! And look above at the slope—only the far end fell. If this end had come down, too!"

Decatur tried to draw the shuddering girl around. "Don't look! If the ship is safe—"

"That awful, awful slide!" cried Hope. "Had this end fallen with the rest, we'd now be lying back there. But it didn't—it didn't! And here we are, all safe and sound!" The girl rebounded from her fright. "Father, we're safe—safe past the barrier! No rounding the Horn for the old Nantook!"

Tisdal came limping forward. "Downs and Coon Joe are lost, sir," he reported. "Saw 'em carried over the side by the big sea. Would 'a' went myself, but fetched up in the stabb'rd shrouds."

The captain stared astern and shook his head. The slide had cost him two of his best men. The strongest of swimmers must have gone down in that seething maelstrom, and neither of the missing sailors could swim a stroke.

Swansen came waddling from amidships to sing out the damage he had noted:

"Binnacle and skylight smashed, sir; stabb'rd quarter boat carried away; waist-boats stove; hatchings and gratings gone by the board; main yard—"

"Belay," broke in the captain. "Brail up royals, gallants, and courses. Strip her to tops'ls. Stand lookout, Seth."

As Tisdal jumped on the forecastle head in place of the little skipper, a shout by the latter brought the carpenter down from the maintop on a run. He sounded the well and reported two feet of water.

All this deluge may have poured through the open hatches when the bark was swept by the tidal wave. Yet there was a chance that the violent wrenching had started a plank. A gang was at once told off to man the pumps. Above decks the topmen were fast reducing the immense spread of canvas.

The bark glided out of Gaillard Cut, on the Pacific slope of the Isthmus, under topsails and jib and with her pumps spouting brown streams into the scuppers. The rapid fall of water in the well tended to show that no serious leak had been sprung.

By the time the bark had made San Miguel and tied up in the entrance basin of one of the twin locks, the sucking of the pumps proved that the stanch old hull was as tight as ever.

Sad had been the wreckage from the flood in the homelike cabin-rooms of the captain and his daughter. But Hope had not waited for daylight to set about the restoration of order. Decatur seized his opportunity to be of service to her, and led the steward and the cabin-boy in the task of rehabilitation.

By dawn all the wet clothes, bedding, and mattresses had been taken on deck to dry, the broken china and glassware had been flung outboard, the walls and furniture rubbed down, and the floors swabbed.

There remained the mess-room to clean. But Hope was so tired that Decatur made her lie down to rest in the spare stateroom. The little cubby had not been used since the night he came aboard off Coney Island, and because of its closed port it was one of the few dry spots aboard the bark.

The girl's weariness was so great that she could not eat. When Decatur turned about from opening the port he glanced at the narrow bunk and saw that she was already fast asleep. Never had she appeared lovelier. The maze of her half-disheveled hair framed her face in a golden halo. But the pallor of her cheeks troubled him.

"No wonder Gus calls her Snow Flake," he murmured. "It's too true—down in this tropical heat."

As he tiptoed out and closed the door, Captain Converse came down the aft companionway.

"Where's Hope?" he queried.

Decatur pointed to the door. "The only dry bunk, sir. I've just made her turn in."

"Good," commended the captain. Then his eyes became stern. "Seen Jessup?"

"No, sir. His door is closed. Shall I call him?"

"Wait. I'll first settle with you. Thanks to your information, the Nantook lies here safe on the Pacific side of the blockade."

"But I only gave you the tip, sir," protested Decatur. "It was your courage and daring seamanship that turned the trick."

"My all was staked on the venture. While you—" The stolid New Englander thrust out a hand that had lost a finger from the frost-bite. "You've proved yourself a man and a gentleman."

"That, sir, makes me feel— But really what little I've done doesn't half repay for what you and Miss Converse did for me."

The disclaimer brought the young man a clap on the shoulder from the three-fingered hand.

"You'll do, lad. Hope tells me you'd like to sign on for the voyage. How about making you supercargo to Nome at third mate's wages, and after that fourth mate for the voyage on third mate's lay?"

The flash of joy in Decatur's black eyes passed as quickly as it came. "But a fourth mate, sir— And I'm not even an able seaman."

"From what you told me, back there in Gatun Lake, you're well grounded in mathematics. Until we reach Nome you'll have nothing to do as supercargo. You can put in your time brushing up on navigation. Now, that's settled. We'll see about Jessup."

Once more stern-eyed, the little skipper rapped on the door of the mate's stateroom. There was no response. He turned the knob.

The door swung in. Over the captain's bald head Decatur saw Jessup outstretched in his bunk, with a small Bible open in one hand. His eyes were closed, and his face was as placid as a young child's. He was fast asleep.

The mate had obeyed orders with absolute literalness. He had gone below after his shot at the deserting pilot. Receiving no order to come up again, he had remained below throughout all the frightful uproar and turmoil of the slide and the wild maelstrom of the tidal waves.

The dryness of the room showed that he had closed his port before taking to his bunk. The Bible may have been used to prepare himself for the death that would have been absolutely unescapable had the ship been caught in the avalanche. And now he was sleeping like a child.

Captain Converse rallied from his amazement to spring across to the bunk and grasp the shoulder of the sleeper. At the first touch Jessup jerked up to a sitting position, wide-awake on the instant.

"Aye, aye, sir," he murmured. "Is the ship safe?"

"Safe at San Miguel, and all clear—no thanks to you. I telephoned the officials at Culebra. Your bullet made only a flesh wound, and the pilot is ready to call quits in return for my agreement not to forfeit his pay."

"The fellow was deserting ship in an emergency," argued the mate. "He deserved a bullet through his heart."

"You're a bit too ready with your bullets, Mr. Jessup. The man had a right to go overboard. I was defying the canal authorities. They've chosen to let that blow over, long as we managed to scrouge through. But if you had hit the mark I believe you aimed at, I'd be held as an accessory to the murder, and the Nantook would be tied up in the zone until after the trial. No, you're too free with your pistol to suit me, Mr. Jessup. I'd as lief pay you off at Panama—coaster-mate's wages and a bonus of fifty dollars."

Jessup met the stern eyes of his superior with no wavering in his quiet gaze.

"I'm a whaleman, sir. I signed on for the voyage with you as a mate. The bark suits me. You'll have to break me—for cause. I will not give up my berth willingly."

"Then you'll hand over that pistol. If you can't enforce orders without shooting, you're not the kind of mate I want."

With a quiet smile, Jessup drew out the ugly weapon and handed it over.

"I believe in going armed, sir, because I do not like to act the bucko," he remarked. "There is less chance of friction when the men know you have a pistol. I have never had need to shoot except in case of actual mutiny."

"Managed right, there's no occasion for either pistol or mutiny with the Nantook's crew," snapped the captain. "Turn out and relieve Tisdal. I've made all arrange-

ments to drop to tidewater. Call me at Panama."

The mate had laid down fully dressed. At the curt command he sprang alertly from his bunk. Before he was out of the room Captain Converse had rolled into the warm bunk, without stopping to strip off his still damp shoes and clothes. He was asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

As Jessup came from the doorway he met Decatur face to face. For a moment the two stood measuring each other with the intent gaze of antagonists who have come to realize each other's rivalry and strength. The mate was first to speak.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Either keep forward or get off this ship."

"You've another guess coming, matey," replied Decatur. "This is a new deal. I've been signed on again—in the cabin mess."

Jessup's brown eyes widened and as quickly narrowed. After a slight pause he spoke with the tranquillity of one who has no doubts of the outcome: "Whether you are to stay aft will be decided at Panama."

Decatur shrugged and followed up the companionway. Fore and aft the decks were strewn with wet clothes and bedding and mattresses.

In the midst of this clutter seamen lay asleep, outwearied by the night's watch and toil. While Jessup relieved Tisdal, the new member of the cabin-mess lay down for a nap with his late mates of the forecastle.

He was oblivious of the drop of the Nantook through San Miguel lock, of her towing by tug across Miraflores Lake, and the final drop to Pacific tidewater through the Miraflores locks. But he wakened in the sultry heat of the breezeless mid-morning, as the bark tied up at La Boca, the nearest point to Ancon and Panama.

Some two hours later, roused by the noon-time dinner call, Hope Converse came out of the cubby stateroom, faint and white from the smothering midday heat. But at sight of the messroom her drooping eyes opened wide and fairly beamed with delight.

The place had been transformed into a tropical bower of graceful palm fronds that rose around all the walls out of hampers of tropical fruit. There were pineapples and mangoes, figs and limes, alligator-pears, coconuts and plantains. The center of the table was a mass of splendid, deliciously perfumed orchids and Bignonias and Gustavia superbas.

The delighted girl was not alone in her surprise. Her father and Tisdal were already staring at the lavish display in open perplexity. Jessup came down the companionway and looked around with a lift of his arched eyebrows. Beyond question he, too, was a stranger to the happy surprise.

Last of all, Decatur put in his appearance from the main deck, backed by the grinning Swansen.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Converse," he greeted gaily. "How do you like the effect?"

"Oh, Mr. Decatur!" she cried. "Did you do all this? But you shouldn't. It's —it's dreadfully extravagant!"

"Not a bit of it," he disclaimed. "Got a barge-load of the stuff for a song. Thought I'd set 'em up for the boys forward. I know what salt horse means in the tropics."

The girl's blue eyes glinted with happy tears. "You're generous! Here's your place on my left, opposite Gus. We're the underlings, you know."

Decatur's sparkling glance told that he was more delighted to sit beside her than if he had been asked to take her father's seat. Truly matters had changed for him aboard the Nantook.

Only thirty hours before he had left the bark at the muzzle of Jessup's pistol, a discharged forecastle hand suspected of murder. Now he was sitting down beside the lovely daughter of his captain, a welcome member of the cabin mess.

As he smiled up the table he was met by the reserved yet none the less sincere smiles of Tisdal and the little captain. Jessup alone eyed him with a frown, and the displeasure of the mate passed unnoticed in the general excitement over the serving of a big wild-turkey gobbler.

Swansen smacked his lips. "What say,

Snow Blossom? Makes you think of Thanksgiving, hey?"

"Not think, Gus," the girl half-whispered. "It is Thanksgiving—our feast of thanks that we're not over on the other side of that slide—or buried beneath it!"

She looked around at Decatur, her radiant eyes veiled with a mist of happy tears. "Oh, Barry! and we owe it all to you—even the turkey!"

He flushed red with pleased embarrassment.

"Don't blame it all on me, Miss Hope. I own up to the bird. First thought of a parrot pot-pie, but the turk seemed more like home. As for the rest, it was all due to the nerve of your father making that wonderful race and defying Uncle Sam there in the Cut."

"I had behind me mates and a crew as good as ever sailed out of Buzzards Bay," said the little captain as he stood up to plunge his carving-fork into the sizzling roast bird. "Every man jack did his share. Jessup persuaded me she could carry the balloon-jib—"

"And Gus lifted his lift-skys'ls," put in Hope.

"Yet, with it all," added her father, "we'd now be heading out of Limon Bay for the Horn, if Decatur hadn't warned us about the slide."

The new supercargo flashed a glance from Hope to her father and then at his seemingly indifferent rival. "Reckon I've got to take what you dish up to me, sir. But I won't mind if you save me the wishbone. I want to pull it with Mr. Jessup."

The faint blush that tinted the girl's white cheeks told that she had divined what was back of the remark. But if the mate understood, he gave no sign. He sat through the four courses of the feast, quietly enjoying the unusual dishes and no less quietly observing the looks of Hope and Decatur.

After the ice-cream from Ancon and the black coffee, when Decatur opened a box of Havanas, Jessup at last shot his bolt.

"No, thank you, Captain Converse," he waved aside the box. "I do not care to smoke Mr. Decatur's cigars."

With cool deliberation, he drew a frayed newspaper from his pocket and faced Decatur, as all stared at him, jarred and astonished by the sudden note of discord in the geniality of the feast.

A deep growl rumbled up out of Swansen's huge chest. He hunched forward over his plate to scowl at the mate.

"What's that you say?" he threatened, "Ay'd like to hear any gink spiel that the lad ain't squared hisself for the way he come aboard off Coney."

Jessup glanced casually at the squat giant, and turned to Captain Converse with his usual grave dignity.

"This is not a pleasant duty, sir," he said. "Miss Hope asked me to put it off until we were through the Cut. Not wishing to be a killjoy, I have delayed until the last possible moment. May I ask that your daughter leave us?"

Hope hastened to interpose. "I prefer to remain, Mr. Jessup. If you have anything to say against Mr. Decatur, I wish to hear it direct."

"That's right," agreed her father. "And I take it Decatur thinks the same. Am I right, lad?"

The young man's eyes were on his plate. After a tense moment of silence he looked up and stared along the table at Jessup. His face was as white as Hope's, and his teeth were clenched on the full lower lip.

"All right," he defied. "Fire away. Do your painful duty—your painful Christian duty!"

The mate gazed back at his taunter with no sign of flinching in his clear brown eyes and no trace of malice or hypocrisy in the gravity of his handsome face.

"All I know is what I have seen in the newspapers, Mr. Decatur," he said. "Here is one I found at Gatun. It tells about your sinful affair with that actress and your gambling away of all your fortune."

"But—but these newspaper stories—" murmured Hope. "They are often overdrawn—false—"

Decatur turned to her, his eyes clouded with doubt and indecision. But as he met her gaze of candid appeal his half-parted lips closed in a firm line.

"I don't know what the papers cooked up," he said. "It's true, though, I plunged

on stocks and lost everything, and it's true about—that woman."

At the abrupt confession the girl's eyes sank and she shrank almost imperceptibly. In perfect silence she rose and went around past the gaping Swansen to go aft into the main stateroom.

When the door closed Decatur stood up and bowed to Captain Converse.

"I wish to apologize, sir, for not leaving the ship at Gatun. My only excuse is that I thought I had paid for my wild oats. I don't mean by the loss of my fortune and having to work my way. No, it was the realization of what I had done—the disgraceful memory that almost drove me insane. I thought I had paid. Now I know that was only an instalment—if you'll kindly give your daughter my apologies—I shall go now."

"Sit down," commanded the little skipper in a tone that compelled instant obedience.

"Good. Now mark my word. You've signed on for the voyage, young man, and you stay signed. I take it, Mr. Jessup meant well. At any rate, he has done his duty, and that's settled. I may not be so well posted on Scripture, but I remember something about not throwing first stones. Am I right, Seth?"

Tisdal grunted, and reached a tattooed hand down across the table to Decatur. "Take a brace, lad. We've all been young. 'Tain't what you've done that counts. It's what you're doing and going to do."

"You're white!" muttered Decatur. He choked down his emotion and straightened to face Jessup's look of grave disapproval with flashing eyes. "I'm not going to be a quitter. I'll stick and take my medicine."

CHAPTER XI.

THE GENTLEMAN BUCKO.

AT the turn of flood-tide the Nantook cast off her moorings and dropped down stream with the ebb. The breeze was light under the lee of the Isthmus highlands, but the strong Pacific tide rapidly bore the whaler down the last miles of the great Canal and out past the Naos Island breakwater.

Beyond, in the open bay, the bark seemed to loose all headway as she bore southward aslant the coastwise current. No less canvas was spread than during her wild race through the canal. Yet now she rode on an almost even keel, and only a foamless ripple showed under her forefoot. The breeze was so faint that Decatur was surprised when he learned they were making a good three knots an hour.

He spent the afternoon forward in the sympathetic company of Swansen. At the call to supper he at first hesitated and hung back. But then he set his jaw and went aft with his companion.

Jessup was pacing the quarter-deck with his noiseless, resilient tread. He cast an indifferent glance over the poop-rail at the oddly-matched friends, and sauntered back along the weather-rail.

Decatur was red with anger as he followed Swansen down into the messroom. They found Tisdal alone at the table.

In reply to Swansen's gruff inquiry, the steward said that Miss Hope was feeling a bit under the weather, so the captain was taking supper with her in their "sittin'-room." Decatur's flush faded.

He sat through the meal silent and moody.

The next morning Captain Converse and Jessup came to breakfast with the others. But Hope remained in her stateroom.

The messroom had resumed its usual bare, tidy appearance, for the wilting flowers and palm leaves had been flung overboard and the hampers of fruit stowed away in the lazarette or carried to the galley for preserving.

The mate quietly ignored Decatur. Captain Converse greeted the supercargo in the same curtly cordial tone with which he spoke to the mates. But he at once plunged into a discussion with Jessup over the prospect of working the bark out into the Pacific. Decatur soon gathered that the Gulf of Panama has an ill-name for calms and adverse currents.

Before mid-morning the last faint breath of the breeze died away and left the Nantook becalmed on a sea as still and glassy

as a stagnant pond. From truck to deck, the full spread of sails hung limp in the torrid, dead air. No slightest catspaw rippled the flat surface of the gulf; no low swell came undulating to tell of a distant breeze. Above the motionless ship the cloudless sky arched over, hard as a sapphire except where it softened down into the heat-haze around the horizon.

But the stalemate was of brief duration. After half an hour the loss of all steerageway was reported to Captain Converse.

A glance at the barometer showed him that no hurricane threatened. He came on deck, squinted at sky and gulf, gave an order to Jessup, and returned to the company of his daughter.

The whaleboats, damaged by the big wave in the canal, had already been repaired by the carpenter. Under the mate's terse commands, two of them were promptly lowered and manned by the port watch. They were strung out tandem, with a line from the Nantook's bows, and the long, slow, steady pull of their crews at the sweeps soon had the bark under way.

Decatur watched the oarsmen toil and sweat down close to the hot mirror-surface of the water in the full glare of the sun.

"Look at the poor devils, Gus," he said. "They're parboiling. What's the use of punishing them this way? We can't be making enough out of it to pay."

"Put that up to the ol' man, lad," grunted Swansen. "Likely he'll show you we're pulling out of a contrary current or into a favorable one. He ain't long in the leg like Jessup, but you'll find he's taller than most skippers from the chin up. Mebbe no fuzz on his dome, but there's a think-tank under it."

"Can't see the sense of this, though," criticised Decatur. "What's the difference of the few knots we can make?"

"What was the difference between scrouging through the Cut when we did, or tailing 'long a bit later? Ships can lay adrift in Panama Gulf two weeks to a month if they don't work out, and two weeks lost here might mean we'd find Bering Strait blocked by the ice-pack. Besides, it's time the men got broke in to the oars. We got whaling ahead."

"I see," said Decatur. "But why not shift watches every two bells? We'd make better time, and none of the men would get pegged."

"Mebbe you've noticed that the ol' man leaves a lot to the mate."

"What of it? I'm no seaman, but I know something about working relays of shifts. I'll put it up to Jessup."

Swansen blinked, grinned, and waddled aft beside his friend, without a word of remonstrance. They found that the mate had come down from the glare of the quarter-deck and was seated in the shadow of the messroom companionway, where a very slight current of air was sucking into the ship. He looked up at the approaching men and then lowered his eyes with placid indifference.

Decatur flushed, hesitated, and spoke with the emphasis of overborne reluctance: "Mr. Jessup, Gus tells me it's very important to scrouge out of the gulf. I've seen rescue work in a mine. We can get a great deal more pull out of the men if you shift them every two bells."

"Yes?" questioned Jessup, without troubling to raise his eyes. "Well, when I wish advice from a landsman, I'll ask for it."

"You'll have to, next time," rejoined Decatur, his black eyes flashing with resentment. "I know enough now to take my suggestions to a man of brains. Captain Converse listened to me once, and he will again."

The mate rose and slowly stretched his tall figure in the opening of the companion.

"Oh, if you insist upon being noticed, I'll consider your idea," he answered with quiet irony. "Since you are so anxious over it, we'll shift the watches now, and you'll row stroke-oar in the aft boat."

Taken aback by this shrewd counter-blow, Decatur drew aside to cast a glance of inquiry at Swansen. The bulldog jaw of the Swede had thrust forward; his gray-white eyes were fixed upon the mate in a menacing glare.

"Guess I know what you're after, Jessup," he growled. "The lad's in the cabin-mess now."

"Where the carpenter and boat-steerers belong," rejoined the mate. "They're taking their watch outboard, and so will this green hand. Time he was learning to pull an oar."

"Wait, Gus," put in the younger man, his mouth firm-set. "If he has the right to command me—"

"Not till he settles with me first," growled the Swede. "If you want to try any bucko work, Jessup, you're free to take me on. The lad's too clean a scrapper for such as us. Here's your chance to show you got the stuff. Ay'll give you your bellyful."

Jessup's ironical smile did not change. His brown eyes met the cold glare of the belligerent challenger with a look of bland indifference, and he stepped lightly forward as if to slip past between the friends. At this seeming proof of pacificism Swansen's heavy jowl relaxed in a derisive grin.

No less swiftly than Decatur himself could have struck the blow Jessup pivoted and twisted a corkscrew jolt to the point of the Swede's slackened jaw. Swansen reeled back, almost but not quite knocked out. With tigerish quickness, the mate bounded upon the half-stunned man to batter him with foul blows below the belt.

The third mate struck out blindly, and his bull strength flung back his lightly balanced assailant. Jessup rushed again and kicked with intent to disable the now fully enraged Swede.

He failed of his purpose only because Swansen sprang to meet him and caught the kick on his knee before it could swing higher.

Regardless of the stinging jabs in his face, Swansen closed and clutched his enemy in a terrific bear-hug.

Rumbling with rage, the squat giant tightened the grip that fast squeezed the breath out of Jessup and began to crush his ribs. Not an instant too soon to save himself, the purple-faced mate left off beating the iron-hard body of his crusher and gouged at the white-glaring little eyes.

With a roar of agony, Swansen loosened his almost fatal hug and wrenched himself away from the still more frightful eye-clutch of Jessup.

A dozen barefoot men of the starboard watch came pattering aft to see the fight. Swansen was standing with his hands pressed against his almost blinded eyes, but he heard the footsteps and growled an order for Decatur to keep the crowd clear.

For several seconds Jessup stood a few paces away, gasping and purple-faced. There was nothing vindictive or ferocious in his expression. Though his eyes were bloodshot, their dilated pupils gave them a startled, wondering look.

But mild as was the mate's aspect, he was as unready to quit the savage contest as was Swansen. The only reason why they did not rush together again was that the Swede could not see and Jessup was too weak from the terrific squeeze of that death-hug. But the moment the mate caught his breath he regained a good part of his strength. He sprang forward.

A warning cry from Decatur failed to save his friend. Still unable to see clearly, Swansen could not avoid the foul kick of his enemy. He doubled together and fell on the deck in a writhing heap. Promptly Jessup started to kick at the head and face of the helpless man. The sight was too much for Decatur. He rushed in and jerked the mate away.

"That's enough, you beast!" he cried. "When a man's down—"

"You'll be—next!" panted Jessup as he whirled upon the interrupter of his sport.

He bounded to the attack, his eyes fixed upon Decatur with their peculiar wide and startled stare. Decatur bent to meet him and let fly an uppercut and swing.

The first was blocked, the second ducked, and in return a short-armed jot came in through Decatur's guard. Had it struck his jaw squarely he must have dropped.

Even its half-glanced blow sent him reeling backward.

As with Swansen, the mate leaped in to finish his work. Too dazed to side-step, Decatur dodged a jab at his face and, striking down a drive at his solar plexus, closed and grasped the mate's elbows to keep away those eye-gouging fingers.

In vain Jessup sought to wrench his arms out of that grip.

He could neither free himself nor strike.

With a fair fighter Decatur might have held his opponent to the clench as long as he chose. But Jessup had been trained aboard ship, not in the squared circle.

When he found himself fast, he uttered a low snarl and flung forward to bury his teeth in the side of Decatur's neck. The younger man released his grip of the elbows to clutch the mate's throat.

Instantly, Jessup pulled back and drove in a foul fist blow that brought Decatur to the deck in the same way that the kick had doubled up Swansen. The only difference was that Decatur was not so completely disabled.

Even in his agony he managed to jerk his head away from the first kick at his face. As the foot raised for the second kick, his out-thrust hands grasped it and gave a quick twist.

Had Jessup's bones been turned to water he could not have collapsed more suddenly. In his fall he tried to drop upon his intended victim. But Decatur had the advantage of fore-knowledge and he had rallied from the foul blow. He whirled over, clear, and leaped up. Jessup rebounded from the deck no less resiliently, but a fraction of a second slower. Decatur's attack caught him half-risen.

Unable to avoid the swift uppercut and punch over the heart, the mate staggered back gasping and clucking. Decatur rushed at him, certain of victory and eager to make an end of the fight.

For his lack of caution he received a blow that again evened the desperate contest. Both men were panting, and Decatur was white with pain, when Jessup rushed in turn.

Something in the mate's dilated eyes or the pose of his arms and forebody may have warned Decatur. He blocked Jessup's kick by an upraised shoe that caught the mate's shin and sent him hopping backward.

Murphy, foremost in the ring of onlookers, was unable to repress his approval: "Nate, bhoy, nate! But thry th' heel next toime. 'Twill break th' bone."

Decatur did not hear the advice. He had flashed in and caught Jessup nursing the bruised shin. Unable to avoid the other's jabs, Jessup took both full in his face. Then his clutching hands caught Decatur's left wrist in a grip like steel and twisted the joint to snap the bone.

The agony forced Decatur to bend over, but as he turned he brought his right fist around in a wild swing that landed square against the ear of his enemy.

Jessup fell sideways on hands and knees, releasing his grip of the wrist. Before he could spring up again Decatur was upon his back.

As the two rolled over on the deck, Swansen staggered to his feet and burst through the ring of gaping seamen.

"Watch out fer gouging, lad," he warned.

"Stand clear!" panted Decatur.

He was on his knees, with the mate's left arm twisted in both his hands. The mate had suddenly ceased to struggle.

"Up with you," ordered Decatur, and Jessup obediently rose with him. "There you are, Mr. Foul Fighter! Happens I know something of jiu-jitsu. All I have to do now is to hold on. If you move, you throw your shoulder out of joint. How about it? Speak up! Do you call quits?"

Jessup gazed past the head of his captor, his face gray with the agony of the twisted arm. But at the moment when his eyes confessed defeat, his body tensed and his voice rang out clear and defiant:

"You mutineer! Break my arm if you dare!"

Decatur made no move—he had no chance. Jessup twisted himself around. There was a snap like the crack of a dry twig. The arm dropped down out of Decatur's relaxed grip—dislocated.

From the messroom companionway came a low cry: "You brute. You heartless brute! I thought you a gentleman—but to break his arm—"

The girl came toward the quivering, panting fighters, her blue eyes ablaze with scorn. Before either could speak, her father sprang out past her and confronted them with equal sternness.

"Fighting—officers of my ship!" he denounced. "What does this mean?"

"Mutiny, sir," gasped Jessup, his right hand clasped upon the dislocated shoulder.

"Could have handled one of them—but both—too much."

"The lad jumped in when he got me down, sir," grunted Swansen. "No mutiny about it. Ay asked the mate if he wanted to take me on, and he took me up."

"That so, Mr. Jessup?"

"We'll—call it—that," murmured the mate.

Decatur thrust out his hand. "Will you shake, Mr. Jessup? I don't like your style of fighting. But you're a cracking good sport."

Jessup ignored the proffered hand and looked past his enemy at Hope. The girl spoke for him: "How about yourself, Barry Decatur? To have a man at your mercy and deliberately break his arm!"

The scorn and contempt of the reproach brought a scarlet flush into the already hot face of Decatur. He was still unnerved and half-dazed from the stress of the deadly struggle.

Both he and Swansen were in an awkward dilemma. Jessup had started the fight and he had fought foul; yet neither of his opponents had been disabled, while he was.

The thought probably did not occur to Decatur that the girl had seen only the last incident of the fight and that she believed Jessup had fought both men at the same time.

"I'm sorry, but—didn't break his arm," he confusedly answered her. "Only out of joint—his own fault. Chuck roll under his arm—I know how. Can pop it in again—easy."

"Yet you stand there and let him suffer—you who hurt him so!"

"Aw, Snow Flake!" put in Swansen. "Have a heart. The lad on'y—"

"Belay your jaw, you Swede bucko," commanded Captain Converse, his eyes like blue-gray agates. "Lay forward with your men. Call in the port watch and get outboard. I'll sweat some of this bad blood out of you. Next man who starts a fight aboard this ship goes into irons. Lay forward now. Look lively. You, Decatur, help Mr. Jessup below."

The mate turned the hand of his uninjured arm palm outward against Decatur, in a gesture of repulsion.

"No, I don't want any help from him, sir."

"But you can't go that way!" cried Hope. "If only I knew just how to do it!"

"Very simple, Miss Converse," said Decatur, his voice cool and sharp. "Get him up against a bulkhead so he can't flinch, put a hard cushion or roll under his armpit, and lever the arm. The joint will snap into the socket."

He swung about and hastened forward along the hot, pitch-oozing deck to overtake Swansen and the men. Neither Hope nor her father looked after him. They were leading Jessup between them to the companionway.

Aft in the cozy main room where the girl had dressed Decatur's gashed cheek she now followed his directions for the treatment of his enemy's dislocated arm. They proved correct: the ball of the joint popped into its socket as Decatur had predicted.

Jessup endured the pain of the operation without a groan, and once that his arm was back in place, he declared himself all right again. But Hope insisted that he should allow her to treat the strained ligaments.

Her father went up to take charge of the ship while, with the help of the steward, Hope bathed the inflamed shoulder and bound it up in a soothing compress.

When the girl asked for the particulars of how the trouble had started Jessup smiled gravely and shook his head.

"I'll ask you to let matters rest as they are, Miss Hope. Thanks to your kindness, I shall be myself again in a few days. I gave rather more than I took. That satisfies me."

"But for both to attack you at once!"

Jessup looked down at his bruised knuckles.

"I believe there will be no more trouble. You heard what your father said."

"About any more fighting? Yes. He always does what he says."

"Then I am fully satisfied, Miss Hope. If there's one thing I dislike it is to act the bucko."

The girl's deep eyes glowed with approval. "I'm glad there's one gentleman aboard besides father."

"I shall always try to prove myself one," murmured Jessup.

CHAPTER XII.

TANG O' SALT.

DECATUR had taken to the boats with Swansen and his men as the port watch, sweating, purple-faced and almost exhausted, crawled aboard. The loss of Downs and Coon Joe in Gaillard Cut had left the starboard watch a man short in each of the two boat crews.

When the third mate said that he himself would take stroke oar in the aft boat, Decatur promptly volunteered for the vacant seat in the other.

He was offered by Swansen bow-oar in the fore boat, where there would have been no one forward of him to see if he shirked. But Decatur insisted upon taking stroke-oar. The big Irish boat-steerer and Swansen exchanged doubtful glances.

Standing beside them, the young man appeared almost slight. Once in his boat, however, he not only kept stroke with Swansen, but his seemingly effortless swing on his thwart bowed his long sweep more than any other, with the exceptions of the third mate's and Murphy's.

To tow the heavily-laden bark was like rowing with the line fast to a wharf. There was no spring or give, only a continuous dead pull at the sweeps in the blistering heat and glare of the midday sun. When at the end of their two hours of grueling labor, the starboard watch were called inboard, three or four of the men collapsed. Decatur was little less outspent, yet his black eyes were still bright as he climbed aboard by way of the forechains.

"Be jabers, ye've got the makin's, sor, if ye'll oxcuse th' liberthy," said Tim Murphy. "Oi bad me oye on th' shpring av yer swape, an' ye a rockin' aisy as a babe in his craadle."

"Easy?" muttered Decatur as he shuffled aft, leaden-footed, with Swansen. "Lucky for me, Gus, I went out for the crew, my last two years at college. Made my letter."

"Next season, lad, you'll come out of the ice a whaleman," grunted the third mate. "Step in and cool off. I've got a shower rigged in my cubby."

The messroom was empty. Dinner had been served an hour past. Only the steward appeared when the friends came out from their cooling bath. Swansen saw his companion's eyes cloud at the sound of Jessup's voice in the "sitting-room."

"Take a brace, lad," he mumbled. "She'll give us a square deal soon's she gits it straight."

But the disgraced pair had gone down in the girl's esteem far more than the adoring Swede could believe possible. When, after another exhausting turn at the oars, they came aft for supper, Hope was at the table—but so, too, were the carpenter and Murphy and the other boat-steerer, the big negro, Black George.

The newcomers were quiet and well-mannered in the presence of the captain's daughter, and Decatur knew that, according to whaler custom, they belonged in the cabin mess.

Because of the coaster cargo, however, all three had signed on before the mast as far as Nome. That they should be brought aft so soon after the fight was, to say the least, significant.

Though Decatur and Swansen had been moved up a place on each side of the table, they were required to rub elbows with Murphy and the carpenter. This of itself troubled the supercargo not at all, for there was nothing of the snob in his nature.

The real punishment was that Black George sat at the foot of the table, and Hope had moved to the head, beside her father.

The girl not only confined her talk to Jessup. She readjusted his injured arm when he sought to draw it from the sling, and she insisted upon cutting up his meat for him.

The roast was a saddle of venison bought by Decatur at Panama.

After supper Decatur found himself called upon to share his stateroom with the carpenter. Swansen doubled up with Tisdal, leaving his own room to Black George and Murphy. As the carpenter was in the port watch, one bunk served both him and

Decatur, as they alternately came on and off duty.

The new order of things had been established for nearly a week when at last, between the lightest of breezes, heart-breaking towing and shrewd slants along favorable currents, the bark worked down within five degrees of the Equator and rounded Cape Malo, out of the gulf into the open Pacific.

The worst of the towing was now past. But the old bark was still in the doldrums and had to contend with baffling breezes and more calms and the sudden dangerous squalls of the tropics.

During all the tedious slant up Central America to the zone of the trade winds Decatur and Swansen were no less in the doldrums than was the ship.

Hope showed no sign of relenting. She was civil, even pleasant-spoken to them.

But her reserve showed that she believed they had put themselves on a level with the forecastle hands.

Jessup, on the contrary, continued to enjoy the privilege that he had gained by the relatively trifling discomfort of his injured arm. He not only had the girl's companionship, as before, in her morning and evening pacings of the quarter-deck, but she insisted on treating his shoulder every day. Most of his evenings after their strolls were spent with her in the cozy main stateroom.

Meantime, Decatur was busy with either hand or brain all of every day and half the nights. He never shirked the onerous boat work. He was always first aloft to brail up the main royal before a squall or to set it when the fierce gusts abated.

While others off watch were spinning yarns or thumbing old novels or sleeping, he pored over charts and treatises on navigation or dug practical whaleman's sea-lore out of Tisdal and Swansen.

Captain Converse took favorable notice of the young man's eagerness to learn and gave him hints on subtleties of navigation not to be found in any book. Some of these he saw in practise as the little skipper nursed and led and drove his craft up through the doldrums.

And along with the art and skill of the whalemen he learned more of their daring. Mates and captain all knew to a hair what the bark would stand up under. Now and then they lost a spar or split a sail by holding on too long in squalls. But a few hours of hard driving with the lee rail buried in white water, meant the reeling off of long miles of northing.

One of the surprises of the voyage was that Jessup, the mild-eyed, would run into a squall with more canvas spread than even Swansen relished.

The quiet efficiency and cool courage of the mate were undoubtedly among the prime causes that spurred Decatur to his utmost effort. From the first there had been no chance of friendship between the two. They were as unlike as oil and water, and this natural antipathy was increased every day by the fuller awareness of their rivalry for the favor of Hope Converse.

To all appearances, hard work and good behavior alike failed to regain Decatur any degree of standing in the esteem of the girl. Yet he kept to his toil and study with unflagging zeal.

By the time the Nantook had worked up into the Pacific trades, he could take the sun as well as Swansen and figure out the ship's latitude and longitude more quickly than Tisdal.

The seriousness with which he sought to absorb nautical knowledge at every pore did not prevent him from enjoying such amusements as came within his reach. He and Swansen missed no opportunity to trail lines over the taff-rail, and their efforts as fishermen kept the cabin so over-supplied with bonitos and dolphins and other fine fish that many had to be salted down and some even found their way forward.

The artist in Decatur's nature never wearied of the wondrous beauty of the graceful, long-bodied dolphins. They came aboard a brilliant azure blue and passed through gorgeous transformations of green and bronze, red and gold, to the final gray.

He found far livelier sport, however, spearing fish from the forecastle head. He had a four-pronged dart (the grain) ever ready for fish up to a hundred pounds, and a bombless harpoon to use on larger game. While the bark was still south of the Tropic of Cancer his " bag " of big game included

a large sea turtle, two porpoises and a sixteen-foot shark—harpoon work that gave him good practise for the future.

Once in the zone of the trade winds, life aboard the Nantook settled down to a steady routine. Day and night the bark surged through the crystalline indigo of the long ocean swells, before the steady push of the southeast wind. All the round of the twenty-four hours there was seldom need to touch a sheet or brace or bowline, and never to reef or furl a sail. The men were kept busy only with ship's housewifery—scrubbing decks and paint work, tarring rigging, slushing down spars, polishing brasswork and breaking out stores.

A week of this monotony added the final straw to Swansen's glum discontent with the state of affairs aft. He had waited ever since the unlucky day of the fight, hoping that his Snow Flake would relent.

Now he had more time to brood, and the sense of her injustice at last broke through the barrier of his sullen pride.

He watched for his opportunity, and caught her alone in the messroom as she was about to go up for her morning promenade with Jessup. When he blocked the companionway with his broad body, she stopped at the lower step and looked at him with cool displeasure in her blue eyes.

"You are in my way, Mr. Swansen. I wish to go on deck."

"Meester Swansen!" he mumbled, and he sat down on the steps, glum and heavy. "Ay can't move—Ay got frost-nipped. Won't you help me up, Snow Flake?"

Spots of angry scarlet flamed in the girl's white cheeks. "You are insolent! Never call me by that foolish name again!"

Swansen slowly pulled himself to his feet.

"Sure. Ay git out of the way. Ay never asked you to help me before. Many a time I lugged my Snow Flake up dis companionway when her leetle toes was frosted—Aye, and before that, when she was so teeny Ay hold her in one hand. Who smuggled her up into the crow's-nest to squeal 'Blow—blow!' when the whale spouted? Who caught her the seal pups and the leetle white-bear cub?"

The scarlet was fading from Hope's face. The blue eyes had misted over. But the firm-set lips did not relax.

"You knew how I have always felt toward needless fighting—toward brutality."

"Sure. Ay know. The old Swede bulldog belongs forrard. He's ugly and he got licked. That old bucko bruiser what pulled Snow Flake outa Frisco Bay ain't fit comp'ny for a growed young lady. Well, good-by, Mees Converse. Ay won't trouble you no more."

He averted his battered face and stepped clear of the companionway. In another instant a slender white arm was around his bull neck and a pair of tear-dimmed eyes were seeking to meet his down-fixed gaze.

"Oh, Gus—Uncle Gus!" reproached the quivering girl. "Why did you force me to dislike you? It sickens me—that brutality! Why did you let Decatur egg you into fighting him?"

Swansen again averted his face from her, and groaned: "Ay never lied to you, Snow Flake. He didn't do no egging. The lad is too clean a fighter for bucko mixing. So Ay offered to take him on, and he jumped me."

"What—Mr. Decatur? But I thought—"

"No, the mate. Ay sure got to hand it to him. He's some peach. Had me going, one, two, three. If there's anything he ain't got up his sleeve, Ay didn't miss it. He was all there with both flippers and the eye-gouge and the kick below the belt."

"Gus—no—I can't believe it!"

"What—the kick? Sure, that's how he done for me. If it had been me, with him down, Ay'd 'a' stove in his slats. He started to reform my map with his foot. Then's when the lad sailed in."

"And then you both attacked Mr. Jessup!" reproached the girl.

As she drew away from Swansen he confronted her squarely, his little gray-white eyes reddening.

"The damn' liar—*kuh-uh*— 'Scuse me, Snow Flake. Didn't mean to cuss. But if he told you that, damn his pretty sheep's eyes if Ay don—"

"Wait, wait, Gus! I— Oh, I'm afraid it's been all my own fault. Let me think—Yes, I remember, he said only that he fought you both. I mistook him. I

thought you and Mr. Decatur attacked him together. He did not say it. But I misunderstood—and it seemed so unfair of you—so cowardly!"

The Swede's glowering face lightened. "That lets us all out, Snow Flake. It's been a tough deal, though, for the lad. Ay fought bucko, same as Jessup, and Ay got what was coming to me. The lad jumped into the game when Ay couldn't wiggle a finger. He fought clean till after he'd been fouled. Then he got the mate in that Jap hold."

"But he needn't have thrown the arm out of joint!" protested Hope.

"He didn't," grunted the Swede. "Jessup done it hisself."

"Himself? Why, that's impossible!"

"No, it ain't. The lad never budged. Jessup was yust going to give in. Then he seen you, and he give the twist that done the business."

Hope's eyes widened with bewilderment. "I—I can't see why he should have—hurt himself."

"You can't?. Yust give the lad the same chance. He'd put both arms and his neck out of joint, to be coddled same as Jessup, going on a month."

A rosy blush swept down the girl's face and faded as suddenly as it had come.

"Mr. Jessup is a pleasant friend, Gus—no more. I would treat Black George's shoulder just as carefully if his joint was thrown out. And, Gus, it's all right now between you and me, ain't it?"

Swansen showed his yellow fangs in a grin of adoration. She smiled back at him and started up the companionway. His grin sobered.

"Hold on," he begged. "How about the lad?"

"Ask him to join me," the girl murmured over her shoulder.

The third mate waddled out on the main deck and forward at his liveliest gait. But his delight was masked behind a glum scowl when he came up into the bows. Decatur had just speared a large bonito. Swansen took the line and jerked his thumb backward.

"I'll pull in your catch, lad. You're wanted on the quarter-deck."

Decatur slipped on his shoes and hastened aft, in ready obedience to what he mistook for an order. Even the sight of Jessup and Hope along on the quarter-deck with the steersman failed to check his quick step. He ran up the poop-ladder and came toward the couple, his cap off to Hope, but his eyes upon the mate.

"Gus says I'm wanted, Mr. Jessup," he reported himself for duty.

"Not by me," replied the mate with careless irony, and he waved toward the booby hatch. "Captain Converse is below."

"Wait, please," said Hope, as Decatur turned away. "Didn't Gus say that I wished to see you?"

Decatur flashed about to the girl, his eyes aglow with radiant eagerness. "You? No. He merely said I was wanted aft. Can I be of any service to you, Miss Converse?"

"I wish to beg your pardon," said Hope, her candid eyes dark with contrition.

"But—but, deuce take it, I don't see why you—what reason—" stammered Decatur.

"Because I've been unjust. Through no fault of Mr. Jessup, I misunderstood about you and Gus in that—that affair. I'm so sorry—"

"Don't!" broke in the young man. "I can't let you apologize. You've more right than that to think the worst of me. It was my nasty temper breaking loose again."

"Then you'll forgive the way I've treated you?"

"Not half what I deserved. It's done me a world of good—teaching me a little self-control. Just to show you—if Mr. Jessup's arm had been all right, I'd have broken out again. I'd have given your father the chance to carry out his promise of using his irons."

"O-o-h! But now?"

"That's why I worked so hard. Nothing like digging in, tooth and toenail, to keep from flying off the handle. You see, I couldn't run away."

Jessup had been watching the girl and Decatur with a quiet smile on his handsome face and a faraway look in his brown eyes.

"Thanks to Miss Hope, my arm is now

in good shape," he remarked. "You are welcome to start something whenever you please."

The open taunt only drew a good-natured rejoinder from Decatur: "Thanks to Miss Hope, I've no longer any wish to try her father's irons. And I'm learning the value of discipline."

The mate waved toward the poop-ladder. "You may go forward, now. Miss Hope, we were talking about the poets of New England."

"Mr. Decatur's watch is below," remarked the girl with gracious tact. "Perhaps he will join us, Mr. Jessup. You are both men of culture. I believe you should be friends."

With impulsive readiness, Decatur thrust out his hand. Jessup clasped it heartily; in fact, more heartily than Decatur relished, for the mate's grasp almost crushed his fingers.

Hope saw only the bland smile of Jessup's rather thin lips and the dilated pupils of his eyes.

"I am so glad," she said. "Now we shall be a trio of friends. That will add so much variety to the talk. Mr. Decatur, who are your favorite poets? Mr. Jessup prefers Emerson and Browning. You'll think I'm a strange girl. What I like most are poems of the sea and the north. Think of those old Norse vikings—the way they cruised about icy seas in their open boats!"

Decatur glowed back at the enthused girl. "You're of that blond viking stock and reared in the polar pack. I'm only a landsman, but—"

"But you, too, are of seafaring stock," she broke in. "Beyond doubt you're descended from Stephen Decatur—perhaps also from Commodore Barry."

"Never thought much about it before this voyage. But now—"

"Now you feel it—you know it!" cried Hope, her eyes sparkling like fathomless blue water. "The tang of salt is in your blood. You're the son of forefathers who went down to the sea in ships and learned the wonders of great waters!"

The smiling face of the young man sobered.

"I went down—and the sea bore me up. You asked me to tell you my favorite poets. Of late they've been cabaret rimesters. Now the one poet who appeals to me is Henley. You may remember this one of his:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."

Before Decatur had quoted half of Henley's wonderful poem, Jessup's face began to cloud with annoyance. At the last line his impatience drove him to disregard Hope's parting lips.

"Don't say you like that heathen thing," he exclaimed. "There's no true religion in it from first to last."

"But the braveness of it—the courage!" cried Hope.

Decatur nodded gravely. "It sure helps one to buck up—when he has gone adrift in the—universe."

"Even a totally dismantled craft need not go adrift as a derelict," murmured Hope. "Many a half-foundered ship has worked safe to port with a jury rig."

"Not with compass and rudder lost," put in Jessup.

"But one may find a new rudder and compass," said Decatur, his eyes on the delicately lovely face of the girl. "I have faith in life and hope for the future."

If she sensed his audacious play upon her name, there was no drooping of her long lashes or tinting of the pale cheeks to indicate her feeling. Her candid eyes looked meaningly from him to Jessup and back again as she replied:

"Faith, hope, and charity—but the greatest of these is charity. I wish my friends to be real friends to each other."

"You saw me shake hands, Miss Hope," said Jessup with quiet finality of tone.

"I should say we did!" muttered Decatur, his mouth twisted in a rueful smile. He turned his shoulder on the mate, and spoke with eager vivacity: "I say, Miss Hope, why d'you always stick to the

quarter-deck? I've never seen you forward, except when your father piloted the bark past the slide."

"Miss Converse has her dignity to consider," interposed Jessup.

Hope smiled and shook her golden head with sudden childlike animation.

"But I'm not an officer, Mr. Jessup. I used to scramble all over the blessed old ship, fore and aft, below and aloft. Now that we're out of the heat, I'm beginning to feel the need of more exercise. If you'll excuse me, I'll go forward and have a look at Mr. Decatur's catch."

The mate touched his cap and sauntered aft to the taffrail. But as he curved behind the steersman he paused to watch Hope and Decatur racing each other toward the bows. The pupils of his brown eyes dilated, and he crushed one of his hands in the other as he had squeezed Decatur's fingers.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Love of Land

by

Raymond S. Spears

TIMOTHY BRENN owned a thousand acres of land in Old Lake Town. A wise geologist had thus named the town, because he said a million years ago that region had been the miles-wide beach of a vast inland sea, dammed by a wall of ice where the St. Lawrence flows now, and the overflow running out into what is now the Mohawk Valley.

Of that all-stuff-and-nonsense Tim Brenn knew the story, but he believed it not at all.

When Tim was a boy, over the modern seas, he had dreamed of the day when he could own a thousand acres of land. That was to him the great hope of life. He loved the ground he walked upon; he loved the grass that grew on the ground; he could look at a peat bog all day long, and at dusk there would rise in his throat the feeling that followed the thought that over yonder was a country where a man might earn good wages and buy land—cheap.

All he wanted, or hoped, was just to own land and be a poor farmer. Of more than that he never thought.

So Tim had crossed the ocean, two days a stowaway, seven days a fireman in the stoke-hole, two days in detention, and two hours swimming in the black night to the Happy Land about which he had dreamed.

A farmer had hired him, wet as he was, to help unload a wagon of produce and thence to go out to work on a truck garden. He liked the work well enough, and the food much better; but at the table one

night, a year later, he had heard the farmer say that up north in Old Lake Town a man could buy land at tax sales for ten or twenty cents an acre.

Within the month Tim was up north in Old Lake Town, where he learned with his own ears that the acres around him were really for sale at ten to twenty cents an acre, the amount of back taxes.

Tim had saved money from his wages. He now had a hundred dollars. He learned the formula for bidding in lands at tax sales, and he selected some ground so poverty stricken, so bare, so yellow with sand and black with moss that there were no competitors against him, and he bought a thousand acres of land—a so-called mile-square lot, the mile being so liberal by the measuring of old-time surveys that Tim Brenn had obtained his thousand acres for ninety dollars.

"And that's eighty-nine dollars and ninety-eight cents more than it's worth!" an Old Lake townsman assured the wildly joyous Tim Brenn, who had in little more than a year realized an ambition which had burned with undying brightness through a hundred generations of his family, more or less.

"You can't raise a thing on it!" another neighbor told the foreign young man, whose brogue was richer, by far, than the soil of his farm.

"What?" Tim cried. "Look 't the illigant berry-bushes!"

"It's good for nothing but briers," the native retorted.

"Ah—but there's a thousand acres of it!" Tim laughed. "A man could live on a thousand acres of bare rock—"

"That's what you've got—bare rock, broken up into small pieces."

"It 'll wor-rk wid a rake!" Tim laughed again.

Countless people had moved out of Old Lake Town as soon as the timber was all cut away. One of the abandoned houses was on the thousand acres—a barn-frame, two-story house which had cost $1,800 to build. Paint and a few panes of glass renewed its good looks and Tim moved his valise and extra shoes into it. He built him a bunk of poles from a clump of second growth, and covered it with grass that grew in thin tufts on the beds of moss.

People wondered how he lived. He caught trout from the white-sand brook in the gully near the house; he picked and dried blackberries and raspberries; he set some cunning poachers' traps and caught rabbits and many grouse; he snared woodchucks; he raised a field of potatoes—which grew strong and healthy in the sand, enriched by dead moss.

Tim Brenn hardly stirred from his thousand acres. He marked its corners and lines, and he loved the land with the fiery ardor that many a man wastes upon non-essentials—upon himself, for example. He cut and trimmed out the blackberry patches and the raspberry patches, and tamed the wild briers, and make a fruit farm of it—a hundred acres of berries which in season kept Brenn picking from before dawn till late in the night, by moonlight, to save them. He sold those berries by the hundred quarts, and in two years he had an income that satisfied his idea of what a landed proprietor should have.

He went up and down his acres, restlessly. He stirred up the thin soil around little evergreen seedlings which he found sprouting among the wintergreen-berry vines, and contesting with the trailing moss for supremacy. He trimmed and resoiled the tiny, spindling maples and beeches which were wrangling with briers for the food in the panic soil. Where sapling trees were so crowded that some would inevitably have starved to death, he dug the tangle up by the roots, tenderly unsnarled the frantic rootlets, and replanted them all, each in a bit of the ample room that he could find out on the mossy barrens where the very hoofs of wild deer, in passing, cut through and exposed the yellow sand.

Tim Brenn was a man of strong notions. He believed in attending to his own affairs. When a neighbor's cattle came wandering over the unfenced line, he went forth with a mighty *shillalah* and drove them forth, with their tails straight in the air. He would follow the herd to the neighbor's and explain with great politeness that the cattle ate the leaves from his trees and made cuds of the precious twigs.

The neighbors protested in vain that the trees were scrubs and that they were not worth saving, and as Tim had no cattle of his own it was a shame to let his fields lie waste as they were.

Tim Brenn listened to the insults to his beautiful land and its products with the illest kind of patience. He used his fists upon the people who said that his thousand acres of land were without value. People called him a mad Irishman for his love of his land and all its beautiful features, even to the moss—yea, and even to the yellow sand which a man could not pick up and hold in his hand for the wind and the slipperyness of it.

Tim toiled on the land continuously. Nothing ever came between him and his precious thousand acres. In order that he might claim the land wholly as his own, and that it might not reject him in any extremity, he went down to Willett, the County Court, and took out his naturalization papers. When the judge, in his august robes, questioned him about his intent and probed the soul of him, the fervor of Timothy Brenn's allegiance to the soil of this, his adopted land, startled the judge and the idlers in the court, who had given little thought to the greater aspects of the naturalization business, counting only the votes it made. They found themselves wondering whether to laugh at the bristling man from Old Lake Town, or whether to blow their noses—and they began with one and ended with the other, for there was that in Tim Brenn's manner that left no man in doubt on second thought.

So Tim Brenn's naturalization entered into the traditions of that big, red, ugly building of a court, and when the politicians went over the lists of names of Republicans and Democrats in Old Lake Town, they always pointed at Tim Brenn's name and laughed, for he belonged to no party, but stormed down to the political doings and asked absurd questions about taxes, which in his case were two cents an acre and yet amounted to twenty dollars, since he had so many useless patches of sand, and if it hadn't been for the berry bushes both Tim and the crows would have starved.

Tim Brenn worked long hours every day. No sooner was the frost out of the ground than he was poking sprouted beechnuts into holes in the thin sod, planting them tenderly. He had found several butternut-trees, all gnarled and decaying, down the creek in a bit of a flat and beside a marsh. From around these trees he gathered many tiny sprouts and planted them here and there, in any spot where the soil looked as though a butternut would enjoy it and thrive on it.

One day a neighbor, knowing Tim liked a tree, brought him some pine seedlings from down the road, and another man gave him a peck of acorns, just for the fun of seeing Tim plant them with all the care he could bestow upon them—more lovingly than he put two-eyed bits of clean, large potatoes into the ground.

All Tim's neighbors, including those who did not like his independence, his fiery defence of his rights against vagrant animals, or his preaching down at the polls, when he talked of the glory of being a free and ruling American citizen, watched the man's acres with laughing eyes and jeers which they expressed among themselves but never twice to Tim himself—for Tim effectually defended his acres against any slur or imprecation. His reputation had become established when he took a big, burly logger and made him eat of the yellow sand to prove it was filling, at any rate, when the logger had uttered a grievous insult as to the value of the land and jeered its meagerness of quality.

They lived there, where they saw the Brenn place daily. They could not detect any sign of change as a result of all the toil which Tim put upon the thousand acres. Tim himself, loving the land with all his heart, sometimes mocked his own dreams. Then he would say to himself that a Banshee must be wearing out the moss, walking on it.

But when he had been performing his labor of love for ten years, a spring arrived when the Mile Square Lot seemed suddenly to blossom up, like some strange kind of a great flower-bed. The blackberry patches were all trimmed out and

hoed evenly. There were many acres of raspberries, as even as potatoes hilled up. More remarkable than the rest were the clumps of trees. They seemed suddenly to rear their canopy above the meager soil, as though they, too, loved it. The brook began to show signs of being larger. Two or three permanent springs boiled up in sand where there had formerly been only wet-weather pools. Flowers of many wild sorts sprang up and blossomed—and Tim looked at them in wonder.

"Sure, darlings, I never planted *you!*" he would declare. "As I live, you have come to surprise me— Ah—arragh! Here's a new one, the name of which I do not know, but under the dark leaves I find small bells of flowers— Yis! I have some fine visitors— And you— Oh, my darling of a red-jacketed bird! Will you not stay with me this summer? You are wilcome to anny tree you would have— And you, blueback! Come on, now! I shall make you a little cabin to live in, eh? And you, big yellow-winged feller? What would you have me to do, I say, to make you at home—eh?"

Tim was careful what rabbits he ate, and what woodchucks he hunted from their holes. By the grace of his love for his land, and all its products, he coaxed a thousand birds to stay, that spring, within singing distance of his garden, where he hoed, or his buckwheat field, where he planted with a seeder hired from a neighbor—team and all.

He had toiled, not thinking of the greatness of his task. He had worked upon every one of his acres. He knew ten thousand little trees by name, and he called them his little children. It was so with the birds and the potato hills—for he would put in ten or twenty different kinds of potatoes each year, and in that way he had developed new kinds of potatoes of his own, which he sold down below, in Poland, or Cold Brook, or, as happened after a while, by the carload for places farther away.

He had so much to do with his own hands, taking care of the thousands acres, that he had to bring in his neighbors' boys to help him. No boy that was cruel to any tree or to the nestlings of a bird, or who trapped woodchucks wantonly could work for him. To each boy he gave a task according to the boy's nature—and people marveled at his understanding of boy nature. To the girls he gave good wages, and they picked his berries, and put them into their baskets.

He did so well that people at length began to say that he was a mighty sharp Irishman, and that he had known all along what he was about. He was just fooling everybody when he said he loved that bright yellow sand, which no one else in the world ever had thought of working with love and tender care, and that he was pretending merely to stir it up a little—not expecting anything of it!

"But, I tell you, I did expect the sand to treat me as well as I treated it!" Tim declared, sharply. "And as for the trees—"

Tim looked at his trees with tears in his eyes. Truly he had loved them, and he had given them all the care that his fifteen-hour days of labor would permit. He had worked among the weaklings and the starvelings and the cripples. He had taken them out of their desperate positions and planted them where the sun could shine on them and the rain gather around their roots, so they gathered strength, and, Tim said, heart, to grow and spread their eager twigs up flapping with widening leaves.

Now, all of a sudden, the thousand barren acres flared up alive with beautiful, symmetrical trees, with generous shade upon the ground and ten thousand forks in which birds built their nests, and countless banks where woodchucks dug their holes and rabbits crouched under the thickety shrubs.

On all sides of the Brenn Mile Square Lot people wondered at the transformation of that culled waste of sand. Some of them counted it luck, and wished that they were as lucky. Others came visiting, and watched Brenn at his daily tasks, heard him cautioning the boys and girls to take care of this little hemlock sproutling, that bit of hazel shrub, stopping them all in their work to look, with him, at some gay bird in a wing-frolic in the air.

Tim Brenn looked with awe upon his own handiwork. He could not quite believe that his love of plain, yellow sand could perform such a wonder as he now saw—the aggregate of his million little deeds of love and reverence, helpfulness for the starved creatures of his barren acres seemed to have been multiplied by a reward in millions of friendly things. He would find a sturdy, gnarly, wrist-large root sprawling out from some young tree trunk, where he remembered having tenderly laid down a thin, weakly strand of rootlet.

When he saw such things, his heart thrilled with the joy of it. It was as though all the living things of his thousand acres were filled with gratitude to him; profiting, in his name, for his kindness.

The sand plains of Old Lake Town were transformed. They were, on Brenn's Mile Square Lot, blooming and blossoming. Not without envy did his neighbors regard the fruits of his love and toil. When Tim Brenn, the mad Irishman, had driven their cattle off from his barren wastes they could laugh; but when his acres blossomed and called forth their envy, it was found that his *shillalah* had left dents in the mean souls of those who had sought to impose upon him and his right to love and care for his thousand acres—in which he alone saw so much to love.

Tim Brenn called himself a poor farmer, but many hated him because he was rich. He had made money where nearly all his neighbors had failed. He had held his head high, when he should, according to nature, have been bent by his burdens and unhappy in his sufferings. There were many who felt that the head of Tim Brenn should be bowed down like the heads of his neighbors, and among them was a man with whom to think was to do.

His opportunity came. Tim found that some fiend had stepped into a nestful of eggs of a beautiful ruffed grouse out in the corner of his land, beside a leaning stump, and that some one was killing his precious rabbits; and one night a rifle shot in the gloom took him hot-haste to where he found a fine buck deer with velvet horns wallowing in its own blood.

Then Tim had sallied forth, with club and fist, successfully to preserve his land from raiding. Finally all of them had been obliged to indulge him in his whims, and for a long time, when it had been worth no one's while to dispute with him as to the ownership of the wild game and fish which grew and lived on the Thousand Acres, he had enjoyed peace. But now that there were rabbits in every bush, partridges in every clump of trees, and deer which lived at their ease, sometimes sampling Tim's own lettuce just behind his house in his home garden, an uneasiness grew up in the relations of Tim and his neighbors, and he felt that a crisis had arrived when a man had again taken the life of one of those fine deer.

It was a crime—a crime against Tim Brenn, and a crime against the law of the State. There were thousands of acres on all sides of him—lands that were like what his own had been. Now those lands were still lean and scraggly, where the crows almost starved. On his own land there was plenty—a wonderful plenty. Tim himself would have found difficulty in explaining just how the miracle had been wrought.

People came to his place to look at it. They asked him what fertilizers he used, and what methods of cultivation he had adopted. The hundreds of acres of his upspringing trees attracted the attention of the Government, and men came with great callipers and measured the trunks, and figured the heights, and scratched their chins and pulled their ears, trying to get at the science of it, Tim denying that there was any science, and searching for words to express the feelings in his heart and the flaming joy in his head—for he would gladly have shared his secret with any and all, if only he could have found the words to put it in.

From the tenth year of his ownership, Tim Brenn became more and more conspicuous. He protested, in his fiery kind of modesty, against the people who came a long way in their automobiles to become acquainted with him. He had done nothing; he was a poor sand-plains farmer.

He had much work to attend to; so much that he had to pour out his money into the hands of all his neighbors' children, so be it that the children were kind to his briers and shrubs, and did not disturb the birds in their nests with unkindly ways.

Tim Brenn's place loomed more and more wonderful in the landscape. The brightness of its trees, the glorious spread of their limbs, were conspicuous, compared even with the woodlots that were growing up in wild struggle on neighboring places. But those woodlots were not entirely uncared for. Boys and girls who had come to work for Tim Brenn grew older, and they came into possession of some of that raw, bare land. They did on their own acres what Tim was doing on his. Tim would come over and help them with the work, and tell them the things that he had done. It meant hours and hours—days—years of toil, but Tim Brenn had proved the sweetness of it. Tim Brenn had proved the reward of faithfulness and loving care and ardent effort. His own land, with its glorious life springing up, was like a bird song in the dawn—some one said. One could really hear Tim Brenn's place in the spring, so noisy were the protected birds.

But some one began to raid and poach through Tim's woods and around his bushes. He hunted with a little rifle, which was noiseless, and dead feathers and scattered hair told the story of tragedies. Then one day Tim caught a genuine bad man killing young grouse, no larger than robins—and laughing at the sport. This man was a hotel keeper, who said he must train his dogs in the summer, killing birds illegally, to have the dogs in good condition for fall hunting.

Tim, possessed by fury, pounded the flat face of the man till it was saucerwise, and kicked him over the line into the public highway.

Ged Starvett was the hotel keeper's name, and he set himself to the task of obtaining adequate revenge for Tim's assault. He waited and watched for his chance. All summer long, for years, he waited, while others grew used to Tim's prosperity and many gladly recognized that it helped them all in wages in berry time, in gathering nuts and generously shared meat and crops. But Ged Starvett waited with hate in his heart for seven years to revenge the broken nose which Tim had flattened upon his face—then came his chance!

All the beach of that Old Lake—dry these million years—was parched and seered. The leaves fell early from the trees that autumn. They lay upon the ground like thin, dry shavings, in windrows and drifts, fluttering and heaving in every breath of wind.

Starvett's opportunity had come, indeed! At first he had told around among his friends about how he would get even, but now he had kept silent. He rode from his squalid little tavern in his new automobile, and as a morning wind out of the west began to blow he tossed gasolene-soaked cotton waste on fire into the dead brush lands west of Tim Brenn's line.

Behind him, thin blue smoke poured up into the clear blue sky. Bursts of yellow smoke ensued, with occasional puffs of black.

The wind blew arrow-heads of flame through the splinter-dry brush and briers straight at Tim Brenn's thousand acres. The fires marched till every one of them linked up with the others, on the right and left flanks. Then, like a devastating army, the red tongues jumped from stalk to stalk, and the blue smoke, running low about the ground, swept through the limbs of Tim Brenn's woods, over his tamed briers and among his plantations till it smote his nostrils, where he was engaged in gathering butternuts with some neighbors' children—with whom he divided equally—along the marshy pond on a fork of his brook.

Tim Brenn ran up to a knoll top to look. He saw the smoke, he smelt the fire, and he heard its distant roar. Tim Brenn was a brave man. He feared no one. He could have looked his God fearlessly in the face and said:

"I have made my mistakes—but with a clean heart, Lord!"

Now the color left his cheeks, and as he saw his beloved grouse in wild flight before the fire he began to sob. Here was

an enemy with whom he could not cope. He and the little children who had worked with him could not go and fight *that* devastating flame. The glory of his Mile Square was its wandering points and clumps and lines of trees, its wild orchards, its tall dry grass and orderly briers. Now the fire was advancing upon the whole west line—the more than a mile of line!

Ged Starvett, his mischief accomplished, rode on up into Hillwart Town, and stopped at a clean little hotel there, where, drinking over the bar, he told the bartender-proprietor that he had noticed a fire working through the briers and second growth toward Tim Brenn's place.

"What!" Jack Condin, the bartender, exclaimed. "Did you put it out?"

"It was going too hard for me!" Ged shook his head, winking.

The bartender stepped to the door and looked down the plains down the long road. There, eight miles distant, he could see the Tim Brenn place, like a square ripened wheat field in a land of sand, the color of bleached grass and rusty patches of moss. To the westward from Tim's place, as Ged had said, Jack could see smoke rolling up and toward the beautiful "park."

Without a word, Jack Condin stepped to the telephone and rang the whole party line with a long, wavering alarm.

"Hello, everybody!" he called into the telephone.

A chorus of voices, male and female, answered.

"Be still!" Jack ordered, "Tim Brenn's place is threatened by forest fire. Everybody git down there like hell!"

"What—fire!" some one exclaimed. "Woods afire— Tim's place afire?"

"All right!" a chorus shouted in return. Three minutes later a little black automobile, bumping and bounding, passed the Hillwart hotel, with three men in it, and two of them held the shining spoons of shovels in the sunshine, and the third one was driving. Another minute, and a big red car drove by, fifty miles an hour, with seven or eight men hanging onto it. Ged Starvett swore as he heard the milk pails rattling and ringing in the tonneau. In fifteen minutes, seven automobiles from up the line went down the road, and then Old Dick Baxter rumbled by in the dust, whipping his big team of horses into a lathering trot, the axes, peaveys, shovels and pails rattling in his wagon box.

Jack, who had been out to the barn, took a pair of field glasses and looked down the slope of the mountain ridge. He could see thirty miles of public highways from where he stood. He saw, with satisfaction, that little dust clouds of hurrying vehicles were visible on every road.

"Come, Ged!" he turned to the visitor. "Get a move on! We got to go and help!"

"Not by a damn sight!" Ged retorted. "After what Tim Brenn did to my nose!"

"You will so!" Jack said. "I'm fire-warden of this town, and if you don't take me down to help fight—"

Ged laughed in Jack's face, but Jack smote the laugh on the false teeth, and turning the hotel keeper over to his wife to guard, a prisoner, Jack requisitioned the man's automobile, and raced to do his own duty in the matter of the fire that threatened Tim Brenn's show place of the whole country—having sent calls to all available men.

He stopped here and there, and took on plows—five of them—and other tools, with scant regard for the beauty of the polish on Ged Starvett's automobile. He carried those plows down to the fighting line, and he found that already ten plows were turning over the briers and the patches of moss, a hundred yards from Tim Brenn's line, and well ahead of the running flames—horses were prancing and even automobiles were turning furrows at the rate of four miles an hour per plow.

Alone, Tim Breen had made the beautiful place what it was. It represented more than twenty years of toil. The man felt old at that moment, when he realized the import of that smoke and flame—he, whose spirit had kept young, aged visibly. Wrinkles settle upon his cheeks and films spread over his eyes. Gray was in his hair—though it showed but little in that tawny mop.

The dozen boys and girls who had come

by special invitation to harvest the butternuts ran up to his side and crowded around him. They caught his hands, his suspenders, his sleeves. One brave boy of action shouted:

"Come on, Father Tim—we'll fight it!"

"Bless yer heart, me boy!" Tim choked. "I'll not let you childer go into that hell!"

But four boys leaped away from Tim, eluding his jump to stop them, and raced toward that army of flame—refusing to heed Tim's shouts and cries. They would not turn back. Tim could do nothing. His strength, at the peril of his darlings, deserted him. He told the other children to go home, and he went to his house, in the midst of the young trees, and closed the doors and windows. He drew down the shades, and sat in his own little den of a room, where he had stored many of the pictures people had given him, and where he had stacked the reports and documents which Congressmen and State Senators and Departments of Agriculture had sent him, telling him how to nurture spruce trees for pulp, and hardwood trees for furniture, and wild cherry for ornamental woods. As though Tim would let any man's ax touch any tree of his!

So Tim sat there, his head bowed with a great grief. He had toiled through the years, and he had been gifted with a great success. He had a beautiful estate now, and his wealth could not be measured by any kind of figures graced by a money-sign caption.

"I had better die than live to see my darling wild childer burned! I'll not witness it. I'll die where I am!" he said to himself.

So he sat there, knowing neither hunger, nor thirst, nor the passing of time—only a great sorrow, all that morning, and over the noon, and into the afternoon. The minutes were laggard, and there was no clock to tell him what the hour was. He did not know, nor care. He reckoned the minutes by seconds, though he did not know that. Fire was coming to him, only too fast. He could feel the heat of it—he could smell the smoke of it.

So he, alone, waited inactive while the flames threatened Tim Brenn's place—never dreaming that he had conquered a more barren soil than his thousand acres of sand, and that the country side had flowered into friendship for him as great as his worth to them, and that at that time, because they loved the place Tim had made and the man who had made it, hundreds of men had come to help, with scores of teams, and all the tools that were needed.

Jack Condin had only to rough-crew organize his men. He sent them in, each gang with a little boss, with their axes, shovels, teams, automobiles, milk cans full of water, pails and peaveys. They tore a swath along the front of Tim Brenn's Mile-Square Lot, first three furrows wide, and then ten; then, as hundreds of men sweated and horses hauled, fifty feet wide.

Before noon there were three hundred men on that fire line, and they did not wait for the fire to come to them. As reinforcements arrived, they went to meet it. They patrolled all of Tim Brenn's near line, to make sure that no spark set it aflame behind their trenches. They brought hundreds of barrels of water in milk cans, which they poured out in pailsfull, wetting down the leaves that had been so dry that a bit of glass bottle might have started a fire.

"We can't let it get away from us!" Jack cried. "We got to save this place—and Lord help the man who threw down that cotton waste!"—for by this time the charred origin of the fire had been found.

While they worked, men talked. One late comer told of seeing Ged driving up the back road, before the fire began. Another reported seeing a pile of cotton waste in Ged's automobile. Jack, himself, found an empty gasolene can in the car he had requisitioned. Some shreds of waste established a line of evidence.

Jack started to take the names of the fire fighters, to have them paid by the State, county and property owners. A man's voice rose in protest.

"We did this for Tim Brenn, Jack, and there's no charge by me for it! Tim's a good feller!"

"Where is he?" some one asked. "I've not seen him to-day."

"Hey— Tim— Where's Tim?" a shout went up.

Tim was nowhere around. When it was ascertained that Tim had not been on the firing-line, a fear smote the hearts of the men who had been saving Tim's place. The man's love for it was known by all now, and it was well understood, too, and at last shared by many, especially the young people who had helped him about the work.

"We better go find him—right away, boys," Jack said, in a low voice.

The fire no longer need other attention than a little watching. A boy, smoky and black with streaks, spoke up.

"When I started," the boy said, "I seen Tim goin' for the house."

The men headed for Tim Brenn's house. They followed the winding paths Tim had cut through the timber and the fields. They swarmed up to the pretty building. They saw, with concern, that the green window shades were all drawn down. They hesitated doubtfully, and whispered as they gathered in front of the porch, taking good care not to tread on the flower gardens, nor trample among the wayward bushes.

Jack, at last, walked up the front steps and across the porch. He knocked on the front door, softly. Then with greater force. There was no answer. He tried the door and found it unlocked, and so he entered, taking off his hat. He walked softly; a doctor from down the valley scurried up to join him.

They entered the darkened den, and there sat Tim with his head on his hands. He did not look up. The doctor touched his head.

"Hello, Tim!" Jack said.

Tim looked up.

"Good day, b'ys," he whispered, choking, "I'll not go wid ye!"

"How goes it?" Jack continued, ignoring Tim's remark.

"Arragh! Arragh!" Tim cried. "But be gone, boys—I smell the smoke—and the fire—"

"Yes, you're right!" Jack exclaimed. "It's in my sweater, and it's in my hair!"

"Eh—eh?" the maker of many kinds of garden asked, a lightlike frightened hope appearing in his eyes.

"Yes—the boys have come— They're a bit thirsty, Tim—and we would like a drink out of your spring."

"A drink!" Tim whispered. "Tell me—the fire?"

"There is no fire," Jack laughed.

"What—what? No fire?"

Tim threw up the window shade and looked toward the west. He saw a serene garden of trees, briers, ferns—and above them a clear blue sky, with only two or three distant white pillars of smoke.

Tim turned and looked at Jack.

"It's thrue!" he whispered. "There is no fire— How came it so?"

"Come with me, Tim!" Jack crooked his finger, and the two men led Tim to the front porch, and at sight of Tim a cheer burst up from the smoked throats of more than three hundred men—an army which stood there with shovels and axes and pails waving in the air.

"You came to save me woods!" Tim choked. "For me—the selfish old man that I am! You came to save them for me!"

"Not on your life!" Dr. Mauray patted the man on the shoulder. "Not for you—no, sir! We were working for ourselves—every one of us! Don't give us a credit we do not deserve. We could not let your place burn up, Tim, because it belongs to all of us—"

"Arragh! Arragh!" Tim exclaimed. "You spalpeens to tell me that— But I have been selfish— And Jack said you were thirsty. There's a spring—I have no better to offer you— I thank you—I thank you, b'ys!"

Tim broke down then. He could not say the things that were in his heart, any more than he had ever been able to say them. There were so many more in his heart that he had never had there before, that he said, whimsically, that he feared he would forever be speechless now. Then, in the moment of deep, good feeling, some one mentioned that Ged Starvett had fired the brush out of revenge, because Tim had, with a rough hand, protected the birds and wild life.

"I've got him a prisoner up to my hotel!" Jack Condin declared incautiously.

"We'll shoot the whelp!" some one shouted, and the little army of fire-fighters on the instant became a blood-thirsty mob. Rage showed on every countenance, and the very tense-weaving of the crowd was ominous, hateful, like the sinuous alertness of a snake.

"Hold on, b'ys!" Tim shouted. "We'll do nothing of that kind! I'll not stand for that— The law—yes! But—"

"He wasn't hittin' you alone, Tim!" some one cried.

"Yis— Thrue for it— But we must let those that are not here have their say, too, before a grand jury and before a petit jury!"

An uncertain growl followed.

"You'll do this one little thing more for me, b'ys?" Tim smiled upon them. "You'll not be spoilin' a good day's work, messin' it all up now, will you?"

Some one laughed. Tim, who had loved and fought and toiled and then suffered a day of supreme anguish was pleading with them, his face all alight and aglow—he was begging them not to spoil his happiness now by making him remember with his thankfulness that a bad man had suffered unfairly—more than the law allowed.

"All right, Tim!" a voice spoke from the crowd, and then some one said, "Well, I got to go home and milk!"

In three minutes the crowd had dispersed and vanished. One small boy remained. His face was marked with black carbon, and he smelled of smoke. His eyes were red and his hands streaked with brier scratches and with tears that had been wiped away.

"Shall we come in the morning, and pick the butternuts?" the boy asked eagerly.

"Ah—Arragh—my boy! Bless you—for wanting to come again!" Tim choked, and then he dropped on his knees, and when the boy saw Tim was praying, he, too, stepped softly behind him and went home through the beautiful young woods, all alive with lingering migrant birds, which seemed reluctant to bid good-by to the other creatures which would remain there during the winter that was approaching.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

"WHOM THE GODS LOVED"

BY ANNE O'HAGAN

MORE still she lies than hilltop snows
When winds are dead,
When motionless the wide white moon
Hangs overhead.

No colder breeze had ever blown
To chill her heart
Than shakes from April's close-set boughs
Pink buds apart.

She knew no dust-parched August day,
No gray, slant gale.
Ah, blest, whose steps stray soft to June
And at June fail!

More still than snows now lies she here
Where seasons cease,
Nor longs for gladness evermore—
White-wrapped in peace!

The Law's Outlaw

by Ethel and James Dorrance

Authors of "Who Knows?" "The Whitewashed Wall," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD.

IN external appearance, there was nothing to distinguish the "Emporium" of Rodney Hicks from the usual mountain store of the Sierras. To an original structure of logs two wings had been added, one of rough boards, one of slabs deserted by a traveling sawmill. It is doubtful whether the windows had been washed since the frames had been nailed into place; at least, the accumulation of dust and cobwebs argued that conclusion. There was more excuse for their lack of mercantile display; few ever passed Hicks's place without entering, others would scarcely have been attracted by any feature of the meager stock which the proprietor might have exhibited.

"Hawk's Nest Emporium" was the full title upon the false front of the central structure, done after the crude art of some itinerant sign-painter. Smaller lettering amplified this: "Groceries—Dry Goods—Hardware—Soft Stuff." The last innocent-sounding item was the most flagrant thing about the sign, for the "stuff" dispensed in the back room of the store was as "hard" as ever came from still or vat. Rodney Hicks was as cautious toward the outside world as he was free toward those who were "known." He no more desired controversy with State or Federal excise officials than he fancied paying license fees.

Over the door of the rough-board wing, which was Mother Hicks's part of the establishment, another sign proclaimed: "Eats and Sleeps for Men and Beast." Mrs. Hicks, fat, freckled, red-headed, was a good mother and no indifferent cook, as many a scoundrel "on the dodge" was willing to testify.

Such was the center around which the checkered lives of the Nesters were wont to gravitate. The region was wild and desolate, yet served to support quite a colony of men who, for various reasons, were safer there than elsewhere, some of them attended by faithful wives and fast-increasing broods of children. They played at ranching in the secluded flats where the recession of hills had left patches of arable land. They toyed with placer mining on the bars of the straggling creeks. And they kept up a pretense of stock-raising, although most of the increase to their herds came of skilful rustling from the foothill ranges.

But over the region and its inhabitants hung the ominous pall of advancing civilization. All knew that it was only a question of time until the law would take them in hand and insist on their full observance of its statutes. This realization served to bring them together in closer brotherhood, so that warning of the approach of strangers was swift and accurate.

This Saturday afternoon Rodney Hicks sat in a half-doze under the shade-throwing overhang. No business could be expected until the sun had dipped into the west, when

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for August 18.

his usual customers would drift in from several directions, for the evening of the last day of the week was usually a large one at the heart of this one-house " city."

High overhead, a buzzard was playing butterfly in the sunshine. Across the road, in a clump of pines, several squirrels were nutting. In the empty corral, a short distance beyond the store, Carey Tait was arguing vociferously with a fellow mountaineer regarding the quantity of tail required for the kite which Sammy, the storekeeper's ten-year-old son, was trying to fly. The father's heavy under-lip sagged in a snag-toothed smile as he heard Tait's noisy declaration that he guessed he was boy enough inside to know what a kite needed.

The store-keeper's alert ears detected the sound of hoofs, of a horse galloping at speed from the pass which gave access to the valley. His first glance was toward the improvised signal-station at a ranch-house three miles away, which commanded a view of the winding trail into the Nest. Seeing no sign of the flag which would have been raised were strangers approaching, he felt reassured. Evidently some one of the " bunch " was arriving early.

Yet, to make certain, he slouched into the road and stared in the direction of the approach. His first sight of the rider was not convincing, for it carried no recognition. He whistled a signal of alarm to the corral.

Carey Tait hastened into hiding in the barn, while the other mountain man, who was not particularly " on the dodge," joined Hicks in front of the store. Sammy remained in the corral with the kite, which still refused to fly.

From the shade of the overhang Tait and the man who had hurried from the corral watched the road as the horseman approached, riding with an open, above-board air that somewhat disarmed any apprehension they might have felt for Tait or the peace of the prospective evening gathering.

At two hundred yards, the proprietor made a surprising discovery. " Well, bust me if that ain't Charley Easton!"

" That sure is his horse, come you to speak of it," agreed the mountaineer. " Who'd think he'd have the nerve to—"

" He's always been thataway since I've know him," interrupted Hicks. " Up and doing the unexpected when you'd least expect it."

The Nester turned to stare at a poster which was tacked on the outer wall of the store near the door. As if in salute, his right hand went to the butt of a revolver, decorated in mother-of-pearl. His expression sharpened, and into his whitish-gray eyes came a vulpine look.

Neither look nor movement was lost on Rodney Hicks, and the tone in which he next spoke expressed frank resentment.

" Forget it, you fool! You don't want to try for that thousand."

The man of the hills removed his hand from the vicinity of his revolver. Both were silent until the arrival drew up in the shade of the clump of pines, slipped from the saddle, dropped the reins over his horse's neck and strode across the road.

" Greetings, Easton — and welcome!" cried Hicks, with all the cheer of face and voice that should accompany such words.

" How do, Hicks," came the somewhat formal return, followed by a nod for the proprietor's companion.

" Been some time since you favored the Nest with a visit. Can't say as I was expecting you just now."

" Never can tell."

In mounting to the porch, Easton suddenly stopped. His eye had fallen upon the placard tacked beside the door. He stared at it a moment, then, slowly, and with due emphasis, began to read the announcement set forth in the most emphatic type found among the job fonts of the Pyramid City *Sphinx*:

"$1,000 REWARD

for the Capture of

CHARLES EASTON

Dead or Alive.

" The supervisors of Pyramid County offer above reward for said fugitive or his body. He is wanted for the deliberate murder of Sheriff Ethan Ransford at Echo Lake on the 7th inst., and for other crimes.

"WARNING!!!

" Easton, former deputy sheriff, is a crack shot and desperate. He is likely to shoot on sight.

Any one crossing his trail is advised to take no chances."

At the bottom of the poster, in smaller type, was a detailed and none too flattering description of the fugitive. When Easton came to this, he ceased to read aloud.

"If I thought I looked like that," he muttered, with a grin, "I'd be tempted to go and give myself up."

With a sudden, intolerant jerk he tore the poster from its tacks, crumpled the sheet into a ball and threw it into the road.

"That's going a little too strong for safety," he remarked. "A thousand dollars is a hell of a lot of money to offer for the scalp of a poverty-stricken rancher."

Rodney Hicks expanded into a warm, bland smile. "Ten thousand reward wouldn't mean nothing up here in the Nest, my boy."

"Maybe so, but I'm surprised at you for letting it stick on your walls," reproached the county's newest outlaw. "If you tacked up a 'Wanted!' for all your customers who *are* wanted, your whole shack would be turned into a bulletin-board."

"No hard feelings, Charley," the storekeeper responded hastily. "You're welcome as a rain in August. You can stay as long as you like, and you'll get all the warning that's going, just the same as if you'd always belonged. There ain't a hawk in the Nest that's hard enough up to try for blood-money."

"They'd better not try for mine," declared Easton, still resentful. "How came you to post me?"

There was considerable diffidence in Hicks's explanation. It seemed that Pop Atwood with a considerable posse had ridden that way a few days before and had insisted on tacking up the notice. The storekeeper hadn't seen any way of refusing.

"What's more," he continued, "I hadn't any idea you'd flutter along to the Nest. Still, it ain't a bad idea to let our boys know you're wanted. The sheriffing bunch didn't seem to think so, either. You must have had a neat hole-in, for you don't look the least fagged, though they have been riding the county like a forest-fire gone wild the past week."

"I'm fresh as paint," declared Easton, with a grin. "They haven't been near me, and I don't propose that they shall."

The former deputy sheriff had reason to exult. His knowledge of the country and its many hidden trails had stood him in good stead. Neither he nor his horse had suffered, and not once had they been put to it to elude the several posses which the outraged county had set afield. The reward notice for himself, which he had just read and destroyed, held no news for him. Already he had encountered a dozen or more. Indeed, it was the fact that he had been so thoroughly placarded as an outlaw that emboldened him to seek refuge openly in Hawk's Nest. He expressed confidence that the code of the region would not admit of his being handed over to justice, even for the reward offered by the supervisors.

"Nobody up here would take the county's money as a Christmas gift," assured Hicks.

At that moment there strode out of the front door of the store Carey Tait. He had been apprised by Mother Hicks of the identity of the new arrival, and knew that he had nothing to fear from one more "wanted" than he had ever been.

"Hicks is right, Charley," he said cordially. "You're among friends at Hawk's Nest, now that you're one of us."

Thus assured, Easton found a chair and gave close attention while the three Nesters told him as much as they knew about the search that had been made for him. They were agreed, however, that Easton would have to "take a slope." He would never have a chance in court on the charge of slaying a sheriff who had defeated him for the office.

Of course, they would "hide him out" for any reasonable time—glad to—but the killing was of a sort that would not be forgotten. They pointed out that, having made the Nest in safety after the region had been thoroughly searched, he had his choice of getaways—could go south to the Mexican line and cross it, or lose himself in the desert to the eastward.

Easton gave their expert opinion due consideration. When he contended that the desert was not on his map, the three were unanimous in advising Mexico.

"You've got plenty of money," agreed

Hicks, " and that will carry you a long way with the greasers, if you don't let them take it away from you all at once."

" Where did you buy that plenty-money music?" Easton inquired.

Hicks's laugh was fulsome. " The posse spilled it that there were thousands in old man Davison's safe."

" What do they think I had to do with the Davison job?"

" The game's up there, too, Charley. Seems that they had a surgeon up from Los to operate on the old man, and that he got his senses back. He recognized you and your cholo. That's why they put the ' dead and alive ' on you, with the accent on the ' dead.' "

That he also was charged with the robbery of Candlestick Farm was news to Easton. There was no mention of this crime in the posters which he had read, and naturally he had talked with none from Pyramid City since the trouble at the lake.

As his thoughts rested on what Rose must be thinking of him, he grew silent and slouched down in his chair, his eyes alone alert. To this taciturn mood he held through the meal presently announced by Mother Hicks, and showed no signs of thawing until several new faces had been added to the group on the front porch. The fact that all received him in a well-met spirit, regardless of his past activities as deputy sheriff, seemed to cheer him. That no one mentioned the happening at Echo Lake, either to congratulate or condemn, was certainly considerate.

Carey Tait seemed particularly friendly. When the crowd adjourned to the back room to escape the chill of the mountain night, the heavy-jowled one tilted his chair against the wall alongside that which Easton had just taken. In lowered tones he stammered out an apology for his outburst at the Golden West the day the election returns had been canvassed.

" I couldn't know what you had in mind when you rawhided me and I got riled as a lady grizzly. But I swear I wouldn't have been such a ninny as to draw on you if I hadn't lost track of my drinks in the pleasurable experience of being welcome and officially present in the county seat."

" Say no more about it, Carey. I needn't have been so prancy myself. I was just a bit miffed over—well, over other happenings of that day."

" Don't worry with promiscuous regrets," advised the older outlaw. " What's going to be, just naturally comes about."

When the crowd thinned out toward midnight, Easton again fell into converse with the man who had carried the election returns to Pyramid, in the course of which he put a casual question. Had Tait seen or heard anything of Sancho Mendez?

" I was just going to ask you about that same *hombre*," declared Tait. " When we heard that you'd fired him, we thought perhaps he'd make for the Nest. He's got lots of friends in the cholo village, over toward the desert. But not hide nor hair has any of us seen of him."

The topic of the half-breed ceased when Hicks announced it time for honest men to be abed and picked up the lamp.

" I had the missus fix the shack back in the arroyo for you two," he said. " Tait will show you the way, Charley—out there you can sleep as safe and peaceful as a pair of puppies. Night-night!"

The two tall men, so recently enemies, now alined as friends, slipped out the back door and dodged into the shadow of the chaparral. Tait found a path, with which he seemed familiar, and led the way to the shelter which Hicks had designated, hidden in a dry wash, perhaps an eighth of a mile from the store. There they found blankets spread on a couple of brush-filled bunks, built against opposite walls.

" In the morning, Charley, I've got a proposition to put up to you," said the angular Nester. " I may be able to help you get out of this with a whole hide and with more of a jingle in your pocket."

" In the morning," yawned Easton.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HONOR OF THIEVES.

LONG experience had taught Charley Easton that the axiom of " honor among thieves " was not entirely dependable. As a man charged with murder, having a

price on his head, he had expected a cordial reception in Hawk's Nest, and nothing had occurred since his appearance there that afternoon to disappoint him. Yet, although he felt reasonably sure that he would be protected against capture by any posse which the authorities of Pyramid County might send out, he was by no means so sure of his immunity from the machinations of the outlaws themselves.

The reward offered for him would probably be a temptation to some. Also, owing to the general belief that he was responsible for the Candlestick robbery, he might well be suspected of carrying his share of the "swag." Certainly he was in no position to take chances.

Perhaps, had not every cautionary sense been alert, he would have found no cause for suspicion in the ease with which his companion fell asleep. Yet, a babe with a water-clear conscience could scarcely have dropped off more quickly or deeply. Before Easton had decided which side of his bunk was the more comfortable, regular snores were issuing from the couch across the shack. Struck by the fact that these audible respirations were timed with unusual regularity, he decided to test his own talent at counterfeiting sleep.

Some minutes later, his reward came when he sensed a stealthy movement in the opposite bunk. Without varying his own labored breathing, he waited, his muscles tense, his gun ready under the blanket that covered him. Whether in physical attack or some more subtle move, the mountaineer meant trouble.

Easton heard the shack-mate rise to his feet. Then the creaking of a floor-board told that he was crossing the room. For a moment he felt the faint whiff of the other's breath upon his cheek and realized that his seeming slumber was under investigation. This evidently passed muster, for, a moment later, the door opened, then softly closed again.

When the sound of a dislodged rock came to Easton's ears from outside, he left his bunk and crept to the door. By the waning light of the moon he could see Tait's figure disappearing through the chaparral that curtained the trail toward Hicks's. Waiting a moment to give the man a safe start, he let himself out, and, with a tread less noisy than the night wind, followed.

His trailing ended as he approached the barn, for there the sound of low voices halted him.

"Sure he's asleep?" The question carried clearly through the shadows. The voice was the guttural wheeze of Rodney Hicks.

"Would I be here if he wasn't sawing wood?" demanded Tait. "What d'y take me for?"

"What's on your mind that couldn't wait until morning?"

"A chance for some easy money—and clean as a hound's tooth, at that."

"I won't touch that Davison gold," the heavy man objected. "I'm doing pretty well here with the emporium, and I ain't anxious to get on the dodge. I've got the old woman and Sammy to think of. Besides, Charley Easton isn't the man to stand and deliver after he's gone to this much trouble. Showed that by croaking the sheriff. He wouldn't hesitate to—"

Tait interrupted roughly with a demand to be informed as to who had mentioned the Davison plunder. He had a better scheme in mind, he declared.

From the cover of a clump of wild lilacs Easton sent his crooked smile in the direction of his fine pair of "friends," but did not mind that it was wasted on the night. Even beforehand, he felt that he knew the nature of the proposal which Tait was about to make, but was surprised to find that he was not alone in his surmise, as the storekeeper's next remarks proved.

"If it's turning Charley up for the reward that's in your mind, Carey, I'll have none of it. A rotten deal like that would give the Nest a bad name all along the line. It'd prevent any new blood coming in, and, at the rate the gang is cleaning house and settling down, we need emigration."

"When I need you to plan my leads, I'll reform and settle down myself. Now, you listen to me!"

Tait proceeded to unfold a plot for realizing on the ex-deputy's misfortune that had not occurred either to the candidate conspirator or to the proposed victim.

"I happen to know," outlined Tait,

" that Easton has a bunch of fat cattle down in the Rincon. They're ready for market; but, with half the county ready to pot him on sight, he'll not be able to market them. In the morning I'm going to frame him a proposition by which he hands over a bill-of-sale to that stock and lets me drive them out for him for half the profit. He ought to jump at the chance."

" That seems like a fair enough proposition. But why this here midnight confab? What cards do I draw?"

Tait's low laugh had an unpleasant sound. " I don't wonder, Rodney, that you wasn't a success on the twisted trail. That divvy-up proposition is just what I'm going to hand him. He'll fall for it and hole in here with you. I'll go over and get the cattle and drive them back this way for you to take into market. But Charley won't be around to speak for his promised half, and that's where you come in."

Still Hicks protested density as to the play expected of him. " I ain't going to attempt any rough stuff—not with a man who can shoot like he can," he added.

The plot-maker grunted his disgust. " 'Twon't be necessary. The morning after I start for Rincon, you'll fake getting a signal from the pass that a posse is riding in. Throw the scare into him proper, give him enough supplies to carry him into the desert and start him on his way. He's been brought up on manzanita and don't savvy the cactus. The sand and sun will finish little Charley, and we can split fifty-fifty on the cattle."

When Hicks finally signified his approval of this plan, the man in the lilac-brush felt that he had heard enough. Silently, as he had come, he returned to the trail and gained the shack in the arroyo.

" Double-crossing hounds!" he muttered, as he again crawled between his blankets. "They just couldn't play fair with anybody, no mater how hard a fellow was up against it."

For some minutes his mind was active with a plan for his own protection, but by the time Tait returned he was really asleep.

The Nester's proposition to " lift " the fugitive's market band on a division basis was made to Easton after breakfast, preceded by a line of remarks designed to establish the speaker's sincerity and his desire to help out any " critter what's bucking the law."

The ex-deputy listened, his interest seasoned with admiration. Indeed, Tait spoke with a straightforward manner calculated to deceive any one not " in the know," and finally appealed to Hicks for his opinion.

" I say that it's mighty white of you, Carey," applauded the coconspirator. " I don't know many men who'd go as far as to half the pot. There's many who'd be yellow enough to try to hog it all. If Charley wants to hole-in here while you're gathering his part-out, I reckon we'll find him a whole loaf."

" But I couldn't think of letting Tait take all the risk," protested Easton, seemingly moved by this solicitude for his finances.

" 'Twon't be any risk—no risk at all," the mountaineer assured him. " If anybody's watching your ranch, I'll flash my bill of sale, and they won't be able to stop me. I'll tell 'em that I've been over on the desert, and met you as I was coming out—see? Naturally, I won't know anything about the shooting up of Ransford. I had an order for a bunch of beeves, and asked if you knew where I could get any. You sold me yourn on the spot. How was poor old Carey to suspicion anything wrong, considering your rep? Don't you see, Charley—don't you see?"

For several minutes Easton appeared deep in consideration of the plan. At last his face lightened, and he spoke with feeling:

" I appreciate your offer, Carey, for I'm in a very particular hurry to realize on that stock. Debt of honor I want to pay. But there would be risk. You'd probably have trouble with the vaquero I left in charge. He wouldn't savvy a bill of sale."

" Then I'd jam it down his throat!" Tait turned belligerent at once under fear that his chance was slipping away.

Suddenly Easton smiled. " Tell you what I'll do — I'll go with you," he declared, as if under inspiration.

The voices of Tait and Hicks lifted in a duet of protest.

"You want to put your head into a noose?"

"They'll get you sure if you go sloping around Rincon!"

"With a good pal like Carey along, I'm not afraid of anybody getting me!" cried Easton. "Come, let's saddle and get an early start!"

Further persuasion failed utterly to move him from his decision. He preferred to pull his own fat, he declared, and insisted that if they went at all it must be at once. His bravado reached such an appearance of enthusiasm that he begrudged the delay caused by a momentary conference between the other two, "over affairs appertaining to their private concerns." And in the end it chanced that the Nest's newest outlaw took the back trail on the very day after his arrival, accompanied by his one-time enemy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MADNESS OF EASTON.

DUSK was falling when Easton and Tait, riding fagged horses, made the edge of Rincon Cañon and looked down upon the ranch-hold of the fugitive. They had made good time from Hawk's Nest, having shortened the distance by several of the region's cut-off trails. Neither was sorry for the journey's end, for no saddle-going is harder on man or beast than the ups and downs of the mountains.

There was still light enough for them to make out the corral in the basin below, and see that it held a considerable herd of cattle. The light of a lamp showed in a window of the log cabin, and occasional sparks, like fireflies, darted upward from the chimney. The scene was tranquil enough; but when Shasta began a whinny of joy, Easton clamped a silencing hand on the cold muzzle.

"There's probably no one down there but Ramon," he observed to his companion, "but we'll take no chances. Two separate posses have combed the cañon, to my personal knowledge, and, of course, it's the last place they'd think I'd return to. Still—"

"You're smart to be cautious now, but you was plumb foolish to come at all," grumbled Tait. "Supposing your vaquero is there, can you trust him?"

"Ramon's the whitest cholo I've ever known. Look at the way he's been rounding up my cattle against just such a visit as we're on! The corral is nearly full, which lends to a quick getaway."

The mountaineer scowled for a moment into the increasing gloom. "Suppose you stay here with the nags, while I go down for a bit of scouting. If Ramon's alone, and the deal looks on the level, I'll fling up a whistle."

Easton nodded, and Tait took the downward trail.

As he began the descent, the ex-deputy led the horses back into the brush. After tying them with stout mecates, he returned to the rim.

A moment's further scrutiny, then he, too, dipped into the cañon, but by a route that showed no trail. Across his arm, he carried the riata that had hung through the day on his saddle-horn; at his hips dangled the two revolvers to which he had so often trusted his life.

Although his movements were catlike with stealth, he seemed more intent on speed than concerned with the noise of his downward progress. But with the clash of horn against horn within the corral and the thud of bovine bodies against the fence, there seemed small chance of his being overheard.

He gained the shadow of the original adobe house without being challenged, or, so far as he knew, observed. He entered through a window on the side opposite the log cabin, in which the light still shone.

Once inside, he crossed to the front door, which, instead of bolting, as might have been expected from his previous movements, he made certain was unlocked. With the carefully protected light of a single match, he fixed the position of the fireplace and the scanty furnishings in his mind. Then he crossed to the opposite wall, where a built-in clothes-press stood. At the cost of another match he found this to be empty.

Testing the swing of the door, to make

sure that it was noiseless on its hinges, he stepped inside. As the clothes-press extended to the roof and a couple of feet out from the wall, it was not uncomfortable as a hiding-place, but he did not remain within.

Recrossing the room, he clambered out the window through which he had entered, flattened himself in the deepest shadow of the outside wall, and turned his face toward the lighted cabin up the hill.

For some time he looked and listened. The ascent of an early moon eased his task by dropping a phosphorescent half-light into the cañon. Suddenly his figure stiffened. Against the lamp-lighted window of the cabin he saw the silhouetted figure of a man peering in. Then, almost at once, it disappeared.

Leaning forward, straining his ears, he soon heard footsteps descending the path; a moment later could discern a shadowy, dark shape approaching. Once certain that the man was heading for the dobe, he swung himself back through the window, slithered as silently as he might across the floor, stepped into the closet, and left the door sufficiently ajar to give him ocular command of the room as far as the fireplace.

His wait was not long. The outer door opened with a slight creak, and some one shuffled into the room. Next moment a match flared, and he recognized his companion of the day's dash from Hawk's Nest. With effort, he stifled a sigh of relief, for his recent movements had been governed largely by surmise, the foundation of which was none too secure.

The adobe structure was provided with board shutters for protection against storms, all of which were closed, except those of the window which Easton had lately used. Tait crossed to this, leaned over the sill, and brought the hinged boards to, thus making the structure practically light-tight. Having struck another match, he lighted a candle which he produced from his coat pocket. He dipped a few smears of the grease upon the table-top and planted the butt of it firmly therein.

Half-way to the fireplace, Tait hesitated and glanced back toward the clothes-press. The man inside sank deeper into the shadow and held his breath. As the only cover in the room, it certainly commended itself to investigation.

Easton did not fear discovery for physical reasons, for the advantage would be all on his side. The consequence which he dreaded was that the visitor would not disclose the object of his visit to the deserted dobe when he was supposed to be scouting the log cabin up the hillside.

But the fact that the door was ajar evidently quieted Tait's suspicion. He scowled a moment in its direction, then continued to the fireplace — a huge-mouthed opening of boulder and dobe brick, wide enough to burn a generous length of log, and sufficiently expansive in chimney to hold a man, even one of so goodly bulk as the mountaineer.

Stooping under the rough mantle, Tait stood up within the chimney, only his legs from the knees down visible.

Slowly and noiselessly, Easton swung back the closet door and stepped into the room. The temptation to tiptoe across, run a rope around the protruding legs of the man who, he believed, intended to trick him, and drag him out to immediate punishment was almost irresistible. But the mental reminder that he had searched that same fireplace and chimney in vain for the very object which the Nester now sought restrained him. He shook out the noose of his rope and waited.

From inside the chimney fell a shower of dislodged soot and ashes, followed by muffled curses from the cause thereof. Then a fair-sized boulder crashed downward, to land on the hard-baked hearth.

Almost at once Tait's knees bent, his soot-smeared face appeared, his shoulders wriggled downward, his entire body emerged from the fireplace and straightened. In his hands was a canvas sack. This he contemplated for a moment and dropped upon the hearth.

The clink which sounded from the impact was as music to the fugitive, sweeter than any he had heard since the clatter of cooking utensils that day he had surprised Rose Davison in his kitchen.

"Some luck this!" he heard the Nester ejaculate, as he knelt beside the sack and began to work upon the knot that tied it.

Charley Easton's moment had arrived. Loosening his "cutter," on the possibility that his skill with the rope might desert him for the first time, he put life into the pleated rawhide. With a thrill, he heard the riata's snakelike hiss as it shot forth. With fascinated eyes, he saw its loop descend over the head and shoulders of his quarry. As the unbreakable strand fell about the outstretched forearms, he lunged backward with all his weight, tightened the noose into a cruel pinion, and jerked Tait off his balance onto the floor.

It was no great feat for one so expert in the greatest art of the range to loop the other end of the rope around the legs of the overturned conspirator, and to run home knots that would hold against all struggles. Before Carey Tait had time to wonder what had happened, he was more of a prisoner than he had ever been before in all his checkered career.

But a man in Easton's position could afford to trust to nothing, not even a rawhide riata; so his first move was to disarm his victim.

The Nester, in the blinking light of the candle which he himself had placed upon the table, turned over to glare at his captor.

"Is it you—you murderer?" he gulped. "You couldn't play fair with your own brother, could you?"

"You see, Carey," returned Easton, with his one-sided grin, "I was afraid Rodney Hicks might throw a posse scare into me — afraid I mightn't be on hand when you returned with my share of the divvy, you know."

"You listened in on us, you hell-hound!" Tait's exasperation surprised him into admission.

Easton's laugh was too genuine to soothe. "You, at least, knew that I hadn't turned on Denton Davison. You showed that in your face. I had reason for suspecting why you knew, and it isn't such startling arithmetic to make two and two out of four. When you were so all-fired anxious to visit Rincon Ranch, which isn't at all a safe place for a man of your past, I did want to keep you from getting lonesome on the trip. It looks as if I'd get what you came for, eh?"

He stepped over the figure of his captive and lifted the soot-covered bag. Evidently it was heavier than he expected, for he needed a second hand to move it from the stones.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you and the cholo made a bigger haul than I'd credited to you!"

"What do you know about Sancho?"

Easton laughed even more pleasantly than before.

"Ha, I thought you'd acknowledge your pal! You see, he was my *mayordomo* here for several years. I can recommend him for the most desperate, as well as the most petty, of crimes."

"Did the fool breed confess? Have you held him up?"

Even though he well knew the rawhide's unyielding nature, Tait struggled against it.

"I won't deny that I held him up," admitted the ex-deputy, "but I couldn't make him come across with the hiding-place of Davison's gold. That was my chief anxiety until just now, when you were so obliging as to produce it for me. I'd searched this house, chimney and all, to the best of my ability."

Trussed up like an Egyptian mummy whose ossuary was too small, Carey Tait lay still, in silent contemplation of his present plight and the overthrow of his schemes against a man who had removed himself from the protection of the law. He signaled his arrival at a decision by wriggling to a sitting posture and achieving a sickly sort of grin.

"Leave me loose, Charley, and I'll play square with you," he said. "I'll admit that we didn't rate you right as an outlaw. You've got us all beat. Leave me up, and we'll divvy this Davison stuff. Forget your steers, and beat it while the chaparral's in bloom. There's enough here for both of us."

"And where does Sancho Mendez come in?"

Bound as he was, Tait looked his disgust at this expression of sentiment.

"How far toward the border do you expect to get, Charley, if you stop to square up with every Mexican you bump into? Take it from me, when you're on the dodge, trust to white men and them only."

"White men like you and Rod Hicks?" Easton chuckled. "Your plan's all right from your point of view, Carey, but it happens that I've a better one — from mine."

The Nester's sullen look returned, but he waited; for, indeed, his interest was vital. Any move that Easton might decide on had more possibilities than lying roped in a deserted 'dobe, with a candle already beginning to sputter its dregs.

"What's the big idea?" he urged.

"I don't expect you to take to it just at first," temporized Easton, "for it involves temporary discomfort for you. Your part in it is to ride to Pyramid City as my prisoner."

Even in the pallid candle glimmer, Tait's face could be seen to turn a light saffron through his tan. He stared at his captor as one does at a man who has shown unmistakable signs of a disordered brain. He resorted to the one weapon left him—guile.

"You're joking, Charley — you with a thousand on your head! Besides, what's going to become of the gold?"

Easton glanced at the heavy, soot-covered sack. "The gold? Oh, I always bring in the evidence. Guess that collection of double eagles will pass as such."

"But they'll hang you quicker than a minute for croaking Ransford, once they get their hold of you! They won't wait for any sour apple-tree — not that posse! It 'll be the first live branch for yours!"

"I've been taking chances all my life, and I'd like to try one more. Make yourself at home until I come back. I'll scout the log cabin as you promised to do and didn't—then we'll see."

Easton had gained the door when the man in rawhide bonds called him back—called so stressfully that he returned.

"I'll tip you off to something, Charley." Tait lifted the cunning, urgent look that is the outer sign of a last hope. "Don't try to make Pyramid with prisoners."

"And why not?"

"Because Rod Hicks is on the way to give you up!"

"*What?*" roared the ex-servant of law and order.

"Hicks ain't on the level, either. He'll have a posse here in an hour or two, and you'll swing before you see the county-seat again."

"What's eating the store-keep?"

"Nobody expects anybody to be square in this dodge game, except when he's got the other feller on the hip, like you've got me. I'm giving you the truth, so help me. If I had the use of my hands now, I'd take—"

"You'd take your gun and try to beat me to it, wouldn't you?"

"I'd take my hat off to you," completed the prisoner. "You've showed me you're fit to king the whole of us, and you've got some reign ahead of you, once you get away. But look out for Hicks. He's double-crossing you for fair."

"We'll be under way in half an hour," Easton assured him; "and don't you worry about meeting our late host and his posse. I wouldn't think of giving them the pleasure of stringing you up, or Sancho Mendez—let alone myself."

Half an hour later, when Tait had exhausted his stock of vituperation as well as his physical strength in the effort to break the embrace of the rawhide, he heard horses clatter up to the door. Easton and a vaquero, whom he judged must be Ramon, came for him, and tied him into the saddle of a fresh mount. While this operation was under way he recognized Sancho Mendez, leashed to a second horse.

"You have met Señor Mendez, I believe, Mr. Tait?" Easton introduced sardonically. "You must overlook any bad manners on his part. He is not feeling very polite—oh, not on account of any depression over his sins! He's just overcome this evening because I caught him wearing a suit of clothes."

The half-breed muttered as he turned from the speaker to his recent collaborator in crime.

"The evil one," he observed, "he have rope' you, too?"

Tait, seeing no hope of aid from this

source, raised himself to attempt one last supplication — not in terms of mercy for himself or Sancho, but with the plea that the arch-crook, the sheriff-murderer, the man to whom he was not willing to prove allegiance, would listen to reason regarding the saving of his own life.

"I tell you, Charley, the posse will get you, and there'll be no time for explanations. Let's the three of us slope back to the Nest and give Hicks the reception he deserves when he returns to a burned-down emporium."

But the insane are usually dense to argument. Charley Easton only laughed.

"Why, Carey, I always have brought in every man I started out for! Where would I take you if not to the county-seat?"

"None of us will ever get that far!" wailed Tait. "Hicks puts things through once he starts. We'll not get out of the cañon."

As if weary of the discussion, Easton's attention had swerved. He demanded of Ramon whether all was ready. On an affirmative answer, he gave direction for the feeding of Shasta, then signaled the start. The strange cavalcade of three, all well mounted, but two bound to their saddles, started out of the yard.

At the bars, Easton turned and called back to the vaquero: "You'll be along as early as possible to-morrow?"

"*Sí, señor!*" sounded Ramon's answer.

Carey Tait felt even more puzzled by something the incomprehensible fugitive said to him as they started up the switch-back trail.

"Don't worry, Carey. No posse will take us to-night, for we're not going out the mouth of the cañon."

And indeed, to the mountaineer's increased dismay, they took the rougher trail that led back toward Hawk's Nest.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE COUNTY JAIL.

EASTON steered no easy course into the mountains. Fortunately for themselves, his two prisoners were mounted on sure-footed pack animals—Follow and another beast who well might have been similarly christened; there was no need of their holding reins.

They had been under way perhaps an hour when Tait, who rode immediately behind the leader, ventured comment:

"Hold up, there, Charley; you're off the trail!"

"Thirsty, are you?" was the answering query.

Halting, Easton dismounted and produced a canteen from the cantle of his saddle. He unscrewed the top and offered water first to the Nester, then to his former employee. Both drank deeply, as did Easton himself when they were through.

The Mexican returned only a graceless scowl, but Tait resorted to tact.

"Much obliged for the water," he said as he brushed his lips upon the shoulder of his coat. "But that wasn't what I was yelping about. You're on the wrong trail, pardner. You'll never get back to the Nest heading this way. Ask Sancho, if you don't believe me."

Without waiting for the appeal, Mendez vented a string of curses linked together by his complex vocabulary. The whole might have been interpreted freely as meaning that he no longer cared which trail or whither.

Evidently Easton had no intention of going into consultation over their route, for he remounted and continued to lead in his original direction.

A second hour passed in steady plodding through the darkness before the mountaineer's saddle-bound discomfort urged him to a second protest.

"What you think we're made of, Charley? I'll be worn to a frazzle if you keep this up much longer. And you sure are off the trail!"

"I couldn't be off this trail," waved backward with Easton's laugh, "and you couldn't possibly know it if I were."

"I know every trail," insisted the white captive.

"Perhaps every trail but this one, Carey. I'm blazing this as we ride!"

"Suppose, now, that you make the point you're heading at, where do we come out?"

"Daylight will tell you," was all the satisfaction vouchsafed by the man with a price on his head, who alone had command of his mount.

Twice in the hours that followed, Tait tried to prod Follow over convenient bluffs, in the hope that the fall might loosen his bonds, but the animal was true to his sobriquet. Sancho Mendez seemed dazed; at least, he made no effort to be anything other than a pack to his beast.

The half-light that precedes dawn brought grim realization to the Nester with the recognition of certain landmarks. They had started over the trail back to Hawk's Nest—yes; but somewhere in the night had deserted it. Now, unless Carey Tait had lost entirely his memory of the country, they were bearing down upon Pyramid City, the one place in the world where the three of them could least afford to be seen!

Terrified in mind by this conviction, tortured in body by the jolting which he could not ease because of his bound condition, he tried to reason out what possible plan Easton might have to effect his own escape with the Davison gold. Did he plan to leave them as hostages to public clamor and himself take to the hills with his doubly stolen plunder? At the first halt, called because of the necessity to breathe the horses, he begged a conference.

"What's it going to get you to turn Mendez over?" he asked. "As for pitching me in for good measure, why, old Denton Davison himself will give me a clean bill! He's got to do that to save himself."

"He has—*why?*" demanded Easton.

"I did the dirty work that cost you the election, Charley. I don't mind admitting it now. The old man didn't come across as he had promised, that's why Sancho and I cracked Candlestick."

"Are you trying a new line on me, Carey?"

"Nary another. Davison's got to get me off, or I'll squeal."

"I thought," said Easton, halting in his exercise up and down before the prisoners, and fixing a knife-blade glance on the Nester's face, "that Ransford bought the votes?"

"Ransford nothing! He was clean as daylight. The old man was mighty particular about not having him catch on. That's all the more reason he'll lope to court to save me. Say, you're not going to leave us down in the valley, are you—plant a little of the gold around about as evidence and then try to beat it? That won't let you off for croaking the sheriff, and I tell you old Candlestick's *got* to save me."

"Thanks for that Davison dope." Easton spoke from the depths of what seemed to be a deep, regretful reverie. "This is not the first time I've heard he had a hand in the election, but I'm sorry—mighty sorry that I misjudged Ethan Ransford." After a moment's silence he shook himself back into attention to the present. "You're wrong about my going to leave you anywhere. I'm taking you into the county-seat and straight to the courthouse jail. I promised somebody I'd bring in whoever robbed old man Davison, and you're one person who's going to witness me do it."

"They'll hang you!" whined Tait, in a last outburst of despair.

But it seemed that Easton had not heard. He remounted and started off. The packhorses, well trained and regardless of their human burdens, jogged into line.

The fugitive fell into silence, his head sagging forward, his broad shoulders slumped. After some moments, Tait heard him speak, although he did not turn. He seemed to be muttering to himself, as a man sometimes does who feels alone with nature. The mountaineer strained forward to listen.

"God knows I tried, Rose! I tried! God knows I tried!" he seemed to be saying over and over again.

An hour later, Charles Easton, worth a thousand dollars dead or alive, clattered up to the county jail, still followed by two prisoners, both feeling more dead than alive.

Certainly it was force of habit that led him to reach for his keys as he strode up to the oaken door that, when opened, disclosed only a barred one of steel. Perhaps the first realization of his changed position came when he found the keys wanting. He had been so interested, too interested for his own comfort, he now realized, in keeping

his vow to Rose Davison to bring in the men who had assaulted and robbed her father. Well, he'd see the thing through, cost what it might, he decided. He hammered upon the door.

Deputy Ben Tapley, sleepy, new to his duties, worn with running false clues on the county's greatest crime, answered querulously from a window overhead.

"What's the trouble?"

"Prisoners."

Easton heard the green official clatter down-stairs. Presently the double doors were opened.

"They're out there, tied up on pack-horses," he muttered, from the shadow of the opened door into which he had stepped.

Tapley rushed out, gun in hand, a pair of steel handcuffs dangling from his belt. After several minutes he returned with the sadly worn pair, who were too tired for protest, and locked them in separate cells.

"What's the charge against them?" he asked, turning in the dimly lit corridor to the man who had brought them.

"Plenty—they're the Davison robbers."

The voice, aided by the outlines of the face which showed beneath the turned-down brim of the black felt hat, brought belated recognition to the jailer. Before Easton could make a move a six-gun was straight-lining a threat at his empty stomach.

"Don't move, Charley Easton!" cried Tapley. "I've got you, and got you alive. Thank Heaven, I left another cell open!"

For the first time in his life Easton let a man take his guns—and the man was trembling!

It was when he felt himself propelled toward the open cell that he realized how exhausted he was. In addition to the physical effort of nearly twenty-four hours in the saddle, he had been under the mental strain of effecting the bloodless capture of the Nester, of picking an unmarked trail through the night to escape the posse, of bringing his little party into the county-seat without a shot.

The chief thing he wanted of life at that moment, was sleep. The cell held a cot—a blessed cot! After all, it did not matter where he rested. Time enough to-morrow to marvel at Ben Tapley's temerity in locking him up inside what he had long considered his own jail. Until then he could wait for any praise due him for the capture of the Davison assailants and the recovery of the loot.

"Just tell Clarence Cecil and Pop Atwood that I'm back," he said wearily. "But before you do anything else, go out and get my saddle-bags and lock them in the safe, if they've trusted you with the combination. The gold these scamps stole from Davison is in them. I'll hold you responsible."

He waited within the grated door until sure that Tapley had obeyed this request. Then he threw himself upon the cot. Almost instantly he had attained his first desire. He was asleep.

"Lord!" gasped the farmer deputy, peering in at him from the alley outside the cells. "Good Lord! He's my prisoner—my first prisoner! One thousand dollars reward!"

It was noon before Atwood, Hartley, and a disgruntled posse rode in from the fruitless race to Rincon Ranch, which had been started by word from Rodney Hicks that the fugitive had ridden that way under the escort of Carey Tait. They had found the ranch deserted of humans, with not even a trace of Easton or his alleged decoy. The proprietor of the Hawk's Nest Emporium had been renamed some exceedingly uncomplimentary things. When they were met by Ben Tapley's report, one which the jail's three occupants substantiated, excitement burst like Fourth of July.

Behind the closed doors of Hartley's office the prosecutor and the former sheriff spent a most unsatisfactory hour questioning Charley Easton. The story he told them, while it seemed to clear up the mystery of the Davison robbery and, what was most substantial, supply the loot, confirmed their previous decision that the ex-deputy was insane.

Easton calmly informed them that, having suspicions of his own as to the perpetrators of the robbery, he had broken up his posse of three at Echo Lake. Returning to his own ranch for a night's rest, he had surprised Sancho Mendez, his dis-

charged *mayordomo,* coming out of the adobe-house which the cholo had formerly occupied. He had captured him after a struggle, and forced from him the admission of his complicity under the leadership of Carey Tait, but was unable to learn what had been done with the gold.

Keeping Mendez a prisoner in the loft of his cabin, under guard of his vaquero, Ramon, he had next ridden into the Hawk's Nest country, where he found himself well received because the county had seen fit to post a price on his head. He detailed the method he had used to lure Tait from his lair, his return to Rincon in the Nester's company, and his capture after the bag of gold had been produced from its hiding-place in the chimney of the 'dobe.

But here Easton halted, showing a sort of resentment.

"You fellows don't believe me, do you?" he demanded.

"Of course we believe you," Hartley was quick to assure him. "But what about Ethan Ransford?"

"Well — what about him?" Easton snapped. "Am I his keeper?"

"Charley, we've got to know about that end of it," Atwood urged soothingly.

At this, Easton arose, as if on sudden decision.

"You'll not know from me," he said. "The idea of your doubting me after the years we've worked together, Pop!"

When their utmost persuasion failed to move him from this new policy of silence, Atwood and Hartley returned him to the basement jail. It wrung their hearts more than either would have cared to admit to see the strange, crooked smile that returned to his face as they shut him in—so much like the smile of his attractive, former self.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRIAL.

THE authorities quickly were brought to realize that they faced a new problem, one quite as serious from the view-point of law and order as any that had lately occupied them. The news of Easton's capture spread through the valley, jumping from farm to farm as a fire spreads from pine-tree to pine-tree, once it gets a start. The "pumpkin-rollers" gathered in force, formed a faction called "Friends of the Slain," and agitated the subject of summary vengeance.

The very boldness of the ex-deputy's return, bringing two men whom he charged with the Candlestick robbery, seemed to aggravate the feeling against him. Most people considered it a daring attempt to save himself from the consequences of the graver crime.

Carey Tait repudiated any admission or confession, declaring Easton's claims but inventions of a master-murderer and thief. He denied having participated in any enterprise, legal or otherwise, with Sancho Mendez, and explained that he had accompanied Easton to Rincon solely for the purpose of delaying him until Rodney Hicks could arrive with a posse. While Tait was still held prisoner, there seemed little chance that he would ever be brought to trial, for Denton Davison had given him a "clean bill" on the Candlestick charge, and his friends from the Nest, famed for their alibis, were rallying to his support.

Mendez maintained a sullen silence, except for intermittent protestations of complete innocence. Davison insisted that he was the cholo referred to in his earlier accusations, even as he reiterated his belief that Easton's was the voice he had recognized. Atwood brought forward the fact that several weeks before the robbery Easton had discharged the Mexican for thieving. But this, to the minds of most, only gave the stamp of premeditation to the Candlestick crime; the ex-deputy, they argued, had discharged the man that he might the more safely use him in his attack on the man to whom he was so heavily indebted.

In view of the Echo Lake tragedy, the robbery was already a side-issue. Davison was on the road to recovery; the stolen gold was in the possession of the authorities. The price for the murder of Ethan Ransford—a life for a life—was the crying demand.

There were few who did not believe that Easton had shot down his rival without

giving him a chance. Indeed, it was impossible, even for members of the "cow-hide" faction, to disregard the evidence of the eye-witness, Clarence Cecil Hartley, who was certainly sound of mind and had no incentive to perjury.

Had the accused given himself up, or been captured in the course of the pursuit, an insanity plea might have passed the public. But the boldness of the return showed too great sagacity. "Oh, yes, he's crazy—as a fox is!" was a remark that epitomized the general conclusion.

Only on the promise of an immediate trial had the authorities prevented drastic action. Speeded up because of the emergency, the judicial machinery of the county had established a new record. The proceedings had been facilitated by the suspect's seeming indifference to developments. He had refused to hire a lawyer or to consult with the one assigned to his defense by the judge. He had offered absolutely no plea for delay.

But as he waited in his cell, he grew noticeably more subdued. The care-free, almost exultant manner which had marked his return, disappeared in a painful-seeming sort of expectancy. When any one sought him, he was usually found sitting on the edge of his bunk, his eyes fastened hopefully on the door. His forced smile of greeting could have deceived no student of physiognomy as to some bitter disappointment behind it.

The impatient way he would push back the black hair from his forehead and divide his attention between his visitor and possible new arrivals would have argued some imminent anxiety. As night followed night, with the day recording no unusual event, the look that darkened the gray of his eyes would have proved that the hurt was of the heart.

And all these four days the girl for whose mercy he had hoped had suffered more poignantly than he. Like a wraith of ivory and gold, all her bright color gone, all her bouyancy fled, Rose Davison had attended her father and her household tasks, then had sat on the gallery, her eyes straining in one direction—that along the road toward town.

At times she gripped the arms of her rocker and pulled herself to her feet, as if under some compelling impulse, but always had settled back again, that look of a wounded animal on her face—a wounded, tortured animal that still hopes vainly for reprieve.

With tacit consent she and her father had exchanged no comments on the subject that held the county's attention. In view of this mutual taciturnity, it had not appealed to her as obligatory, on this morning of the fourth day, to tell him of a decision which had come to her during the horror-watches of the night. White-lipped, gloom-eyed, yet with her cheeks showing the first tinge of color in many days, she had attended him as usual at the breakfast which was served in the huge bedroom to which he was still confined.

When, later in the morning, he fell into a doze, she wrapped her ripe-corn hair tightly in its coronet braid and donned the becoming blue habit. Leaving word with the nurse that she had gone for a ride, she mounted her horse and started toward the county-seat.

The court-room at Pyramid City was crowded to the doors when Deputy-Sheriff Tapley entered with the news that the jury before which Charles Easton had been tried for the murder of Sheriff Ethan Ransford had arrived at a verdict. There arose a murmur of surprise, for the twelve had been deliberating less than half an hour. While quick decision had been expected, and only one possible in view of the evidence, there were some who shook their heads over such unseemly speed in a first-degree case. Messengers were sent for the presiding judge and the State's attorney.

The trial had taken but two sessions of the court. Hartley, as eye-witness, had given the principal evidence for the prosecution. The bottomless state of Echo Lake had been duly established, to account for the disposal of Ransford's body, the missing link in the State's case.

To supply motive, Hartley had offered the sworn deposition of Denton Davison that Easton was the moving figure of the Candlestick robbery, and had called Pop Atwood, who, with great reluctance, had

admitted appraising Easton that there had been crooked work against him in the last election. The witness testified that he had sent the ex-deputy a note by trusted messenger, which, as nearly as he could remember, was worded to the following effect:

When crooks fall out, honest men have a chance to get their due. Ransford's election was stolen from you. Denton Davison made the deal with Carey Tait. They have quarreled over payment, and Carey can be made to tell everything. Better ride back with the bearer of this.

Atwood then produced the answer which he had received, asserting that the prisoner would not go into the vote-fraud.

Although the charge against Davison of falsifying the returns from the Hawk's Nest election district had been a sensation, its merits or demerits were not examined, as its only bearing on the case was the proof that Easton had believed himself defrauded.

The defendant himself had refused to take the stand at the behest of his assigned counsel, who hoped thereby to establish his client's disturbed mental condition. All the attorney could do under the circumstances was to introduce several character witnesses, who had dwelt upon his long and fearless service for the county. Later Dr. Watterson had answered affirmatively a series of hypothetical questions, asserting a strong professional belief that Easton must be insane.

The summing up had been brief on both sides. Hartley had asked for a verdict of guilty, assuring the jurors that there would be time before any sentence was carried out fully to determine Easton's mental state. The attorney for the defense had rested his whole plea on insanity. The judge's brief charge had been impartial—confined to the law applying to the case.

And now the jury was ready with its verdict.

The judge and prosecutor entered, with the messengers who had been sent for them. Deputy Tapley brought up the prisoner, who walked with a firm step and seemed self-possessed. In stern tones the judge warned the crowd that, whatever the verdict, there must be no demonstration; then advised the clerk to bring in the jury.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAW'S OUTLAW.

THE first glimpse of the faces of the twelve as they entered from the room of deliberation told the spectators that the delivery of their finding would be but a formality. Their grim expressions, the way their eyes avoided the prisoner's, could mean but one thing.

The court's formal query hammered the deathlike hush.

"Gentlemen, have you arrived at a verdict?"

In sharp contrast was the foreman's husky return:

"We have, your honor!"

Many glanced at the prisoner. On his face, rather than the dread to have been expected from all portents, a sudden radiance flashed. He half rose from his seat, then got fully upon his feet and straightened to his full, lank height. His eyes were fixed on the entrance door as if they saw some vision of delight. At first with a quiver, then with its old whimsical charm, his mouth widened in its crooked smile. A luxurious breath, as if reprieve of life, lifted his chest.

Impelled by the look of him, the many turned to see what might have been the cause. They soon would have turned anyway, for excitement disturbed the rear of the court-room. From the detaining hand of a bailiff a woman broke, to come hurrying down the aisle.

"Wait—wait a minute!" she cried.

Hatless, flushed, shaking, Rose Davison reached the rail, then clutched it to steady herself.

"Young woman, what is the meaning of this?" demanded the judge.

"The verdict — you haven't pronounced it?" she cried through gasps of incoherency.

Several shaken heads reassured her.

"Then you mustn't," she hurried on. "It's all a mistake. Ethan Ransford is alive. He is coming here. I met him just now on the road. Charley is free!"

"Miss Rose, what—why—"

A gust of amazement, protest, incredulity from the crowd drowned the court's questions.

The judge stared at the girl in demand, but her attention had swerved. Her tear-wet eyes, her quivering attempt at a smile, the unmasked emotions of her woman's soul were lifted to the prisoner.

He was leaning forward; seemed to see only her.

Outwardly they looked like two superb statues; within, they were living the most vital moment of their love; they were exchanging the reproaches, the desperate demand for pardon, the free response of their brimming hearts.

But striking as was this tableau of reconciliation, a new sensation rivaled it.

Once more the spectators at the door gave way, this time to permit the passage of a man with bandaged head and arm in sling, who leaned heavily on the shoulder of a Mexican in the garb of a vaquero.

Despite the small section of the white man's face that showed beneath the bandages, suspicion of his identity was instant; the moment he spoke the crowd accepted the fact that Ethan Ransford had returned from the dead.

"I came as soon as I could, and I'm mighty sorry for this attempt to railroad Charley Easton for something he never dreamed of doing." Ransford lined up at the rail and began a statement to the court. "My—my murder was a put-up job, the only way we could figure out to land the Candlestick robbers. After we had wasted a day on blind trails, Easton told me that he suspected Tait and Mendez, not so much from evidence that the rest of us had gathered, as from some of his own.

"You see, he happened to know that Tait had had a row with Mr. Davison over money. Then the day he visited the ranch he found a glove of his own near the safe, one that he had missed after firing Mendez. It seems that the cholo was in the habit of adorning himself with Easton's effects. We decided that since the rest of the country had been pretty thoroughly scoured, Hawk's Nest most likely sheltered the two fine birds.

"But we both knew—why, you all know—the futility of going there in the name of the law. There are too many rat-holes to get any one really wanted. Charles suggested that one or the other of us get next by nesting there with a price on his head. Well, it surely wasn't in my line. I—I somehow didn't seem fitted even to play desperado. So we settled it that Charley should appear to murder me. We worked out the whole scheme one night while Clarence Cecil, here, was asleep."

An indignant exclamation from the hectic-visaged lawyer interrupted Ransford's recital.

"Why did you play me for the fool? Why couldn't I be trusted with the plot?"

For the first time Easton spoke:

"We doubted your ability as an actor, Clarence Cecil, even as a clown."

"If our plan was to work," supplemented the man so recently mourned as dead, "we had to convince you that murder had been done, or, despite your profession, you could never have convinced the county. That was necessary to assure an alarm that would be heard and believed in the Nest. The shots Charley fired at me at Echo Lake were blanks, and the body you saw him dragging toward the water was exceedingly alive. If you'd taken to cover and stuck around a while, you'd have seen the two of us mount and take to the hills. I found a fairly comfortable place to hole-in and Ramon, here, kept me supplied with food. Charley did the rest."

Slowly the expression of the judge, dazed at first, changed to indignation. "But why delay to this last moment?"

"You'll have to ask one confounded papa puma why he decided to take a fall out of me," returned Ransford, an ironical grin appearing on the bandage framed face. "When Ramon came with the news that our round-up was complete, that it was time for me to throw off my mask of death, he found me facing a real finish. That puma was some fighter—he nearly did for me! Ramon has been working on my wounds ever since, battling a fever that would have spilled the mercury, if we'd only had a thermometer. I never dreamed that Charley would be up against a hurry

trial like this, or I'd have come out regardless."

"But why—" Still vague in the instantaneous change of view-point demanded of him, the court turned toward Charley Easton.

"There was no use my telling the truth until Ransford appeared," he returned. "Nobody would have considered such a tale—especially from a supposed madman. Even my account of the arrest of the thieves was doubted. And besides—" He did not finish. His quiet smile, his whole attention seemed to have returned to Rose Davison.

"About that robbery!" puzzled the ruffled prosecutor. "We have Denton Davison's deposition that he recognized Easton's voice as the battle began."

Ransford broke in: "I was a witness to Sancho Mendez's confession that he and Tait robbed Candlestick. The only thing he would not tell us was where they had planted the loot."

"But, your honor, Mr. Davison says—"

The lawyer's insistence was checked by a mild interruption from the prisoner: "Mr. Davison was mistaken, that's all. When you hate a man it's only human to believe him guilty of your wrongs."

"That's so. That's so," agreed the judge.

"Just one thing more," added Ransford. "I hereby resign the office of sheriff. I'm not fitted to hold it."

"You never really had it!" cried the voice of Pop Atwood, in defiance of court etiquette. "This mistake of a trial's had one good result—it's made Charley Easton what the majority wanted him to be from the first, sheriff of Pyramid County."

"What—what do you mean?" A look of utter bewilderment showed on Ransford's face.

"He means—" began Easton. He paused to send a warning glance about which all understood as a plea to shield the daughter of the man who had wronged him. "He means that Carey Tait cooked the returns from Hawk's Nest, for—for reasons of his own."

Ethan Ransford stepped to the prisoner's box and offered its inmate his hand.

"I'm glad, mighty glad," he said. "You deserve all you can get."

Perhaps there was significance in the fact that his eyes followed Easton's, to settle with a determinedly cheerful, yet somehow wistful look upon the emotional face of the girl.

On the speedy, decidedly unconventional adjournment of court, after the jury on instruction from the judge had rendered its unnecessary verdict of "Not guilty," the crowd swirled into groups that were an ovation to the prisoner.

"What have I *always* told you?" contended Boniface Dominick from the elevation of the court-house steps. "Charley Easton has his own way of doing things—but he does 'em, don't he? He ain't *never* been what you'd call on the surface."

In the sheriff's office, where the trouble had all begun, two were holding a session of thanksgiving that it was ended.

"I tried, Rose," murmured Charles Easton into the fragrant braid of her corn-ripe hair. "At first I had to try. Later it came easier and easier. It has all been worth while, for it has helped me to conquer my jealousy—to conquer myself. I couldn't doubt you after that day at Rincon when you said you still loved me. Once sure of that, I was able to see what a really fine customer Ethan is. He's so fine, I hate to hurt him by taking you away from him. However, that's going to be my one last meanness."

"Charley," she digressed, with reproach that was too tender to hurt, "why didn't you come to me with the truth before you brought in your prisoner? Didn't you know that I—"

He interrupted, a contumacious frown appearing like a joker between his happy eyes.

"I promised your father never to seek you until after I'd paid the thousand I owe him. Which reminds me that I must be off to Rincon this evening and drive in my cattle to market."

"Stubborn Charley! But you did come to Candlestick with me?"

"You sought me that time. And remember that I didn't want to go, even then,

for fear the sight of me would make him worse."

"Then why, even after they had jailed you, couldn't you have sent me word?"

"Besides, I wanted—"

"That's what you began to say in court!" she exclaimed in his pause.

"I hoped you would come to me, even when every one else thought me a murderer."

"I almost died resisting," she confessed. "And then, last night, I decided to come anyhow. I was late getting started, and on the edge of town I met Ethan. I hadn't any idea the trial had gone so far. But, Charley, I came just to see you. I—I *had* to come."

For a moment of the sweetest reassurance of his life, he gazed into her tear-dimmed eyes. His lips whispered:

"Purple flowers—who could doubt them, sprinkled with the dew of truth?"

"The vine!" To her face came an almost superstitious look, succeeded by a rosy flush. "It is in full bloom over the porch of the bungalow."

"Our bungalow," he corrected. "For you and your law's outlaw."

(The end.)

A Lady Landlubber

by

Charley Wood

THE Seabird was a very ordinary-looking craft, so far as rig and build and general appearances go. Place her among any hundred of her kind which ply out of "down-east" ports, and, for the life of you, you could not have told her from the other ninety-nine.

She carried three masts, fore and aft rigged; both hull and upper works were unkempt in parts, and her crew of nine, all told, hailed from New England, with the exception of the cook, who was a reformed Halifaxer.

But aboard her was to be found an extraordinary situation, one that is seldom to be found on ships larger and handsomer than she—that was a satisfied crew.

Somewhere there may be a lion who is satisfied with the walls of his cage; somewhere there may be a man who would spurn a free-will offering of a million dollars; somewhere there may be a woman who has no desire to be queen of the universe; but none of these are rarer nor more difficult to find than a sailor who is fully satisfied with his captain and ship.

Mate Haskins, Ship's Cook Timmins, and an A.B. were talking over this very thing in the galley one evening. The Seabird had just completed a prosperous year, and was laying in Scartown, her home port, prior to sailing for Newport News in ballast. The cook was seated on his sea-chest, the mate on the bottom of an overturned

bucket, and the A.B. stood in the doorway and talked respectfully.

"What makes me appreciate the ole man," the cook was saying, "is that there ain't no wimin relatives comin' aboard for to run things."

"That's the very reason I shipped aboard here," said the mate. "Soon's I heerd the skipper was a bach, I says, 'Here's the ship for me, with no wimin contaminatin' her.' I was right, too, wasn't I?"

"I know what them skipper's wives is aboard ship," put in the A.B. "Wasn't I sailin' on a coal-boat not two year ago, with the skipper's wife runnin' things, and didn't she have us dressin' up in our Sunday gear every Sunday and scrubbin' everywhere there was coal-dust—"

"And wasn't I on a hooker," interrupted the cook, "where the skipper's old maid sister was pokin' of her nose into my galley fourteen times a day for to learn me how to cook? And me fifteen year in front of a ship's stove!"

"That ain't no worse 'n me with a skipper's wife aboard all the way to Galveston and back," said the mate. He rammed down the ashes in his pipe and held it up for them to look at. "Smokin' of this pipe was an unforgivable sin, she says, and 'dang' was too strong langwidge to be tolerated! They was newly married, they was, and them's the worse kind."

"You bet," agreed the cook, "and the older the worse. Now, if this skipper was to get married at his age he'd prob'ly be worse 'n ten young ones."

Then the voice of the captain broke in upon the conversation, calling raucously for a mug of hot water.

"Hot water for what, I wonder?" said the cook as he shook himself into action. He heated some in a kettle and took it aft. When he returned from the cabin his face wore an expression of perplexed anxiety.

"Gonna shave, he is," said he as he entered and stepped over the mate's legs. "Gonna shave, and there on his bunk he's got laid out his best uniform, brushin' of it. He ain't had it on for five year. What's he intendin' for to do?"

During a short silence the mate scratched his head and drew loudly on his pipe, and the A.B. thoughtfully shuffled his feet in the doorway.

"What does a man usually shave and dress up for, I axes you that?" said the latter, sagelike suspicion in his tone.

"A lady," answered the mate without hesitation. He got darkly to his feet. "I'm goin' to have a look for myself."

He went aft without another word.

Captain Holly stood before his mirror and shaved for many minutes all unaware that the mate's head was projecting just around the cabin door-frame.

The eyes therein flashed suspicious disapproval as they swept the scene—the neat uniform upon the bunk, the boot-blacking gear, the clothes brush, and the suggestion of fastidious preparation that went with it all. Finally the mate ventured in.

When he returned to the galley five minutes later he entered and threw himself upon the bottom of the overturned bucket in profane disgust.

"There'll be a lady landlubber aboard here inside of a week, mind what I tell you," he said, and continued, with the cook and the A.B. hanging on his every word:

"I couldn't haul a word out o' him. I axed him was he goin' ashore to-night, and he says not; and when I says 'To-morrow, mebbe,' he first acts bashful and then tells me it's none o' my danged affair.

"Then he turns on me sudden and says there's goin' to be a big change on this ship. He's goin' to dress like a gentleman from now on.

"To-morrow I'm to turn to, he says, and get every swab aboard this ship workin' to clean her up. He wants every plank of her painted inside and out, he does, and the decks holystoned white, and he wants it all done in four days, the fifth bein' our sailin' day."

"And the day the lady landlubber comes aboard, eh?" concluded the cook. "That's the way they all begins."

"The very way," said the A.B., and ran forward to peddle the news to his mates in the forecastle.

The unholy change that came over the

Seabird's crew when this news reached them was a sad thing to see. Before midnight there was not one who had not arrived at the conclusion that the Seabird would now be ruined both as a ship and a home for sailormen, and that any sort of trouble was worth daring rather than risk a cruise with "a lady landlubber" at the helm.

"Fer," said one oldish A.B. to a younger mate in the forecastle, "a man what's steered clear from gettin' made fast so long is duff for a woming when he does get in love. If she told him to paint the hull a deleecate blue and tie baby pink bows on the end o' the gaffs he'd do it. I fer one don't sail on her if I has to get arrested to keep from it."

"No more do I," responded every mother's son in the forecastle.

But the carrying out of the resolution was no easy matter, they found out, for they had signed articles to take the Seabird from Newport News to Port of Spain with coal, and to desert her now without proper excuse meant a gap in their service records that would look ill in future chances of promotion.

Therefore, the matter had to be accomplished by methods not absolutely aboveboard either in conception or execution.

That was the very possible explanation of the period of demoralization that seized them during the next few days—and nights—before sailing day.

There was one way of being prevented from sailing aboard the Seabird that appeared to them easy and sure above all others: that was a short term in jail. To men of their worldly experiences it presented no unknown horrors.

Although the people of Scartown may never know it, that was the underlying cause of the nights becoming hideous with noise and debauchery about the water-front where the Seabird lay.

In one purple night she had lost her reputation as a ship with a particularly well-behaved ship's company, and had earned the name of having a crew whose capers could have been equaled by none but Morgan's pirates.

Of course, it was impossible to indulge to such an extent without some retaliation by the law; and the town lock-up was opened for the first time in two years and a half to receive members of the Seabird's company.

But—and here was the rub—they were invariably turned loose and ordered to go back to their ship! The main reason for this curious situation was that the town's one judge looked upon all sailors as a rough, spirited class of men who had but small opportunities to disport themselves ashore, and were therefore entitled to a large leeway of leniency.

The crew was baffled. They resorted to all the tricks known to sailordom to overcome the judge's scruples. They battled and brawled about the streets, they tested every stage of inebriation in an effort to attain one that would appear heinous in the eyes of the law; they maltreated hollow-sounding ash-cans and roared out every song their memories possessed at odd, dismal hours, and brought the townspeople grumbling from their beds.

It was all in vain. He had never yet sentenced a sailor for being drunk, the judge informed worse-for-wear Able Bodies more than once, and did not wish to if he could help it. He invariably closed the reprimand with the remark that the township would be better off without such hell-bents, in jail or out, and that he had no desire to be instrumental in preventing them from sailing on their ship.

When they expressed a strange wish to be incarcerated anyway, he became enraged and had them hustled from the court-room.

"My booms!" groaned one sailor to another on one of these occasions. "Here's me that's been jugged in other ports six times for havin' only a ballast cargo aboard me, and now I gets dead lit, smashes a policeman on the peak, and axes to be locked up, and they turns me loose. My booms!"

But the nights did not hold all the unsatisfactory hours for the crew, either, for there were the days to be contended with, days filled with the hard labor of tarring and cleaning and painting, with the skipper always at their back, clean shaven and

dressed in his best. It was particularly hard on men who returned aboard swollen, sullen, and blear-eyed.

At last there dawned the one day left before sailing day, and not one of the crew had reached a satisfactory answer to the problem. That was also the day that desperation seized them and the principles of Ananias were introduced in a manner that outdid the originator of them at his worst.

Man after man approached the captain, or sent word from ashore, and more or less glibly, as the case might be, told of their sorrowful inability to sail aboard the Seabird, owing to whatever excuse their separate imaginations settled upon. The captain swore at each loud and individually, but handed them their discharges.

By noon of that day the schooner had but three of her crew left, those three being the mate, the cook, and the skipper himself.

"A fine crew that was I had," remarked the latter to the mate about that time. "Just as I gets things better'n I ever had 'em afore they jump, dang 'em. What we should o' done is to take a bottom board er a capstan bar and give 'em somethin' to go ashore for. What do you s'pose got into them swabs?"

"Mebbe they got sweethearts ashore what they can't leave," replied the mate with brutal emphasis. "There's some pretty gals in this port, there is."

"Leastways," said the skipper, "I give you and the cook credit for not losin' your heads over 'em."

"We got as much right to as anybody else, though," said the mate. He walked abruptly away and left the skipper leaning on the rail and guessing as to what prompted the remark.

While the skipper pondered, the mate dodged into the cabin and closed the door behind him. The skipper would have been yet more chagrined could he have seen how he sprang quickly and stealthily at the task of gathering together his belongings and throwing them into his sea-chest.

The mate's packing was not quite complete when the skipper, still leaning moodily on the rail, spied a man attired in a messenger's uniform pulling a dory toward the Seabird with all speed. He paused to salute the skipper before slewing the boat alongside.

"A teleegram for Mate Haskins," he sang out.

The mate sprang from the companion and rushed to the rail. He seized the envelope, tore it open, and instantly plunged into a state of anxious concern.

"My poor, old mother what I never been away from more'n a month in my life!" he said, brokenly. "Eighty years old, she is, and took with paralysis. I got to go without wastin' a minit."

"Bad news, that is," sympathized the skipper. "I'll change the sailin' date an' wait till you get back."

"I might not be back for weeks er years," the mate informed him as he rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes. "There ain't no tellin' how long them strokes last."

He ran to the cabin and appeared almost immediately with his sea-chest. The skipper raised his eyebrows in surprise as he noted the chest and wondered at the quickness with which it must have been packed. But he helped the mate lower it into the messenger's boat, and grasped his hand as the latter stood up in the boat and chokingly bade him good-by.

After the boat shoved off, the skipper leaned on the rail and sorrowfully watched the mate near the wharf. He was still in this attitude when he spied another boat headed toward the schooner with all speed. Pulling lustily at the oars was a man attired after the manner of wharf policemen.

The skipper stamped about his deck with angry apprehension as he reasoned that if the officer was coming for anybody aboard his ship it must be the cook, for he was now the only man left aboard but himself. It was in his mind to run to the galley and tell the cook to hide when the policeman swung alongside and grasped the rail.

"Cook Timmins, he's the man I want," said he. "Not wishin' to be disrespectful, cap'n, but I want him right away, too."

"What did he do?" demanded the skipper.

"Broke three plate-glass windows last night when he was drunk, that's what," answered the officer.

"What kind of a policeman was you to let him do it?" inquired the captain.

At this moment the cook appeared at the galley door. He was dressed for shore, and on his back was his sea-chest, ready-packed, and at his side jangled a number of private cooking utensils. The captain watched his approach with feelings so chaotic he could not frame words.

"I ain't the man for to run away when I know I done wrong," he said as he approached. He leaned over the rail, dropped the chest into the boat, and followed it with unexpected alacrity owing to an ungentle placing of the captain's boot.

"Go and be durned, you good-for-nothin' grog guzzler," bellowed the skipper.

The cook quickly shoved the boat from his reach and the policeman lost no time in getting the oars to work.

"Good-by, skipper," the cook bid over his shoulder. "I hopes you has a pleasant cruise."

While this had been going on, the mate had landed and stealthily slipped a dollar bill to the messenger. He then proceeded up the street with a jaunty stride that totally belied all filial concern. He even whistled a snappy tune. He had gone but half a block in this manner when he paused to watch the approach of a man with a wheelbarrow. On the barrow was what strikingly resembled a long keg of beer, and all about the man and walking with him in a state of excitement was the rest of the Seabird's crew.

At sight of the mate they sprang forward and began to talk all at once and explosively, and all the mate could make out of the jumble of information was that the keg of beer was destined to go aboard the Seabird.

"Clear out, you bunch o' swabs," bawled he, "and let me talk to him so's I can get the bow and stern o' this thing." He cleared the way with a strong hand and grasped the man's shoulder.

"Sure," said the man, unreluctantly resting the legs of the barrow upon the street and preparing to talk. "This is for the blow-out aboard the Seabird this evenin'."

"What blow-out?" asked the mate, taking a grip on the shoulder that made the man wince.

"Ain't you heered about it? The cap'n is givin' you lads a surprise blow-out this evenin'. There's goin' to be beer and sandwiches and all, and a little hard licker, mebbe, and durin' it he's goin' to serve out gold pieces to every man."

"When's the lady landlubber comin' aboard?" asked the mate in the voice of a man who was being strangled.

"I ain't heard of no lady," was the answer.

The mate dropped his sea-chest and sat upon it with his face in his hands.

"If you're jokin' me I'll knock you clean over the bow of that wheelbarrow," he said suddenly.

"I ain't jokin' you," expostulated the fellow. "Don't my brother work in the bank—janitor he is. It was him that told me all about it. The skipper comed in all dressed up to get the gold-pieces for you lads, and bragged about how he was gonna give you a surprise party. Bonerses er somethin' is what he called them gold-pieces—"

Whatever more was said by the beer-man was not heard by the mate, for he suddenly shouldered the chest and legged it for the dock with handsome speed. The crew followed. They reached there in time to see the cook in the act of disembarking with the policeman.

Like a flock of loud-voiced crows descending upon a corn-field, they gathered around the pair and all but swept them off their feet with the volume of news the beer-man had imparted. As the situation developed, the cook dropped his utensils with a loud crash, and as the full force of it dawned upon him he ragefully kicked them off the wharf.

"Now, what're we for to do?" he asked.

"Come on," interjected the policeman, "first we'll have that drink you promised me fer comin' out to get you—"

"I'll give you a drink of my fist, I will, if you don't shove off," said the cook, wheeling upon him. "You didn't do me no favor."

While they glared at one another the mate's attention was attracted to the beer-man. He was gruntingly loading the keg aboard a boat preparatory to taking it out to the Seabird. The mate suddenly ran toward him.

"I'll go out with him," he called to the crew over his shoulder, "and straighten things out with the skipper for you swabs."

"No, you don't," instantly objected one of the Able Bodies. "You don't come nothin' like that on us. You'll fix it up for yourself, you will, and us can go hang for our money."

"He's right," said the cook; "you ain't no better than we be ashore. We don't let you go off and leave us in the soup."

"We can't all go out there together er he won't believe none of us, you hollow-headed pan-wrestler," was the mate's answer.

"Ruther have that than for to have you go out there alone and play us dirty," doggedly asserted the cook.

"What do I care what you want?" flung back the mate. He made a step to enter the boat, but with the quickness of so many cats springing upon a mouse every member of the crew pounced upon him and hauled him back to the wharf. The man in the boat took advantage of the diversion and shoved it off, thereby extricating himself from the mess with a whole skin.

"I'll smash every one o' you swabs stone-cold if you don't lay off me!" raved the mate.

"You may do one o' us, but all o' us'll make a derelic' out o' you in no time, and you know it," gritted an A.B. "And don't forget you're ashore, neither, not aboard ship."

The mate ceased to struggle and was silent as he soberly reasoned out the suggested possibilities. All at once he wrested a hand free from restraint and surprised all present by feeling in his pocket. When it came out it contained his pipe, and he went peaceably about lighting it.

"Then what're you goin' to do?" he asked. "There's three o' you supposed to be on your backs in the hospital, and two o' you has got dyin' uncles er brothers er such like. He won't believe none o' you no quicker'n me."

"I'll go," offered the cook readily, "I'm only s'posed for to be arrested."

But there was an explosion of dissensions at this offer, too, as each had a fond wish to be the one selected and would submit to no other choice; and as the idea of all going at once was obviously impossible, the procedure was brought to a total standstill.

It ended with the whole gathering dispersing disgustingly and profanely, and selecting whatever part of the wharf suggested a reasonably comfortable seat with a reasonable amount of solitude.

Most of the long afternoon they spent in hanging about the wharf and keeping a watchful eye on each other. There was also not a little wondering done as to why the skipper had not been ashore to look up another crew; and why he had ever set upon the idea of giving a "party" in the first place, and who among them was the worst fool. The mate had a marine glass tucked away in his sea-chest and he continually pointed it at the Seabird in an effort to keep an eye on the skipper's doings.

Whatever other conclusions they might draw, there was no denying that the skipper had ceased to worry, if appearances went for anything at all. Time and again the mate's glasses showed him complacently smoking his pipe or reading his paper. He did not even countermand the beer ordered nor the other promising stores that went out later.

The torture grew as the afternoon wore on. Suddenly the cook jumped to his feet with an exasperated utterance, and before any one was well aware of it he had leaped into a boat and was pulling toward the Seabird. A loud, angry cry went up from the others as they saw the cunning trick. The cook pulled more desperately at the sound of it.

With thumps and clashes, the rest sprang into whatever boat happened to be nearest

them, regardless of ownership. A moment later a boat race composed of all sizes and makes of boats, with the occupants yelling angry objections and threats at one another, was in full tilt toward the schooner. The noise of it resounded along the full length of the Scartown water-front.

The captain sprang to the rail and looked amazedly at the onrush of yelling men. So furiously and fast did the oars splash that a broad, white path was left astern of the boats, a path of churned water that laid as straight as a carefully constructed roadway from the wharf toward the Seabird. In all his years of skippering, affirmed the captain aloud, he had never seen anything to compare with it.

The end of the race was surprisingly close when one considers the impromptu start and the many different styles of craft that were engaged in it. They bumped against the side of the Seabird in pairs and triplets. No sooner did they bump than the rowers leaped from them and swarmed up the side.

The astounded skipper was suddenly surrounded by a circle of howling men who all tried simultaneously to tell him their stories and accuse the others. They were a strange sight as they yelled and gestured at him while he looked on in dumb amazement from one to the other, and became exasperated as he tried to fathom the reason of it all.

Finally there came such an expression of concentrated indignation upon his face that, one by one, they became silent as they saw it. In a short moment the silence of the tomb reigned aboard the Seabird.

"One more word o' gab from you and I takes an oar and smashes you into your keels!" he suddenly broke out. "Every one o' you is a worst liar than the other. You ain't fit to be called sailors, you ain't."

They sidled and shrank guiltily under his words and glares.

"What's more, you're a crew of narrow-topped, double-dealin' fools! I was going to give you a surprise blow-out and a profit-sharin' of ten per cent because the Seabird had twice as prosperous a year as ever since she was launched. I had reasoned out that there was other things besides work to be had in this world, and a man owed it to himself to dress up and have a clean ship when he could afford it. All them companies ashore was givin' out bonuses and profit-sharin', and I thought you was a crew that deserved it. That's why I done it, you cringin' snakes, that's why I done it! And how did you do me?"

He walked to a large array of paper-wrapped bundles which lay upon the deck beside the keg of beer. With a series of savage, well-aimed kicks he broke the wrappers and sent dozens of dainty sandwiches, salads, pickles and bolognas hurtling and crumbling about the deck.

"There's your grub—look at it!" he bawled.

The crew obeyed him, dismally, not daring to move nor allow a peep of objection to leave their pale lips.

Suddenly the captain ran to the donkey engine and returned with a sledge hammer. With two fierce strokes of it he knocked in the bung stopper of the keg and the crew gasped as their horrified eyes beheld a spurt of snowy foam shoot from the hole and splash about the deck. In another second there was a beautiful, amber rivulet running down the deck and off into the scuppers. Groans escaped them as they watched it.

"There's your beer—smell it!" roared the skipper.

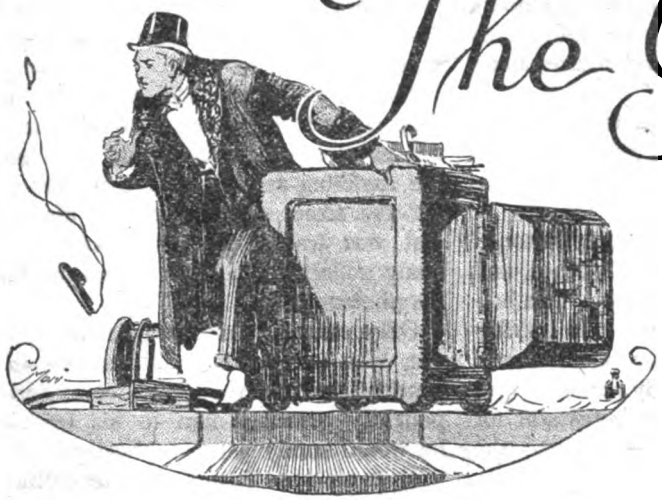
But no one dared to take advantage of the offer. When they had thirstily beheld the last drop trickle from the keg the skipper drew a small bag from his pocket. He held it before them and shook it.

"And there's your gold pieces what you won't never get," said he, "because I'm goin' ashore and I ain't comin' back till I've spent every last one of 'em. I can afford it, and I don't give a deep-sea dang whether I sail to-morrow er not!"

With that he swung dignifiedly upon his heel and leaped into his dory. Without so much as a backward glance, he resolutely pulled for the wharf.

Not till he was well ashore did they begin moving about among the ruins.

"One thing, though, that I'm glad of," sighed the cook at last, "that is that we found out fer sure that there weren't no lady landlubber comin' aboard."



The "Gat"

by

Clyde B. Wilson

WHEN you have killed a man it is time to go. The Gat listened, thought rapidly, and decided. So swift and sure had been the attack not a cry had escaped the victim. The Gat placed the knife where it might naturally have fallen from the hand of a self-murderer.

He then turned to the open safe, where he had been surprised before finding what he sought. Stooped before it, he hesitated for an instant, tempted to further search. He shook his head. The prize was not worth the risk.

Robbery exposes a suicide blind, and with the biggest job of his career planned for to-morrow he could not afford to have the police aroused to extra watchfulness by a mysterious murder committed to-night. This must look like a suicide. He replaced the papers in the safe exactly as he had found them and closed the door.

The rattle of the combination crashed against the dead silence of the room. Somehow it reminded him of the clang of a certain bolt to a certain cell he knew of. He stepped to the double doors and turned his ear to the crack where they met in the center.

His eyes fell upon the figure. Its evening clothes exposed an expanse of white shirt-front; white, except for a splotch on the left side the size of a man's two fingers. He must hurry!

Noiselessly he slid the big brass door-bolt into place. With infinite ease he turned the key over in the lock below, and the bolt clicked faintly. His strained senses again recalled the clang of a certain bolt to a certain cell he knew of; again he listened for a moment.

Quickly and without sound the Gat then drew two of the hinge-pins from the hinges of the right-hand door. The third one stuck slightly. A few turns back and forth with a pair of plyers, and it came out freely.

From a small bottle he deposited, with an apothecary's accuracy, a few drops of oil into the loop of each hinge. With his plyers gripped on the door portion of the middle hinge, he slowly and noiselessly worked the door free.

Fastened by the lock and bolt in the center, the two doors swung as one on the left-side hinges. He opened them an inch and let them sag to the floor. Then he took the pins, immersed each in the oil-bottle, and inserted them a quarter of an inch in the hinge-loops on the door-facing, where they leaned enough from a perpendicular to keep them from dropping into place until he should be ready to jar them down.

The Gat was ready for his exit. He turned and surveyed the room to see if he was leaving any clues. He suddenly was seized with an impulse for cautionless flight. He set his teeth and muttered an oath.

This wasn't the first man he had killed, but it was the first he had knifed; and that shirt-front! The stain had spread to the size of a man's hand.

Hurriedly he went into his coat, buttoned the fur front over his evening clothes, and sprung his opera-hat into shape. The hollow snap of it startled him. He quickly lifted the doors clear of the floor, opened them the width of his body, and stepped into the hall. He stood perfectly still for a second. His ears fairly sucked at the silence.

Opening a corkscrew in a combination tool-knife, he swiftly inserted it in the hall side of the door to serve as a knob. With knee braced against the facing to steady himself, he raised the doors to the proper height, and with nerve-wrecking slowness meshed the hinges without jarring a pin down.

Then pulling steadily by the corkscrew to hold the door in place, he tapped lightly with the heel of his hand on the door in the position of the top hinge. The pin dropped into place with a barely audible click. Once more he listened intently before proceeding.

The middle pin jarred down with equal success. He stooped and tapped lightly at the bottom hinge. It did not drop in. He tapped harder, and with a noise that sounded to him like the ring of a steel crowbar the pin clattered to the bare floor.

The Gat ground his teeth in rage at this utter waste wrought to his infinite pains. He had left a clue to point straight away from the suicide lead he had planted. That Satanic sleuth, Houdin, would grab it with the eagerness of a bloodhound.

Nervously he pulled his corkscrew from the door. He had intended to cover up the hole it made, but there was neither need nor time for that now. That hinge-pin was enough to waken the dead man. How could servants sleep on?

A faint light sifted into the hall through the crack of the doors he had just closed. He turned toward the street door and stiffened like an icicle as he faced a man—Fool! How he hated nerves! It was only a clothed hall-tree.

Half-way through the outside door he dragged in a deep breath of cold air, then suddenly choked. With head bent against the tumbling snow a policeman was crossing the street directly toward him. The Gat was trained to fast thinking. Too many policemen in New York had studied his photograph!

Only recently that devil detective, Houdin, who was sending all his pals to the penitentiary and the death-room, had impudently promised him to his teeth that he would surely get him shortly.

Over on open Broadway with nothing on him, he did not dodge them; but coming out of a house on Fifth Avenue, after midnight, where a stabbed man would be found the next morning—perhaps now the servants were up!

Only so long as it took these thoughts to flash filmlike through his brain did the Gat hesitate. He might have to kill another man or two, but—

He stepped back inside the door. Absolute silence greeted him.

It was a white night, unfit for red deeds. On the street with people about him he should have felt easy; but he was shaken. Things were not working out.

In the first place, he had not come to New York to pull this job, but a bigger one. He was a fool to have been tempted by it. But it had looked so easy—no killing; and see how it had turned out.

He had dressed at his hotel in evening clothes and gone to Paulo's fashionable gambling-rooms for no other purpose than to see if Henchen was there. He was, and had seemed drunk enough to be good for the night. But that's just the trouble. No dope is dependable when you have to figure booze as one of the elements. Henchen had taken a notion to go home.

Worst of all, he hadn't got the money; and because, like a bush burglar, he had left his gun in his overcoat, clear across the room, he had had to use his knife in-

stead—and smear things all up. Well, if the murder outed, the knife would be his alibi. His jealously guarded reputation as an exclusive gun-user would save him from suspicion.

The Gat straightened himself savagely. He used to have nerve! But no wonder he was cracking.

For one thing, there was Betty—good old Betty—once so game; now afraid to read a murder story in a magazine; scared spineless of the "Thing," that shapeless fantom something which she believed in religiously and claimed eventually gets all criminals; writing him everywhere he went, imploring him to cut the thing and make a home in some green, quiet no-place, and settle down with her.

Then there was Cat Stark, the fastest thinker, and the fastest gunner in the gallery, caught only last week with his automatic still smoking. And the papers today full of Bruce's last nap in the hot chair.

The snow lit cold and wet on the Gat's face, and he shuddered. He needed a drink—but not in this neighborhood. He'd take a stiff one at the hotel.

He found himself on Broadway. Lights showed red through the screen of snow; great splotches against a white background. He noticed an unwonted number of policemen in sight. They seemed mostly to be in pairs. That usually meant something.

For reasons in accord with well-laid plans, he had avoided to-night the haunts of his accomplices in the big coup of tomorrow. He hailed a taxi and mentioned a hotel, miles south of them.

As they turned east into a shadowy street far down on the lonesome end of Broadway, two policemen suddenly appeared directly in their path. As they came to a stop one of the officers stepped to the side of the taxi. His front was covered with a blanket of damp snow. A red sidelight on the taxi reflected on his star; a red splotch on a white background, over the left breast.

"Let's see your fare!" he demanded.

"What's the joke?" asked the driver.

"Murder," said the policeman, peering through the water-streaked cab window.

The Gat, with his hand to his nose, ducked his head slightly with a loud sneeze while the point of something in his right coat-pocket came to a line with the officer's head.

"Where?" questioned the driver.

"Kyle's place, Fourteenth Street. Coke Oskiski out-gunned a detective, but he got through us. We'll get him before morning. The net's spread."

"Not Houdin, I guess?" persisted the driver.

"Not scarcely," laughed the officer. "They don't out-gun Houdin! All right, go ahead."

The Gat breathed again, but wished the idiotic driver had not mentioned Houdin. Rotten queer some of these New York automatic artists couldn't out-gun him! The trouble was they didn't have bones anywhere but in their heads!

As he alighted from the taxi and paid the driver, a policeman parted from another on the corner close by and strolled by, scrutinizing him closely.

The Gat turned down his collar and entered the hotel. As he approached the desk the house officer walked directly toward him. Again the point of something in his right coat-pocket lifted slightly. The officer passed on by him. For God's sake! Wasn't there any one astir in New York to-night but bulls?

The clerk handed him a letter and a telegram. The letter was from Betty, and he thrust it into his pocket. He knew what was in it; one long pathetic plea to quit it before they got him, and a lot of superstitious talk about the Thing. He tore open the telegram. He knew by heart the three or four code words incorporated. As he read, the letters staggered and ran into an unintelligible streak. They righted themselves and he read it again.

Dan taken in Toledo. More Houdin's work. Houdin in New York.

The Gat felt warm. He took off his coat and threw it over his arm. In doing so he slipped something from it to his trouser-pocket. He turned to the clerk, cleared his throat, and made a second attempt to speak.

"Bar open?"

"Closes at one. Maybe you can get in."

The bar was deserted save for one somewhat crumpled customer in evening coat and hat, leaning heavily against the rail at the far end. The Gat scarcely noticed him. Most of the lights were out, for which he was glad.

Perhaps the bartender wouldn't notice how hard it was for him to hold the glass of Three-Star steady. He raised it toward his lips. A glass crashed at the end of the bar. A bartender swore at his clumsy customer. Part of the Gat's liquor splashed on the bar. There was scarcely enough left to moisten his throat.

As he started into the elevator he heard a rubber-soled step behind him and simultaneously felt a touch on his arm. His hand shot into his right trouser-pocket as he whirled. A bell-boy handed him his key.

"You left it at the desk," the boy explained.

At the second floor he left the elevator and plunged down the hall. A dim green globe barely lighted the hall with its ghostly hue.

His room was just around the corner in the next hall. With head down he swept around and smashed into something. His hat fell to the floor. He swore viciously as he kicked shut a linen-closet door which had been left carelessly open.

The Gat laughed nervously as he picked up his hat and strode on to his own door. The key rattled in the lock as he inserted it. He stepped inside and pulled the door shut quickly behind him as if pursued.

He was in total darkness. He recalled turning out the lights that evening when he left the room, and knew the position of the buttons. With his hat in his right hand, he extended his left before him along the wall. His tremulous fingers found the top button. He pressed it.

For an interminable second he stood rigid with a hellish terror. He felt his flesh creep, his scalp itch and shift, and his eyes burst. Merciful instinct guided his fingers to the other button. He plunged the room in darkness, but the positive after-image of something—something with hand pointing straight at him; with a wide expanse of white shirt-front, smeared on one side with a vivid stain the size of a man's three fingers, remained for a second.

Instinct, training, and a melting spine contributed to the Gat's quick squat. Hunched low against the door, he waited for the flash of a gun to give him a mark for his own. It did not come. Not a sound came.

Hideous seconds passed while tardy reason tried to right his panicky wits. He knew he was mortally afraid, but he was sober. He had taken but one drink and spilled most of that. This, he had just seen, was miles from here, dead! He had stabbed it to death—that shirt-front was the bloodiest thing he ever had seen!

Bah! It was time to quit the murdering business when a little blood could so stir up the imagination! Imagination! No, by ——! He knew when he saw a thing! Once before in his life he had thought he imagined seeing something, but a man had fallen when he shot. Should he shoot now? What at?

Dead men don't travel miles across city blocks! Dead men's ghosts may. Betty believed in ghosts. She had told him that he would some day; that the Thing would get him! Betty must be right; for when you have killed a man and his ghost beats you to your room— But you see ghosts in the dark, not in lighted rooms! He could see it now. It was no ghost, then. It was something else, unutterable, unthinkable, closing in on him, perhaps.

With this terrorizing impression, the Gat's last nerve-cell exploded, and every fiber of his being impelled him to flight. He grasped and turned the knob behind him as he rose, sprang backward into the hall, and jerked the door closed.

He turned, and again the breath caught in his throat and he stiffened and swayed. Not three feet from him, in the green-ghost light from the globe above, stood a grinning apparition; something in evening clothes, with a wide expanse of white shirt-front smeared with a dark splotch.

That was all the Gat saw. Through his blinding fright he did not recognize the

intemperate patron of the barroom of a few minutes before. He did not notice that damp ashes from a slobber-soaked cigar, dangling from a maudlin mouth, had blackened the inebriate's shirt-front.

Neither did he see the suddenly sobered look of appeal, nor hear the pitiful cry for mercy as, crazed with a fear that knew no reason, he fired full into the breast of the helpless creature before him.

As though the report of the gun had an awakening effect upon his paralyzed senses, the Gat came back to the actual. With a horror upon him, he whirled and ran in the opposite direction. No other intersecting halls appearing, he brought up at a closed window.

Forcing this up, he peered into the semi-darkness only to discern a sheer wall below and one opposite, neither of which offered any means of escape. He heard the rattle of the elevator ascending, and calculated his half-minute of time. Desperately he tried door after door to find them all fast. As the elevator stopped, heads began to appear through doors down the hall. The Gat recognized the house detective as the latter stepped around the corner with gun projected.

Both weapons exploded, and the detective swung half around. In the instant that the Gat withheld a second shot, to note the effect of his first, he was lost. A door swung open just behind him. Before he could turn, a heavy form was hurled against him, and a pair of hard arms encircled him.

Chewing curses, he fought insanely with a man in pajamas, but, taken behind, his arms were locked. As he tried to bring his automatic into line with the detective who had started forward again, it was knocked from his hand by another ally in pajamas. The hall was full of people. He was tripped to the floor, and the detective, with a pale face and a limp arm, was standing over him.

Still sticky with one crime, the Gat was caught with the damning evidence of another thick about him.

Other officers arrived, and he was taken down to the hotel office. A sergeant recognized him.

"I think Houdin would like to know about this," the sergeant said, and went into a telephone-booth.

He came out shortly and addressed another officer. "I thought so. Houdin wants to see him here. He was just called on another case, but will be down on the wagon from headquarters."

The Gat, huddled in a big chair, wrists locked, and an officer beside him, heard but evidenced no interest. He was dazed and nauseated like a patient from the operating-room with the anesthetic still clouding his mind.

His terrible fear, the more tormenting because he could not indict nor define it, had gone, but had left him weak and beaten. His one vivid impression of all that had transpired was the spectral something in his room which had driven from him his last reserve of reason and brought this ruin upon him.

The coroner had arrived and was attending to the removal of the body when Houdin appeared. The detective came straight to the Gat and surveyed him deliberately. At sight of him something of the Gat's old antagonism awakened and with it just a flash of his old courage. He faced the detective squarely for a minute.

"At last," was Houdin's curt and only comment. He turned to the house detective, who was having a slight wound on his arm dressed.

"What happened?" he asked.

The officer reported it briefly. The Gat had come in the hotel, gone to the bar and then up-stairs. In a few minutes Whitney, a notorious but harmless character, and a permanent guest at the hotel, had gone up, a little more illuminated than usual. A shot had followed almost immediately. The battle in the hall was described. Whitney was unarmed, hadn't an enemy in the world to any one's knowledge, and no reason could be ascribed for the shooting.

Houdin turned to the Gat fiercely.

"Why'd you shoot Whitney?" he snapped.

"I didn't," muttered the Gat, his tone and manner rendering the wretched denial convincing only as to its untruth.

"All right," replied Houdin. Then he

continued less severely. "This isn't like you, Gat, to be caught so far away from an alibi. There's something behind it. What's the matter with you? Lost your mind, or your nerve, or both?"

There was nothing left for the Gat to build courage on. Despair, disgust, self-pity welled up and mixed in his mind and impelled him to impetuous speech.

"That's it, Houdin, my nerve's busted. I'm a yellow-spined coward. I was scared—afraid—I—"

"Afraid of what?" cut in Houdin eagerly.

"That's it—what? I don't know."

"You lie! You do know!" Houdin was driving him.

The Gat shook his head distressedly.

"You'd been at something else; that's why you were afraid!" Houdin was conferring the third now. He was bending over the Gat, watching his every expression and reading behind his eyes. "Tell what you know about that killing at Fifty-First and Fifth Avenue to-night, Henchen! Tell it, I say!"

The Gat, professional gunman, and even in his fallen estate still proud of his specialty, spoke too eagerly.

"Ever hear of me using a knife?"

Houdin smiled and straightened up.

"Who told you a knife was used?" he shot at him.

"The papers—the police," countered the Gat desperately.

"You sure fell out of bed that time, Gat," replied Houdin. "The papers haven't got it yet. These officers don't know it. A servant found Henchen less than thirty minutes ago. They had just phoned me about it when I heard you were caught. Somehow I thought so. That's why I came up here first."

The Gat relaxed and sank farther into his seat. Utter hopelessness dulled his eyes.

"You can't put me in the chair but once," he faltered, offering at the same time his only rebuttal and consolation.

"That's right, Gat. Too bad," replied Houdin, a little pity replacing his elation at having so successfully maneuvered a confession. Houdin turned to an officer.

"We'll go up and take a look at his room. Bring him along."

On the elevator Houdin, looking at the prisoner's shirt-front, said:

"Been drinking, haven't you? Looks like you'd spilled some booze on your shirt there."

The Gat looked down. A large stain, the size of a man's three fingers, soiled the left side of his shirt. He raised his manacled hands to the spot, then placed his fingers to his nostrils.

"Brandy," he said. "Had one drink and spilled it."

Two officers, the hotel clerk, and Houdin took the Gat to his room. The clerk unlocked the door, stepped into the room, and snapped on the light. He stood to one side to let the others pass. The Gat, coming next, suddenly stopped.

"Go on," ordered the policeman.

"Wait a minute," replied the Gat, staring straight ahead of him.

The others hesitated.

"Unlock my hands a minute," the Gat requested of the officer. "No tricks."

The policeman looked at Houdin. The detective nodded his head, interested in the proceeding. The officer unlocked the cuffs. The Gat freed his left hand, stepped back a pace, and extended his left arm along the wall to the position of the light-buttons.

Across the room, directly opposite the door, was a tall clothes cabinet. The door of it was a full-length mirror. Into this the Gat was staring. He saw reflected a man in evening dress, his arm pointing straight out in the direction of the door where they stood. A wide expanse of white shirt-front was reflected, on the right side of which was a dark stain the size of a man's three fingers.

For a second the Gat stood thus; then, with a thin laugh, turned and extended both hands to be cuffed again, remarking:

"That's the first time a drink, applied externally, ever made me see things."

"What's the big idea?" asked Houdin.

"I know now what I have been afraid of all evening," replied the Gat wearily.

"What?" queried Houdin.

"Myself." And again the Gat laughed thinly.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

NEXT week we are going to give lovers of good mystery stories a treat. It is some time since we have read of such a puzzling mystery as the murder of *Eric Stannard,* the noted portrait painter, and we believe those who read

FAULKNER'S FOLLY

BY CAROLYN WELLS

Author of "The Curved Blades," etc.

will agree with us.

This popular author has a knack of creating situations that threaten to baffle every attempt of detectives, amateur and professional, yet hold the attention every moment because of their startling developments. That's the sort of story " FAULKNER'S FOLLY " is, a story of puzzles that grew out of a crime—a study of motives and cross purposes that is both brilliant and sound.

" FAULKNER'S FOLLY " will appear in four generous instalments. We know from the response of readers who enjoyed Miss Wells's " Curved Blades " that this popular writer is a favorite with the ALL-STORY family. Her return to our covers with a new and fascinating novel is an occasion for rejoicing.

Only seven more days to wait for " FAULKNER'S FOLLY."

ONCE, when the train was eating up desert miles during the monotony of a long, hot afternoon, I looked from the window and saw the beginnings of a reclamation scheme. A tiny town of brand-new lumber, here and there in the distance ugly, square, childish little board houses and tent-houses set in the hot, dusty sands and sage-brush, and a vast superfluity of raw, barren wilderness, the ashheap of a continent.

I wondered then, idly, as bored travelers will, what manner of people lived there, what manner of people could be interested in staying in such a place, enduring its manifold discomforts, even hardships, what rewards they looked forward to. The question was answered for me, and will be answered for all of you who have wondered, in

A SHARE OF LIFE

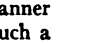
BY WILLIAM HARPER DEAN

a complete novelette which will appear in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY next week.

In gripping fiction, Mr. Dean paints the daily life of the desert dwellers, the settlers in Uncle Sam's big reclamation areas, who hang on with the courage of heroes and heroines for the coming of the water which will rub Aladdin's lamp in the wilderness.

Never again can I look on the desert settlers without some measure of understanding and sympathy. I know now that there is drama there—big, gripping drama.

After you have read " A SHARE OF LIFE " I think you will agree with me.



WE take pleasure in introducing to you next week a new and very promising young author, Edwina Levin, whose story, " A MATRIMONIAL TRUCE," is, in our private opinion at least, one of the most human little comedies we have ever had the pleasure of giving you.

However, this is for you to decide. Anyhow, if you don't get a laugh, or many laughs, and a smile or two of sympathy and understanding out of the trials and tribulations of *Jeremiah* and *Lucindy Debbs,* you're less susceptible than we are, that's all!

It is the opinion of many that the Ten Commandments are not exhaustive enough. So, according to some, the eleventh commandment is for every one to mind his own business, and the thirteenth to live within one's income.

But there are other statements of the eleventh commandment, and you will find one of them vividly portrayed next week in a little story of the United States navy, by Octavus Roy Cohen and Eric Levison, "THOU SHALT NOT SQUEAL." That, in the opinion of the navy, is the most important part of the whole Decalog.

Just how *Rainey the Rookie* felt on the subject goes to make an interesting and colorful tale.

* * *

"HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?" by Genevieve Wimsatt, deals with an angle of the war that is a little out of the ordinary. It's a clever little story, and if you are fond of morals it will give you this one: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," but first make sure that it is something you have no reason not to do. Otherwise you may find yourself in the position—

But read the story and laugh.

* * *

There are some sacrifice plays that don't get into the score-book—not any score-book kept by man. That's the idea behind a brisk little story of baseball we are offering readers of next week's All-Story Weekly. The story is called, aptly, "NOT IN THE SCORE-BOOK," by Grant Trask Reeves. It is one of those clean, clever baseball yarns, with a touch of sentiment, that reflects the virtues of our national sport. If all baseball players were as good sports as old *John Gilson*, there'd never be a deserved criticism of the game.

* * *

"UNUSUALLY DANDY STORIES"

To the Editor:

I want to express my appreciation for such an excellent magazine as the All-Story Weekly.

Until recently I have been an earnest advocate for the more expensive publications; but one day I happened to purchase an All-Story Weekly, attracted by the beautiful picture on the cover. Since then it has been numbered among the select list of America's magazines to which I subscribe, and I have been a constant and eager reader.

There are so many splendid stories coming out each week that it is hard to pick any winners, so I am naming only a few which particularly appealed to me.

I thought "The Super-Scoundrel" was mighty good, all but the ending, and "Lady Barnacle" just as clever as could be. "The Rebel Soul" certainly lived up to its cognomen as a "different" story. It reminded me to some extent of Poe's "William Wilson." If the character of *M. Antonio Polozzi*, who made his appearance in "The Malachite Earring," will be as interesting and original in future stories as he was in this one, little more may be desired.

I am reading the first chapters of "The Terrible Three" this week, and greatly anticipate the next instalments. Where in the world do you get such unusually dandy stories?

That the All-Story Weekly will be blessed with as good stories in the future as it has been in the past is the sincere wish of

Box 809, Laurence Steinhauser.
Miami, Florida.

"SOME STORY"

To the Editor:

Gosh, or darn, or whatever you say for strong language. I can't think of the right things to say, blame it all!

Say, take Mr. William Slavens McNutt's hand and shake it for me, will you? When I finished reading that "Reactions in Mauve" in the July 7 issue, I tried to cry and laugh; but who could cry at that last sentence? *Some story!*

I have wanted to write to you for a long time, and Mr. McNutt's story brought me to my feet in a hurry. I just had to write and tell you he is some writer, and the All-Story Weekly is my friend in need every week. What more can I say? Every other author you have suits me, too.

All-Story Weekly's friend and McNutt's every time.

Buffalo, New York. G. B. Sayre.

"ALL-STORY THE BEST OF ALL"

To the Editor:

I have been wanting to write to say how much I enjoy reading the All-Story Weekly.

The best stories were—"On a Stallion Shod With Fire," "The Sin That Was His," "The Gun Brand," "Mid-Ocean," "The Stroke of Twelve," "Ladyfingers"—and oh, dear me, I could mention so very many more!

I have never seen a letter from Maryland. Surely the All-Story Weekly must have a great many admirers in this State. I borrowed the first book I read, and it did not take me very long to decide to buy it myself, and now I can hardly wait from one week to another.

I read a great many magazines and books, but the All-Story Weekly is the best of all.

Hope soon to see a sequel to "On a Stallion Shod With Fire."

Mrs. B. A. Crutchley.
45 East Fifth Street,
Frederick, Maryland.

"TO THE VICTOR" IN BOOK FORM

To the Editor:

I have read the All-Story Weekly for a number of years, and think it the best ever.

I would like to know if the story, "To the Victor," written by Harold Titus, published in the *All-Story Cavalier*, May 23, 1914, is published in book form, and where I can get it.

I am just reading "The Lad and the Lion," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and think it is just fine.

What is the matter with Zane Grey? I have been looking for another story from him. His stories are certainly good. But, then, all of your stories are good; it would be hard to tell which are the best.

Best wishes for your success.

A. F. BLUME.

Hazelton, British Columbia.

NOTE: "To the Victor," by Harold Titus, has been published in book form by the Rand, McNally Company, Chicago, Illinois, under the title "I Conquered." Price $1.25 net.

PRAISE FOR THE ARTISTS

TO THE EDITOR:

For some time I have been longing to make to you the suggestion that you publish in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the names of the artists who furnish the beautiful outside pictures with as great prominence as those of the story writers. I cannot particularize pictures, for as fast as I feel like praising one, another comes up and says: "Why do you not mention *me?*" The list would therefore become too large. So I will praise them all, though perhaps the *Janie Frete* cover is the greatest cover so far. I should like to know more about her, and am impatiently waiting for sequels to several stories which seem to have been "bitten off too short." Mr. Blighton's "Haunted Hands" is also going to be a fine story, I can see.

Yours truly,

A. S. GIBSON.

9 Chestnut Street,
South Norwalk, Connecticut.

NORTHERN STORIES GREAT

TO THE EDITOR:

When I like anything, I like to say so, and I know of nothing which I enjoy so much as the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I had not even seen a copy of this delightful little magazine until I met my husband. He was reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, which he gave me, and—well, we three have been inseparable ever since. That was almost two years ago, and we have read all the stories since. Our favorite authors are Zane Grey, George A. England, Giesy and J. B. Smith, Jackson Gregory, Perley P. Sheehan, Edgar Rice Burroughs—and most all of them, in fact. Space does not permit me to begin naming the stories we like best, but I cannot keep still about "Between Heaven and Earth." I like it especially well because it is just as good in the last chapter as the first; and I think we need a sequel to "The Lad and the Lion." We both liked "Red Blood," and think all those northern stories great. I especially liked "Wolf Breed," too.

Good luck forever to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MR. and MRS. J. E. ARCHERD.

R. F. D. No. 2,
Cleveland, Oklahoma.

A "BONZER" MAGAZINE

TO THE EDITOR:

I am pleased to say that I find the ALL-STORY WEEKLY brighter, better, and more full of gripping human interest than ever.

What impresses me is your masterly attitude in regard to the war, avoiding the sickly stories with which the English magazines are filled.

The high literary ability as instanced by such stories as "Just to Prove It" and Mary Gaunt's "At Artful Forks" is astonishing. I was bitterly disappointed at not being able to get "Too Much Efficiency," and have written to America for same. In this little town the numbers are so popular that I have been obliged to run a tape through each number and tie same to my table that those "who read may not run." Your magazine is a "Bonzer," and appeals to the spirit of Australia.

Yours very truly,

Yanawonga, Australia. R. P. LEWERS.

WANTS SEQUEL TO "THE LAD AND THE LION"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a few years, and like it very much because the majority of the stories are different. The stories I like best are "Greywold" and "The Gun Brand." "Between Heaven and Earth" was fine, also "Hiding Places" and many others. I would be writing all day if I named them all. "The Lad and the Lion" was very good, and that is why I am writing; I am not satisfied with it. Get Edgar Rice Burroughs busy on a sequel, please. He is my favorite author, but he won't be if he does not give us a sequel, and that soon. Fred Jackson is another good author. "Tinsel" was a very good story.

Wishing you further success, I remain,

MRS. H. P.

Columbus, New Mexico.

AUTHORS ALL SPLENDID

TO THE EDITOR:

Having just completed "The Lad and the Lion" in the current issue of the ALL-STORY

WEEKLY, I want to write and congratulate you on this splendid story. I have only one objection or criticism to make, and that is that it was altogether too short.

I can't imagine any more of a treat than to take an ALL-STORY WEEKLY and tilt my chair back with my feet on a table and dive into a story up to my eyebrows, especially if it is written by Reynolds, Burroughs, or Williams; but they are all good, and I don't want to slight any of your splendid authors.

I am a new reader of your magazine, but believe me, I won't miss a number if I have to mortgage my little old flivver to do it.

Yours truly,
M. IDSE.

Stony City, Iowa.

"THE LONE STAR RANGER"

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find ten cents in stamps, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the week of November 18, 1916. I have been taking ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a number of months, but neglected to get a copy of this edition.

When are we going to have another serial by Jackson Gregory? I certainly enjoyed the last one. Also, give us some more good stories by E. K. Means, Frank L. Packard, and George Allan England.

Please let me know if "The Lone Star Ranger," by Zane Grey, ever appeared in the pages of the ALL-STORY. If so, when?

Always an ALL-STORY WEEKLY reader,
EUGENE E. CLAUTIER.

620 Lansing Avenue,
Detroit, Michigan.

NOTE: "The Lone Star Rangers," by Zane Grey, was published in the *All-Story Cavalier*, May 9 to June 6, 1914. "The Last of the Duanes" was published in *The Argosy*, September, 1914. The two stories combined into one are published in book form, under the title, "The Lone Star Ranger," by Harper & Brothers, New York City. Price $1.35 net.

"PACKARD'S MASTERPIECE"

TO THE EDITOR:

Will enclose money for renewal.

Wish to express my appreciation of the great story by Isabel Ostrander, which you have just given us. "Between Heaven and Earth" was a dandy and no mistake. "The Sin That Was His" I consider Packard's masterpiece, and it was one of the strongest stories you have ever published in the magazine.

"Opportunity," "The Holy Scare," "The Man in Evening Clothes," and "Ladyfingers" were particularly good.

Hope to see before long serials by by E. J. Rath and Zane Grey.

Sincerely,
W. B. BEECHES.

Winterport, Maine.

LETTERETTES

Enclosed find one dollar, for which please send us the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, commencing with the July 14 number. We still have all praise for the magazine, and I am now reading "The Lad and the Lion," and can hardly wait for the next book. Also just finished "Raiders." It was great. Tell Thomas Addison to write us some more like it. In fact, there are so many good ones lately I can't mention them all.

MR. and MRS. H. A. LOHR.

Carterville, Illinois.

I think the lady who said, "Ladies do not like detective stories" is wrong, for I know about a dozen that like them best. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY suits me first rate. Have taken it about two years. Did not know there was such a book before or should have taken it longer. I have sent several more people crazy over it since then. I pass them along when I'm through with them, but I insist on having them back. Like some others, I would rather miss my dinner than the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Is this the first letter from Grimsby? Lots more detective stories, please. I remain,

MRS. J. CHARLTON.

Grimsby,
Ontario, Canada.

I have been a regular reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three or four years. Have started to read "The Lad and the Lion," and think it is hard to beat; also "Raiders," "Between Heaven and Earth," and "The Cave Man." I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best ever.

I always read the Heart to Heart Talks, and enjoy them very much.

Three cheers for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and the editor and authors!

C. M. HARREY.

McClelland, Iowa.

Having been greatly impressed with Austin Hall's "Almost Immortal," which was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY on October 7, 1916, I also want to express my enthusiasm for his latest story, "The Rebel Soul." Please remember, Mr. Editor, that I am waiting for some more of Austin Hall's "different" stories.

Truly yours,
J. W. STOUGH.

San Jose, California.

5 MONTHS TO PAY 5

Tailor-Made-to-Order

Send for Style Book and Samples of Fabrics

Have your clothes made to order from finest, stylish fabrics, by our expert tailors and take 5 months to pay. That is our offer to men who wish to dress in latest style—and then we save you $15 to $25. Every garment guaranteed a perfect fit and best workmanship—actually made to order from your measurements. Your choice of handsomest fabrics—the very pick and cream of the weaver's art, in plain colors, checks, stripes, plaids, and all weaves.

Look into this offer—get the facts (all explained in our Style Book). See if this is not the fairest, most liberal proposition you have ever had on tailor-made-to-order clothes. We leave the decision on fit, workmanship and quality all to you. Try on the suit we make for you and if not the best value you have ever received—if not satisfactory in every way, return it at our expense. If it is all that we say and you are fully satisfied, pay balance on our easy terms.

As Little As $1.00 Down

You can order by sending as little as a dollar down—and that back if you wish to return the suit. Send now for our big Style Book showing the latest snappiest, fashions for this season—also samples of our fabrics. Learn from this book how we can buy these fabrics in immense quantities at rock-bottom mill prices and share our savings with you. Learn also how we tailor our garments to give them the style to suit your figure and personality—how we interline and hand sew and give you garments that keep their shape. The Style Book tells all about this—and also gives full directions for self measurement. Send for it free.

This Classy Tailor-Made-To-Order Suit, Only $16.75

$1,000 Reward

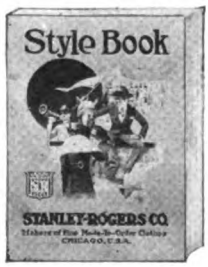
This is given in gold to anyone who can prove that we do not actually make to order every garment ordered from us from the customer's measure. We operate our own great tailoring shops, employing the most skilled tailors and every garment ordered from us is made here under expert supervision.

Save $15.00 to $25.00

See for yourself. Compare our fabrics and prices with any elsewhere and see what our quantity buying and direct selling to customers saves you. By operating on such a large scale we cut down the "overhead" expense and give our customers the benefit in low prices on extra fine quality.

Free Style Book

We will send you the big Style Book with pictures in actual colors of garments made by us. You see exactly how you will look. Choose direct from the big selection of 70 cloth samples—the very best fabrics selected by our experts. All prices and terms given too. You ought to get this book even if you are not ready to order now. Get posted on the styles and the prices you should pay for highest class made-to-order clothes. The Style Book is free. Send the coupon, and get it now.



Stanley-Rogers Company
1015 Jackson Blvd., Dept. 932, Chicago, Ills.

SEND THIS COUPON NOW

Stanley-Rogers Company,
1015 Jackson Blvd., Dept. 932, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me FREE your new Fall Style Book showing latest Metropolitan Styles, also 70 Cloth Samples and full particulars of your $1.00 down with 5-Months-to-Pay-Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

Don't Envy Successful Men Be One!

BE AN EXPERT ACCOUNTANT

500,000 Firms Need Them—Only 2,000 in America

Today, in America alone, there are over 500,000 large firms that need annual or semi-annual audits. In every large city there are hundreds of openings for trained accountants. As there are only about 2,000 certified public accountants in America, the demand far exceeds the supply. For this reason the incomes and salaries paid are good. Just as soon as you complete the LaSalle Course, your chances for obtaining immediate employment will be excellent—no weeks or months hunting for a job—the position will seek you. If you complete the course with satisfactory grades you will be fully qualified for one of these positions.

We Will Train and Coach You In Your Home—By Mail—In Your Spare Time

Hold your present position. Earn while you learn. Study when you feel most like it. Advance as rapidly or as slowly as you desire. Study a little every day in your leisure time—part of which is now wasted. You can complete our entire course, become a master accountant—in less time than any other because our system will teach you the "working-knacks" and "short-cuts" employed by experts. In this our course differs from all others.

Under Personal Supervision of William Arthur Chase, C.P.A.

You will receive your training under the direct personal supervision of William Arthur Chase, an accountant of National prominence, who is Ex-Secretary of Illinois State Board of Examiners in Accountancy.

The Course was prepared by some of the world's most noted accountancy experts. It fully covers the field—Theory of Accounts—Practical Accounting—Cost Accounting—Auditing—Business Law, etc. It will prepare you for the C. P. A. Examination in any state.

Quit—The "Shirt Sleeve" Class

Why "grind" along, day after day, with the other **untrained "help"** waiting for a raise **that may not come**—and will be **small even if it does?** Determine to get out of the "shirt-sleeve" class. Resolve to bid goodby forever to hard work, long hours, and low wages. Decide to become a trained accountant—to direct others—and to draw a "man's" salary.

Choose Your Future Today—

The first thing to do is to mail the **coupon.** If you don't do it today the chances are you **never will.** Quit dreaming—**act.** Write your name and address on Coupon. Mail it. We will send you by return mail the **Free Booklet:** "Ten Years' Promotion in One," also complete information concerning the course and 112 page catalog which explains state examinations, salaries, etc.

La Salle Special Guarantee

We give the student a written agreement signed by our Treasurer, that if the student completes the course with satisfactory grades, and fails to pass the Certified Public Accountants examination held in any state, we will give him special instructions and help—**without additional charge**—until he does pass.

La Salle Extension University, Dept. 932-H Chicago

"The World's Greatest Extension University"

The WAGES

Of Bookkeepers, Clerks and other untrained help is from $12 to $20 a Week

As long as you neglect to obtain special training you will belong to this class. You will be one of the "help." You must "keep your nose on the grindstone." You can't demand a raise because **hundreds** of men are waiting to take your job—and for **less money.** No matter how **honest** or how **faithful** you are—or how **hard** you work—the wages will be **not more** than $20 a week. That is the limit—you can take it or leave it. If you want more salary you must obtain **special training**—there is no other way. Why work hard for wages of from $12 to $20 a week when you can become a **Trained Accountant** and draw a real salary instead of mere living expenses.

The SALARY

Of Many Trained Accountants is from $3,000 to $10,000 a Year and up.

Trained accountants get large salaries because there are **only a few hundred of them**—while **thousands** of firms need them. For this reason an expert can **demand** and **get** big pay. Then why don't you become a trained accountant? It is not very difficult, after all. The La Salle System will make it **easy** for you. Our course is written in a **clear** and **simple** manner. Everything is **fully explained.** You cannot **help but learn.** Under the personal supervision of our instructors—and the **coaching** of our experts—you will soon be qualified to earn a good salary. With our **help**—if you have **average intelligence,** and are **determined—failure is impossible.**

La Salle Extension University
Dept. 932-H Chicago, Ill.

Send at once your free Book "Ten Years' Promotion in One" and Catalog of your Course in Higher Accountancy and C. P. A. training. I am obligated in no way.

Name.....

Street No.....

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