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COPY

SATURDAY JUNE 26

BY THE YEAR \$4.00

# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*Sequel to  
"A Man  
Named  
Jones."*

*Land of the  
Shadow People*  
*by Charles B. Stilson*





# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CXI

NUMBER 4



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, 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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1920

Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXI

NUMBER 4



SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 1920



## Land of the Shadow People

by Charles B. Stilson

Oct. 25, 1919

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

FEW stories that we have published have met with a more cordial and enthusiastic reception than that given "A Man Named Jones," published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY October 25—November 22, 1919. Jones won many friends, and more than a few of these friends have written us demanding a sequel. In response to this wish we induced Mr. Stilson to write the story—a five-part serial—that starts on this page. Many of the characters who played their parts in the earlier story appear again in the sequel; among them *King Kelly*, *Kay-Kay*, and *Grimshaw*.

Perhaps we should say that at the beginning of this tale Jones is living happily in Detroit with *Katherine*, his wife, and their five-year-old son, *Bobby*. He thought that his days of adventure were past, but—

Here is the story.

### CHAPTER I.

BOBBY JONES LEAVES HOME.

"OH, gee! Molo, it's good to be home again, after that *vacashun*! Now we can play!"

Thus, and with breathless emphasis, did Bobby Jones deliver himself of his learned opinion, legging it meanwhile across a three-acre lawn, and crowding on all the steam that his five-year-old underpinning would stand. His confidant, a big, gray dog of formidable aspect, trotted close beside him.

In their wake a corpulent and venerable red Persian cat, with arched tail of the circumference of the proverbial rolling-pin, valiantly kept the pace for a few rods, and then turned to one side and crept under a snowball-bush, where it stretched out, alternately panting and washing its face with paws which were garnished with six toes each.

Bobby, galloping across the grass like a newly released colt, was that day and hour returned from a two-months' fishing trip with his parents in the wilds of upper



Canada, the delights of which he was far from appreciating. Molo, who was some three years the lad's senior in worldly wisdom, seemed, if the agitation of his stubby tail was credible, to agree precisely with the sentiments of his young master.

Cyrus the Persian, who had passed the two months "boarding out" at the city pound, also rejoiced, in his cattish fashion, to find himself once more at home, where he could once in a while chase a bird—a pastime which was its own reward; for he was much too fat to hope ever to catch one.

The Jones mansion, which Jones senior had built upon his return, nearly six years before, from a somewhat adventurous wandering among the islands of the southern Pacific, where he had found Katherine Manning and changed her name to Jones, stood well back from the street, not far from the junction of Maxwell and Jefferson Avenues, Detroit. The house, fronting in Maxwell Avenue, was three stories in height and proportionately extensive. The lower two stages were of green stone, almost hidden by a curtain of ivy and ampelopsis; the upper was of frame construction, into which were let a number of balconies, screened by the creepers. A cluster of elms shaded the front lawn and the drive. In the rear of the house was a large garage, and beyond it a stable.

Adjacent to the buildings were grounds some five acres in extent, partly lawns and partly gardens. The whole was enclosed by a high iron paling-fence of old-fashioned pattern.

Along the front of the grounds in the direction of Jefferson Avenue extended a lawn that was like a small, green sea, with here and there an upstanding island of shrubbery. Through this young Bobby steered an unerring course.

Not far from the iron fence, but at a considerable distance from the house, he pulled up and took breath. In front of him was a clump of lilac-bushes. The sod had been cut away from their roots in a circle, and the plot was rimmed with a fringe of dwarf nasturtiums, which, as the season was mid-August, were in gorgeous bloom.

"I may get a scolding for this, Molo;

but *you* sha'n't—so keep back," admonished Bobby. He lifted a sturdy leg and stepped cautiously across the nasturtiums. The dog, head cocked to one side and tail wagging, stood at the edge and watched him.

Not without a deal of grunting and stretching, the laddy wormed his way into the lilac thicket, whence in a half-minute he began to emerge, rear-foremost, and dragging something with him. He was nearly free of the closely growing shrubbery when a pertinacious branch prodded him, and he straightened convulsively. A sound of rending cloth apprised him of a catastrophe.

"Oh, *darn!* there goes my pants!" he exclaimed, feeling for the seat of the injury; "now I *will* catch it! Oh, well, never mind."

He squatted on his hams, and with vast satisfaction contemplated the booty which he had retrieved from the thicket. It consisted of a broad-bladed cutlas, which a clever hand had carved from a pine board, and a brace of pistols of similar material and workmanship.

All three weapons were somewhat weather-stained. Frowning at that discovery, Bobby proceeded to rub them vigorously with a handkerchief which, until that moment, had been clean. Unable to remove the "rust" from his arsenal by that means, he picked up a small, flat stone and scraped away with that for several minutes.

He next dug with the point of the cutlas in the soft earth at the foot of the lilacs, and resurrected a time-abused black felt hat many sizes too large for him. Pinned fast in the band of that relic was a glossy, curling feather which once had adorned the caudal eminence of a luckless brown-leghorn rooster.

A yard of flaring red woolen rag, drawn from inside the crown of the hat, completed Bobby's equipment. Casting his own trim little Panama contemptuously among the lilacs, he set with reverence the battered "slouch" atop his chestnut thatch; and in a trice, pistols in sash and cutlas in hand, one of the boldest mariners that ever sailed the blue was searching for pirate craft along the green horizon of the Jones garden.



Molo, who had lain down, peered at him through the nasturtium stems.

"It's pirates to-day—South Sea pirates—Molo," said the boy, with a quick glance about him to set his scenery. "Let's see; that's the sea, of course," pointing to the lawn, "and this is an atoll"—Bobby called it an "a tall"—"and these—the nasturtiums—are the coral reefs. Here are the palm-trees," indicating the lilac-bushes, "tall trees, Molo.

"I'm Captain Rob-bert Man-ning Jones. I'm lost in the island; and you are a whole shipful of pirates coming to get me. No; you're not in the right place for that. You're too near the island. Get up, Molo! Go out there in the sea and lie down!"

Obediently the dog got up, and re-deposited himself in the grass forty feet from the "atoll." Molo was used to being a pirate ship, and he at once went to sleep, unmindful that his "heaving deck" was, theoretically, the scene of bloody destruction.

Bobby ducked for the cover of the lilacs, whence, with pistols that never missed their aim, he annihilated hordes of the enemy.

And so the play went on, until the lad, attracted by a low whistle from the direction of the avenue, turned his head. What he saw caused him to forget entirely his duty of defending the atoll until every pirate had bitten the salt sea waves.

"What a pretty puppy!"

Pistols flying to right and left, Bobby straddled over the nasturtiums and scooted toward the fence.

The whistler, who was sauntering slowly along the sidewalk, was a thin-faced, swarthy man, who walked with the wide swing of a sailor. Small gold rings were in his ear-lobes, and he wore a thin, black mustache which drooped at each side of his mouth like the tails of two rats.

Beside him, trotting at the end of a chain, was the cause of Bobby's cry of pleasure—a red Irish terrier puppy, three months old, fat as a butter-ball, with smut-black snout and a ridiculous scut of docked tail, nearly the size, shape and color of a cigar-stub.

Bent double, Bobby ran sidewise along the fence, venting his admiration in a series

of endearing adjectives. On its side, the puppy whined, flickered its tail at the rate of two hundred whisks to the minute, and strained at the leash. Once it succeeded in touching Bobby's outstretched fingers through the bars with the tip of its cold little nose. Bobby thrilled with delight.

With smiling eyes the man looked down at the boy and paused.

"You like heem—yes?" he asked, his accent strongly foreign.

"You just bet!" replied Bobby with enthusiasm. "What's his name?"

"Hees name ees Mike. You like play wit' heem?"

"Oh! will you let him come in?"

In answer to the boy's eagerly gasped question, the man shook his head; but he pointed ahead in the direction of Jefferson Avenue.

"S'pose you come out, play wit' heem," he suggested. "A gate ees yonder."

"But I can't; daddy keeps the gate locked," objected Bobby.

"You come 'long; maybe I open these gate, all right," the man answered, moving on along the fence with the puppy. Bobby followed.

The gate, a narrow grille of iron-bar work like the fence, was used sometimes by the Jones gardener. As Bobby had averred, it was kept locked. To the lad's surprise, the stranger, after fumbling for a moment at its bolt, opened it.

Bobby plunged through and gathered the more than willing terrier in his arms. The gate swung to.

At this juncture Molo, aroused from slumber by the sound of voices, trotted across the lawn and thrust his grizzled head against the gate, whining and growling uneasily. But the grille opened inward, and Bobby's trusted friend and protector was unable to join him.

From uneasiness the dog's tone changed then to anger. He reared against the bars and barked threateningly at the stranger.

With a scowl that Bobby did not see, the foreigner edged away from the gate.

"You like thees Mike so well, you come see other pup I got," he said hurriedly. "You shall tell to me the one you like bes', and I geev heem to you."



"O-oo!" responded the delighted boy. "Where is it?"

"Jus' yonder." The sailor indicated with his finger a closed automobile which stood under a maple-tree a few feet beyond the boundary of the Jones grounds. The boy, lugging the terrier-pup, went along readily. Molo followed on his side of the fence, leaping against the bars and barking savagely.

On the driver's seat of the limousine sat a man apparently asleep. The sailor opened the side door. An unpainted wooden box was on the floor of the car.

"Other pup ees in there," said the man. "I hold thees Mike while you go see." Bobby clambered in.

As the boy laid eager hands on the cover of the box, the sailor, holding Mike by the scuff of his red neck, glanced up and down the street. No one was near. With the agility of a cat, he leaped into the car and slammed its door.

"Go, you José!" he shouted.

On his seat the driver, suddenly wide awake, turned on the power. As the machine left the curb with a jump, a surprised and angry treble voice floated back along the avenue:

"Hey! Stop that! I want my mo—" The last word died in a muffled wail.

The car slipped away, its speed increasing with every revolution of the wheels, and turned south in Jefferson Avenue.

In the corner of the Jones grounds a maddened gray beast hurled itself again and again in reckless fury against impassable iron bars, until their sharp edges cut its flesh and the foam at its jaws was flecked with crimson.

Across the wide lawns echoed a sweet-voiced woman's call:

"Bobby! Oh, Bobby! Where are you, dear?"

## CHAPTER II.

### KING KELLY'S WARNING.

**D**URING and for some time previous to Bobby's encounters with pirates, both fancied and real, Jones senior was in his study, plowing through a two-month

accumulation of mail, which was stacked elbow-deep upon his table.

Jones was a tall, squarely built man of thirty-seven years, with exceptionally deep chest and powerful shoulders. Heavy black hair waved above his wide forehead, and below were brown eyes, noticeable for their clearness and direct regard.

Inordinately slothful in his youth, he had slumped into obesity after his college days at the University of Dorchester. But his roving, active life in the South Seas had thinned him again and had hardened him into well nigh perfect physical condition. Since his return with his bride, he had kept himself scrupulously in form.

An unlighted cigar clamped firmly in one corner of his mouth, he made alert inroads on the paper-mountain in front of him; and as it decreased, a waste-basket which he held between his knees filled correspondingly.

On the opposite side of the table, pulling at a short brier and gazing through the French windows into the August sunshine, sat young Jim Arnold, of Dorchester. The fathers of the two men had been boyhood chums. The acquaintance of the younger men, though recent, promised to ripen into a friendship as strong as that which had cemented their sires.

Jim had made one of the Canadian party. He was passing a few days in Detroit before returning to Dorchester in New York State, where Jim Arnold, Sr., had been coroner for more than a quarter of a century, and where in his official capacity he once had pulled the younger Jones out of a disagreeable hole.

Young Jim was a shorter man than his friend, but nearly as broad in the shoulders—a keen-faced, gray-eyed youngster, of endless good humor.

Of the mail upon the table the bulk was made up of newspapers. Those Jones scanned rapidly, reading little but the headlines, and occasionally tossing one aside to be referred to later.

He was near the middle of the heap when a name in display type on one of the front pages caught his eye. His busy hands ceased burrowing. One of them reached out, found a match and lighted the cigar.



"So Kay-Kay is gone," he muttered.

"What say, old chap?" queried Arnold, stirring in his chair.

"You've heard me tell about Kinsella—Grimshaw's partner in San Francisco?" Jones asked, continuing to read the item which had held his attention.

"Uhuh; and a precious rascal you pictured him. Is he in jail?"

"No; he's dead—suicide, it says here—and under strange circumstances."

Newspaper in hand, Jones arose and opened a door into the hall. "Kate!" he called.

Katherine Jones was helping a maid unpack vacation trunks. At the moment of her husband's call both hands and her mouth were full of wearables; so it was a queer, stifled voice that answered down the stairway, "Yes."

Jones chuckled. "What is it—hairpins?" he asked.

"No," in a clearer tone; "handkerchiefs. What do you want, Bob?"

"Can you come down for a minute? I've struck a piece of real news in a newspaper."

Two minutes later Mrs. Jones entered the study, where her husband and Arnold were standing to receive her.

She was a strikingly beautiful young woman, this wife whom Jones had found on the uncharted isle of Zaumouti in the far South Sea. Her wilderness life had taught her a self-reliance that was reflected in her features; and had given to her graciously feminine figure the poise and strength of a young athlete. Her eyes were blue as the depth of the Pacific waves that lapped her island, her hair as yellow as its golden sands.

Had he not known her as the wife of his friend and the mother of Bobby, Jim Arnold could have, would have, fallen in—but, anyway, there was no use in thinking about it. She *was* his friend's wife; and he had resolutely uprooted the dangerous sprout.

"What is your news, Bob?" asked Katherine, as with a tired little sigh she sank into a wicker rocker and replaced a fugitive lock of hair. "Where is Bobby?"

"Run to grass, I guess," Jones answered with a smile. "I saw him a little while ago cutting across the lawn like a scared

rabbit. Molo and Cyrus were with him. The news is a reminder of the old times, and a trifle grisly. Kay-Kay has killed himself."

He read aloud from the newspaper. The item was a press dispatch from San Francisco, dated more than a month before. It related that Kerwood Kinsella, dealer in curios and Oriental goods, had been found dead in his place of business in Leavenworth Street, killed by a powerful alkaloid poison, evidently swallowed with suicidal intent.

Certain features of the affair puzzled the Frisco police. There was no discoverable reason why Kinsella should have taken his life; his business was moderately prosperous, his health excellent; none of his acquaintances had heard him say anything to indicate despondency. Kinsella was forty-six years old, and unmarried. So far as known, he left no relatives.

The author of the dispatch closed by recalling the fate of Kinsella's former partner, Captain Zalmon Grimshaw, lost at sea on a yachting cruise in the South Pacific nearly six years before.

"So Kay-Kay never went or sent to rescue Zalmon," said Jones when he ended his reading. "I had a hunch that he wouldn't when I told him where and how we had left his side-kicker. I had Kay-Kay sort of sized up right, it seems. I'm blessed if I can guess, though, why he should voluntarily quit his mortal husk like that."

"Then the chances are flourishing that Grimshaw and his band of kindred spirits are still sweetly marooned on Zaumouti," remarked Arnold.

Jones nodded. "It looks mighty like it," he answered.

Katherine shuddered.

"And I hope they stay there forever!" she exclaimed with unwonted vehemence. "I know that it is a wicked wish; but I do. I'm almost sorry, Bob, that you told me about Mr. Kinsella—it freshens my memory so."

"Sometimes I dream of that walking monstrosity, Grimshaw, and his horrible smile. It makes me afraid even to know that he is living." She shivered again.

What her husband was about to reply

was never said. From the direction of the eastern lawn sounded the frenzied barking of a dog. Jones sprang to his feet.

"Something is wrong!" he ejaculated. "Molo never barks like that without a cause."

He stepped through the open window to the porch. Katherine was there ahead of him, sending her call for Bobby across the sunlit lawns.

No Bobby answered; only the furious challenge of the dog was flung back to her listening ears.

All three of them, Katherine in the lead, ran across the grassy expanse. Cyrus came forth from the shelter of the snowball-bush and toiled breathlessly behind them.

In the angle of the iron fence at the far corner of the grounds they found Molo, still beating his head futilely against the bars. Of Bobby there was no sign. No well-loved voice answered the repeated calls of his father and mother.

At a word from Jones the dog came leaping to him.

"Where's Bobby, Molo?" he asked. "Find him, good dog."

After a glance at its master's face, the animal bounded whining to the fence and ran along it to the corner. There it thrust its muzzle between the close-set bars, voiced one doleful howl, and then began to dig frantically in the sod, as though it would tear up bodily the obstruction which held it back.

Jones knew his dog. Its actions told him that somehow Bobby had gone beyond the fence, where none but a good climber could have passed. Calling the dog to him again, he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and approached the narrow gate.

To his surprise, when he laid a hand upon the gate, it yielded and swung inward. Molo squeezed between his knees, nearly upsetting him, and started in the direction of Jefferson Avenue, tail quivering, nose held close to the sidewalk, and sniffing eagerly. The three worried humans who were depending upon him followed.

A few feet beyond the angle of the fence the dog turned out to the curbing, halted there for an instant, and then began to run in small circles. Failing to pick up the

lost trail, it returned to the curb, sat down with muzzle raised, and regarded Jones hopefully.

Jones bent over the curb. He found no sure indication of what he surmised: that the trail was lost because an automobile had stood there and gone. Tales of kidnaped children, back to the days of Charley Ross, flashed through his brain and sickened him. Heavy hearted, he turned to Katherine.

"I'm afraid, Kate dear, that we have lost the little chap for a while," he said, choking a bit in spite of himself. "But it cannot be for long." His voice rang with the determination that was one of his characteristics: "We'll find him!"

Katherine was a strong woman. She fought down a rising inclination to hysteria; but she turned very pale. In answer to her husband's assurance, she nodded, not trusting herself to words.

Molo whined. Jones reached down and patted his head, and the caressing fingers came away smeared with blood. The sight of the animal's lacerated scalp moved the man strongly.

"Good boy, Molo," he murmured; "you did your best for him—even to shedding your blood. I sha'n't forget that."

"How do you do, Mrs. Jones—and Mr. Jones. Has something serious occurred?"

The speaker, a tall, masculine-featured, elderly woman, had descended a terrace on the opposite side of the avenue and come puffing asthmatically across. She stepped over the curb with a grunt.

"I saw you all out here acting queerly, and I thought that I would step over and see," she continued. "You must have just returned from Canada. I—" Her labored breath failed her, and she paused.

"Oh, Mrs. Klinger, some one has kidnaped Bobby!" Katherine cried, the impulse to tears shaking her voice.

"What!" From one to another of the three faces stared Mrs. Klinger. Then she exercised a neighborly and womanly prerogative. She opened her arms and gathered Katherine into them. "You poor, dear woman!" she exclaimed with genuine feeling. "Cry. I know that you want to; and it will do you good. You know, I



had a feeling that something was impending; but—"

"Why?" cut in Jones, who knew his neighbor as a strong-minded and observant woman.

Mrs. Klinger gulped heroically for the breath to go on: "For a number of days past I have seen a foreigner loitering in the avenue in the vicinity of your grounds—you know I object, to foreigners on general principles. I think that they should be made to remain where they come from.

"This one was a dark, gypsy-looking person—gold earrings and that sort of thing. I have had it in my mind to tell you. I thought of robbery; but this is—"

"When did you see this man last?" queried Jones.

"Less than an hour ago. He was walking by the fence. He had a small, red dog on a string."

"That was the bait, Robert," said Katherine, raising her head; "you know Bobby always has been mad about puppies."

Jones pointed out the spot where Molo had given up the boy's trail, and asked Mrs. Klinger if she had noticed an automobile standing there within a short time.

"Why, yes, I did; though I had not thought of it in this connection," she replied. "It was a limousine."

As it seemed there was nothing more to be learned where they were, and much to be done elsewhere, the Joneses and Arnold started to return to the house.

"What shall you do?" Mrs. Klinger called after them.

"Put the matter in the hands of the police—and then get out and help them," answered Jones.

"The police are very inadequate. I'm sure the man was a gypsy," called Mrs. Klinger again, as she puffed across the street.

Jones, recalling the swarthy, ragged chaps whom he had seen peddling articles of hammered copper from door to door, thought it unlikely that one of them should be riding about in a limousine. "Whoever he is, if he is a kidnaper of the usual kidney, we shall either catch him or hear from him before long," he said.

"And Robert," his wife faltered, "if they should ask a ransom, you won't—you will—I can't bear to think of Bobby in—we—"

"Kate," Jones's deep voice was solemnly earnest, "if the police fail, and there seems to be the slightest danger, I will get our little man back, if it costs us all we have." At the gate he paused. "I wonder if the scoundrel unlocked this gate, or if it was left unlocked through carelessness?" he asked.

In the face of the calamity which had descended upon his friends, Jim Arnold had maintained silence. He now broke it, and proved that a pair of more than ordinarily keen, gray eyes had not been idle.

"Neither," he declared; "the bolt has been sawed. It was done some hours, perhaps days, ago; for there is a thin rust over the sawed surface. I don't know when it rained here last; and, anyway, the dew could have formed the rust."

With one hand below the bolt-socket, Jones struck sharply against its frame with the other. The severed piece of bolt fell into his palm. As he looked down at it, his nostrils twitched. He raised the fragment of iron close to his face and sniffed.

Memories poured through his brain: A mighty ocean of shifting colors under a gorgeous sky and a brassy sun; tropical islands, set like gems in the tide; wild songs in unknown tongues; weird dancers in the moonlight on sanded *tinesaras*; battle; love—all the glamour, the romance and the mystery that the South Pacific meant to him.

For the odor which had floated to his nostrils from that bit of iron was the same that had been constantly with him through wondrous months. He would never forget it. It was a perfume soft and heavy—the scent of coconut oil.

With the other memories evoked by that fugitive fragrance—inseparable from them—had come that of Grimshaw, smiling and implacable—the man who for a time had seemed destined to become the evil genius in the life of Jones.

Why was it, Jones asked himself as he went on with the others toward the house, that the man who had sawed the bolt of his

gate and stolen his son had used coconut oil to deaden the sound of his sawing—that oil of all others, when there were so many lubricants more easily procurable? Not wishing to add to Katherine's alarm, he said nothing to her of this odd reminder of their former perils.

In the study, which he entered through the window, he found a man who had that moment come in by the door. He was Wixon, the gardener, an English sailor who had sailed with him on the yacht Moon-Bird, and who had proved faithful in the midst of much treachery.

"Hi 'adn't looked for you so soon, Mr. Jones, or Hi should 'ave been on 'and, sir," he explained, his hard-cut features lighting up. "Hi've been down-street, buying a bit of new fence-wire, sir." Noticing then the perturbed looks on the faces before him, he asks, "Why, wot's wrong, sir."

When told that Bobby, whom he worshiped, was gone, Wixon choked a savage oath.

"With your permission, Hi'm hoff at once for a look about," he said eagerly, starting for the window. "Hi 'ave middling sharp eyes, sir, though they do looks two ways at once.

"Oh, Hi say, sir, you found the cablegram? No? Hi put it on the table. It came more than a month ago; but as you 'ad left no forwarding haddress, Hi 'ad to 'old it, sir." Wixon hastened out.

In response to his telephone-call, Jones was informed that the Detroit police chief and a squad of his detectives would be in Maxwell Avenue as soon as a police speeder could bring them.

That business under way, Jones turned his attention to the cablegram, which he found buried under a quantity of mail matter.

"Why, Kate, the cablegram's from the Martian!" he exclaimed as he saw the signature.

"Martian" was Jones's nickname for a tried but eccentric friend who had accompanied him to the South Sea, and who had wedded the Ariki Foyara of the island of Bomavalu, and thus become a king. The despatch was dated from Guam.

"Grimshaw escaped Zaumouti," ran the

Martian's message. "Fear trouble, Robert. Am on way to join you." Followed the Martian's full signature, "Brutus Finlayson Kelly, Rex Bomavalu."

With the slip of paper in his hand and the persistent scent of cocoanut oil in his nostrils, Jones smiled wanly, and then his face hardened. The old battle was on once more. King Kelly's warning had reached him too late, and Grimshaw had struck a terrific blow.

Poor Bobby!

### CHAPTER III.

#### KAY-KAY'S TWO CALLERS.

AT eight o'clock in the evening on the 14th of June—a little more than a month before Bobby Jones scampered through the iron gate of his father's fence in fateful pursuit of a red terrier pup—Kerwood Kinsella, of San Francisco, received two callers.

Mr. Kinsella had not expected visitors at that hour. Had he been consulted, he would have preferred to receive none—least of all the ones who came.

It was Saturday night. In accord with his custom at the end of each week, Mr. Kinsella at six o'clock had closed his office and salesroom on the third floor of the Duvain Building, in Leavenworth Street, and had gone out for a light restaurant luncheon. At half-past seven he had returned to his desk to cast up the returns of the week's business.

One large room housed all departments of the establishment. From rear to front it was stacked, shelved and hung with curios and wares of the Orient. They ranged from a child's toy to a Burmese rug; from rare, almost priceless, satsumas and ivories to gaudy trinkets, such as one wins by rolling wooden balls in the Japanese booth at the fair.

When Mr. Kinsella entered on the night in question, the spring lock of the door clicked cheerfully behind him, assuring against interruptions. He did not turn on the arc-lights which swung from the ceiling, but threaded a familiar but devious path through a maze of fantastic, many-hued



oddities to a far corner, where a single light burned under a green shade.

This corner was the office. Under the lamp two flat-topped desks stood back to back, and near them was a squat safe.

Kinsella removed his coat, hung it on a rack, and seated himself at the desk nearest the door. Its companion had long been unoccupied, and was piled with a miscellaneous accumulation of articles which Kinsella had pushed across from time to time when they had been in his way. One memento of the former occupant remained: a bronze stand on which lay a number of corroded pens and a cigarette-holder of slender bamboo a foot long and exquisitely carved.

By following the precepts of the man who once had sat at that vacant desk—that exceptionally able partner who had been “lost at sea”—Mr. Kinsella had prospered. If the fat tummies of grotesque Chinese dolls sometimes disgorged packets of the poppy-stuff of which dreams are concocted, Kinsella was so much the richer for the forbidden traffic. He was an apt pupil of a clever teacher; and Federal agents troubled him not.

For the half of an hour he sat, his thin face bent over a ledger, in which his fountain pen scratched busily. Occasionally he paused and caressed his red mustache, or ran his fingers through his crop of rusty hair, while he eyed his work with satisfaction. It had been a good week—and all good weeks were doubly remunerative, now that there was no partner to share in them.

On an ornamental wall-clock a tiny Vulcan clanged eight hammer-strokes upon his anvil. The knob of the door rattled. Kinsella stirred in his chair. Who could be coming at this hour? Probably some one had mistaken the door. The latch-bolt snapped back, and the door opened.

“Who’s there?” called Kinsella, thinking that likely it was the janitor; for he knew that he had left the spring on the lock.

No one answered. The door closed. A soft, heavy tread came on across the floor. Through the dusk and the jumble of confusion it followed the sinuous passage unerringly. The floor boards creaked.

Kinsella heard, and his narrow eyes widened. Because his fingers trembled so violently that he could no longer hold it, he laid his pen down. He caught hold of the lamp-shade and tilted it, flooding the end of the passage with light.

Into the circle of radiance waddled a short and prodigiously fat figure, at sight of which Kinsella sprang up with a choking, stammering cry:

“G-g-grim-shaw! G-grim! My God! I thought you was dead!” Recovering himself and swallowing hard, he hastened forward with outstretched hand. “Honest, Grim, I thought it was your ghost when I heard your footsteps!” His teeth were clicking together as he spoke.

Grimshaw took the proffered hand. Kinsella noticed that he wore a pair of white cotton gloves.

“You didn’t used to be afraid of spirits, Kay-Kay,” he answered, “either liquid or ethereal—but that was six years ago. No; I’m not a ghost, not yet—though it’s a wonder.”

Followed by Kinsella’s staring eyes, he crossed the open space and let himself cautiously into the swivel-chair at his old desk. Quite different he appeared from the clean-shaven, immaculately-clad man he had been when last he sat there. Then he had been as nearly the pink of fashion as it is possible for so fat a man to be; now he wore a nondescript and shabby suit and a limp felt hat, and his face was covered nearly to the eyes by a ragged white beard.

For a moment he was silent, running his eyes over the litter on the desk-top. Then he asked: “Well, how’s the business, Kay-Kay?”

Kinsella drew a quick breath of relief. “Flourishin’,” he replied. “Want a statement?” He nodded toward the ledger and sat down.

“Not now; I’ll look into it later.”

“But how, in the name of all that’s holy, did you—what happened you? Where you been? You look old as Methuselah,” pursued Kinsella volubly.

“And feel older than that,” returned Grimshaw, a note of weariness in his voice. “What did Jones tell you had become of me? He came to see you, didn’t he?”

"He said that you was lost in a storm, Grim. That's the dope that has been all over San Francisco for the last six years."

"Lost, eh?" Grimshaw chuckled. "Well, that's the truth, in more ways than one. I've been enjoying a six years' fishing excursion on an island called Zaumouti, where the fishing is damned good and the society damned poor—the which was handed me because I erred in my estimation of a man's capabilities."

"I told you that man Jones might prove a tough customer."

"It wasn't Jones that euchred me; it was his friend Kelly. But never mind that; here I am again, and still smiling—always smiling, Kay-Kay."

He looked hungrily at the bamboo cigarette-holder on the desk.

"If I remember correctly, you smoke a cigarette once in a while, Kay-Kay?"

Kinsella nodded, and produced a packet. Grimshaw inserted one in the bamboo, helped himself to a match from Kay-Kay's box, and puffed avidly.

"Why the white gloves, Grim?" his partner asked.

"My hands are sights to make a lady shudder—sunburn and blisters. I worked part of my way back as an able seaman."

"Need money?" Kinsella made a move in the direction of the drawer where he kept his check-book.

"In a way, no; and in another way I want all you've got. Got some foolscap? Good—and I see that you have a fountain pen handy. Now, Kay-Kay, you're going to draw up your will—in my favor. That will put a cinch on this partnership business."

Kay-Kay laughed uneasily. "Now that you're back on the job, it strikes me that that is a rather needless precaution to be takin'," he suggested.

"It's precisely because I *am* back on the job that I am taking it. And for a while no one is to know that I have returned—not until I have had something to say to Mr. Jones. I knew that I would find you up here to-night; so I didn't take chances by daylight—even with these whiskers. Ready?"

"Hell! I'm no lawyer; I can't make a

will," protested Kinsella; but he took up the pen.

"I can. I will dictate. You write."

Grimshaw leaned forward and carefully deposited the stub of his cigarette in Kinsella's ash-receiver, lighted another, and sat back, crossing his white-clad hands comfortably on his stomach.

"Start off with your date-line, city, county and state," he directed. "Got it? Now then: 'I, Kerwood Kinsella, aged forty-seven years, being in full possession of my mind and faculties, do hereby—'"

Kinsella, feeling that he was complying with a useless whim, but fearing Grimshaw much more than a darky fears the devil, wrote.

The will was not long. In the briefest terms it devised the business and bank account of Kay-Kay to his partner, Zalmon Grimshaw, "whom I never have given up as dead." A well-known San Francisco trust company was named as executor.

When the instrument had been signed, Zalmon glanced through it.

"Not just as a lawyer would have done it; but it will hold," he commented cheerfully. He placed the paper in his pocket. "Ahem; that was a devilishly dry proceeding. Refreshments still in the same place, Kay-Kay?"

"Yes; and a good stock on hand."

Zalmon heaved himself upright and opened a teakwood cabinet which stood near the desks. A moment later he set out two glasses of sherry.

"Bumps, Kay-Kay," he challenged, grinning and sipping with relish.

"Bumps, Grim," responded Kay-Kay, swallowing hastily and setting down his glass. "Gad! that's the first time I ever made a will. Makes a man feel as if he was goin' to die, eh?" he said with a wry smile.

"He usually does—some time," retorted his partner, consulting a battered watch. "By the way, Kay-Kay, I brought an old friend of mine with me to-night."

"Where is he?" Kinsella glanced in the direction of the door. "Why didn't you have him in to witness the will?"

"I will introduce you to him presently." Grimshaw took another cigarette. Kin-

sella started to imitate; but his hand faltered and fell short on the desk before it reached the packet. From under his hat-brim, Zalmon watched keenly.

"Christopher! that must be strong sherry!" Kay-Kay ejaculated. His speech was thick, and his face had turned strangely pale. "Did you notice, Grim—I c-couldn't reach—that cigarette? I c-can hardly talk; but my—head—is—clear—as—" His voice trailed into an unintelligible murmur and ceased.

Zalmon arose and removed his hat from a head that was as bald as the globe of the electric light which was reflected on his shining scalp. Every sign of weariness was gone from him. He bent forward to meet the gaze of Kinsella, who sat bolt upright and rigid and stared at him.

"I have a few things to say to you, Kay-Kay; and I do not think that you will interrupt—now."

He smiled amiably, blew a cloud of smoke, and rubbed his moist pate with one gloved hand.

"In a long and varied life I have acquired a pretty keen judgment of men. In fact, I recall only one error of the sort, and that was with regard to Mr. Kelly. I thought he was merely crazy; and he turned out to be a genius. I made no mistake about Mr. Jones. I do not love him; but I know that he is not a liar—am as sure that he is not as I am that you are. Kay-Kay.

"When Mr. Jones left me on Zaumouti, he promised me that he would tell you where to find me. He *did* tell you. If it is believed in Frisco that I went down in a storm, it is because you planted and cultivated the belief, Kay-Kay."

Grimshaw paused to light his fourth cigarette.

"My purpose in coming up here to-night just as I did, was to dissolve our partnership," he continued. "Do you know that you made your will? It was because you were about to commit suicide, and your conscience troubled you; so you set things square with your old partner before you went. That's what they will all think. See here, Kay-Kay."

Zalmon removed one of the cotton gloves

and extended under the light a hand as plump, pink and soft as an infant's.

"No blisters or sunburn, eh?—and no finger-prints around the place for the clever detectives to find. Why am I putting my cigarette stubs and ashes so carefully in your dish? Same reason. After I go out of here, I haven't been here.

"Now there is one other little formality to be attended to." He took out the will and reached for Kinsella's fountain pen, first taking the precaution to draw on his glove again. "That's the witnessing of this instrument.

"Let me see: Spanish Luiz can write, and so can Mr. Michael Mullaney—and either one of them will gladly swear to the signatures I'm going to make for them. There we are now, all proper and as should be. Now I'm going to put this will in your safe."

He twirled the knob of the safe's combination, and placed the paper in one of its compartments. When he had closed the heavy door, he opened the cabinet again, put away the glass which he had used and set the bottle out on the desk. He glanced at his watch, and holding it in his palm, once more faced Kinsella.

"Now I will introduce to you the friend I brought with me. It is death, Kay-Kay, my son.

"In the sherry in which you pledged me was a bit of Chinese alkaloid which old Li Wong once gave me. It is powerful medicine. Its first effect is physical paralysis; its second is death.

"Your head is as clear as a bell, Kay-Kay, as you were trying to tell me. You can hear and comprehend every word that I say to you—and you can almost imagine what you are thinking."

He glanced down at the watch-dial.

"In five minutes you will be a dead man."

Not a muscle twitched in the whole of Kinsella's spare frame; but his eyes glared up at Zalmon like those of a snared wolf.

"Good-by, Kay-Kay." Zalmon picked up his partner's nerveless hand and shook it. A fiendish gleam in Kay-Kay's eyes responded. Grimshaw shook a finger at him.



"Don't go away mad," he reproved gently; "you know that you earned it, Kay-Kay."

After a glance around to satisfy himself that he had neglected no precaution, Zalmom tiptoed to the door and closed it softly behind him.

Shortly after his departure, the second caller, who unseen had entered with him, advanced to the desk and transacted his business. He left Mr. Kinsella sitting very straight and still under the green light—and so he was found on Monday morning.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE MARTIAN'S STORY.

AS he had told Mrs. Klinger he would, Jones "got out and helped" the police, working nearly twenty-four hours a day, burning countless gallons of gasoline, tirelessly following clue after clue to the kidnaping of his son. As tirelessly worked Jim Arnold, who, to see his friends through their trouble, had delayed his return to Dorchester.

From coast to coast, the newspapers of the country took up the search for the lost child; and the chubby features of Bobby Jones soon became as well known to the reading public as the face of the President. Jones offered a reward which ran into five figures for the recovery of the boy or apprehension of his abductors. The Mayor of Detroit offered a lesser sum. A private detective agency of national fame and almost world wide scope supplemented the efforts of the authorities of the Straits City.

Trail after trail proved blind and futile. Bobby had disappeared as completely as though the fairies in which he firmly believed had spirited him away.

Nor did the child's captors give any sign that they were holding him to ransom. Red-eyed, sleepless and weary, Katherine and Jones watched every mail, started at each ring of telephone or door-bell; but no message came.

So matters stood on the eighth day after the kidnaping. In Jones's morning mail on that day was a roughly-wrapped parcel, addressed in printing done with an indeli-

ble lead-pencil. It contained a shapeless old black coat, in the band of which flaunted the glossy tail-feather of a rooster.

Katherine seized the token, voicing a little mother-cry as she buried her face in the folds of a crumpled felt. Her husband and Esper, the detective whom the Kearns agency had sent to camp at the Jones home, examined first the wrapping and then the hat for the message. There was none.

Hardly an hour afterward, a taxicab from the Michigan Central Station rolled into the Jones Grounds. Esper, professionally alert, was the first to sight its occupants.

"If I'm not mistaken, here comes an emissary, Mr. Jones," he said. "My faith! They've sent the wild man of Borneo!"

Jones looked from the window. For the first time in eight days he laughed.

"No; these are allies," he replied. "The Martian has arrived." He hastened out to the drive.

First out of the car was the man who had called forth the detective's comment—a brown South Sea islander, who, on his native beaches, and in the undress there customary, undoubtedly would have been a stately figure. But bone rings in nose and ears, an upstanding crop of fuzzy hair six inches long, and a handful of bow and arrows do not blend harmoniously with a civilized suit of clothes, russet-leather oxfords, and a sailor straw hat. Viewed even at a distance, the combination was startling. To its ludicrousness the superlative and self-conscious dignity of the individual who wore it added much.

Behind that bizarre apparition came a tall, spare white man—white for purposes of classification only; for a tropical sun had tanned his skin to a dusk as deep as that which nature had allotted to his companion. Besides the extreme meagerness of his frame, his most noticeable features were a crook of a nose, mild eyes of pale blue, and a brush of red hair.

This was Brutus Finlayson Kelly, king of Bomavalu, and nicknamed the Martian because of the hallucination that he once had entertained that he was a waif on

earth from the planet Mars. The other was Nambe, his prime minister.

"Welcome, Martian, welcome!" cried Jones, wringing Kelly's thin fingers, and getting a grip in return that astonished him by its vigor.

"Robert!"

For the moment, the name of his friend was all that Kelly could utter. His long face was overspread by a look of beatific satisfaction and devotion; and his lips trembled.

"Hello, Nambe!" Jones thrust out a hand to the brown man.

Some of the rigid dignity of the Bomavaluan potentate was lost in a flashing smile as he replied:

"By dam! Nambe make-um big glad, see Tamal Jones!"

"You received my message, of course, Robert?" Kelly asked as they went on toward the house. There was a tinge of anxiety in his tones.

On Jones's lips remembrance faded the welcoming smile. "Yes, Martian, old fellow," he answered; "but I was in Canada when it came, and Grimshaw—if it is Grimshaw—reached me first."

He told Kelly, who was not a reader of newspapers, what had happened. By the close of the relation they were in the study, where Katherine greeted the travelers warmly, and introductions were made.

"I feared that Captain Grimshaw would work you some great harm, my dear friends," said the Martian sorrowfully. "If only this message might have come to you sooner." He seemed to blame himself that his warning had not succeeded.

"Why, Martian, you did your best," returned Jones with feeling. "Even had your cablegram reached me directly, I don't know that we should have been prepared against just this brand of calamity."

"I had thought, anyhow, that Grimshaw and I were quits. I told his man Friday, Kinsella, where to go fetch him. We are not sure even now that it is Grimshaw who has Bobby."

Kelly nodded his head with finality.

"It is Captain Grimshaw," he declared. "Robert, you don't know the depths of blackness in the soul of that man—nor do

I; but I always feared him through instinct."

Esper, who had been listening keenly, interrupted to ask:

"What is your particular reason, if you have any, Mr. Kelly, for being so sure that Grimshaw is the kidnaper; or is it merely a general conclusion?"

"It is partly the instinct of which I spoke but now," the Martian responded, "and partly the result of past experience with Captain Grimshaw. The two coordinate. The experience is this:

"In the first place, Captain Grimshaw did not get what he went to Zaumouti to get. Secondly, he encountered a series of events there which he had not anticipated; added to which is the fact that his partner, Mr. Kinsella, did not go and get him, and he has passed six years there which must have been exceedingly irksome to his spirit. Thirdly, I judge from the way in which all kinds and conditions of scoundrels obey him, that he does not forget an injury, and that he settles his scores with relentless exactitude.

"In the fourth place, to touch upon something more tangible," and here the Martian's peaceful eyes glinted reminiscently, "when he escaped from Zaumouti he went at once to Bomavalu and made a very conscientious and efficient attempt to disturb the peace of my realm and leave the dynasty which I have founded without a head."

"And you gave him another trimming? Good boy, Kelly!" cried Jones, stirred to a momentary enthusiasm.

"He did not accomplish his ambitions," rejoined the Martian with modesty. "As time went on after your departure, and I heard occasionally that Captain Grimshaw and his crew were still upon Zaumouti, I began to think that my family and people would not be altogether safe so long as such dangerous men remained in our neighborhood.

"As you well know, Robert, I am a peaceful man; but I will not have my people molested. I had the opportunity to purchase a small sailing vessel, and as Mrs. Kelly and I had had a good year with our pearl-fishing, I made the investment.

"We then went up to Manila, and I bought at the government depot a Hotchkiss rapid-fire gun, fifty Krag rifles and a little six-pounder which Admiral Dewey took from the Spaniards at Manila Bay in ninety-eight, and which was still quite serviceable.

"Your old lessons in marksmanship stood me in good stead then, Robert. I drilled a company of my men in the use of the Krags, and I learned the operation of the cannon.

"When Captain Grimshaw finally came—he had been taken from Zaumouti by a rascally sailing-master whom he had persuaded to his designs—we were prepared. He did not give up his project easily. But after a week of hell that cost me the lives of nineteen brave fellows and the loss of my schooner, which the villains burned, we beat them off. I have reason to believe that their losses were only slightly less than ours."

"Fine dam fight, Tamal Jones, sar," put in Nambe, who, tiring of the unaccustomed chair, had squatted upon his hams on the floor.

"Wish you might have had the luck to put a bullet through Grimshaw," said Jones fervently.

"I tried to, Robert, I tried. It is not a pleasant sensation, that of marking one man for deliberate slaughter; but I did it. I remembered the terrible day when I saw you crucified on the stockade wall by his orders. That awful picture rose before me when my people were bleeding, and I sought Captain Grimshaw's life with an earnestness of which I do not like to think.

"Once, in the forest, I shot dead the man who stood next to him. Later I dropped a shell from the Spanish gun on the deck where he stood, and turned it into a shamblé. But he seems to wear the safeguard of the devil. I do not think that he came by a scratch."

Eyes flashing and breath coming fast, Jim Arnold listened to this grim tale, so simply told in Kelly's slow voice with its quaint turn of speech. Jim, whose climactic experiences had been the shooting of a deer or the landing of a small-mouthed bass, began to appreciate the Martian.

His affection for Jones was one of the strongest things in Kelly's life. When he was sure that Grimshaw had given up his attempt on Bomavalu and had left the neighborhood, he began to worry. The end of his uneasiness was that he started for Guam. As he had lost his schooner, he had to make part of the journey by the slow and perilous means of a sailing raft.

From Guam he had sent his warning; and then he had followed it, to go to the aid of his friend whom he believed was threatened. This proof of devotion touched both Jones and Katherine more deeply than they could express.

In the afternoon of the day following the Martian's arrival the friends were gathered for conference in their headquarters in Jones's study; though there was discouragingly little material for conference. The police chief had come and departed, taking with him the reporters for the afternoon newspapers, who had made the last visit for the day and received the stereotyped answer, "Nothing new."

Wixon, who had been pottering half-heartedly about his gardens, dashed suddenly onto the porch, thrust his head through the open window, and sung out:

"'E's 'ere, sir!"

"What's that? Who's here?" asked Jones, leaping in his seat. "Not Bobby!" Katherine stifled a scream.

"Grimshaw, damn 'im!—Hi begs your pardon, missus. 'E's a-straddling up the front walk like an old goose-gander!" Wixon himself was trembling like a ratting terrier.

An electric bell rang. A minute afterward the door-maid entered the study with her tray and handed Jones a card. "Zalmon Grimshaw, Dealer in Oriental Oddities," was its engraved legend.

"Fetch him in here," directed Jones.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PRICE OF ZALMON'S "AID."

AS the maid left the study, Detective Esper arose and moved his chair so that it stood with its back close to the open French windows.



"I will go out here, Mr. Jones," he said. "Let him talk all he will. If he's our man, he may put his hands right into—" Esper tapped his hip-pocket. A clinking of metal links responded.

"I'll go with you." Arnold laid down his pipe and followed the detective to the porch, where Wixon already had taken the cue and disappeared.

Ushered in by the maid, Zalmon came then, travel-worn and bearded no longer, but groomed to the moment, as of yore, his triple chin clean and pink as the cheek of a girl, his face smiling, and his manner suave and self-assured.

Jones and Katherine he had of course expected to see. The presence of Kelly and the islander must have surprised him; but he did not show it; and he included them all in a large bow of greeting.

"Good day, everybody. Bless me! this is quite like the old days, eh?" he said, crossing to the chair which Jones indicated to him.

None of the four whom he addressed stirred from their seats or answered. Only Nambe, squatting on the floor, began to fret nervously with his bow and four-foot arrows; and Katherine, biting her lip and picking at her handkerchief, gave evidence of the rising of a tempest that was almost beyond her power of control.

But Zalmon was neither alarmed nor embarrassed. He eased himself in his chair, clasped his hands upon his stomach, and addressed himself to Jones.

"I know that I have chosen an inconvenient moment to pay you this little call, Mr. Jones," he began. "You are in great trouble. I have read of it in the newspapers.

"I shall not attempt to convey to you how deeply I feel for you. Suffice it to say that it is your trouble that has brought me to you. I wish to offer you my assistance."

At that astounding statement, Jones's hands, which lay upon the table, closed tightly, and his face hardened. Grimshaw raised and shook a pudgy finger.

"Let it be understood, Mr. Jones, that in helping you, I hope also to help myself," he continued. "On that basis I ask the

favor of a few minutes' calm conversation. I will be brief as possible—but I wish the discussion to be calm."

"I am calm, Grimshaw—preternaturally calm," replied Jones. "Go on."

"I have a proposal to make to you which I believe will be mutually advantageous and profitable," said Zalmon.

On the porch a yard away from him the Kearns detective stiffened like a setter dog.

"Something more than six years ago you and Mr. Kelly came to San Francisco. You were looking for means to find the island of Zaumouti. You had with you the dog of a Mr. Cooper, whom I had met, and whom I knew to have located an emerald mine of unheard of value. What had become of Mr. Cooper, with whom I had considered associating myself, I did not know, nor do I know."

"He was dead," Jones volunteered.

"Mr. Cooper never told me the location of his mine," Zalmon went on. "I assumed that you were in possession of that information, and that that was your reason for setting out for Zaumouti.

"We became associated in a sort of partnership, which, I admit, was rather blind on both sides. It turned out that you were not looking for emeralds, but for something which in your eyes was more valuable. You found it." He glanced at Katherine.

"But I was looking for emeralds. They offered the means to realize a dream that I long had cherished. I meant to find them.

"I have given up neither the dream nor the emeralds, Mr. Jones. But I am getting along in years. I will soon be an old man—too old for dreams. Time presses.

"You left me on Zaumouti—to look for emeralds, you said. I did not find them. You told my partner where to find me; but Mr. Kinsella was somewhat slow in making his arrangements. In fact, he died before he had them completed. I have lived for six years in a place where roasted dog was a delicacy, and the nearest approach to a martini was sour orange beer.

"Chance threw the means in my way to leave the island. I then went to Mr. Kelly, whom I thought might share with me some measure of the prosperity which he had found. But he was inhospitable.

"I returned to San Francisco, to find my partner dead. From a former acquaintance of Mr. Cooper I learned that a map of the location of the emerald mine is in existence. You, Mr. Jones, have that plan. No; please do not interrupt me until I have fully stated myself.

"I thought to come on and find you and plead with you for a share in the emerald enterprise—to beg you to not let this rich mine lie fallow, though you have a fortune, and do not care for the jewels. On my way hither I learned of your recent misfortune.

"I decided then to come, not as a suppliant, asking all and with nothing to give in return, but to appear as a negotiant. In brief, Mr. Jones, help me to find the emeralds, and I will help you to find your lost boy."

Jones could keep silence no longer.

"What you mean, Grimshaw, is this," he broke in sternly: "having tried to murder Mr. Kelly, and failed, you came to America, where you were more successful with Kinsella. You then kidnaped my son, and you offer now to return him to me in exchange for the plan to Cooper's emerald find."

Grimshaw smiled broadly, and shook his head in negation.

"Mr. Jones, sir, there is not the slightest chance that you can substantiate those damaging statements. The surest proof of that is that I am sitting here before you.

"Mr. Kelly will tell you his islanders fired the first shot in your late unpleasantness: I can prove that Mr. Kinsella was dead when I landed in San Francisco; and I ask you, does the published description of the kidnaper tally in any particular with my person?"

Zalmon's smile was both pitying and tolerant.

"Furthermore, you appear not to have understood my offer, Mr. Jones. When I said that I wished you to help me find the emeralds, I meant just that. I do not care for the plan. I know that the mine is somewhere in South America. I propose that you shall go there with me and find it.

"You may keep the plan; you may make your own arrangements for the trip; I do

not ask to know where we are going; nor do I expect to take any of my friends with me. I trust all to you.

"The source of the emeralds found, I promise you that I will lend you my assistance to find your son—and, Mr. Jones, sir, I'm a mighty efficient detective. As first evidence of it, I suggest that the description of the criminal is singularly reminiscent of a character called Spanish Luiz, with whom I believe you had some amusement one evening in San Francisco."

"And who was a devoted henchman of yours," countered Jones.

"I could safely challenge you to prove that statement also," retorted Grimshaw affably. "Come now, do you say that my proposal is a go?"

"Were I in the least inclined to entertain it—which I am not—it would be useless from the start," answered Jones with a savage laugh. "There *was* such a plan to the emerald mine. It was in the collar of the dog. But Mrs. Jones feared that it might tempt me some day to further adventuring, and she asked me to give it to her to destroy. I did so."

Grimshaw shot a lightning glance at Katherine's face. What he saw there caused him to smile more affably still.

"Ah, Mrs. Jones is a woman—she did not destroy the map," he said.

Jones looked inquiringly at his wife. She nodded, avoiding Grimshaw's gaze.

"It is true, Robert," she admitted. "I was foolish enough to keep it. I have it put away with the big emerald which Mr. Cooper gave you."

"Anyway," growled Jones sullenly, "seeing that you deny kidnaping the boy, what proof have we that you could do anything toward recovering him?"

"Only your own experience that I am a man of considerable resource," replied Zalmon. His eyes wandered over Jones's table. On it lay Bobby's Panama and the wooden pistols, which Wixon had found and brought in from the nasturtium bed. Beside them was the battered felt hat and the wrapping in which it had come. "I see that you have received a parcel by mail," commented Grimshaw significantly. He swung himself to his feet.

"I will be going now, Mr. Jones. I do not wish to hurry your decision. Take plenty of time to consider the matter. Take three months. If your agents or the police find the boy within that time, the proposal, of course, is nullified.

"If not, I shall be happy to accompany you to South America, share and share in the venture; and to do my level best for you afterward. Good afternoon, everybody."

Esper stepped in through the window, jingling his handcuffs.

"While we have you, I think we'll keep you," he remarked.

Zalmon grinned at him.

"Ah, my boy, I thought that one of you was somewhere about," he said. "You should not have given the old man a warm chair."

"Stick 'em out!" ordered Esper, advancing his shackles. Grimshaw shrugged and complied.

"I shall not resist," he laughed. "May I inquire what the charge will be?"

"We'll just hold you as a material witness for the present. We'll find the kid, all right, and then we'll hang on a more serious charge, if we don't before."

"I had anticipated something of the sort. I should be a bit careful, if I were you, young man, about that other charge. I bear an excellent reputation in San Francisco, where I was in business for more than fifteen years.

"As for the little pleasure trip in the South Seas of which you may have heard, that is something rather outside of your jurisdiction, I fancy. If you hold me more than a fortnight I shall be surprised."

"Come on!" Esper tugged at the handcuffs. The pair departed.

"So that is Captain Grimshaw!" ejaculated Jim Arnold, who had followed the detective into the study. Jim emphasized the remark with a long whistle. "Well, we've got to hand it to him as a clever old rooster. Not a doubt that he's it; but he didn't peep one word that you could pin anything onto."

Jones nodded gloomily. He realized that the trap had failed.

"Bob, I don't want to seem too previ-

ous," continued Arnold; "but if you *should* take a notion to run down to South America this fall, count me in on that party, with both feet."

"In that case there will be five of us," said Kelly, who had been looking pityingly at Katherine; "but I hope that it will not be necessary to go. I never heard of the map before, Robert. Where is the place?"

"Jungles of Peru—but we won't be going there. How did you make the count five, Martian?"

"All of us who are here," Kelly answered, with a glance around.

"Decidedly, Kate wouldn't go," declared her husband.

"Decidedly Kate *would!*" announced that young woman.

An attorney and a writ of *habeas corpus* released Zalmon within ten days, and he took up headquarters at a fashionable hotel.

Nambe counseled capture and torture, and wondered why so simple an expedient had not occurred to the others.

One month passed, and no progress had been made in the hunt for Bobby Jones; two, and Jones senior began to make preparations for a journey; at the end of the third he announced himself ready to accompany Grimshaw.

He was a strong man; but he had given in because of the lines which the months had graven upon his wife's face.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DON CASTRO INTERVENES.

"**B**LUE seas, white-domed cities, green plantations, deserts of burning sands, gleaming peaks crowned with eternal snows, mysterious ruins, sandalled Indians with herds of alpacas and llamas, lakes of azure, impenetrable jungles and endless rivers. They have their beginning in the mists of the heights, or the mirage of the plains; and the mists, mirage and halo of memory and romance attend them."

From the deck of the Chilean coast steamed Carita, his face turned eastward toward a shining coastline of yellow sand,



Jim Arnold thus descanted; and was filling his depleted lungs when, at his elbow, Jones interposed:

"Hold on, Jim! In plain Yankee, where 'do you get that stuff? Mystery, mists, mirages and memory! Rather florid, my boy. I begin to suspect you of a private understanding with the steward."

"As to the last count, deponent saith not," retorted Arnold cheerfully; "but as to the other," inflating his chest and pointing shoreward, "there you have it before you: 'That little-known region of the western sea; that fascinating land of Peru!' I know that I have quoted it abominably; but I could give you yards of it, my dear fellow, yards of it!

"I've been reading it up. Captain Amesbury is an Englishman, y'know. He let me take a book by a fellow-countryman of his, who spent a number of years down hereaways, and who seems to have digested his experiences without any souring of his literary stomach. Mr. Kelly here will agree with me, I'll bet."

Jim turned to the Martian, who stood on the other side of him. "Isn't it corking good stuff, Mr. Kelly?"

"Splendid," answered the Martian, with a glimmer of enthusiasm in his pale eyes which showed that he meant it.

Arnold looked again at shimmering sea and golden coast, above which hung the heavy drift of the *camanchaca*, the mist-wall engendered by the Humboldt current, and without which these rainless shores would be well-nigh uninhabitable. Inland, beyond, piled spire upon spire to the heights of heaven, where snow-capped peaks and silver clouds mingled in one unbroken, stupendous background, stretched the first mighty line of the Andean ramparts, the Occidental Cordillera.

High over all, the giant peak of Huascarán, never ascended by man, lifted its twin towers and its crest of perpetual snow against a turquoise sky, twenty-two thousand feet above the ocean's ebb and flow.

From these things the young man glanced to the heaps and bales of tropical fruits on the after-deck: pineapples, figs, olives, bananas, coffee and oranges; and then to the dress of himself and his companions, large-

meshed suits of crash, in which the figure of Jones appeared extraordinarily massive, and that of the Martian unusually attenuated.

Jim fetched a sigh, and stretched his arms wide.

"And to think that to-night will be Christmas Eve!" he exclaimed.

"I've learned a lot about Peru," he continued after a moment. "For instance: there are no fires in the Andes; and fish don't grow in the upland lakes—which will be a disappointment to our fat friend, who, I think, is the most pertinacious angler I ever saw. I've been brushing at my very dusty Spanish, too."

"If you continue to manifest such qualifications, I shan't have to hire a guide," offered Jones.

At that minute the captain came up and announced: "We shall touch at Santa in two hours, Mr. Jones, sir."

The three friends crossed the deck toward the companion. Katherine already had gone below.

"Hi! Grimshaw! Port in two hours!" called Arnold.

Ponderously immaculate in white flannels and cap, Zalmon sat in a steamer-chair by the rail, absorbed in two of his favorite occupations: trolling over the vessel's side with a spoon-hook and a steel pole, and consuming innumerable cigarettes. His big pink face, which the sun might burn but never tan was the seat of a beaming smile of cherubic satisfaction, which began at his spectacles and was lost in his turn-down collar.

Despite the speed at which the steamer traveled, he occasionally landed a fish. Each time that he did so, he methodically weighed the trophy with a pocket-scales, and made an entry in a small alligator notebook.

He acknowledged Jim's hail by a wave of his hand, tossed his cigarette over the side, and began to "take down" his pole.

Jones laughed shortly. "Getting sort of chummy with old Billiken, Jim," he suggested.

"Hardly chummy, Bob," protested Arnold; "but, though I know he's one of the damnest scoundrels this side of the heated

hereafter, I'll be jiggered if I can exactly hate him."

"I understand." Jones nodded. "Hard and often as he has hit me, I don't think that I ever hated him, either. But if he thought it to his interest to cut your throat, Jim, he'd do it with that infernally optimistic smile of his, and tell you that it hurt him more than you. If there be such a thing as the human enigma, Grimshaw is it."

The Martian saying nothing, but remembering much, shuddered.

Grimshaw, casing his tackle, waddled aft, presented the edible portions of his catch to the steward; and then he went below to look after his traps. He paused with his hand on the companion-rail, and through the faintly blue lenses of his spectacles, regarded the cloud-piercing summit of Huascan.

"By hikey! old sky-buster," he said, "if Cooper's emeralds are anywhere in your neighborhood, Z. G. will sweat off considerable of his earthly burden before he hangs one of 'em to his watch-chain." Mopping his forehead with his handkerchief, and thereby disturbing the repose of a neatly grizzled brown wig with which he covered his cranial nakedness, he descended the steps.

Two hours later the Carita tied up for a brief stop in the harbor of Santa, situated on the bay and river of the same name, and port for the inland town of Huaraz, end of the first long lap toward Jones's goal. For Cooper had marked his find in the foothills above the River Ucayli on the eastern slopes of the White Cordillera; and the party must cross the Andean ranges to come at it.

Not holding himself aloof from the party, for it was foreign to his nature to play the turtle, Zalmon did not intrude. True to the words of his odd bargain, he left everything to Jones, though he bore his share in the expense. He had seemed content and incurious with the vague information that their destination was somewhere in South America.

In the course of the long voyage southward—by way of New York and Panama—he had amused himself quietly after his fashion, with a seeming of hearty enjoyment

in all that he did. As he had plenty of funds—presumably a store laid away before his Zaumouti adventure—he had not lacked for companionship. Quite a group gathered at the gangway as the party left the boat at Santa; and not a few of the farewells were for Grimshaw.

Strange combination of character! Certainly no chance acquaintance would have dreamed that the brain under that hairless and benevolent dome was the abiding-place of schemes and desperate memories, beside which plain piracy, open-handed bloodshed and capital crimes were pale and innocent. It held also much useful information and knowledge of many tongues. At Santa, where little English is spoken, Zalmon stepped unobtrusively to the front with a fluent command of Spanish, smoothing over many minor difficulties.

Jones, every fiber of him urging haste in the fulfilment of his part of Grimshaw's audacious compact, for the sake of his wife and son, was impatient of delays. His party was as the Martian had counted it. Wixon, much against his will, had remained behind; and Molo, viewed as a needless encumbrance, had been left in the sailor's care.

Santa, ridiculously busy for its small size, held nothing to detain the travelers. That same afternoon they left behind them the pleasant bay with its rim of low white buildings, its bustling jetties and its screaming ships.

That evening, after a dusty, tortuous journey of seventy-five miles by rail over constantly rising ground, they reached Huaraz, where they passed a quiet Christmas Eve at the El Nación hotel.

Before turning in, Jim Arnold stood for a time at his window. Behind him the Martian, with regular breathing, punctuated the slumber of the weary. Down in the white-walled *patio* a tiny artesian fountain plashed and tinkled, and a dry breeze rustled among the leaves of an ancient olive tree.

Wild music was playing somewhere. In the direction of the city *plaza* a confused hum of voices, the splutter of fireworks, and an occasional weak flare against the pale splendor of the moonlight, told that the in-

habitants of Huaraz were celebrating the advent of La Natividad.

Jim's garments clung to him; the temperature was eighty-odd. He held up and shook a limp and wilted collar. Again he remarked, and with emphasis:

"And to think that this is Christmas Eve!"

Viewed by daylight, Huaraz was the typical Spanish-American town: streets laid out squarely about the central *plaza*, on one side of which was the stately cathedral of white volcanic *tufa*, and on the other the municipal buildings, shops and houses of the wealthy.

In the buildings were represented all ages of architecture: the primitive wattled hut of the Indian; the adobe dwelling with its red-tiled roof, its *patio* and its balconies and porches with windows garnished with iron lattices, or *rejas*; and the white stone temple topped by stucco towers.

Although it was a holiday, Jones determined to see the mayor, and present papers which he had obtained from the State Department and from the Peruvian minister at Washington, and which the latter had assured him would allow himself and party to travel freely through the republic.

But the task of hunting the mayor was more easy in determination than in accomplishment. He was neither at his office nor his residence; though, if the directions given by various courteous Peruvians were correct, their civil dignity was almost as omnipresent as a lesser deity. He was at the cathedral, arranging with the bishop details of the procession. He was conferring similarly with the commander of the troops which were to march. He was making a speech on the *plaza*. He was hearing the grievances of a deputation of underpaid *alcaldes* from the mountain towns. He had gone to the station to meet a senator. Thus without end.

"Damn!" thought Jones.

As the day advanced, the streets filled. Ramrod-like little Peruvian dons, proud of their Castilian lineage, accompanied by their *señoras* and *señoritas*, and arrayed in the latest reflections of Parisian fashions, rubbed elbows with swarthy Indians from the hills, broad-faced Cholos, lean Que-

chuas, tall Aymaras with their hair plaited in long *trenzas* like Chinese pigtails; descendants of the Inca legionaries who had battled with Pizarro and his *conquistadores* four hundred years before. Picturesque folk these, some of them wearing wide hats of snowy felt, others the flat, gaudily-trimmed, reversible "pancakes" of straw, the edges turned up to denote good weather.

All of them, men and women, sported the inevitable *poncho* of intricate design and flaring colors. Chola belles who wished to be superlatively *à la mode* sailed along majestic in the balloon-bulge of as many as eight separate petticoats, superimposed one upon the other, and each of a more riotous hue than the next.

It was a scene as varied in sound as in color.

From the open doors of the cathedral, where several hundred Indians groveled on the cement floor, swelled bursts of sacred music. On the breeze-swept *plaza* a swaying crowd shouted and sang in four languages. Here a vendor of iced drinks cried his wares; yonder a seller of confections and confetti vied with him in lung-power. Came a bronze-skinned giant of an Aymara, his shoulders piled high with exquisitely-woven *ponchos*—entire output perhaps of his village—and put them both to shame with a bellow like a mountain bull's.

At times a band played a *retreta* from the *plaza* bandstand. Bottles and tins emptied of *chacta* or *aguardiente*, the fiery sugar-cane rum, crashed and clanged underfoot, while their contents added a shriller note to the vocal *mélée* above. In the narrow side streets bands of savage dogs snarled and fought over the garbage heaps.

The air was filled with explosive squibs, shooting spirals of many-hued paper, clouds of scented powder and showers of variegated confetti, hurled by giggling *señoritas*. Unlucky the passer under the balconies where these black-eyed mischief makers lay in wait. Unless he were very wary and agile, *plump!* down on his devoted head would smash a *globo*, an india-rubber balloon, but filled with water instead of air. Sometimes they burst. Sometimes the benediction took the form of a bucket.



Occasionally passed a detachment of diminutive soldiers with marching music, escorting with its attendant priests a life-sized waxen representation of the Nativity, borne on the shoulders of half a score of sweating Indians, the figures of the Holy Family carefully protected from the melting heat of the sun by a canopy of green thatchwork.

Through this carnival of joyous worship Jones's party wended on the trail of the elusive mayor. Arnold frankly enjoyed it all. After a few peltings, he brought a pocketful of confetti and returned all gifts with interest.

He was tempted by the big Aymara salesman; but when he learned that the cheapest *poncho* of the lot was priced at ten golden *libras*—approximately fifty dollars—his desire for it abated.

"Beggars know the value of money, *créame*," grunted Zalmon, who waddled serenely beside him, fanning himself with a palm-leaf and grinning over it like a chubby Chinese idol, while he parried with ready wit and flawless Spanish the crossfire of kindly jests which his beaming face and rotund figure drew from the crowds. Once, when the *globo* descended upon him from a balcony, he snapped its string and bore it away in triumph, explaining to the pleading *señoritas* who had launched it that he would return with it "*mañana*."

"Great day for the priests and the saloons," he remarked to Arnold. "Repentant Indians are pouring forth their *soles* in a silver stream in the church yonder. But what have we here? *Qué dice usted, señor?*"

The inquiry was address to an individual who had bobbed from the crowd and confronted them, speaking volubly.

He was a little wisp of a middle-aged man. A frayed Prince Albert coat was pinned about his shirtless body with blanket-pins. Sockless feet protruded through yawning gaps in his antiquated military boots, and a battered top-hat sat on his grizzled locks.

His cheeks were unshaven and sunken. Lip and chin bristled with immense up-turned mustaches and a stubby imperial. His nose was larger than the Martian's.

Poor as he was, and perhaps hungry, he carried himself as straight as a spear.

He was selling lottery tickets, "under patronage of the government, *señores*." Zalmon bought one of them, price one *sol*. As they moved on, the small man attached himself hopefully to Arnold, talking at a pace which Jim's lame Spanish was unable to follow. Jim smiled down at him, reflecting that somewhere he had seen a face like that, possibly on a postage stamp.

"Why so tempestuous, little Ugolino, or Humberto?" he asked quizzically in English.

To his immediate discomposure, the Peruvian answered in the same tone, and with reproachful dignity:

"My name is Don Castro de Ulloa, sir."

"Don Castor Oil," Jim dubbed him at once; but he did it silently. Aloud he apologized, purchased a lottery chance, and asked Don Castro if he knew where the mayor might be found. The don bowed a stately acknowledgment of the *amende*, pocketed Jim's *sol* with a smile; and in response to the inquiry raised a voice of surprising power.

"*Hola amigos! dónde está el corregidor?*" he shouted into the faces of the crowd. "*El corregidor! Pronto!*"

Over the heads of those about him the gigantic vendor of *ponchos* made answer with the desired information. Don Castro with a lordly gesture tossed him the *sol* which he had taken from Jim. Then with a bow which included the entire party, he said, "Follow me, *señora* and *señores* all. I will conduct you."

He led toward the upper end of the *plaza*. On the way, he asked Arnold if the party was traveling through the country. Answering in the affirmative, he pointed toward the mountains.

"*Casas de los Gentiles?*" he queried.

"I don't get you," responded Jim.

"He asks if we are interested in the Inca ruins?" Grimshaw explained.

"No; we are going beyond the mountains," said Jim.

At once a strange, pathetically eager expression passed over the little man's deeply-lined face, and he forgot all English in a flood of his native language, in which the

words "guia," "Montaña," and "A fé de caballero!" were several times repeated.

Jim turned hopelessly to Zalmon. "What's this 'gobbler' stuff?" he asked.

"He says that if we are going into the jungles of the Montaña, he wants to guide us; that upon his word of honor as a gentleman he has been there and that no one in Peru knows the ways better than he—and that he will serve us faithfully for his keep only."

"Si, si!" interjected Don Castro, and added, "Ah, señores, you will not refuse?"

This proposition was imparted to Jones; but before he could answer it, the Aymara's information proved itself correct, and they reached the hiding-place of the *corregidor*, who was delivering a speech, and evoking salvos of cheering from his hearers by scathing allusions to the disputed boundaries between Peru and her neighbors, Ecuador and Chile.

As they neared the mayor's platform, which was surrounded by troops, the Americans saw with surprise the fussy little lieutenant in command snap himself to a rigid salute at sight of their tattered conductor, a courtesy which Don Castro returned with military precision. A few minutes later, when the *corregidor* finished his harangue, he recognized Don Castro with marked respect, almost deference; and Jones suspected that a measure of the punctilious courtesy with which he himself was received by the busy official was due to his queer guide.

After glancing at Jones's documents, the mayor, who both read and spoke English, vised them on the spot, and instructed his secretary to prepare letters of introduction to the *gobernadores* of the mountain towns through which the travelers would pass.

"Into the Montaña?" the functionary pursued with polite curiosity. "It is a serious undertaking, gentlemen. But I see that one member of your party has been there." He looked at Nambe, whose nose and ear decorations and fuzzy hair were attracting considerable attention. "Is he not a *Chuncho*?"

It was explained that Nambe's ante-

cedents were not South American, but South Sea, which did not lessen the interest in King Kelly's grand vizier.

"And this gentleman?" Jones asked, indicating Don Castro, who stood by with thinly-veiled eagerness; "he has applied for the position of guide to my party. What would you advise?"

"You and yours could find no more honorable or experienced custodian than my distinguished friend Don Castro de Ulloa," replied the *corregidor* impressively.

That settled it. As they moved away from the platform, followed by the courteous good-wishes of the *corregidor* and his staff, Jones informed Don Castro that he might consider himself the official guide of the expedition. The little man's joy at the announcement was pathetic. But when Jones extended his hand with five golden *libras* and told him that they were his first week's salary, the don drew himself up proudly, with words of refusal struggling to his lips, though he looked hungrily at the yellow metal. Jones forestalled him.

"I can allow no man to serve me gratis," he said gently. "Besides, if you know the difficult country into which we are going, and can guide me, I shall still remain your debtor."

Don Castro bowed profoundly and took the gold. "There are supplies and mules to be purchased, *señor*," he said briskly. "mules, not horses; and *arrieros* and *muchachos* to be hired. Where shall I find the *patron* to confer with him about these matters; and how soon does the *patron* wish to leave Huaraz?"

"We wish to leave as soon as possible," Jones replied. "We are stopping at the El Nación hotel. I will see you there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I shall be there without fail, *señor*," the don replied. He bowed again, and hurried away through the festival crowd, shouting "*Za! Za!*" as one does to frighten dogs.

"It strikes me that there is something mysterious about our distinguished friend Don Castor Oil," remarked Arnold, gazing after the retreating figure.

**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.**

# Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendant of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

## VI—THE PRICE OF ADMIRALTY

"MY dearest little wife, Kate," wrote Mr. Wm. Pickles. "I trust this finds you in the best of health, as it leaves me at present, though sunbrowned. I am not to say where we are cruising, though this may give you some indication. The thin panjammers you sent me are just the thing, though with only one pair my servant has to hurry through washday. I have a servant now, being an officer. I make the blighter pipeclay me three pairs of shoes per diem.

"This, my dearest, is a rise in my profession in which you share. You being now an officer's lady will insist that I am dressed respectable, and I must say my number one jacket, shell white, is more like a number three than anything I ever saw.

"I trust you have kept up the instalments on the piano, and enclose notes for \$300 (Mex.) so that you can pay it off entirely. You better change these notes at a broker's as they don't ask too many questions.

"It would be as well if you did not go away for Bank holiday as suggested, as you might be tempted to carry on with some other fellow which you know I shouldn't like.

"Your affec. husband

"BILL.

"P. S. Get those panjammers made, and I will tell you where to post them to in my next.

"P. S. 2. I like blue with a pink stripe, granted the usual x x x x, won't you, know.

"P. S. 3. x x x x x x x

"My sweetest little wife Gladys," the kind man began on another sheet. "I trust this finds you in the pink, as it leaves me at present, the pink being caused by a cold which is somewhat mitigated by that dear old muffler you knitted and which never leaves my neck. I have to wear two pairs of pants, being short of thick ones this bitter weather, which I am sure you will regret,

though it isn't for me to bring a tear to your pretty eye, Gladys.

"I want you to buy that mahogonie side-board with the cut-glass handles you was so set on, my loved one. I regret I was a brute about it before, and now enclose 1234 pesetas. This sum I won by backing an Outsider for the Cezarywhich. You better get it changed to English money by a broker instead of Percy at the shop, who might not understand.

"I do hope you keep that Glad Eye to yourself, my Gladys, so as not to give pain to your jealous but truly loving husband

"WILLIE.

"P. S. Still no relation to Little Willie, the clown prince, though sometimes in the same line of business.

"P. S. Of course, you will take for granted the usual x x x x, won't you, Gladdy?"

The affectionate fellow eased the generous folds of his neck and chin inside his collar, licked his pencil and attacked the next sheet:

"My one and only old woman. There is no name like Agerness. Why? Because it is your name. We met a steamboat yesterday called the Agerness Emm, and I was ordered (as gunner officer) to fire upon her. I missed, remembering you. All hands who knew my eagle eye, was horror-struck. But I kept a stiff upper lip, remembering you, my loving, dutiful wife. and though there would have been tooth brushes and shaving soap which I need on the Agerness Emm, she escaped the deadly missile, and doing two knots better than us, was quickly lost to view.

"How is our dear old home looking? I trust clean. I do not think it was quite wifelike of you, Agerness my dearest, when I refused you money for wall-papers to say you wouldn't wash the floors. So I send you 1553 francs (French money) herewith to do what you like with so long as it is spent on my house. This is all my pay to date, we getting our money now in that coin, though I may not say where I am or what doing; this being a Service secret. You better change it into English money through a broker, they knowing how to keep their heads shut.

"You should paint the railing in front of the house yourself, not employing a man, which is expensive. Mast-color and pea-green are the best paints to buy, as I like them.

"The doormat was ravelled at the edges last time I had leaf. I think you should mend this yourself. But if you should require help I authorize you to pay for it out of the 1553 francs enclosed.

"I am

"Your own dear husband

"WILLIAM.

"P. S. Have 1 doz. Bottled beer in the house ready for my return, *and not drunk by anybody else*. I authorize you to pay for this stores out of the 1553 francs above-mentioned."

"Dear Ermyntrude," ran the next letter, "I am quite aware you have a lot to put up with, owing to your Ma finding by Navy List I had not a commission when I married you. I have now, but that does not matter. I am not a person that needs to be made a gent by a different uniform.

"Please note I'm fed up with your grumbles, and shall put myself in the way of a shell, of which there are plenty, if I have any more. Ermyntrude, do you remember your husband is daily in battle, and in a ragged collar too, being very short of these, whilst you are wearing your best hat with the green cherries on it five nights a week, I'll be bound. My size for collars now is 18½.

"I admit I said what I oughtn't last time we met, but you was that way out and deserved it. I enclose 900 marks (German money). I am afraid you will make a loss in transforming it into English, and will probably get into trouble unless you do it through a broker, they asking no questions. When cashed, go and get a decent meal at a restaurant, as I am sure you get nothing fit to eat at home, unless it has changed.

"You needn't take the old woman, as I'd as soon see her die of hunger as not. She deserves it for her nippy ways. There may be some as likes bread and marg for breakfast, but not your husband. It is all very well saying the French do. But I am not French. Nor are you, in spite of those



rediculous high-heeled shoes you say come from there.

"Your true husband

"W. PICKLES.

"Lieut. (G.) I. R. N.

"P. S. Please recollect that marks 900 is to be spent on my part of the house and furniture. Not your Ma's.

"P. S. 2. I note you been taking legal proceedings against me with that cat, Jane Emma. Ma paid, I suppose. Where do you think my affections are? Money talks. I send you the only 900 marks I have in the world. They were earned by blood and wounds. Commissioned officers on active service, with expensive wives at home, have to do without all their little comforts."

The fifth, sixth and seventh of Mr. Pickles's home letters need not be recorded here, as they were very much on the lines of those printed above.

The eighth I give.

"Dear Jane Emma.

"It cut me deep when I got that lawyer's letter and to know that you of all women mistrusted W. Pickles. How often have I told you that I kept myself to myself and expected you to do the same. But when I heard about you and the gentleman in the pawnbroking I got mad and, as it is best to tell the truth, will own that I flirted with the name the lawyer wrote about.

"Well, that's over and done with, and I enclose roubles 11,127, which is all the money I have in the world. We are being paid in roubles now, but I must not say where we are, as the captain, who is very intimate with me, objects.

"I am wearing the last pair of socks you knitted for me. They are full of holes, but I am still wearing them (though having others in my kit sent by a friend) because they remind me of you, my Jane Emma.

"They tell me that the rouble which used to be worth 1/6 is now valued at 2/- in England, because the stamp collectors have taken them up. So exchange with them and not with other financiers. (I am not suggesting gents in the pawnbroking.)

"Taking the exchange at even 1/6, you will see that I am sending you £834.10.6, which is a lot for a poor sailor, though

now a commissioned officer, and highly appreciated. I trust this £834.10.6 will be a lesson to you, and you will pay off the lawyer and let us hear no more about it.

"I am, Jane Emma Pickles,

"Your esteemed husband

"WM. PICKLES

"Lieutenant (G) I. R. N."

Just one more letter from William is worthy of record.

"Darling dearest," he wrote to a Miss Florrie Hawswick.

"You have reproached me several times for not buying you an engagement ring, although I told you I never saw one that was worthy of your tiddly-iddly finger. I now enclose notes for \$2000 (U. S. Cy) for you to get one for yourself.

"Diamonds are the best to buy, as they are easiest to sell afterward if you want to. The money is quite easy to change anywhere, so you needn't go to a broker. They always rob you.

"If you are true to me, Florrie, I will marry you when I get back from this cruise. Then, you can leave the office for good. I may not say where we are, though palm trees are waving, and beautiful mulatter women are offering drinks though I do not like them, or even so much as say good morning. When seeing their attractive smiles I always remember my Florrie.

"That pink necktie you knitted me was a peach, but would not go with uniform, so I exchanged it with a negro for a calabash of gold dust. Please send black ties in future exactly 2 inches wide, and both ends the same.

"You might take a house and get it furnished against when I come back. I like a place to sit out in at the back, if poss., where a fellow may take the air in and drink a glass of beer with his friends. A green table is best, but a scrubbed oak one would do if you like to wash it.

"Yours only

"WILLIAM.

"P. S. I have not forgot the mathewmatics you drilled into me. As a Gunnery Officer I have to keep them up. So I send you (xxx)n. How's that, you sweetest tutoress any man ever had?

"P. S. 2. You might buy one of those

special licenses to have ready in case I turn up unexpected. The leaf we get is sometimes very short. I believe that kind is expensive. But take it out of the \$2000, and if that is not enough, I will send some more.

"P. S. 3. We have a lady passenger on board, she being kept with us for political purposes. She makes eyes at me, which I cannot help, and asks me often to call her Mary, that being her first name, which I have not done, as I thought perhaps you would not like it, Florrie. She has her hair, which is black, hogged like yours, though not so nice, as she does not wear pink slides in it like you do. She is always wearing new clothes, though I may not say (see Service regulations B.375.c.4. for why) where we get them from. But she has nothing so nice as that green blouse of yours with the mast-color trimmings, the one you wore, Florrie, when you told me you loved me."

The stout Mr. Pickles checked his bunch of letters to make sure they were behind the right addresses, as deeply married men find it best to do, sealed the envelopes, and proceeded to strain the reluctant buttons of his waistcoat into their corresponding buttonholes. Captain Teach was always heavily down on any slovenliness among his officers, and indeed had dealt with a fourth engineer fatally for consistently wearing a dirty neck. Then, after inspection in the glass, Mr. Pickles went out on deck to interview the master of a captured coaster and arrange for posting.

Mr. Pickles was a man of care and method, as befitted one who rode so intricate a hobby, and he took every precaution known to science to ensure that there should be no miscarriage of the documents. It is, therefore, with pain that I have to record the action of the coaster skipper.

He was—according to Mr. Pickles—a scraggy little brute with an underfed mind, and a niggardly outfit of one wife, who bullied him. The creature, on getting ashore, went to no post-office whatever, but sneaked into a police station instead; clapped the letters on the table with a word as to whence they had come, and sneaked

off pot-wards to spend the \$2.50 which Mr. Wm. Pickles had given him to defray postages. The police used all official haste, and in less than five days had taken a copy of all the letters, and sent them on to their several destinations.

How the letters leaked I do not know, but leak they did, and the press pounced upon them joyfully. For the most part they were published under the heading, "Love Letters of an Octrigamist." But three of the more serious journals seized upon one minor point and worried it savagely.

This fellow Pickles signed himself Lieutenant G. (which means Gunnery Lieutenant) I. R. N.

What was I. R. N.?

This is a day of initial letters, and William was merely following out the prevailing fashion. For instance, R. N. stands for Royal Navy—meaning British Royal Navy—all the world over. And the letter I, thanks to the past industry of Mr. W. Hohenzollern, indicates the word Imperial.

These serious journals were pretty well agreed that I. R. N. did not stand for Imperial Royal Navy. In fact, very much the reverse, seeing that they were used by a pirate and an outlaw. They guessed the riddle and hinted horribly at it, but it was not till Teach's letter reached the press a week later that the bomb really burst.

However, there it was then, and no bones about it. Teach said he was admiral commanding the Irish Republican Navy, and anyone who wanted to touch him had better weigh up the consequences first.

Washington cabled pithily to Downing Street, asking "What about it?"

To which Downing Street promptly replied by special F. O. Messenger that very week: "Wait and you will see."

Unfortunately, Parliament was sitting, and the British Cabinet was pushed into action by its own friends. The inevitable ass got up in the House of Commons, and by means of a skilfully worded question to an embarrassed under-secretary practically took it for granted that Admiral Teach would have to be recognized as C. in C. of the Navy of Republican Ireland. "And now, sir," he finished up, "is this country

at war with Ireland or it is not? I demand a yes or no. Are the ships of the navy to continue chasing Admiral Teach with a view to his destruction, or are you going to make an honorable peace with him?"

The under-secretary was a weak man, and quibbled. "I must ask notice of those questions," said he, and Ass M. P. prepared to go mischievously ahead, but the Speaker shut him up. However, he was not only an ass, but also a pompous ass, and resented the delighted yells of the Irishry in the House, and bawled out the word "traitors" to them.

Then out of an episode which every one—except Ass M. P. and perhaps the under-secretary—was disposed to take humorously, arose fury.

The accusation was probably unjust. But it was near enough to the truth to sting venomously.

"Apologize! Apologize!" yelled the Irish members. Ass M. P., true to his ancestry, was stubborn, and would do nothing of the sort.

"I was brought up to speak the truth," Ass M. P. shouted, during a lull.

"I pity the gutter that was foster-mother to ye," retorted the member for Ballyliffey. "It'll have run sour ever since. But I'll not believe it was the gutter alone that turned your nose its present crimson."

"I'm a teetotaller," bawled Ass M. P., and the House, instead of screaming with delighted laughter, yelled to the Irish to withdraw.

"Withdraw yourselves, you Saxon swine," was the polite retort, and it is one of the House of Commons' many records that at this moment somebody flung a boot.

Subsequent investigation showed no member without a full equipment of leather foot-gear (except for three members who wore wood on one leg or the other) and the origin of the flying boot is wrapped in the mists of commercial politics.

The trifle that Teach had as little interest in Ireland as he had in Neo-Slovakia—if there is such a state in the latest peace muddle—weighed nothing with the press next morning.

The situation had to be faced; all the

press was agreed on that. But when it came to methods of facing it, there they diverged.

The main bulk of them called for the extermination of this scoundrel Teach without any further delay. And if his friends in any so-called Irish Republic made trouble, let them be attended to fatally also.

The London and New York papers which are run in the interests of international finance discovered in Edward Teach a high-minded—if somewhat misguided—patriot, fighting a lone battle for Irish freedom against the combined capitalists of the world. These put on their best leader-writers, and they turned out some really striking copy. They had few adherents at first. But they knew how to persist, and gained more.

Then, also, there were people who did not care a dump about Teach and his doings and said so frankly, but who boiled with fury at the idea that anyone on earth should fire a shot at the Admiral of the Irish Republic, whatever his habits might be. These last found an enthusiastic advocate, of doubtful value, in Ass M. P. who had been aching for a Cause for years.

Ireland, to give it its due, grinned. From the black north to the rebel south it grinned wholeheartedly. But it said remarkably little. For once in its life Ireland refused to be drawn about Captain Edward Teach, who was not an Irishman, and who had never been in Ireland in his life.

Altogether, it was a pretty kettle of fish, and highly creditable to Captain Teach's imagination. The mere word "Ireland" always sets otherwise sane people completely off their balance—outside Ireland.

In the mean while Teach, who had let the whole world know he was carrying on piratical operations in the Florida Channel, exasperated all the prophets who were predicting his next outrages by simultaneously capturing and walking away with the Cape Liner Matabeleman off Madeira.

To add insult to injury, he announced by a wireless message relayed to the New York *Herald* on Wednesday that he would take the ship on the next day, Thursday.

The *Herald* cabled frantically, and as by

this time all admiralities had been bullied by their respective governments into unwonted activity, even they responded to the urgency. They sent warning to the threatened Matabeleman, and directed her to change her course.

They called up the cruisers of five nations and sent them steaming for the threatened area at an extravagant rate of knots. They even flattered themselves that this time they would put salt on the tail of Captain Edward Teach himself.

Now I do not want to do that eminent rascal an injustice, but I hardly think he acted fairly in this matter of the Matabeleman. He had had one of his own scoundrels on board of her when she left Capetown; a fellow named Presbyter.

The man was a skilled electrician, and carried with him all he needed for the job. He had all the interval between Capetown and Madeira to lay his plans for the demolition of the wireless without undue advertisement, and he did this so neatly and scientifically that nobody on board dreamed of connecting him with the accident. Presbyter was to receive £5000 for the work if he carried it through efficiently, and I hate to record that he handled that sum, and invested it in five per cent British War Stock on which his aunt by marriage is drawing dividends to this day. Teach always paid royally.

It is a fact worth pointing out here that the price on Captain Teach's head at that time was a mere £2000. Presbyter (as his past and future history showed) was a thorough scoundrel, and would have sold his own mother for half-a-crown.

He has freely stated that he could have lured Captain Teach into a neat trap if he had thought it to his interest to set one. But he weighed the advantages between £5000 from a man who had got the reputation of paying on the nail, and £2000 from some dubious thing called the British Government, who would ask a million questions, and had the reputation of being uncommonly slow at parting with cash.

Probably Teach reckoned on this also, being under few illusions as regards the loyalty of some of his following. But in order to take no unnecessary chances he was not

in the Eastern Atlantic at all—any more than he was personally conducting those disturbance-raising operations in the Florida channel.

Neither was he on the Littondale, which had been badly damaged in an unsuccessful action against a well-armed South American liner, and was undergoing extensive repairs in a private harbor of his own.

As a point of detail he was residing in comfort on a sandy Bahama islet, near Tortuga Cay, smoking his big black pipe, and trying to find his great-grandfather Blackbeard's buried treasure. He was also keeping an eye on Miss Mary Arncliffe, who was camping in considerable squalor on another sand cay some dozen miles away.

He had decided by this time that life would not be complete without Mary Arncliffe. But he was taking his own time and method about winning her.

His plan of campaign against the Matabeleman had been delightfully simple. He had rebunkered his captured Pensacola (the ship that carried the store of M. L.'s), and sent her back again to the eastward. She was to lay-to one hundred miles to the westward of the steam-lane between Madeira and Southampton, and put into the water three big armed M. L.'s.

These were to go off and capture the Matabeleman, or sink her if she did not surrender. They were to fly his new flag, a green Irish harp and two green shamrocks, with the motto "Separabo," on a blue-and-white barred ground.

Teach never dreamed for a moment that the big passenger ship would fight to a finish, and she did not. At the third shot she obediently struck her flag to the M. L.'s which represented (so they said) the Irish Republican Navy, and was hurried off by them to rendezvous with the Pensacola and thereafter "to proceed as directed."

This happened on the Wednesday, the day Teach sent his wireless to the New York *Herald*, and so all Thursday's naval fuss was a mere waste of fuel and wages, which, as a tax-payer, I resent.

It was hardly sporting of Teach to send that message. But then, of course, one has to carry in mind that the man was a rank pirate and one ought to be thankful for any



decencies from him, and not expect them too often.

He was not residing on Tortuga Cay. His researches there brought him to a well-buried rum bottle, which told him in plain language that Captain Blackbeard had really deposited his spoils there once, to the usual accompaniment of horrors and strife; but having in a weak moment let one of his companions live, had thought better of the matter, and shifted the goods elsewhere. In extremely cryptic language he added directions.

These his illustrious great-grandson followed, found himself presently on another desolate bird-haunted cay of the same group, where, after search, he lit upon Captain Blackbeard's country headquarters.

Possibly the old gentleman's tastes were troglodytic; possibly security from observation was the keynote of his architecture—I can merely report the result, which was that the dwelling was entirely subterranean. With infinite labor it had been delved out of the ground, and the sand shored back by heavy timbering.

The cabins of old seventeenth-century ships had been dismantled for its furnishing, and there reerected. One entered it by a hatch, which gave upon a ship's ladder. Another hatch covered the chimney. Both, when Teach of 1918 came upon them, were well masked by sand and grasses.

He dug his way in, sniffed the close mildewy air, and for a moment shivered. He

had an instant's pity for the poor captives who had built the place, and then been killed for their pains. But remorse never stayed long with any of the family Teach.

He inspected with gusto the lockers, the sea-chests, the massive table of dull mahogany, the hanging sea-lamp, and the array of arms on the panelling. In one end of a dresser were the remains of bread; in the other a metal-hooped blackjack which still carried a faint odor of fine Jamaica rum, and a couple of portly demijohns of finely matured spirit. It was eminently a bachelor's cabin. The dust of two centuries softened its outline.

There was a low oak door in the further bulkheads, grim enough and strong enough for a jail. Teach opened it, flashed an electric torch, and looked in.

"Ah," he said. "Another taste we had in common, I see."

He jumped back, and wiped away the sweat which somehow had come to moisten his hard, dark face. "Well, I suppose I must have had a great-grandmother, as well as great-grandpapa Teach.

"I wonder if this was she?"

He thought a while, smoking hard at his big black pipe, and fingering the bullet hole in his ear. "But I'd better get all this—this, cleared out before I bring Mary here.

"Poor old great-grandmamma!

"My God! And I suppose at present Mary thinks I would treat her just the same!"

## SUNLESS DAYS

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

FOR days the rain has fallen drearily,  
 Bowing the grass and flowers wearily.  
 No pretty sounds—no feathered minstrel throng  
 Hail these sad mornings with their bursts of song.

Damp chilling air makes pulses slow to beat,  
 The shiv'ring earth longs for the sun's warm heat,  
 So is my life—so dreary all the while  
 Without the thrill and sunlight of your smile.

# Midnight of the Ranges by George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," "They Were Seven," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

**E**D BURLANE seated on his stallion, Midnight, had witnessed the altercation between Nicked-Nose Peters and Bart Barnquist over the lease of the water-rights on Twin Springs Ranch, Peters's place. What he had not witnessed was the frame-up in Brown's saloon. Young Barnquist had proposed the idea which met with the enthusiastic endorsement of the elder Barnquist and his henchmen, Maltrane and Weaver. Barnquist was to invite Peters into the saloon, pretend friendliness, and, when his back was turned Maltrane was "to get" Peters while Weaver shot-up the place with a nicked .38, such as Peters always used. Then Weaver was to grab Peters's cold gun and leave his own, which was like it, in the dead man's hand, and the rest was easy; a mere matter of explanation and corroboration. Peters's daughter, Berenice, would inherit her father's place, but young Barnquist undertook to deal with her.

Burlane followed Peters to Twin Springs, where he was welcomed by father and daughter. Burlane undertook to remain indefinitely, since he had come from Vernon way on just such a chance.

On the way to the Barnquist ranch, which was the largest and richest place in that corner of San Felice County, father and son quarreled over money. Barney wanted his father to give him a big sum of cash. Greasewood Kate, the Papago Indian half-breed, who presided over the domestic arrangements, had heard the last of the wrangle. She tried to comfort Barney, and reminded him she expected him to marry Ess-Way, her daughter.

Barney hastily dismissed the girl with an indifferent caress and consoled himself with a visit to Mescalero Pedro's place, where Maretta sent him about his business until he could show a big roll like a real ranger. Before he retired that night, Barney lifted a bullet from Weaver's belt and prepared his gun and six blank cartridges which looked like good .45's. The next morning before they left for town, Barney exchanged the faked .45's for the good ones in Maltrane's gun.

When the party of four reached Coppered Jack they found Peters on the street and invited him for a drink. Burlane, a few minutes later, arrived at the saloon and found it in an uproar. With both guns ready for action, he immediately took charge of the situation. Peters was on top of a writhing mass on the floor, and young Barnquist was denouncing him as the murderer of his father. Peters explained he had been attacked from the rear, and when he had reached for his gun found it had been slipped from his belt. Then he started in with his fists.

Peters asked Burlane to take the news to Berenice at Twin Springs, and he would wait at the house of his friend, Wickson, until the sheriff arrived. Barney watched beside the body of his father while all the town seethed with excitement.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MIDNIGHT DOESN'T OBJECT!

**A** CURIOUS counter-play of feelings fought in Ed Burlane's breast as he shook out the horses hitched to the buckboard on his way back to Twin Springs. Ed felt that there was a mystery in the killing that might take much investigation to penetrate. He had seen too many guns discharged, too many men slain

or wounded, shot too many guns himself, not to recognize that there was something sinister, imponderable, in the situation into which he had projected himself when he had catapulted into that smoke-wreathed, stressful barroom.

And at the end of his short buckboard trip was the girl Berenice. He had to take to her the news that her father was charged with murder. He had been looking forward to a pleasant stay in Twin Springs, to possi-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 19.

ble bettering of friendship between them. Now he might be about Coppered Jack and Twin Springs for some time, and would have to be just useful to her. The range rider's innate fineness of soul guided him in planning out what he would better do and say to her in the coming days. He must not use his position to make love to her, with her father under a cloud.

He came to the little house in a fine burst of speed from the buckboard ponies. Everything about the place seemed peaceful. A horse whickered from the corral bars. Ed noted that it was not Midnight.

"Darned old son-of-a-gun's hiding out, waiting for me to coax him to the bars with sugar," he mused as he swung the harness off the ponies and turned them into the corral. He left the buckboard as it was.

He went toward the house, calling:

"Ho, Miss Peters; I say. Miss Peters!"

There was no reply. He stepped into the main room, then into the kitchen. No one answered his hails. He went out the back door, became alarmed, raced about the house, to the corral. Here he called:

"Ho, Midnight!"

There was no answering whicker. Burlane went into the corral. In the soft dirt that was trampled up near the bars he found the reason for the silence of stallion and girl. The prints of her small shoes were in the dirt beside those of Midnight, whose heavier tracks stood out from the light ones of the Peters cayuses. Ed went into the gear-room and saw that his own saddle was gone.

"Risky lil mite o' wholesomeness," he apostrophized the atmosphere. "She's rid off Midnight. First time he ever let any one but me do it."

He smiled, mused for the moment, then a shade of anxiety swept over his face as he thought of what the big stallion might do out on the open prairie, under stress of temptation to frolic and play tricks on the girl rider. He was about to saddle one of the Peters horses and start out on her trail, when he heard the clatter of big hoofs, and Midnight thrummed into view, snorting proudly. On his back was Berenice, laughing down at Ed, who glanced

up at her with a frank smile of admiration.

"Slide down an' hear your sentence," he encouraged.

She laughed and swung down. Midnight came to Ed, nuzzled him, then was turned into the corral with a few quick motions. Burlane put away saddle and bridle and then went toward the house, where the girl had retreated while he was ungearing the stallion. He came into the main room of the sod house to find her looking at him in mock defiance.

"Honest, Mr. Burlane," she said, mischief in the corners of her mouth, "I thought I'd take a gallop on him and be back, and you'd never know. But where's dad?"

"You're lucky to be back whole," he said rather shortly, for the thought that Midnight would carry, peacefully, any one but himself, rather nettled him. Then he remembered his errand; he pointed to a chair and with a grave face said:

"Sit down, please, Miss Peters, an' I'll tell you where your dad is."

Her face went white at the intimation that her father was not at the house or about the place. She sank into the chair and waited for his explanation.

"The Barnquists got your father into the saloon in Coppered Jack—"

"Parley Brown's?"

"Yes; why?"

"He's a Barnquist partizan."

"I understand! Yes, Miss Ber'nice, they got your dad in there, and there was a mix-up—your dad was in it—and Barnquist was killed."

"Was father hurt? Oh, take me to him!" starting up eagerly.

"No, Miss Ber'nice, he wasn't hurt bodily, but some one tried to assassinate his good name, to make him out a cold turkey-killer—"

"Oh, dad never shot, unless in self-defense. He never was a killer—a mean, cold man."

"I don't need to be told that, Miss Ber'nice. But the charge is made; Barnquist is dead. I ain't mourning over that much. And that young Barnquist is cock of Ox Bow heap now—"

"Him!"

The brows of her went up; her stubbed-out, worn shoes swung under her chair seat in disdainful rhythm. Burlane smiled.

"And father?" she reminded him. "Is he jailed?"

"No; nothing is proved yet. He asked me to ride out and let you know how matters stood. I am to go back into town. Do you want to go along? Harvison's been sent for. Ever'thin's waitin' on his comin' t' Coppered Jack."

"I'd better. We having spring water at the corral makes it so that everything on the farm can take care of itself when we are away. I can shut up here and go in. I can stay with Mrs. Wickson. They are old friends."

"Your dad got a heap of friends in town?"

"Not a heap, perhaps, but what we have are mighty good folks." This proudly and with a decided toss of her boyishly poised head.

"He may need 'em all before we've played this through, soda to hoc," Ed said. "Now, do we fork a pair o' nags in or go in th' buckboard?"

"I think the buckboard would be better; but there's Midnight—"

"Oh, he'll stay where I put him. You've got a good, tight, little home corral here, and the rascal has made friends with your hosses a'ready. He'll not be lonesome for a day or two till we get this straightened out."

She set about her few simple preparations for departure while Ed went out to harness the buckboard team again.

Midnight called to him over the corral bars—a gentle, rumbling love-call. Ed sauntered over to him, batted him on the nose with the true horseman's mock-fury with his favorite mount. The stallion made play of nipping, pranced inside the fence, pleading for a scamper with Ed atop him. Ed heard the house door shut, and turned to see Berenice coming down the path, a pink ribbon tie primly set under her square little chin, a pinky-white gingham dress, worn, but clean and newly pressed, receiving adornment from her own fresh charm, her wide-brimmed hat shoved back.

"Only for these here old stubbed-out shoes, I'd feel dressed up," she laughed, embarrassed at his warm glance of admiration. Remembering her position, however, he swept his face clean of this, turning to Midnight for relief and batting at his nipping mouth.

"Your dad got any eatin'—chawin' ter-backer?" Ed asked.

"Yes, on the shelf behind the cook-stove. Do you chew?"

Her face expressed some disapproval.

"No, but one of my family does," he said, chuckling inside.

He came back from his quest a moment later to find Midnight's head over the girl's shoulder. The horse was whickering deeply to her, and she was talking to him. Ed swept a wisp of the sweetened fine-cut under the horse's nostrils and drew it away. The horse left the girl and came to Ed.

"Like a man," she pouted, "to leave a girl for a chew of tobacco."

Midnight got the morsel he coveted, chewed and swallowed delightedly.

"Shucks!" Burlane laughed at her mock disapproval. "Old Midnight, he don't mean no bad manners. He craves terbac because it is bitter. Hosses like bitter stuff, like humans do. It's good for them."

He batted the stallion again, then turned to the business of harnessing the buckboard ponies. In a few moments they were ready. He handed her into the buckboard, leaped in himself. She took the reins, let them out to get the ponies into a harum-scarum lope, and they were off for Coppered Jack, the buckboard swaying, Berenice laughing, Ed enjoying life.

He turned as they topped the rise toward the main trail that would take them out of sight of the sod house. He saw Midnight, at the corral bars, gazing after them, and heard the stallion whicker.

"Darned old son-of-a-gun!" he said aloud.

"Who?" she demanded, swirling the ponies around a hairpin turn, the buckboard on an acute tilt.

"That old cuss of a Midnight."

"Don't you call him names," she cautioned; "he's a gentleman—and—"

Her face was filled with latent mischief.



"Well, finish it," he challenged.

"And you are another," she finished, her face sobering.

"Thanks. You'll find it out for sure if the chance comes," he said with feeling. "I come of folks that believe that women are entitled to decent treatment, whether they are sisters, wives, mothers, or—"

He paused.

"Finish it," she challenged in turn.

"Or sweethearts," he said quietly, taking the reins from her and bringing the ponies down into a steady pace.

It was just past mid-afternoon. The shadows grew longer and longer. A road runner raced ahead of them, then flirted out of the track. A mocker scolded as they passed a paloverde. Burlane found it pleasant to ride thus with her—if only the cloud over her happiness did not threaten so blackly.

Not long after Ed and Berenice left Twin Springs a rider came toward it from the opposite side, over the open swells. He rode easily, with the grace of the born horseman. His big hat's rim flapped gently; the bells on it tinkled; his brilliantly colored *serape* became him well. His smart dun mare neighed joyously as he patted her on the neck.

At the sound of the mare's call Midnight threw up his black head and snorted. The lesser lights in the Peters corral did not pay any attention. They were staid companions of man. In Midnight, young, virile, equine romance burned for utterance.

The rider reined in his horse when he was close to the house. Then he let the mare jog to the watering trough. He had all the appearance of a passer-by taking advantage of the chance of a drink for horse and man. He swung off-steed, drank heartily himself, fussed with the mare's cinch. Then he rolled a brown corn-husk cigarette and puffed it deeply.

Midnight called to the dun mare. She, jadelike, answered wantonly. Midnight called again, urgently.

The man tugged the mare forward, walking toward the house. He called:

"Ho, the house-a! Is-a Mees Peters a-home?"

There was no answer, of course. He

called again and again. Then he went to the door and knocked. He smiled craftily, when no one answered.

Midnight called again. The man led the prancing mare to the sod stable. Once behind it he was out of the stallion's sight. He tied the mare securely to a tie-rack behind the structure and then began to reconnoiter. He first went to the house again and made sure no one was about; then came back to the corral bars. Midnight, viewing him, wheeled, screamed, kicked out with both deadly earnest hind hooves.

"You—a dam-fine hoss." The Mexican smiled, a hand on each hip, his head tipped appraisingly. "You a too dam-fine hoss for just a cowman that he should be a riding, yes."

Midnight kicked again and squealed.

"I'm a going a clean oop you a clock," the Mexican said softly.

He went to the sod stable again and sought among Peter's gear. Presently he came out, an evil smile on his face. He had a big square of strong cloth—a cut-open cloth sack of close weave and a long piece of stout rope, into which he soon cast a running noose. The rope was far stronger than an ordinary lasso. It was at least half an inch in thickness, of finest Manila fiber. It was part of Peters's block-and-tackle rigging that he used for stretching fence sections about his tamed land. The Mexican measured the rope with his eye; considered. He cut it in half, slip-noosed the other part, as he had the first, then sat down in the shade and smoked.

The sun westered. Every little while Midnight, snorting in the corral that abutted on to the sod stable, drew an answering neigh from the dun mare. They talked back and forth. The Mexican smiled and smoked. The shadows crept; clouds floated; a dim feathered kite soared overhead as a hawk quested for prey.

Presently, at the earliest edge of dusk, —the Mexican got up easily. He led the mare to where Midnight could see her; placed her at the west end of the sod stable. She called. Midnight answered and racked down to the fence. While he was making noises at her and she beguiling

him, the Mexican crept, like a weasel, to the east end of the stable, along its north side, and cast one of his big-rope loops on to the ground, just inside the fence near the wall. The other he laid, ready coiled, on the soil beside the stable's wall.

Then he got up and went to the place where the mare was coquetting with her admirer. He led her back along the stable, around the corner. She called again. The Mexican tied her so she could just peep around the end of the stable. Midnight pawed and snorted. The Mexican crept along the north wall, got the rope-end in his hands: waited, like an Indian.

Midnight made a few *pasears* in mid-corral and came back. He heard the mare again, answered her joyfully, and came racing to the fence, to be nearer yet. He was intent upon his temptress and did not see the snake-like form just where stable melted into the soil. Midnight whickered, pirouetting joyfully: the dun mare wheeled. He hesitated no longer. He came charging right toward the fence—

Something menacing coiled up and about his two forelegs, as the Mexican sent a curl up the slack of the looped rope. The noose snapped tight about the horse's hocks. Midnight reared, fought, skinned his teeth. The Mexican snubbed the rope about a post and held on. The dun mare called, but her call went unheeded now, for the great stallion knew that he was in a trap, and all his wild nature surged to the top. He bit at the rope and squealed.

The Mexican, cool, safe, did not try to throw the stallion at first. He let him have rope, prance about, hobbling, his fore legs snugged. Then of a sudden he cast the other noosed rope through the bars of the fence, and Midnight *paseared* into the second trap. He felt his hind legs snared, struggled, leaned over and came to the ground.

The Mexican snubbed the second rope. He vaulted the fence, the big cloth in his hand. The stallion snapped at him, but the Mexican was cool.

"I'm a sure not hurt a you, beeg horse," he said, speaking aloud in his cramped English, for the soothing effect it would have, he thought, on the animal: "the lasso, he'd

a cut your a neck. I want you weethout hurt, much."

He made a deft cast—the cloth was over the horse's head. He twitched it tight—knotted the ends. The stallion was blindfolded, helpless, for a horse becomes weak and terror-stricken when deprived of sight.

The Mexican got up, smiled, lighted another cigarette. The staid old Peters horses sniffed disdainfully as he rose, then went back to their grazing. The horse-thief went for Ed's bridle, that he easily found; then he cut the noosed ropes. The stallion scrambled up and stood trembling, making furtive motions as if to flee. But he ended by remaining quiet. The Mexican bridled the stallion, putting the bridle over the blinder-cloth, which the bridle thus held securely in place. Midnight fought against taking the bit, but yielded at last, in his blind terror. Once he had the stallion thus tamed, the Mexican led him through the corral gate. Soon he had the dun mare and was astride of her, the bridle in his hand. Midnight, sensing that he was following another horse, was calmed. She whickered at him. The stallion answered. The Mexican spurred her gently; she began to walk. The stallion, treading high, shivering, followed. The staid Peters horses called a good-by, but had no answer.

Soon, as the twilight settled, the dun mare, the Mexican, Midnight, were but moving shapes against the growing darkness.

Then the Peters house and all about it were silent, lonesome.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### JUST A LITTLE DIRT.

**T**RAFFIC dull, Maretta Esquimala leaned on the inside of her bar, puffing a meditative cigarette. The regular patrons of the house were about their usual recreations. Presently, with tinkle of hat-rim bells, Jose Pedro Aguilar came in, hands on hips, smiling, puffing clouds of smoke akin to her own.

"You are at last here, Pedro?" she said in Spanish.

"*Sí, dulce señorita.*"

"Do you know the news, then?"

"No; what?"

"That old man Barnquist, he is dead."

"How? So sudden? His heart?"

"Yes, his heart. But it was a bullet that stopped it."

She told him rapidly of the news from Coppered Jack. His eyes sparkled. He said:

"Now the young Señor Barnquist, he comes here; makes of our place his hang-out? It will be money for us, eh?"

"Not our place; Pedro, attend! But my place, I have paid the purchase money, in full, since last week."

He bit his lip, then smiled agreeably.

"Ah, yes," he agreed, puffing smoke at her playfully; "your place. What matters it, so long as we love and are agreed? Come, let me tell you what I have done."

He told her of his theft of Midnight.

"When that big cowman from Vernon stopped here for *aguardiente* yesterday," he said, "I resolved to have his horse. He stopped in Coppered Jack. I watched him. I followed him to Twin Springs. To-day I went there, found all away, got the beauty. He is in the covered stable—where I keep my 'borrowed' horses. The search will be far and wide. I shall have the stallion here. When the excitement dies down, I can run him over into old Mexico and realize a fine sum."

"You are a man, Pedro," she approved admiringly.

He said nothing—but kissed her warmly. Then he jingled out. As he went, she smiled at his back.

"Paff, for you, Señor Jose Pedro Aguilar," she confided to the burned-out end of her cigarette. "Do you think I prefer a man who makes a living stealing horses to one who is already heir to Ox Bow? No, indeed! When the Señor Barnee comes again to tempt me—Basta! I can stand anything but temptation."

She paused, smiled again, went on:

"And if Jose Pedro Aguilar doesn't like it—"

She smiled wickedly, then rolled herself a fresh corn-husk cigarette, and smoked it with enjoyment.

Maretta Esquiemala was just a handsome tiger-woman, full of desires, of wants that a border *aguardiente* shop never could satisfy. In fancy she saw herself mistress of Ox Bow. True, the young lord of the place was five years younger than she, and she was a hundred years older than he was in experience. But only she, with her man-wisdom, knew the depths of the feeling she had aroused in the young cattle princeling who, by a sudden turn, was become the master of the whole south end of San Felicé County. At their last meeting, when she had bantered him so warmly, she had felt the fire leap from his very veins, and with the knowledge of her kind, she believed that he would come to her—as soon as he could.

She would have been surprised to learn, however, that no thought of her was in Barney Barnquist's mind as he sat tiptilted back against the side wall of the Thimble Belt waiting for sheriff and coroner. The younger element, flocking about him, finally trickled away, out of respect to such dim proprieties as obtained and persisted against the force of an all-pervading public excitement, for the violent taking off of a man of such weight as the elder Barnquist was an event in Coppered Jack's annals. In due time Barnquist, the younger, outwardly as peaceful as was Barnquist the elder, sleeping so quietly atop the long bar, was flanked on either side by Weaver, sputtering again, chewing his pipe-stem's stump, and by Lars Maltrane, saturnine, his hard, agate eyes wide staring, his thin, whitened eyebrows working as he raised his brow and wrinkled it in thought.

Maltrane's eyes ranged from the dead man back to his gun that, so fouled and now so cold, was on the bar near the head of the corpse—the *corpus delicti* and the evidence-in-chief all together.

Below the fatal expanse of bar so occupied, Brown and Barnum waited on a steady dribble of trade that entered by the back door, word having been passed out that, pending the coming of San Felicé's officialdom, folks had better come in that way.

Finally all Coppered Jack had had its drink and its glance at the center of at-

traction. Brown leaned against the farthest end of the bar. Barnum was polishing with his bar-cloth, after the manner of his kind. Something scraped on the wood. Barnum shook out the cloth, and the something dropped on to the bar's top.

"A .38 ball," Barnum said, holding it up. "This cloth was the bottom of my pile. I just got to it. Must have been one from the mêlée. 'Tain't battered, nest-in' into th' soft cloths. Nicked on th' nose, like Peters uses."

Parley Brown casually picked it up, chucked it with the guns, and said:

"I guess there's enough of them in th' walls of th' joint to s'ply all th' evidence needed, eh, Barney? But we'd better keep it?"

"Yes, Parley," said the tiptilted heir bitterly.

"I plumb thought I'd found something," Barnum said, still polishing.

"You got so much time for thoughts, you better clean th' dirt off'n that mirror behind th' bar," and Brown waved his hand toward the fixture. "I dunno what's on it, but it seems to be all spattered up wit' somethin'."

Young Barnquist's chair came down on all fours with a bang.

"Aw, what's th' use bein' so particular?" he snapped. Then he paused, as he noted that they all were looking at him.

"The sheriff an' coroner an' ever'body 'll be in, that's so," Barnum said decidedly, taking a dry cloth. He wheeled to the mirror, wiped, stopped, wiped more energetically. Barnquist leaned back against the wall again. Maltrane and Weaver did likewise. Parley Brown settled into the corner the far end of the bar made with the wall.

Barnum, the wiping done, flicked a sheet of paper on to the bar and shook the wiping cloth out over the paper. They were all watching him. He was seen to lay down the cloth and begin to putter with particles that they had heard rattle off the cloth on to the crisp paper. He balled the particles with his finger ends, patting them together.

"Tha's funny," he said.

"Wha's funny?"

It was Maltrane now, his hard eyes glittering. His eyes were still, agate points of tensest interest. His body did not move. Like a coiled cottonmouth snake he was silent, concentrated. Weaver champed at his pipestem; Barnquist fidgeted in his tip-tilted chair. Brown got up.

"Why, that stuff on the mirror, all splattered there, wasn't there before th' row began. I cleaned th' glass early to-day, same's usual. An' it's like—like—"

He was considering.

"I dunno what it's like," he said, his eye holding Barnquist's for a moment. He lounged carelessly against the bar, twisted the paper into a rough spiral, cast it underfoot.

Barnquist's chest relaxed in a half-sigh. Maltrane's eyes flashed from Barnum to Barnquist, then were fixed on his own gun. Like a serpent on a rock he waited.

Presently Barnum remarked:

"Why, here's some change that I forgot to put into th' till."

He picked it off the bar, fumbled it. A piece or two went behind the bar. He stooped and scrabbled about on the floor for it. They could hear paper rustling there. When Barnum straightened up, he had the coins. He tilled them, was at ease again. Brown yawned. Weaver champed his pipe-end. Maltrane got up silently and glided out of the room. As the door clicked after him, Barnquist sighed again, brought his chair down, stood up, ordered a drink with a swagger, sat down again.

"Weaver," he said suddenly, "you find Mal and ride to th' home ranch with him an' have th' news told there. I never thought of sending some one special. An' have th' boys ride in for th' inquest, Alec Pardee at th' head o' them all. I want Ox Bow repr'sented, *strong*."

"Sure, boss," and Weaver champed up and out.

Brown now found business outside. Barnquist shot a glance across the room at Barnum, who suddenly stooped and came upright again with a wisp of paper twisted and held up for inspection. Barnquist came across the room to him eagerly.

"It's th' paper that's got th' dirt off'n th' mirror in it," Barnum announced mys-



teriously, "an' I know what's made that dirt, too."

"What?" Barnquist demanded, with a fearful glance at the silent form at the front end of the bar.

"Some kind o' a greasy soap," Barnum said quietly. "I've handled 'nuff soap, washing out bottles and glasses an' cleanin' bars an' fixtures, in my time. It's th' same 's th' dirt on Mal's gun, there. He stood there an' fired six times, right at Peters, an' never touched a hair, but he slathers my mirror all over with soapy stuff. What 'd he do, boss, play y' for a sucker an' give you th' double X?"

"Oh, I guess Mal was fair an' square," Barnquist laughed. "He jus' plumb shot nervous-like. Lemme have that paper o' dirt."

Barnum passed it over, Barnquist undid it, tested the black substance between his finger ends, sniffed at it. He laid it out on the bar and glanced at Barnum critically.

"You see here, Barnum," he said quietly; "you're too good a fellow to waste your time back o' this bar. I need a clerk and timekeeper out to Ox Bow, at a hundred a month. You're not gettin' over sixty here. Come with me?"

"I'll go you," Barnum said.

Barnquist's hand closed on the wisp of paper. He edged it on to the floor and trod it under foot. Barnum produced a bottle. They drank. Barnum closed one eye in a furtive wink. Barnquist matched it, then shot a glance of fear at that which occupied the other end of the bar.

"Man down to th' wagon yard told me Weaver was lookin' for me—for you, boss," came Lars Maltrane's cold voice out of the rear room.

Barnquist wheeled, hand at hip.

"Oh, is that you, Mal?" he said easily.

"Yes, I want that you and Weaver should ride out to Ox Bow and tell folks of pap's being killed an' have th' boys ride out for th' inquest. A little public opinion bearin' on to Harvison won't do any harm."

"Tha's a good move," the man with the cold eyes said.

He came forward, his eyes on the wisp of paper that Barnquist had trodden under foot. Then his eyes swept up to those

of Barnquist. He took the drink that Barnum nimbly poured out for him, wiped the back of his hand across his alcohol-dampened lips and turned and went silently out.

"He's got a mighty bad walled eye," Barnum said, after Maltrane had vanished.

"He's cold, ice-cold," Barnquist shivered just a bit. "Got one bit o' pride—that he works for one man at a time, like. He never lets his work as dep'ty interfere wit' his work at Ox Bow. He didn't never, even f'r dad. An' w'en he's actin' as Harvison's first dep'ty, he's all dep'ty. He's ice-cold, wall-eyed—a bad *hombre*."

## CHAPTER IX.

### HARVISON IS TIRED.

A CLATTER of hooves at the far end of Coppered Jack, a general craning of necks, a buzz of conversation ushered in Sheriff 'Lonson Harvison and Coroner Dr. Eastman Alberstone and several deputies. Right after them came Ed Burlane in the buckboard. He drew up at the Wickson house and put out the ponies and wagon. He left Berenice there and got Peters. Together with Wickson and several staid old-timers, they went toward the Thimble Belt, whither all Coppered Jack was tending.

And finally, headed by Lars Maltrane and Weaver, came a score of Ox Bow retainers—hard-bitten, hard-eyed men—Foreman Pardee bringing up their jingling rear. Burlane and Peters shoved to the fore. Wickson and his handful of old-timers kept to the front of the room. The Ox Bow contingent was ahead of them. Then came the mixed folk of Coppered Jack. Sheriff Harvison and deputies and Alberstone speedily improvised a tribunal out of the chairs in the rear room and the table. Alberstone made a rather hasty examination of the body of the slain man and of the weapons. With rough skill the doctor probed out the bullet from the keyhole-shaped wound just over the heart. Its end was nicked well!

"I'd like for to hear what's what about this matte'," Harvison said, taking his seat and laying his gun on the table. His dep-

uties against the wall flanked him. "You, Mal, c'm here. You're first deputy down in this corner. You were in this. How'd it all happen? I'd put you on th' posse here, but that you're one o' th' witnesses."

Thus ordered, Maltrane came forward and told his story:

He had seen and heard the quarrel between Peters and Barnquist the day before. The two had made up that day, had entered the Thimble Belt to cement their new friendship with a drink. The Barnquists, father and son, and Peters, were at the bar—had had some drinks. He, Maltrane and Weaver, were in the back room, when they heard the quarrel break out anew. They came out, saw Peters whip out his gun. They drew their guns, began to blaze away. They "shot it out, th' hull wad," he concluded. "Couldn't seem t' hit nothin' first, so I kep' fannin' th' hammer."

Harvison ran his fingers through his tangled beard and spat.

He rolled his keen gray eyes over the table at Alberstone, a loose-jointed, meditative sort of man with a sallow face and deep-set blue eyes.

"You an' Weaver shot it out, your hull wad?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes, sher'ff."

"You ought to have target practise, Mal," quietly. "I can't have no first dep'ty f'r this end o' San Felicé that can't shoot no better 'n that."

He cultivated his beard's roots again, spat, toyed with his gun's butt absently.

Weaver, called, corroborated Maltrane at every point.

"Yes, I shot it out, my hull wad, too, an' missed."

"An' then Peters jumped you, eh, after he slew Barnquist?"

"Tha's it, sher'ff," audibly champing his pipe-stem.

"Pass on," and Harvison waved him aside.

Parley Brown developed a very confused recollection of events in general, but had seen Peters draw and fire at Barnquist, who fell.

Barnum admitted that at the first sign of real hostilities he had ducked behind the

bar and remained there. Had seen Peters draw first, though.

"Sensible barkeeper," Harvison praised him. "'Twa'nt none o' your concerns who shot whose head from his neck."

As Barnum sagged back into the obscurity of the crowd, he found Maltrane, oddly enough, at his side. The man of the agate eyes whispered into Barnum's ear:

"Whyn't yu' tell him 'bout that dirt on th' mirror?"

Barnum blinked, then answered readily:

"Why, he didn't ask me. This ain't a reg'lar inquest; on'y Harvison's own personal inquiry. I'll tell 'bout that on th' trial, though, Lars. I think there's something in it."

"You better," the chill, even voice came into his ear. He felt a chill go over his shoulder blades at the rasp of it.

Young Barnquist was asked to step before the sheriff's table. Barney went, all eyes upon him. He was neither forward nor timid. His eyes swept over the people with a friendly, appealing look. Then back to the form on the bar, his glance carrying the glance of all others with it and reminding them that there was his father, and that he, the Barnquist heir, stood in his stead, to punish and to reward.

"There really isn't much to tell," he said steadily. "I'm not ready with my gun. Pap always treated me like a boy, 's you-all know, folks. Well, we came in with Peters there, to drink and make up. All of a sudden Peters he got riled at somethin' and drewed. Pap reached for his gun, but 'twas too late. Me? I'm clumsy with a gun. I never shot it out with any one. Before I c'd get my gun out, Weaver an' Mal had begun to shoot, an' Peters went in after them. Then Burlane, that stranger, came bulgin' in, with his guns, and that ended it all. It happened so quick I couldn't act, much."

"But you saw Peters kill your dad?" Harvison inquired.

"Yes—shoot him—cold turkey—"

There was a hum of anger from the Ox Bow crowd. A shuffle of feet in the rear of the room told of the old-timers, with Peters, shifting their weights on their tired feet. The deputies behind Harvison and

Alberstone tensed, then relaxed as the Ox Bow folks calmed.

"Where were you when Peters shot?" Harvison asked.

"At Peters's side. I had jumped away to get room to swing my gun. It caught in th' holster. I came toward him just as he fired."

"You c'n pass, son," Harvison said kindly.

Young Barnquist sat down in one of the chairs beside the table that happened to be empty. So, when Peters came forward, in response to the sheriff's call, they were, accused and accuser, very close to each other.

"You tell us what happened, Peters," Harvison said crisply.

"It's 'bout like Barney has said," Peters said, uncovering his head and speaking quietly, "'s far's th' friendly drink's concerned. There was no real a'gument betwixt us, sher'ff. Fi'st news I knew, Weaver an' Mal were a blazin' away at my back. I wheeled, to find my gun twitched out o' my holster. Old Barnquist was away back against th' wall; Barney here up th' bar f'om me. I see I was in a jack-pot, an' I leaped for th' nearest, Mal an' Weaver, there, as I c'd tell their guns were emptied by th' time I woke up to what was goin' on."

"What was goin' on?" Sheriff Harvison asked.

"Nothin' but a cheerful plan to git me in here, start a row an' kill me, an' lay it onto me," Peters said evenly.

Barnquist snapped erect and answered him, face to face:

"You lie, Peters. You made your boasts yesterday what you'd do if things weren't jus' so-an'-so—"

"Now, you sit down, son," Harvison cautioned; "you might git something stirred up that wouldn't settle without a rope-stretchin', an' I don't want that ceremony in San Felicé—not an *irregular* rope-stretchin'."

A low growl came from Ox Bow. The deputies shifted their weights against the wall. Quick-darting glances shot across the pool of human heads in between. Peters, at a wave from the sheriff's hand, retired.

Alberstone leaned over and conferred with Harvison.

"Tha's all th' news I care to hear now," Harvison announced at the close of this whispered chat with his conferee.

There was a movement in the crowd. Ed Burlane pushed his way through, shouldering easily aside a half-dozen Ox Bowians, who yielded ground to him gingerly—but more readily, however, when they had got a hasty view of his calm eyes and big shoulders.

"I'd liked to be called, too," Ed suggested.

Harvison swept him with a glance of open scorn.

"You heard what I said," he growled, currying his beard again. "The sheriff o' San Felicé's got all the news he wants—*now!*"

Ed's eyes engaged those of the official. He saw nothing behind their barrier. The officer was stubborn, crafty. He swept Ed aside with:

"This 's only a preliminary inquiry. The coroner wishes me to say there'll be no inquest at this time. We're goin' to investigate a bit before doin' anything—"

Ox Bow stirred in the room's front spaces. Ox Bow growled as the hard-bitten men shifted belts ominously.

"Peters, you," and Harvison's voice rang out clear.

"Right here, sher'ff," and he came forward.

"You'll go into th' calaboose, pendin' further inquiries. You're held on s'picion *only*"—meaningly.

Ox Bow emitted a combined hum of approval. Barney Barnquist's eyes were approvingly on the sheriff. Alberstone leaned over and whispered to his colleague, who nodded.

"Now, boys," Harvison admonished, "remember, no illegal doin's in San Felicé. I c'n tie any knots needed in ropes."

Barnquist got up and waved his hand. Hesitatingly but certainly at the last he made a plea for law and order.

"I am the aggrieved party, if there is any," he said slowly; "le's not have any violence. I've a sad duty to perform," waving his hand toward the form on the

bar. "With that before me, I ask that there be no violence."

"Th' body c'n now be removed," Harvison announced. "an' thanks f'r that pacifyin' speech, Barney."

Ox Bow came forward in serried ranks, people opening out before them. The body of the dead cattle king was hoisted onto the shoulders of his erstwhile retainers and taken out. A wagon was requisitioned, and the corpse was taken from town. Peters, ringed by deputies, went out to the town jail.

Alberstone took possession of the weapons that Burlane had piled onto the bar. Harvison examined them carefully, noting the fouled condition of Maltrane's. He found Burlane at his shoulder. The day had waned by now; Barnum was lighting up.

"I'm a mighty curious man," Burlane announced as soon as he had Harvison's attention. They were alone at the end of the bar for the moment.

"So'm I," Harvison answered.

"My curiosity takes this slant t'day," Ed volunteered, getting no encouragement from the uninviting eyes of the sheriff, who cultivated his beard carefully as he fingered the dirty gun—"takes this shape, Sheriff Harvison: Why didn't you call me to tell what I know about th' shootin' of old Barnquist?"

"Oh," oracularly, "you'll have time 'nuff in cou't to tell all that, by mighty. I seen a man—once," Harvison said, squinting down the barrel of the dirty gun, "who pestered a sheriff so much he lost a trick."

Ed looked into the harsh-featured face of him searchingly.

"Yes, son," Harvison continued, squinting down the barrel anew; "he pestered that sheriff till he lost his trick. Sheriffs is human—almost."

"I'm going to shut up," Ed said.

"You're takin' a long time doin' it"—grimly.

Silence then, potent, while man probed for what was in man's mind and heart and soul.

"You're f'om Vernon, X. M. T.?" Harvison asked suddenly.

"Yes, lately."

"Vernon end o' San Felicé 'bout balances this end, son. I got to get elected again. I'm goin' to. I been bossed around by Barnquists quick an' slow, long an' short, till I'm onable to make up my own mind. But that's neither here nor over yander, son. Whoever killed old Barnquist's got to swing."

"He ought to," said Ed shortly.

He went out, followed by the sly, quiet smile of Harvison.

Ed went straight to the Wickson house. He found the family at supper. He drew Wickson aside and asked:

"What fer fellow is this sheriff? I never run up against him before. Is he a man?"

"No; he's an official," Wickson replied. "Last man talks to him is apt to get him. But he runs his office as sheriff; takes pride in it. He won't let nothin' happen to Peters while he's in jail, I don't believe."

Burlane was silent. He tried in vain to reconcile this deliberate judgment of Wickson, an observing old-timer, with the queer energy with which Harvison had given him a warning not to argue the case with him. He went in and found Berenice with supper in a basket, ready to go to the calaboose.

"No; I don't want any one to go with me," she said; "I want that dad should have a warm meal to make him comfortable."

"You let me go 'long an' carry that basket," he insisted.

He took the handle and started. She followed, protesting at first. They found Peters cheerful and left the basket with him. When they came to the Wickson house Ed said:

"Miss Ber'nice, I'm goin' back to Twin Springs. I want to have ol' Midnight here. I'll put th' ponies out in th' corral. I c'n be back by sleep-time. I'll bid you good night now."

"Good night," and she gave him her warm, loyal hand. "I'll be all right with Mother Wickson. And thank you very much for what you're done for us so far, Mr. Burlane."

His hand tingled with the warmth of hers. He swept his hat low in salute and went for the ponies and buckboard. A



few moments later she heard him clatter up the street, outbound for Twin Springs.

## CHAPTER X.

### OH, MIDNIGHT!

THE night had closed in, dark, still. There was a feeling of a coming storm in the air. Little breezes whiffled about from quarters. The ponies felt it and pranced in the dark. Out in the west the lightning winked an eye, but no thunder sounded yet—the storm was too distant.

The tinkle of a mandolin, the gleam of embers, told Ed of the Mexican ditch-diggers' camp. He turned aside at the ponies' urging. They knew where was the side trail that led to the home corral and the shelter of the sod stable against the advancing storm.

Ed listened for the whicker of Midnight as he caught the loom of the buttes and then of the ranch buildings. He called and had no reply.

"Lil old son-of-a-gun," he said to the nigh pony, "he's off in th' corral corner, hobnobbin' with them Peters hosses. He's apt to hide out thataway on me."

He brought the ponies to a stand. They whickered, and the Peters horses replied. Ed listened again for Midnight, but had no sound of *his* whicker.

"Cute son-of-a-gun," he said to the off pony, whacking him with the hame-strap into the corral. He wheeled the buckboard into the stable, went to the bars, called: "Midnight! Oh, Midnight!"

He listened. There was no sound.

"Mighty queer," he said. "I'll go round by th' stable an' see if he's there. I'd like to rub his nuzzle, dog-dast his shiny hide!"

He went softly down to the stable's end, and the lightning, far-gleaming from the storm's curtain, showed him no Midnight at the fence there. He went to the other end and could see no loom of blackness on four legs there, either. Ed sauntered out to the fence, stooped to get a grass blade—a Texan's infallible aid to clear thought. He got it, sat on his "hunkies,"

chewed, thought, called again: "Oh, Midnight! Here, old son-of-a-gun!"

There was a croon of endearment in the pleading. Ed gave his big stallion the love other men gave their sweethearts. He never had had a serious affair with a girl; he had grown up shy, reserved, clean-living, son of an old cow-man and his wife whom fortune had not treated well. Left an orphan early, Ed had learned to fend for himself along the old frontier. The love of Midnight was his one great passion up to that time. The meeting with Berenice had made him think less often of the stallion during the past days, and he had turned home with his heart yearning for the feel of the old rascal's velvety muzzle against his cheek, the sound of his deep-chested whicker at the corral bars. And now—

"Oh, Midnight!" he called plaintively. Never before had he been compelled to call more than once for the horse to come. In corral, on open prairie, in daylight, moonlight, in pitchiest dark, the horse would always come gladly. The giant equine always showed his joy in his master's presence, carried him proudly, galloping, fox-trotting, walking, making pretty *pasears*, as his master's mood demanded. But now—

"Old son-of-a-gun! You, Midnight!"

There came a gusty tug of wind. Nearer, sharper, heaven-rending lightning split the vault of gloom. The picture was printed on Ed's vision, then it was gone: the trap noose, its end snubbed about the fence post nearest at hand; the trampled soil of the corral there; the other noose, also discarded in the hurry of the captor's flight with his prize. Then the night closed in again. The wind whipped up.

"They've got you, son-of-a-gun, old Midnight," Ed called to the dark night. "They've got you, oh, my own pal. I'll get them—"

His hand fell onto the butt of his gun. He started up, wild, staring. Then came the thought of Berenice, her need, her father in jail.

"I'm in a jack-pot, old Midnight," he thought. "Yes, a reg'lar J. P. Where's th' way out? If you were me, you'd leave ever' thing to come to me. Miss Ber'nice

won't need me till morning. I'm goin' to look for my old son-of-a-gun of a pal of a hoss."

Searching out Peters's pierced-horn lantern, Burlane set its candle alight, and, with its gleams making dim, shifting patterns, walked from the corral bars in the direction the tracks of Midnight beckoned. Finding that the thief apparently had made no effort at covering the trail, Ed presently came back to the corral, caught one of the Peters horses, saddled it, forked it and, still carrying the lantern, rode in the general direction the sign of the stolen horse trended. Every little while he dismounted and cast about for tracks. He found them easily.

"He's either a plum fool, or else he's got a buried ace somewhere," Ed told the Peters cayuse, wise old nag. "He don't even try to get onto the swells' tops, where it would be drier and th' hoof-marks would be less plain. Keeps jogging along in th' dips like he was sure he'd never be headed."

The trail took him almost due east for a time. Then it swung abruptly south with a little easting, and of a sudden Ed found why the marauder had not seen fit to take precautions; for the sign of Midnight and captor went straight into the well-marked sweep of a great herd of cattle.

"Knew he'd cut this cattle-drive sign here, th' thief did," Ed judged. "An' now where does it tail into, back-tracking it?"

He followed the herd's broad pathway backward. There was no reason for doing that, instead of going forward. But it was either way, and Ed took the back track on the first impulse. The rain that had been threatening came spitting down; far lightning blazed; the thunder boomed. The old lantern glittered out. Burlane found himself, after discarding the lantern, still able to keep to the cattle track by the light of the flashes.

Presently the rain ceased, and with it, as Ed knew, all chance of following Midnight's trail farther that night, even had he happened upon it, for the beating of the rain had made all ground signs dimmer.

But he still went forward and came presently to a swell of the plain higher than

others roundabout, and from it glimpsed afar the lights of large buildings. From the general lay of the land, although he was a stranger in that region, he knew it to be the Barnquist ranch. He had passed it the day before, on his ride from Vernon into the Coppered Jack region, and had seen at a distance from the main trail the general arrangement of the Barnquist buildings.

Although he had been riding for a job, the general reputation of the gang that Barnquist kept about him had made him decide not to stop there. So he had drifted on, without definite plan, and the sight of the row between Peters and Barnquist had changed his indecision over the future into a decision to see Peters through and clear on the other side of his present troubles, if that were a possible thing.

Ed twitched the Peters cayuse out of the cattle trail which he now knew for the recent path of one of the Barnquist main herds, which had been driven off to some probably distant water and pasture grounds. Ed kept well out from the Barnquist buildings, figuring that the horse-thief, if he had come that way, would have done the same.

He kept turning over in his mind where the thief would go. Surely not back over the Vernon trail, when he, Burlane, had so plainly stated to several in and about Coppered Jack that he was from Vernon. To take a horse as handsome as Midnight back to Vernon, where he was so well known, would be equal to suicide, unless the thief could show a valid bill of sale from Midnight's owner, for without it a stranger possessing Ed's horse would have been hung, in those days, on sight. Such was the short shrift meted out to the horse-thief in the old times.

"There's either a hide-out down this-away, or when he hit th' cattle trail," Ed judged, "he turned up-trail and is a long ways off by now. I can't do anything till morning, anyway. I better see what I can find off beyond here."

Presently, having circled the Barnquist outfit, Ed guided his pony southwest again. He had been going slowly, and hours had passed. The storm had rumbled off over

the horizon and showed now but an occasional rosy glow on piled-up cloud banks. The air was fresh and sweet. A little owl hooted from the entrance to some near-by prairie-dog hole; afar a coyote hymned the stars.

Ed's cayuse came to the main trail below the Barnquist ranch. Ed now knew where he was, and, remembering the Mexican *aguardiente* joint below him, and thinking to gain some information there, he let the cayuse fox-trot while he lolled in the saddle.

Tinkle of mandolin, sheen of wavering lights, slurring liquid buzz of Spanish, came to Ed as he drew up before the Chaparral Cock. He left the wise old Peters horse at the tie-rail and lounged lithely in.

A group of Mexicans were at poker in a corner nearest the door. A lone lad strummed the mandolin and hummed "Sobre des Olas." At one end of the bar was a tall-hatted man, whose hat-bells tinkled as he quirked his head from side to side in gentle discussion with the lady of the house. Ed strolled up, gave the woman the customary smile, and ordered a drink. The man in the steeple hat eyed Ed aslant, edged away, and presently, as Ed joked with the lady of the house went out hurriedly.

To have a Mexican vanish from the presence of a Texan who showed a disposition to joke with a woman was nothing new in those days, so Ed took it as the usual tribute of a Mexican to American prowess.

Maretta had recognized Ed in a flash as the man who had ridden the big black stallion by her place the day before. She knew what he was looking for as soon as his body had crossed the door-sill. With her, to attract men, to turn them to her own uses, was instinctive.

Born and bred to the business of the wayside *aguardiente* seller, she was true to her type, scheming, ardent or cold by turn, calculating. She saw in Ed a man who might be useful to play off against Aguilar, did that sometimes bothersome gentleman become too irksome to her. She thought that Barney Barnquist and Pedro might

come to use of weapons over her in time. Other men had. Why not they? And she did not want the new heir to Ox Bow killed, as she thought he would be, did he try to shoot it out with Pedro. Therefore she saw that the entry of Ed on the scene might be made to redound to her benefit, did she but play her hand to the best advantage.

Ed leaned forward with just the needed shade of confidential inquiry.

"*Señorita mia*," he wheedled, "if I asked you, as friend to friend, a favor, would you grant it?"

Maretta flashed him a smile and poured out for herself a tiny drink to companion Ed's.

"Of a surety, *señor*," she agreed.

"I have lost a horse—one that I love as a man might love a new wife," he said earnestly.

"Well?" and she sipped from her glass's rim.

"I would do much—much—for any one who could tell me where my horse is."

"He was that beeg, so beeg *caviard* you rode through here but yeesterday?" sipping again prettily.

"It is so, *señorita mia*."

"Eef I view heem, *señor*, I shall eenform you. Was he estolen, or is he estrayed?"

"I think but strayed," Ed paltered, anxious not to have it known that he suspected downright theft, otherwise the thief, hearing of it, would be more wary.

"Hardlee would a man esteal such a dearling horse and bring heem to so public a place," she said, tossing down the little drink—what her red, pouting lips had left after sipping so—"but I may get news for you. Eef so, *basta!* Come in a few days. Who can tell? Much gossip drifts in such a place."

Ed did not make the mistake in dealing with her that a coarser nature might have. He offered her no bribe, no exaggerated attentions. He paid exactly for his drink, bowed, and went out quietly.

Maretta continued to gaze at the door space long after Ed had clattered away. She lighted her a new cigarette and apostrophized its glowing end:

"Ah, those Americanos! They know

how to be nice to a woman. Decidedly, Señor Aguilar, your chances grow less and less. That Barnquist mule I can make love me; but this big man who has lost the horse of midnight hue, *basta!* him I could love."

She finished her cigarette, spoke crisply to the late stayers. The mandolin ceased its plaint; the card game closed with a snap. Soon the room was deserted, and Maretta stood behind her bar, putting things in order for the night.

Came now a light step: the tinkle of hat-rim bells. She glanced toward the door. Aguilar hands on hips, swaying, came in smiling, smoke wreathing his dusk-rose cheeks, his eyes sparkling. He addressed Maretta in Spanish:

"Tell me, *dulce*," giving her a warm pressure of the hand over the bar, "does he suspect where the great *caviard* is?"

"No, Pedro," she crooned to him, accepting his proffered endearments. "He thinks it has but wandered away, and that by search he shall find it again."

"Let him think," he laughed; "and for to-night?"

He glanced at her tenderly.

"And for to-night I do not care to be bothered longer," she evaded. "I must be up early; many will pass and repass all the day to-morrow; trade will be brisk. Many will come and go to the funeral of that *anciene* Barnquist. Do not be sentimental, Pedro. It is bad for—business. Catch the lock as you go out."

She boxed his ear gently, wriggled from his arms that were stretched over the bar toward her. She vanished into a rear room where she slept, and he knew he was dismissed. He went out, slamming the door after him. But he consoled himself by going to the underground stable below the Chaparral Cock, a stable made by digging out a space under a cut-bank in a dry arroyo and coaxing sod to grow atop the hackberry limbs that, interlaced, formed the roof. There he viewed Midnight again and laughed when the big stallion bit at him and kicked and squealed.

"You shall pay a gold piece for every kick and squeal," he said, "when the time comes for me to get you below the border

into Old Mexico. Some hidalgo will pay well for you, my friend, well, well, indeed!"

## CHAPTER XI.

"ASHES TO ASHES."

ALTHOUGH he had been kept subdued, puplike, while the old wolf of Ox Bow lorded it in the full tide of life, Barney Barnquist knew in a rough and ready way what would be expected of him when he came to his majority and some day dominated. He knew very well that he could not lead in that frontier region just because he had money or because his father had had it. He knew that he must go through, himself.

He had been for months secretly cultivating himself with an ardor at which his domineering father would have been astounded, had he known. When by himself, Barney had practiced incessantly with his six-gun, and as he had unlimited credit for all sorts of saddlery, guns, ammunition and other frontier needfuls, although denied money in quantities, he had become what a man of his blood and inclinations might be expected to become—a fine shot, quick as lightning. Up to now he had concealed this, affecting a lumbering, hesitant gun-play, befitting a boy coming to manhood and not yet sure of himself.

There was a deeper craft in Barney Barnquist than any one had discovered. It had been founded on a remark of his father's in the former years when the youngster first had begun to take notice of the expansive activities of his parent.

"Barney, make men think you're a little of a chump, when you're wise, an' they'll play you as if you were a chump, an' you c'n play them like a wise man an' beat them. No one expects to get beat by a plumb fool."

But now, he reflected on the day of his father's funeral, it was time to show some signs of the control he intended to exercise. He went about with just the right mixture of crisp, callow authority, and restrained grief. His usually surly face he had smoothed out. He went with slow tread, conferred several times with Alex Pardee,



the grim, shifty-eyed ranch foreman, upon points of arrangement. He told off the pallbearers, after getting Pardee's favorable opinion on each selection. Lars Maltrane and Weaver were among the six delegated to carry the rough deal coffin to its resting place atop the largest roll of land behind the ranch-house, and a cairn of stones, drawn from the foot of some not-distant buttes, served to make sure that the coyotes would not rob the grave.

Sheriff Harvison and Coroner Alberstone, out from Coppered Jack for the funeral, were pressed into service, reading the ritual at the grave from an old and well-thumbed copy of the *Laudes Domini* that had belonged to Barney's mother and that always served on grave occasions.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the sheriff intoned, dropping earth into the grave. The party followed, in order. A volley from six-guns was the final salute to death. The funeral party mounted and wheeled back toward the ranch-house. The Coppered Jack folk were in the rear. Barney spurred swiftly to the head of the cavalcade.

"D' y' notice, Alberstone," Harvison asked, "that that young cub-bear didn't th'ow no dust on to his dad's coffin?"

"Yes, but I s'pose he's considerable het up to-day?"

"Uhuh."

Arrived at the ranch-house, Harvison and Alberstone rode into the open space before the house, where Barney already had halted, as if waiting for them. The Coppered Jack people kept with the two officials.

"Mr. Barnquist," the sheriff said deferentially, and it was easy to note that Barney felt elated at this form of address. "do I understand that there is a will or any papers you'd like filed over at th' county seat? If not, you take charge, of course, pending the necessary legal formalities."

"Pap, he always said there 'd be no will; I ain't looked," Barney answered, making his horse prance.

"If anythin' turns up like that, you feel free to call on me?" Sheriff Harvison inquired.

"Sure; thanks."

"G' day, Mr. Barnquist," nodding cor-

dially. Alberstone and the sheriff rode off, the townsfolk after them.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," Harvison muttered, as they turned into the main trail: "if God don't take ye the devil must."

As soon as sheriff and coroner had gone, Barney twitched his mount about until he was facing the crowd. The women from the different houses and shacks about the place—Mexicans, breeds, all-whites—were on the fringes. Barney knew that something was expected of him, and he straightened up in the stirrups and spoke:

"Men, I'm disposed to let matters run as before. Pardee will go on as ranch foreman in general, an' Lars Maltrane an' Weaver will be under me for personal work, like they were to pap."

Murmurs of approval greeted this announcement, that put everything in the familiar grooves for the new régime.

"An' you, Greasewood Kate," he called over the men's heads. "keep in charge indoors."

He caught her eye. It had a scornful look. She tossed her handsome head and went indoors, followed by her flock of helpers. Last of them was the girl, Ess-Way, who turned and sought to catch Barney's eye. But he was already circled by the men, to whom he was giving some orders, routine and perfunctory, but in tones that showed his aggressiveness. The girl, head down, went sadly in.

"I guess th' young cub's goin' to chaw right into things," Pardee joked as the men swung off to their bunk-houses.

Barney dismissed all save Weaver and Maltrane with a wave of the hand. He threw his bridle rein to Weaver and signed for Maltrane to come into the ranch office with him.

"Lars," he said, with a certain heavy, seemingly boyish touch of wistfulness, "sit down. I want t' talk with you."

"I been wantin' a gab with you all day," Lars said, slumping down into a seat without ceremony.

Young Barnquist's eyes glowed dully for a space, then dimmed. He sat down and faced the other across the rough desk.

"I'll tell you, Lars. I'm goin' to open up

pap's desk an' things, an' I wanted you as witness. I want you to keep right on with me, as you were with pap—"

"That mean you want me to kill a man wunst in a while?" with serpentlike stroke of satire. The agate eyes glittered. His tongue licked out, just touched his thin lips, then flicked back again.

Young Barney stared at him in apparent alarm.

"I want you should be just what you were to dad—personal man, like—"

"Well," and the cold eyes narrowed to slits, but were brilliant still behind their ambushment of wrinkled lids, under their thin, whitened brows, "if you ask me to kill a man for you, cold turkey, Barney, don't put me up against him with an empty gun—again."

"What do you mean?" Barney started up, fists clenched, face so white it was chalky.

"I generally 'm able t' back up what I say, with a gun or anyway, s' long's no one tampers with my weepoon, Barney. I don't know th' bottom of what took place yest'day, but I will, some time."

He sank back into his chair, moody, his eyes gleaming dully. Barney eyed him. He composed his features, sat down, then smiled.

"You're nervous because you didn't shoot straight," he said. "Peters was too quick at turnin' an' dodgin' when you shot."

"I ain't offerin' no alibis for my shootin' ner explainin' why I missed; it's you that's a doin' that."

Silence now for a space, while the two studied each other. Barnquist held out his hand.

"You'll stay, eh, Mal, at fifty dollars more a month than pap paid you?"

Maltrane forced a laugh to his lips, held out his hand.

"Yes," he said shortly. "I'll play you fair, as I did your dad, if you play me fair. I've no morals, no honor, except this—I shoot for th' geezer that buys my grub. You be fair with me, an' I'm fair with you—clear through, only remember that, as first dep'ty, th' sheriff has first call, if he wants it."

Plain elation shone on Barnquist's face.

He had been apprehensive that the famed killer might take a vagrant notion to ramble after the death of his father. To have that known slayer at his side, to have the gun counted best in all San Felicé County at his service was a host in itself.

"Now, help me look for a will or other paper that may need filing," Barney urged. "You were with pap morn 'n any one else, and would know."

Together they went through the rough desk, the various boxes and odds and ends in which the heavy-fisted cattle king had kept his accounts and papers. There was little to examine. Running Ox Bow by "rule of thumb," the elder Barnquist had trusted little to books. He had one argument against it:

"Ever' time you make a memorandum on paper, you leave part o' your brains there."

So inside half an hour Barney Barnquist was able to let Maltrane go out, convinced that there was no will, no papers that would need filing and that, barring the usual formalities, he, as sole heir, would be lord of Ox Bow.

He sat smiling at this thought. Ox Bow! Square mile after square mile, with access to untold areas of free range! Thousands of head of long-horned cattle. Dozens of retainers. A man-killer, willing to go any lengths to suit the new master. A comfortable house, for the time and region; an income to put up a mansion if he so willed. Thousands of horses to select from. The finest of weaponry—smiles of women, who had already thrown themselves at his not unhandsome head. And there was the woman in the Chaparral Cock. After, if he tired of her, as he would of such a one, there was Berenice Peters.

Barney smiled again and juggled jinglingly some loose gold he had found in a cubby in the desk. He took out a coin, spun it, caught it, thought again of Maretta, who had scorned him because of lack of money to spend on her.

"I could buy a dozen like her for a handful of these," he solaced himself with.

He strolled to the window and looked off. His eye traveled to the top of that highest swell where was that lonely cairn of stones.

He dropped the gold coin into his pocket, his face went white.

There came a rap at the door: the half-breed housekeeper entered, without asking permission.

Greasewood Kate shut the door craftily. She came determinedly forward until she faced Barney.

"What do you want—in here?" he demanded firmly, his eyes engaging hers coldly.

"I want what? I want thees, Barnee," shaking a minatory forefinger under his nose. "I wanta you stop breeking my girl's heart. Tha's all, Barnee."

"Oh, hell; it was all right for me to tucker 'round after Ess-Way when I was a boy. I'm a man now. I'm not a goin'—"

Her face worked with rage. Her voice, though, went low.

"You, Barnee be of a care! You know your pap, he lef' a will?"

His face whitened, he started back, unable to overcome the surprise her direct blow brought upon him.

"No, why, no, Kate?" he blundered. "Did he?"

"Yes, an' I know whare the will he ees, Barnee."

"Where?"

He leaned forward anxiously.

"Come, Kate, I was only foolin' about Ess-Way. O' course I like her. On'y I'm all upset t'day. Can't you see that?"

She regarded him with deep, somber eyes. A little touch of humor came into her smile.

"Your pap, he give me dhat will, one taime, year 'go, Barnee. I send heem down Vernon. I'll—it is in lawyer's room there—I know—"

"Could you get it up here, so't I c'n see it before it's filed?" he asked pleadingly. He did not doubt her; her position as house manager for his father made her story ring true to him; she had been trusted greatly.

"In a day or two, Barnee."

She paused then, seemingly content. He gave her pleasant words, followed her into the passageway. Over her shoulder he saw Ess-Way wistful, at the end of the corridor. He went with her mother and spoke softly to the girl, made the excuse that he was pressed with business, but he gave her a

short half hour of companionship and ended it by leaving her happy again. Then he went off to order matters about the ranch, taking care that Maltrane, sardonic, cold of eye, was at his horse's tail.

"Mal," he said, as they got off beyond the buildings, "I want to git some points on six-gun work from you. You know I *all*-ways was a fool with a gun. You're lightning quick. Give me some pointers, will you?"

"Why, sure," and Lars began his coaching.

"You sure are too clumsy, kid," he said, after a few trials had gone wrong with the young man's marksmanship: "th' boss o' Ox Bow 's got to be able t' shoot some, sometimes. He can't always *hire* his killing done."

Happy with the crumbs of comfort he had cast to her, Ess-Way came to her mother in a quiet corner of the big ranch kitchen after Barnquist had gone. She dropped into the eloquent speech of her fathers of the desert fringes.

"Mother," she pleaded, "he has been so cold before for days: now, after you saw him, he is warm to me again. How did you do it?"

"Where there's a will, there's a way," Greasewood Kate quoted, recalling an old saying of Barney's mother.

"I no' unde'stand that," Ess-Way said, flirting her black braids.

"You don't have to, child," her mother said, hugging her closely. "You do as I say, and you'll be mistress of Ox Bow yet."

"I don't care so much 'bout Ox Bow; it is Barney I want," the girl sobbed, creeping near her mother's broad bosom.

The breed woman kissed her child. Silence brooded over the kitchen as the shadows crept.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE INQUEST IS DELAYED.

SHERIFF HARVISON and Coroner Alberstone tarried in Coppered Jack,

But the jury to consider the death of Barnquist the elder was not impaneled.

The sheriff craftily conferred with all concerned in the case and checked up the testimony of the several witnesses, especially that as to the guns being warm, hot or cold when piled on to the saloon's bar. He also gravely considered the nicked-nose bullet which Barnum had found in the pile of bar cloths.

"Time enough to call the inquest when we get more facts; meanwhile, Peters is in jail," Alberstone informed inquirers, such as Maltrane and Weaver, impelled to seek information by discreet hints from Barney Barnquist. That said, the two officials rode away to San Felicé again, called there by "press of duty."

At Barney's request Maltrane was reconfirmed in his titular position as deputy for the Coppered Jack section of San Felicé and he thus had not only a killer in his employ, but one in office, as had his father before him.

Burlane heard of this when he was on his way to the calaboose one evening, after a day spent at Twin Springs making sure that all was right there. He had taken for his own use the best of the Peters nags—a sorry substitute for Midnight. And posted on the front of the Emporium he had a reward of two hundred dollars for the recovery or return of Midnight "lost, strayed or stolen." His heart was heavy for the familiar whicker, the soft nuzzlings of the black rapsallion, yet he found a certain degree of solace in the companionship that Berenice gave him in her spare time. The girl was most faithful in her attendance upon her father, providing him with such choice viands as she could procure, aided and abetted by Mother Wickson.

Public opinion in Coppered Jack was about evenly divided as to Peters' guilt. Barnquist, sensible of that, was wary, treading with subtlety in public. A rush of new duties devolved upon him, too, and they kept him from going at once to the Chaparral Cock to pay his court to Maretta. He wanted to keep from such companionship until Peters was firmly fixed in people's minds as the killer of his father, and he knew that being seen flirting in daylight in a wayside Mexican joint would not help him in public opinion, for although the wayfar-

ing Texan might stop in such a place for a casual frolic, he would not tolerate the companionship of a man who deliberately placed himself on the Chaparral Cock level. So, despite Maretta's confidence in the power of her own charms over the young heir of Ox Bow, Barney surprised her and Aguilar by remaining away for quite a time after the funeral.

Work on the irrigation ditch went on apace, and Barney seemed to find a real interest in that. He found that the Mexican laborers and foremen cringed to him. He had too much sense to try to overbear Americans.

Now that he was firmly in the saddle at Ox Bow, he delved into the rough memoranda that his father had left with reference to the irrigation project. He had the Barnquist acquisitiveness and itch for power. He counted the teams passing to and from Little Soda, reckoned up the amount of water that could be sold to the Soda Corporation for drink for the mules, saw how only the free water they were able to get for part of their trip at Twin Springs interfered with the Barnquist plans for a practical monopoly on water supply outside of Coppered Jack, thought of how he could put the price per gallon up and up, did he but have free rein.

He continued to pay private attentions to Ess-Way. People at the ranch had known of his preference for the little three-quarter blood and had laughed at what had seemed only yesterday a boy-and-girl calf-love affair. None of the whites expected him to continue to act the cavalier to the pretty little squaw when he became old enough to pick and choose for himself among the white girls of the region. But, because of the possibility that Greasewood Kate would be able to produce some sort of a will, although she evaded his insistent demands, Barney thought it politic to draw the Indian girl on and on. She was too wrapped up in him to notice that his love-making was not genuine, as her untutored nature, swept by gusts of intense passion, made up what he lacked in warmth in their almost one-sided passages at hearts about the rambling, cool gallery, the inside corridors, the dimness of



the aimlessly spaced rooms of Ox Bow ranch-house.

Peters had resigned himself to a fairly long wait. He was never tired of telling Burlane that he ought to go on his quest for a job and not waste time trying to help him, Peters, out of what would prove to be only a temporary embarrassment. Ed, however, found himself able to explain his delay to his own and eventually to Peters's satisfaction by calling attention to the loss of Midnight and the need for hunting up that "old son-of-a-gun."

Burlane was at Twin Springs often, driving out with the buckboard or riding the sedate old Peters cayuse, when alone. Berenice found it a relief from her anxieties to go with Ed on the buckboard trips. And, aside from that, she was becoming conscious of a desire to be near the quiet, polite, mild-mannered range rider.

Burlane felt himself coming more and more under the sway of the wholesome, warm-hearted girl, whose good sense and affection for her father and whose devotion to his welfare in his adversity filled him with admiration. He refrained, however, with the Texan's innate chivalry, from embarrassing her with proofs of his regard for her.

The girl felt the loss of Midnight keenly, as the horse had won her heart that first day by letting her ride him and by responding to her caresses with delighted nuzzlings. She urged Ed to devote all his spare time to the search for him, and Wickson, alive to the byways of trailside traffic thereabouts, ventured the shrewd suspicion that some one around the Chaparral Cock would, in the end, be found to know what had become of the stallion.

Barnum left the Thimble Belt a few days after the funeral at Ox Bow and appeared to claim the promised position as time-keeper and ranch account-keeper. He proved to be ready with pen and ink. He never referred to the queer dirt he had found on the mirror after the killing of Barnquist, and Barney did not take up the matter again. There was little real work for Barnum to do, and that little he did well. If at times he watched his employer narrowly and kept a shrewd eye on the gun-hand of

Maltrane, Barney did not realize it, for already deep schemes for consolidating and extending his power claimed his attention and he only bothered himself with Barnum when he thought of using him for his own benefit.

As the days passed and Barney Barnquist did not come to pay her the anticipated court, Señorita Esquiemala became more and more restless—more tired of the humdrum of keeping in order the mixed traffic of the Chaparral Cock. It needed but the flick of her eyelash; the dropping of one brown, deft hand to the sash in whose folds nestled her knife, to reduce the otherwhere fiery patrons of her bar to submission. Aguilar, watchful of an opportunity of getting Midnight down over the long trails in safety, was moody, silent and did not amuse her enough.

So it fell out that one afternoon Maretta called the stable boy to cinch up her own white mare and, mounting easily astride, she swung off up the trail toward Ox Bow. Her one idea was to come to some position where Barney would have to notice her. She trusted to her own power to turn any chance meeting with him to good account for herself.

On the way up she rode decorously enough, casting about in her mind for some excuse that would warrant her appearance at the big ranch. By the time she was at the trail's fork she had found none and had not met Barney or any of his men. She rode past, toward Coppered Jack, with the intention of going to the town, looking about and then back again, trusting to luck to bring about the meeting for which she craved.

Near the town she spied, well ahead, a buckboard. As she spurred toward it, she saw that the man driving the team was Ed Burlane. The handsome range rider had created a very favorable impression on her when he had called at the *aguardiente* shop that night when he was searching for Midnight. The spirit of a wanton's mischief stirred in her as she saw Burlane riding with a woman—the girl of Twin Springs, of whom every one spoke so well!

Maretta pricked the white mare and swept up to the dawdling buckboard team.

Berenice, leaning forward, was listening to Ed as he told her, with animation, some tale of life on the farther ranges and of Midnight's part in some of his adventures—of romance, swift action, the desire of youth.

"Who is that woman, Mr. Burlane?" she inquired, pointing, and Ed saw that the white horse, whose rataplan they had heard behind them was now ahead, and that on it was sitting a very handsome, bright-eyed, pouting-lipped creature that, in her outdoor attire, he had difficulty in knowing for the wayside barroom girl.

"Eexcuse me, *señor*, but is thees not the Señor Burlane?" she was asking, as she reined in her mare with practiced hand.

The wind whipped her dusk-rose cheeks; her red lips curled just a bit. Her eyes, on Ed's face, were like a caress

Berenice noted the look, sensed the tensing of Ed beside her.

"Why, sure," Ed said heartily, now recovered from his astonishment. "This is Mr. Burlane. You are the lady of the Chapparral Cock?"

"*Sí, señor*," and her smile grew warmer still. "Why do you not call to veeseet us no more, eh, *señor*?"

She sent the barbed arrow of another of her smiles at him, and more of it at Berenice. Then, calling over her shoulder as she twitched the white mare around toward Ox Bow, she called:

"Come soon, that I may talk weeth you what we talked of before, *señor*. Soon, I say."

"All right," Ed answered. "Gid-dap!"

The ponies started to canter. Ed was silent. He glanced aside at the girl. She was still, white of face—

"What—what did she want you to come to *that* place for?" Berenice asked, plainly showing her aversion.

"Who? Her?" Ed was plainly worried. "Why, I butted into that joint when I was a huntin' for Midnight that first night he was gone. I ragged with that girl a bit to find out if she knew anything about th' old son-of-a-gun. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," in a tone that meant, "Oh, *everything*!"

"Your own dad told me I ought to go there once in a while to snuff about," he urged, feeling it was quite aside from the point.

"Oh, did he?"

"Yes. When I was to th' jail to see him. I told him 'bout how I had a hunch that-away. Pap Wickson, too, he said I ought to watch out there, too."

"Oh! You men are *all* alike!"

There was no other sound then but the rattle of the wagon, the thud-thud-thud of the ponies' feet as they spurned the furlongs behind them. They came into Coppered Jack ill at ease. Ed was about to alight before the Wickson house to help Berenice down, but she sprang out nimbly and was gone into the house with scarcely a "good night."

"Gol darn you," Ed said to the off pony, as he sent him into the Wickson home lot behind the house, "what d' y' mean by whickerin' at that Mexican nag o' Wickson's? Don't you know you'll get you'self suspected o' bein' a villain dire?"

Two hours later, when Mother Wickson went to bed, she heard the sound of a sob in Berenice's room. She went in and patted the tousled head gently, bent over and put her arms about the girl, saying soothingly:

"There, Bernie, don't you cry so; yore pap, he's a comin' out O. K. Wickson, he ses so, an' he knows what's what."

"I'm not worrying about dad—"

"Then what?"

"Oh, nothin', Mother Wickson; I've just got th' creeps, tha's all."

"That's a new name for it, Bernie. They called it by 'nuther name when I was a courtin'—no, I mean when I was bein' courted by Wickson."

She stooped, kissed the girl and went out softly.

But long after she had gone, the girl remained, face down, sobbing. The proud, handsome face of the Mexican girl, the handsome, goodly face of Burlane, kept floating before her mental vision, and they seemed to touch and blend as she strove to banish the visions of her first night of jealous heartache.

**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.**

# Prize-Money



by E. K. Means

THE circus was coming to Tickfall. It was the same old show which came every autumn after the cotton had been sold and there was plenty of money to spend. It was traveling through the country in the same old way, miring in the same mud-holes, breaking down the same old bridges, but finding that this mode of transportation had an advertising value.

People lacked things to talk about in Tickfall. A dog fight would cause quite a high wind of conversation, and the approaching circus blew a gale.

Two boys disported in the breeze. They were Orren Randolph Gaitskill, white, and Little Bit, of color. They were friends and playmates, almost as inseparable as the Siamese twins, and things came to pass where they were.

Everybody called the white boy Org, a good throaty word formed from the initial letters of his flossy name. They had to call that youngster by some syllable which would carry easily across the far spaces, for he was like the Irishman's flea in that when you put your finger on him he wasn't there. But wherever he was, he could be depended on to be doing something he ought not to be at.

Org ate his dinner in the dining-room, then carried a heaping plate of food out to

the back steps where Little Bit was waiting to be fed. While Little Bit ate, the two talked.

"Uncle Tom said at the table that an elephant wouldn't ever cross a bridge," Org began.

"Dey got good sense not to cross over de kind of bridges us is got in dis country," Little Bit replied. "Some of de holes in de floor of dem bridges looks like de gates of heaven wide open. Dey'd punch deir legs through dem holes an' scratch all de skin offen deir shins. I'm done dat about fawty times."

"But how will they git here 'thout crossing a bridge?" Org asked. "They are coming from Shongaloon and they got to cross the Dorfoche Bridge."

"De yellerrfunts don't cross. De succus do. Yellerrfunts gits left behine," Little Bit explained, playing his words over the fried leg of a chicken like a boy playing a mouth-harp. "Succus go back de way it come an' ketch up wid de yellerrfunts."

"Tain't so!" Org snorted. "There never was a circus without elephants. I bet this one has got about forty—or at least one! Look at that picture on the wall over yonder at the cotton-shed—elephants!"

"Dey tuck dat kodak picture of 'em be-

fo' dey crossed de bridge," Little Bit responded. "'Tain't no trouble to git de pictures across de bridge."

"Aw, shuckins!" Org snapped. "You are the most igernunt and unreason'ble black boy I ever saw."

"You tole me yo' own self dat Marse Tom said dey wouldn't cross de bridge," Little Bit argued. "I don't fergit my raisin' an' 'spute no white man's word."

"Well, they don't!" Org howled.

"How do dey git to Tickfall den?" Little Bit inquired.

"They swim the bayou!" Org answered triumphantly.

This information was so astounding that the colored boy's mouth flew open. A chicken-bone fell from between his teeth, struck on the steps and bounced out on the ground. Org retrieved it, handed it to Little Bit, who wiped off the dirt on the leg of his pants, and went on gnawing. But over the savoriness of that bone he howled:

"Swim? Lawd, ef dis little cullud boy could only see 'em!"

"That shows how slow your head is to get anywhere, Little Bit," Org said to this. "Your mind has to run just as fast as it can to keep up with where it is at. Sure, we'll see 'em swim!"

"Wharabouts?"

"At the Dorfoche Bridge. They got two real live elephants, and they got to git 'em to town to-morrer by twelve o'clock for the parade."

"I sees," Little Bit replied. "De succuss muss cross dat bridge gwine on daylight to-morrer."

"So we git up early and mosey down to the bayou and watch the elephants swim the stream," Org remarked.

"I hopes I don't sleep too late," Little Bit sighed.

"I'll 'tend to that," Org replied confidently. "We've got a clock that stays awake all night and rings a bell at the very minute a feller wants to git up."

## II.

"How we gwine see de yellertunts in de dark?" Little Bit whined drowsily as he stumbled along the highroad.

"It won't be dark after we walk this five miles," Org told him. "Besides, we got to be there before the circus comes and we don't know when it 'll git there."

"I'm so sleepy I feel dead all up'n down my legs," the colored boy complained.

Daylight was breaking through the heavy curtain of fog which hung above the bayou just as they reached the bridge, and a brief time afterward they heard the grinding of heavy wheels. They stood in breathless attention and watched the approach. If there is a man in the nation who does not know exactly how they felt, his education has been neglected.

First they brought the two elephants forward and stood them by the side of the road at the far end of the bridge, thus permitting them to see the entire caravan pass over the bridge without breaking it down. The heavy wagons passed carrying the great tent, the highly ornate animal-cages passed over, after them the horses and ponies and a number of small vehicles. Then the elephants were invited to follow.

The keeper touched the trunk of the leader with an iron hook and brought him to the end of the bridge. For a moment the hearts of the two boys throbbed with disappointment for the animal stepped on the bridge with his two forefeet and acted as if he was going to cross without urging.

Here he stopped. His trunk waved to and fro, and he began to swing his whole body, throwing his weight first on one foot, then on the other. The frail structure began to vibrate and there was the cracking noise of strain upon the girders. The elephant gave utterance to a loud note of alarm, which was instantly indorsed by a trumpeting from his mate, who had watched the experiment.

"Dat animyle done blowed his nose at dat bridge," Little Bit whispered with intense gratification. "He ain't aimin' to trod on it."

"That feller can't get 'em across that bridge unless he kills them and hauls 'em over in a wheelbarrow," Org murmured triumphantly. "Uncle Tom knows more about elephants than that keeper does."

The keeper took a dirty, bethumbed book from his pocket, and turned over the pages



looking for information about his route. Then to the great delight of the boys, he led his charges from the bridge down toward the edge of the water.

"Now we'll see 'em swim!" Org exclaimed as they ran down the bayou on the other side.

They expected that the elephants would be made to swim right under the bridge where the water was very deep. Instead they were conducted down the stream for a quarter of a mile while the two boys floundered through the underbrush on the other side, trying to keep abreast of their progress and be present at the spot where they landed from their swim.

Alas, for human hopes and expectations! The wise old keeper led his charges to a shallow place in the bayou where they did not have to swim and the water was not knee-deep on either man or beasts! A five-mile walk to see that!

The children would have been dreadfully disappointed except for what happened next. The animals came out of the stream and walked directly toward them.

The boys retreated, floundering through the underbrush, and Little Bit gave utterance to a bellow like a coon-dog at the root of an inhabited hollow tree. The keeper spoke in a sharp tone:

"Bazankah, Barzillah, tut!"

The animals halted and two boys had learned three precious words of elephant language.

The man grinned at the two pop-eyed boys and made a noise in his throat which they interpreted to be a greeting. Then he made a peculiar motion of his hand in front of the larger elephant and spoke:

"Bazankah, come in! Barzillah!"

The second elephant caught the first by the tail, the keeper led the way through the jungle to the highway, the boys walking behind. The caravan had gone some distance ahead.

"Mile! Mile!" the keeper called, and the big beasts struck a swifter gait, a sort of shuffling, running walk. The boys had to trot to keep up.

"Mule up! Mule up!" the showman called sharply, and the elephants fell into a clumsy trot.

Watching and listening, the boys paused for a moment to catch their breath. They had no intention of being left behind. They were just getting ready to travel. Little Bit started off first, and Org spoke sharply:

"Bazankah, Barzillah, tut!"

The colored boy came to a stop. It was not difficult for him to imagine himself an African elephant with the white lad as his keeper.

"Come in!" Org exclaimed, making a peculiar motion in front of Little Bit's eyes in imitation of the circus man.

Little Bit reached out, caught hold of Org's coat-tail, and the two started solemnly down the road.

"Mile! Mile!" Org exclaimed, and they broke into a trot.

"Mule up! Mule up!" Org whooped, and the two went down the road at their best speed.

On the five-mile jaunt back to Tickfall, Org practised on Little Bit until he could make a perfect imitation of the tone and manner and gestures of the elephant-keeper.

What if they did not see the animals swim the bayou? They had learned new words and devised a new game, which is compensation enough for any pair of boys.

### III.

THE boys took a short cut as they approached Tickfall, and were waiting on the show-grounds when the first wagon arrived. From that moment there was nothing their eyes did not see.

Near the performer's entrance in the big tent, they saw a man dig two post-holes about ten feet apart. Setting two posts, he stretched a wire between them.

This was a mystery. Their minds could grasp the reason for everything except this particular equipment.

"Mister, what you fixing that for?" Org asked.

"You two brats git out o' this tent! Gwan now, before you git run in!"

The boys moved away, and gave their attention to other wonderful things, but every now and then they made a guess at the reason for the two posts with the wire stretched between.

"I bet dat's a trapeze fer a monkey to act on," Little Bit proposed.

"Naw. It's too far away from where the people sit to see it," Org argued. "'Tain't that."

The mystery was unsolved when the time came to get off the lot and be ready to march in advance of the parade. It was not much of a parade. But the Tickfall crowd watched it with delight, and then followed in the trail of its dust to the big tent.

Org and Little Bit led the parade from the show-grounds: returning to the show-grounds, they followed the calliope. That noisy nuisance had a trick of dropping hot ashes on the ground as it moved, and the two barefooted boys stepping on the hot cinders performed an Indian war-dance to the delight of the spectators.

A clown leaped from a little painted wagon and followed the boys. At every jump they made, he jumped. When they scraped the hot cinders from the soles of their feet, he did the same. When they winced, he winced. A gushing geyser of whoopful, cackling, shriekful laughter rose from that crowded street, and a good-humored crowd assembled to see the show.

Org and Little Bit passed through the entrance side by side. There they met a man who drew the color line by placing a club between them and snarled.

"White folks to the right! Niggers to the left!"

The two boys stopped, looked at each other, then looked at the guard, surprise written all over their faces.

"Little Bit goes in with me," Org protested.

"This blackie goes with the blacks, unless he changes his color pretty quick," the guard answered, giving Little Bit a push. "Gawn!"

"Stand right there, Little Bit," Org said stubbornly. "You and me are going to set together."

A crowd was waiting behind them. They were interested in the affair and were not pushing or impatient.

The outstanding figure of the crowd was the sheriff, John Flournoy. Org grabbed him by the hand and began to tell his trouble while the sheriff laughed immoder-

ately. Then the two joined forces and advanced upon the guard.

"This boy tells me that you won't let him and his nigger sit together," the sheriff began.

"Naw. Whites to the right, niggers to the left!" he called in a loud tone, and the waiting crowd pushed past the sheriff and the boys and parted at the ring-side according to instructions.

"Did you ever see a negro woman riding in a Pullman car in the South?" Flournoy asked quietly.

"Sure—nursing white babies," the showman answered.

"A colored woman with a white baby in her lap is white," Flournoy said.

"You got it doped right, bo," the showman agreed.

"All right. This little colored boy in charge of this white boy is white," Flournoy argued.

"Have it your way," the guard said contemptuously, pushing Little Bit along with Org. "If some white man parts this coon's wool head with a seat-slat, he won't hurt my feelings."

Thus the two triumphed over the difficulty and were made happy. They went in together, choosing a seat as close to the ring as possible. They were there to see it all. All Tickfall was there, too, for this was a holiday.

And all of it was just the old familiar wonder of the circus-ring. They witnessed the grand entry. The bareback riders came on with their same old acts, for there is a limitation to what can be done on the back of a horse with safety to life and limb. The trapeze performers were there with the same old stunts, for there is a limitation to what can be done on a horizontal pole suspended forty feet from the earth.

This little outfit had one advantage over the big shows. It was not a three-ring affair. Everything took place in one central ring with time and opportunity for everybody to see everything without the nuisance of having the attention distracted by sights to the right and left.

They watched the acts of the trained dogs, saw the strong man juggle cannonballs and mount a platform and lift a horse

with his teeth—so the ringmaster said: The elephants were brought out, and a camel, and two horses and were made to stand side by side, and half a dozen men in succession ran down a long incline, leaped from a springboard, and hurtled themselves over that assortment of animal flesh to a big cushion on the other side.

The clown was there with the same old jokes. He might have uttered new jokes without half the risk the tumblers took in jumping over the elephants, but he chose to move along the old lines of perfect safety. There was not much to this little backwoods circus, and yet to the two boys it was wonderful and glorious and they tingled to the very ends of their bare toes with the glory of it.

"Marse Org, dey ain't never used dat wire over yonder whar dem two posts is," Little Bit remarked in one of the pauses of the show which gave them relaxation enough for speech.

"Give 'em time," Org announced proudly. "They are going to do something wonderful with that fix-up yet. Maybe it is a monkey show. The monks haven't been brought in up to now."

Of course a little donkey was brought in and introduced as January, the greatest trick mule in the world.

One of the expert bareback riders tried to ride this donkey three different times, was thrown off each time, and with each trip over the animal's ears, he shed a suit of clothes and appeared in one of a totally different color. The clown mounted him and shed various articles of wearing apparel all over the ring before he was thrown off.

To the two boys who sat at the edge of the ring and who were well trained in childhood's game of make-believe, this donkey did not appear as hard to ride as the performers pretended. They both felt confident that they could have stayed on the animal when the others were thrown off. And this was true. In fact, the little donkey had been around that ring many times for many years, and had lost all the pep and enthusiasm of youth, approaching superannuation.

Little Bit, in particular, was plumb disgusted. He was the colored jockey of Tick-

fall and could ride anything—pigs, goats, calves, colts, anything that walked on four feet.

The ringmaster was making an announcement:

"Ladies an' gents, I now take pleasure in inviting any one of you to come and ride this donkey. I will give twenty-five dollars reward to any one, white or black, who will stay on January's back for five minutes. Who is the first to try it?"

There was a laugh and the buzz of many voices, each spectator urging his friend and neighbor to earn the money.

In his eagerness Little Bit sprang to his feet, then dropped back into his seat. White folks first. He had nearly forgotten his raising. Org gave him a shove with his elbow.

"Git on that mule and ride him, Little Bit," he said. "Don't you hear what that man says? He'll give you twenty-five dollars!"

"I shore needs dat money," Little Bit chuckled. "I never seed dat many dollars in my life."

The colored boy slid under the ropes and stepped into the arena, walking toward the ringmaster. He was known to every person in the tent, white and black, and a loud shout greeted his appearance.

The ringmaster smiled, for a local character always made a valuable contribution to the entertainment of his patrons. But a second later his eyes hardened, for this little darkey had every appearance of the professional jockey. The shouts of the spectators convinced him:

"Oh, you Little Bit!

"Run him against time, Little Bit!

"We got our money on you, Little Bit!"

The rather stupid-looking donkey was brought to the center of the ring and his back was just a few inches taller than the colored boy's head. Little Bit leaped lightly on his back, the ringmaster cracked his whip, glanced at the open face of a big gold watch and called:

"Time!"

This was the donkey's cue to "cut up." The tent bellied with the laughter of the people. The donkey did everything but stand on his head and slide on his ear, and

the colored boy stuck to him like a cocklebur on a woollen sock. He started in a gallop around the ring and suddenly dropped on both knees; the rider slipped forward on the animal's neck, threw both arms around the donkey's head, and anchored himself safely just behind the big flapping ears. Whether bucking, twisting, pitching, or what not, the boy clung to his back and the crowd in the tent went wild with hilarity.

High above all the noise, there was a sound like a pistol-shot—the ringmaster had cracked his whip.

In obedience to the signal, the donkey started to gallop around the ring. He ran at full speed, making three circuits of the tent. Going around for the fourth time, as the animal and his rider approached the performer's entrance, the ringmaster cracked his whip for the second time.

The donkey swerved as if frightened by the sound, took a sudden off-shoot, and ran at full speed between two posts which had a wire stretched between them about five feet from the ground!

Little Bit had ridden in many close horse-races where tricky jockeys had tried to pocket him and get him in a jam and cut him out. At the first swerve of the animal's body, he threw his arm around the donkey's neck, crouched low, holding on with his curved left leg, throwing the bulk of his body parallel with the animal's side—and rode safely under the wire!

No one knew what Little Bit had escaped. There was no shout of exultation to applaud the feat.

This had always been the last trick in the donkey's act. He galloped to the ringmaster's side and stopped.

A shout proclaimed the delight of the people at the victory of the little negro rider.

The ringmaster put his hand upon the donkey, and Little Bit hopped off.

"You're a good rider," he said in suave tones. "I got to hand it to you."

"Whar is dem dollars you promised to gimme?" Little Bit asked.

"I give you your money right after the show. Go back to your seat!" the man told him in smooth tones.

Then turning to the people in the tent, he announced:

"Ladies and gents, the successful rider of the trick mule and the winner of the twenty-five-dollar prize is a colored boy of Tickfall named Peter Postscript Chew, otherwise known as Little Bit!"

The shout that followed this announcement satisfied Little Bit for a while. He could wait for his money now that the man had announced to all the white folks that he was winner.

The two boys sat together enjoying the rest of the performance more than ever, and at its conclusion they proceeded to collect Little Bit's twenty-five dollars. There is no joy in being a collecting agent. They spent hours in a vain effort to find him whose business 't'was to pay that reward.

The ringmaster sent them to the manager, the manager sent them to the ticket-taker, the doorman sent them to the ticket-seller, and he sent them to the spieler of a side show, who sent them to the fat lady, who sent them to the living skeleton, who sent them into a little side show to interview a wonder who had a living head but no body. This living head explained that it was his business to pay all such prizes, but he did not bring his body with him when he started out with the show and had left his pocket-book in his pants.

#### IV.

THAT is the master criminal who first destroys the confidence of youth in the integrity of life. "If any man offend one of these little ones, it were better from him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

The two boys hung around until dark, eating all the truck which boys usually buy and consume on circus day. They had intended to go to the show that night and were in possession of the tickets Colonel Gaitskill had bought for them. But they were so deeply wounded by the fraud perpetrated upon them that they lost their taste for the show and merely stood around the circus grounds in disconsolate attitudes wondering if some of the show folks would not see them and feel sorry for them and

pay them their money. Vain and foolish hope!

As the people were wending their way toward the ticket-wagon, the two boys saw a half-wit white boy leaning against a tree and sobbing like a little child.

"What's the matter with you, Sooko?" Org asked.

"Lost my money. Wanter go to ther circus," the boy sobbed. "Come all ther way from Shongaloon to see the show—boohoo!"

"Aw, shut up!" Org snapped. "You can get to see the show. We'll let you have our tickets—me and Little Bit ain't going."

Sooko stopped sobbing with such suddenness it seemed as if the spring of action inside of him had broken. He gazed at the two with wonder and astonishment.

"Ain't goin'—you ain't goin'?" he exclaimed. "Why not?"

"The show is a cheat," Org said, and from that point he began and told the whole story of their ride, and the reward, and their disappointment and disillusionment.

"I'm sorry fer ye," the country boy exclaimed at the end of the tale. "But you promised—gimme that ticket!"

Org handed him the bit of pasteboard and the louty youth went toward the big top in an awkward gallop.

About ten o'clock that night when the show in the big tent was in full swing, preparations were begun to move on to the next place. The animal-cages were moved out and the tent which had sheltered the animal exhibit began to come down.

The keeper of the two elephants led the two animals down to a distant corner of the lot and left them there while he assisted in other work. Org and Little Bit could not keep away from that spot. They stood around looking with consuming curiosity at the great flapping ears, the wedgelike heads, the nervous, squirming trunks, and the little, wicked, humorous twinkling eyes. The light of the full moon seemed to magnify the beasts so that they looked twice as large as they had in the morning when the boys watched them wade the bayou.

There was a big stake driven in the ground and the larger elephant was anchored to this by having a loop of his leg

chain thrown over the stake. The smaller elephant was free.

The big male elephant caught the chain by the end of his trunk and lifted the loop from over the stake. He played with it a little while, then placed it back over the stake as it was before. It was certain that the keeper had great confidence in the docility of the animals and their attachment to the show.

Now it is necessary to say that what happens from this time on has its parallel and its explanation only in the experience of some man who goes into a great factory and inadvertently starts powerful machinery in motion which he does not know how to stop. Somewhere, somehow, he accidentally touches a button or rakes his coat-tail across a lever or a throttle, and things begin to happen over which he has no control. He doesn't know how he started things, and he is helplessly entangled in the wheels of circumstance, and scared to death—he'll tell the world that.

It is impossible for a boy to stand by an animal without speaking to it. A boy is a sociable cuss and likes to talk.

For a while Org confided his remarks to things like this: "Hello, old feller! Do you like the circus? Where did you big things come from? Want a apple? If I'd knowed you were coming out here, I'd brought you a big apple."

Then the youngster recalled the fact that he knew a few words of elephant language! Is there a boy in the world who could resist the temptation to give that elephant-talk a tryout?

"Bazankah!" Org murmured. Nothing happened. That was the big elephant's name.

"Barzillah!" Org said, his voice a little stronger as his courage grew. Nothing happened. That was the little elephant's name.

Org imitated the voice and intonation of the keeper, practising these names, and gaining more courage. Then he thought of another word. Stepping in front of Bazankah, he made a gesture in perfect imitation of a gesture he had seen the keeper use, and in the very tones of the keeper, he spoke:

"Kummin!"



Ah! That was where Org "touched the button." The elephants did the rest.

Obediently, Bazankah lifted the chain off the stake and stepped forward. Org had no idea he had given the command to follow. The boys stepped back and the big beasts came toward them.

With a gasp of fear, they began to step across the lot away from the circus. Bazankah, holding his leg-chain, fell in behind them, and Barzillah marched along clinging to the leader's tail in the orthodox way.

Little Bit was one scared little colored boy, scared nearly white. As he went loping across the lot beside Org, a wailing, whimpering prayer whined from his lips, sounding like this:

"My-y-y L'd!"

Ah! That was where Little Bit hung his coat-tail on the throttle and inadvertently expedited the machinery. The boy's mouthing of "My Lawd!" sounded to the big elephant-ears like the word "Mile!" which to them is the word to "go fast."

Barankah and Barzillah speeded up, hustling along behind the racing boy with a funny little running-walk which shuffled over the ground with amazing rapidity. The boys were traveling toward a fence. If they could only get across before the elephants caught them they would be safe.

At one point the boys took a quick turn around a tree with the hope that the elephants would skid or have a puncture or blowout or something like that. But the animals turned with all the majesty and grace of a battle-ship, and then the boys knew they must run for their lives.

Over the fence they scrambled, and paused just a second. Just a second was long enough. Those big beasts walked through as if the fence was not there, and all four were now out in the highway.

Several hundred yards down the road there was a narrow lane which led to the Cooley Bayou, leading off to the right. When they got to this, the boys leaped into the lane and turned and yelled at the elephants with the hope that they would continue on down the big road. Two anguished voices screamed in unison:

"Hi!"

Now the word "Shy!" in elephant lan-

guage means "Turn to the right." Therefore the big beasts turned in where the boys were and followed them down the lane!

It was a long run to the Cooley Bayou, but the boys made it in record time. Barankah and Barzillah floundered through the shallow water, kicking the spray high over their backs and squirting the water at each other with their trunks. Then they racked along behind the boys.

On the edge of the Cooley Bayou hidden from the highroad by the woods there was a rich field of alfalfa hay belonging to Colonel Tom Gaitskill. In the center of the field was a haystack, and the boys ran for this, hoping to climb on the top and be safe. But they did not take the time to climb up. They ran around on the far side and dug in, hoping and praying that Barankah and Barzillah would not be able to find them.

Then the elephants understood the reason for this trip: food in abundance. They began to eat. Little Bit and Org, crouched in a hole on the far side, had half an hour to catch their breath.

"Dis hay will hold dem yellerrfunts fer a long time," Little Bit exclaimed. "Less hump it back to town befo' dey sees us an' follers!"

"I favor gitting away from here," Org said disgustedly. "Elephants make me sick!"

## V.

AFTER Org and Little Bit left town as vanguard for the elephants, something had happened at the show.

The ringmaster called for a volunteer to ride the donkey, and a half-witted boy named Sooko from the Shongaloon neighborhood, had climbed through the ropes and had successfully remained on the beast's back for five minutes. Little Bit and Org had tipped him off how to dodge the wire strung between the two posts.

Then the boy demanded his money on the spot. The ringmaster curtly refused to pay him until after the show. And what had the witling done but taken his seat in the middle of the ring and begun to bellow and bawl like a two-year-old baby!

"I want my money!" he howled, beating the ground with the heels of his shoes.

"You done promised me them thar dollars and I earnt 'em. Now gimme that money!"

The ringmaster said something in a sharp voice, emphasizing his remark by a slight stroke of his whip across the lad's shoulders. The boy sprang to his feet and appealed to the great crowd which filled the tent:

"He won't gimme my money! I want my money!"

Nothing is more appalling than the quickness with which a Southern feud spirit can formulate, manifesting itself in an active fighting force. One hundred men from Shongaloon heard the wailing appeal of the village idiot.

Instantly a hundred men had left their seats and were standing in the circus ring. The feud was on, a roughneck, bur-head outfit, determined that a dude showman with a plug hat shouldn't put anything over on them!

"Hand that money to that boy!" a voice spoke in a harsh tone of utmost finality.

The ringmaster was slightly dazed by this sudden mob and hesitated less than three seconds.

*Bang!*

The roughneck had pulled a pistol from his pocket, pointed it straight up in the air, and pulled the trigger. Instantly a hundred guns came out of as many pockets and the fusillade of shots going straight up in the air through the canvas top of a costly tent sounded like a little battle!

In twenty seconds the top of that tent looked like the bottom of a sieve.

Not another word was said to the showman. No further effort to get the money. They had collected in full. One of the men caught the bellowing lad by the arm and led him to a seat. Another man walked to where the band was located, and, pointing an ugly pistol at the head of the leader, he said: "Play 'Dixie'!"

When the music began the performance was resumed, but the rest of it was conducted to the music of just one tune. At the conclusion of every act the man with the big pistol delivered the ultimatum:

"Play 'Dixie'!"

In an incredible time the tents were down, the wagons were packed and the show was ready to move away from there. Then a

thrill passed through the town—the two elephants had escaped. It was presumed that the promiscuous shooting of firearms in the tent had frightened the animals off.

The circus people did not want to linger to look for them—not while the Shongaloon rowdies were in town.

"I'll give fifty dollars reward for each of the elephants!" the owner of the show exclaimed to Sheriff Flournoy, who had been conducting an investigation of the disturbance in the tent.

"The experience of certain parties this afternoon and to-night convinces me that you are not very good pay," Flournoy said in his calm, slow voice.

"Here's the money to talk for itself," the man exclaimed with an angry oath, throwing a hundred-dollar bill on the table.

"That looks better," Flournoy said. "Prompt payments sometimes save trouble. I'll go out and see what I can do for you."

In a little while hunting parties had gone in every direction, and the main street was deserted.

After a while two little boys came walking up this deserted street, the bright moonlight casting fantastic shadows behind them. Not a thing did they know of what had occurred in Tickfall.

"You two boys hunting the elephants, too?" Flournoy asked with a smile.

"Naw. We know where they are," Org answered.

"No more yellerfunts in our'n," Little Bit murmured.

"Where are they?" Flournoy asked, still smiling, and incredulous of Org's statement.

"They're in Uncle Tom's hay-pasture on Cooley Bayou, eating up a whole stack of hay," Org answered.

Two hours after that the animals rejoined the circus and the caravan moved away from Tickfall. It never came back.

The next day Flournoy met the two boys on the street.

"You youngsters have some money coming to you," he said, and he handed each of them fifty one-dollar bills, with a word of explanation.

Little Bit was the first to speak: "Thank 'e, fer collectin' up fer me, Marse John. Dem show-folks was powerful slow pay!"

# The Convert Goes North

by Valgard Dengir

## CHAPTER I.

WILDCAT CRAWFORD.

THE Highflyer was an hour out of Cincinnati, bound down-stream for Louisville. From her red foaming stacks to her blazing cabins and lighted decks, she radiated life and action and whisky. A negro string-band on the hurricane deck played and howled wild songs in which the passengers joined; the glittering bar echoed to political campaign ballads; only in the cabins was there comparative quiet, for the poker-tables were heaped with gold and the gamblers were reaping a rich harvest amid the fascinated breathlessness of those who watched and played.

In a sheltered and deserted section of the after deck sat a gaunt, ague-stricken man amid a few squalid bundles. Across the bundles, asleep, lay his slatternly dressed daughter of fifteen. He was talking in despondent accents to two men who sat on the deck near him.

"Don't never go to the North!" he was saying. "They're devils up there—plain ornery devils of white men! Jest look what they done to me an' mine! I bought land honest, then along comes them smugglin' devils an' tries to rob me of it less'n I'd throw in partners with 'em; and nigh beats me to death. Then them pesky tradin' devils, not content with robbin' the Injuns, comes along to rob me; and the winter kills my woman, and the swamps kills me, and the Mormons come along, and they's fightin' back an' forth, and some fisherman devil

kills my boy, and there ain't no law nor justice. So I shoots the first fisherman I sees, and comes along out of it with the gal."

"It must be a frightful country!" said one of the two men. He was a small man, clad in black, Gatch by name, the Methodist circuit rider from Cincinnati. "You still own your land there?"

"Yep, but that don't do me no good."

"I'll buy it," said the second man—very large and bulky in the shadows. "Name your price."

The gaunt figure lifted its head and stared blankly.

"Wait!" Gatch turned to him anxiously. "Is this wise, Brother Crawford? This Michigan territory has long been made a State, but it seems to be a fearful country—"

Crawford laughed harshly.

"I can't stay on the river, can I?" he demanded. "I have to make a living, Gatch; and I was raised in the backwoods. Now that you've turned me from the promising career of the best gambler on the river, why not go up to Michigan and put my talents to some good use?"

The circuit rider sighed. "Perhaps you are right, Brother Crawford. You have talents, great talents, and I believe that religion should be muscular. You know your own business best; I'll not interfere."

The gaunt man had feverishly searched through a bundle. Now he came over to the two and sat by them under the lantern, papers in his hand.

"I give five hundred for the land," he

said. "And I'll sell for fifty—anything ye want to give! It's a hull section, mostly timbered, with a clearin' and a shack. Here's the dokuments about it, all reg'lar."

Crawford leaned forward and took the papers. The light struck his face, chiseled it into amazing lines of cruel, cold and determined strength. It was a young face, bitter and harsh; yet the gray eyes contained a warmth that was surprising.

From his pocket Crawford took gold, and counted it out.

"Here's two fifty," he said. "I'll send another two fifty to Mr. Gatch at the end of the year—giving you your full five hundred, partner. Take him to the cabin and have the deed made out, will you, Gatch? You know I don't want to be recognized."

He drew back again, shadowed, and lighted a cigar.

In two minutes the circuit-rider had vanished with the incredulous settler, who could hardly believe in the stroke of luck that had befallen him. Crawford sat smoking in the shadows, his eyes fastened on the slatternly figure of the sleeping girl; could his eyes have been seen, pity would have been found in them, and a great craving for humanity.

The shuffle of feet made Crawford glance up. A lumbering deck-passenger was coming along, a great hulk of a man, shock-headed, brutalized, stinking of raw whisky. He halted beside the figure of the sleeping girl, staring down, and an evil chuckle broke from him.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, stooping and fumbling at the girl's arm. "Hey, wake up an' talk!"

Crawford's voice bit out very evenly.

"Away from here, you swine! Don't touch that girl again."

"Who ye talkin' to?" demanded the other, snarling over his shoulder at the shadowed figure. "I'm a gentleman, I am—American citizen! Good's any man alive an' better'n most; sired by streak o' chain lightnin' and reared on alligator's milk, understand? I chaws, I do! You shet up!"

He bent again to lay his hand upon the girl, who was stirring uneasily.

Crawford came out of the shadows, leaving his cloak behind him. He took the

"gentleman" by the shoulder, whirled him about, and drove him staggering across the deck with a blow to the mouth. Then he waited, under the lantern.

His figure was surprising—a slender, yet large figure, so well balanced that its size was forgotten. His linen was impeccable, of fine quality; in his black silk stock glittered a diamond pin.

"Be off with you," he said, low-voiced. "I've no desire to fight."

From the ruffian broke a roar—a bellowing, echoing roar that trumpeted through the whole packet.

"Wow! Hurroo!" rang out his voice. "You ain't, huh? You're learnin', huh? Well, you're gwine git chawed right smart, here an' now! Come to it, grizzly!"

He hurled himself forward. Crawford met him with a terrific blow—a staggering, bone-smashing blow that drew a frightful red smear across his face and sent him revolving sidewise. He uttered another bellow, and came forward again.

By this time, cries of "Fight! Fight below!" were resounding through the boat, and everyone not too busily engaged, already, came rushing to the scene, eager for the entertainment. More light flashed; ardent forms crowded about the two fighting men; yells and shouts of glee arose on every hand.

The bully was fighting like a madman. Crawford stood under the lantern, cool and cold, untouched; his face was a mask of stone, terrible with the flashing of his eyes. More terrible were his blows. Frightful blows were they, merciless and brutal in their work. The bully's face was a great spatter of blood, and Crawford's knuckles were redder at every stroke. Yet the bully still came at him, howling in rage.

"Tear 'em apart!" shouted some one, awed and agonized.

"Leave 'em alone, you fool!" The captain of the packet pushed to the front, his roar quelling all interference. "That's Wildcat Crawford!"

"Leave 'em alone," echoed a softer voice, from a black-clad man who held a derringer in his hand and eyed the men about him with cold, cruel eyes. A gambler this, one of the fraternity of the river. And Craw-

ford was the most famous gambler of all that fraternity.

"He'll murder the man!" shrieked the first voice.

"And I'll murder you if you touch him!" said the gambler quietly.

The end came at last; no human thing could longer stand before the awful blows of Crawford. His fist drove into the smear of red. There was a crunch as the bully's jaw snapped—a crunch that ended in a howling wail, a crash, and silence. A chorus of cheers arose, and the ring of men stepped forward, rushed in on Crawford with congratulations.

"Proud to see you!" bellowed the captain, hand extended. "Didn't know you were aboard. Why, what's the matter?"

Crawford was standing looking at them, hands at his side.

"I'm sorry for this, gentlemen," he said quietly, his voice piercing the silence. "Very sorry. That brute was molesting the girl in the corner."

"Fine, fine!" leaped out the voices. "Let's liquor! Hey, steward! Get drinks—"

"No drinks, thanks," and Crawford lifted his hand. "Gentlemen, I'm through with the river. I may as well inform you that I've gambled for the last time—"

Gatch came pushing through the crowd, and Crawford nodded welcome to him.

"To put it plainly, gentlemen and friends," he said, "Mr. Gatch, here, has converted me. You may regard it as a joke; but I don't. Please remember that! I'd like to leave the boat at the next landing, captain."

The silence that lay upon them all was deep and tense, incredulous yet awed into belief by Crawford's personality. His name was known to most of them as that of the most terrible man on the river—the keenest gambler, the best loser, the most deadly fighter. And this man was converted!

Wildcat Crawford—converted!

"Well," said the captain awkwardly, "it ain't spoiled your strength, Wildcat—damme, sir! Pardon, Mr. Gatch; forgot your presence. Let's get out of here, gents; I need a drink after hearin' this news."

Crawford looked after them, unsmiling.

"Here are the papers," said Gatch.

Crawford took them and thrust them into his pocket.

"You needn't think I'm a brute," he said roughly. "That fellow—"

"Man, man!" broke in the other hastily. "Don't fly off the handle! I think you did just the right thing, Brother Crawford! Perhaps you're the very man to go into the northland and prepare the way for the world! And if I can come up there this summer, I'll do so; we may work together, and perhaps, during the coming winter, we can give you some missionary work to do—I have a little influence, and I can tutor you so that you can pass the board satisfactorily. That is—unless you change your mind in the mean time."

"I don't change my mind often," said Crawford.

## CHAPTER II.

FRIEND GILBEAULT.

**W**ILDCAT CRAWFORD was dead—had died back there on the Ohio River in the southland. And now Henry Crawford, roughly clad, stood on the Mackinac wharf and waited for the double-ended boat that was coming to bear him away to his own place.

Gatch, the circuit-rider, had wakened in him something dormant, unguessed. Gatch had killed in him the desire to prey, the desire which was mastering him, and had aroused in him the passion for higher things—a craving for humanity, friends, the warmth of life. Crawford was, like many strong men, something of an extremist in these things. The faith that had come to him was earnest, sincere, and simple; that same terrific power of concentration, of pent-up energy and passion loosed at one outlet, which had made of him the most dreaded man on "the river," was now directed at another outlet, poured into another channel.

As he looked at the settlement, a historic place of the North, the heart uprose in him for joy of the thing he had done and the course he was set upon. It was spring, and the fragrance of arbutus touched



his nostrils cloyingly. The gold had come, the Indians had been paid their bounty; the traders and harpies had stripped the red men, and Mackinac had gone back into its doze again—trading was done for the summer.

The fort on the bluff was now only a station for invalid soldiers. Below, nestling under the tall cliffs, was the town—the tin steeple of the abandoned mission church, the Indian agency, palisaded and sentineled, the old Astor post that was become a hotel under the prosaic name of the Grove House. About these romance-hung buildings clustered the bark-roofed houses of voyagers, now given over to fishermen or traders; all with their sweet French gardens, their juniper and snap-dragon, thornapples and vines. The Wisconsin, which had landed Crawford here, was gone on to Chicago. The revenue cutter had loaded her firewood that morning and had gone likewise. The bay, save for canoes and mackinaw boats, was empty.

A hail stirred Crawford from his meditations. He looked down to see the mackinaw boat at his feet, her sail flapping idly. In her stood the man he had engaged—a swarthy half-breed, Pete Gilbeault by name. Gilbeault lived down the shore, and was glad to pick up an extra dollar by carrying Crawford to his own land.

No words passed. Crawford handed down his rifle, his pack of supplies, his other pack of clothes and blankets, and Gilbeault stowed them in the boat. Then he climbed down himself.

"Ah'm make for steer," said the boatman. "Mebbe you watch de sail?"

Crawford nodded. They pushed out from the wharf, slowly gathered way, and when once beyond the shelter of the half-moon bay caught the breeze fairly. The mackinaw boat heeled over and darted for the straits and the open line of Lake Michigan. Once they cleared Waugoshance Point and the shoals, as Gilbeault explained to his passenger, they would strike south and would reach their destination some time that night, dependent on the wind and sea. To the south lay Cross Village, centered about the old L'Arbre Croche mission that had been formed to continue the St. Ignace mission of earlier days; and beyond this was Gil-

beault's place. Farther still was the land owned by Crawford.

"They tell me," said Crawford, lighting a pipe and passing his pouch of tobacco to the other man. "that I'll have to go to Charlevoix to get my deed recorded. Is that far?"

"No. I take you dere, mebbe. She's be down de coast. What you make for do, huh? Farm?"

Crawford nodded. "Yes. Is that place of mine any good?"

Gilbeault sucked at his pipe and stared at the horizon for a moment.

"Well," he said slowly, "Ah'm tell you dis, meestair: You got dam' good gun, mebbe you make ver' good farm. She's got de little bay, de good anchorage, where Cap Bennett like for make his schoonnair lie up quiet, so de rev'noo cuttair not see her. Cap Bennett, he live on your place now."

"Oh!" said Crawford. "He lives there, eh? But the place belongs to me."

The other shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Mebbe; Ah'm not know 'bout dat. Cap runs de w'sky, de tabac, from Canada in his schoonnair. She's one ver' good boat, dat schoonnair! De rev'noo cuttair nevair make for catch her yet. Cap is pardners wit' Moore, de w'sky-trader. Moore, she's one sharp man; Ah'm tell you! Moore, she's go see de Injuns, she's draw w'sky from de tree, she's sell dat tree to de Injuns an' go 'way."

Gilbeault relapsed into silence. Crawford pondered this information, realizing that he was going up against a hard game. Game, indeed—more like a battle! The lure of it thrilled him.

Bennett, the smuggler, seemed to have seized on the place Crawford had bought; and was in league with Moore, the whisky-trader—evidently, a lawless combination! There promised to be stirring times ahead, thought Crawford.

"And where do you stand, Gilbeault?" he queried bluntly. "You're a fisherman, aren't you?"

"Mos' de time, yes. Mebbe you want for buy de boat? I got one ver' fine boat like dis one, laid up on de shore; she ride de wave any time, even de big storm in

autumn. One time, Moore shoot de Mormon fisherman over to de Beavairs, an' take de boat; den she's make for rob me, and Ah'm take dat boat from him mahself—"

"You say that Moore murdered a fisherman?" ejaculated Crawford.

"Sure." Gilbeault pointed to a rifle neatly slung under the thwarts. "Everybody steal de net, de boat, de gun. If Ah'm see dat schoonnair Able come up de wave, Ah'm head for de shore, quick! But Ah'm think dat schoonnair be at de Soo now. Mebbe you fight Bennett?"

Crawford slowly shook his head. He found himself liking this man, liking him very much.

"Not unless I have to, friend. I've done too much fighting in the past. I've come up to this country to work, to make a man of myself. I used to be a gambler," he added frankly, "a hard drinker, a pirate like your Cap Bennett. Now I'm going to try and be something better to the world around me—to stand for what is right, to obey the word of God, and to make other men respect the right."

Gilbeault regarded him curiously, yet understandingly.

"Ah'm think you's be have de dam' hard time, den," he said. "You ain't de preach-air?"

"Hardly." Crawford laughed. "There's no preacher up here, is there?"

"Jus' de priest at de ol' mission. Ah'm not go to church, me." Gilbeault frowned. "Ah'm look for do de right thing, be good fisherman, be good woodsman—*bon!* Ah'm see de good God all de time in de sky, in de watair, in de trees; Ah'm not need to go to de church for find Him, *non!* De Injun go to de church. De Mormon, too—"

While Crawford listened, this stubborn old free-thinker of the northland told of the settlement on the Beaver Islands, thirty miles off the coast, of Strang and his followers—men of the Mormon faith who had come here after the break-up of the Mormons at Nauvoo. Since their coming, there had been open war in the North.

Gilbeault professed to take no sides in the matter. He said that the Mormons were good enough if let alone, and that be-

cause they had opened war on the whisky-traders and protected the Indians from harm, the trouble had started. Now it seemed that no man's life was safe, and the law was as yet a joke in this half-settled country. In these early fifties the timber wealth of Michigan was still unrealized, transportation was difficult, and settlers came slowly.

Crawford realized with no small satisfaction that in Pete Gilbeault he had found a very valuable friend and adviser, and as he came to know the other man better, he found the reason. Gilbeault was of French and Indian blood, and under the stolid exterior flamed an ardent blaze of imagination, of fancy, of independence. Gilbeault saw a man come into the northland, a man clean of whisky, a strong man undaunted by the fact that strife awaited his coming; above all, a man with the hardihood to say that he stood for the right, and to confess his past. That confidence had put the spark to Gilbeault's spirit, had won him into an instant flame of friendship.

The hours passed, and the mackinaw boat rounded Waugoshance Light and headed southward. By dark, said Gilbeault, they would pick up Skillagalee Light—the tiny Isle aux Galets lay off-shore opposite the old mission—and as the fisherman was explaining the name, Crawford sighted a drifting boat ahead and checked him.

The boat bobbed on the swells, seemingly empty of occupants. It was a small skiff, and as Gilbeault steered toward it, his dark features became darker and sterner.

"Looks like a Beavair boat," he said. "She's drift wit' de wind, mebbe."

They bore down upon her swiftly. Crawford let the sail flap, and got out a fish-spear that served as boat-hook. As the two craft came together, he caught the skiff and held it alongside. He saw what the skiff contained, then looked at Gilbeault.

The latter crossed himself silently; wordless, the two men stared. In the bottom of the skiff lay a man on his back, dead, his bearded face upturned to heaven. His empty hands were flung out, clenched. He had been shot twice through the body. Nets in the bow of the skiff showed that he had been fishing.

"A Mormon?" queried Crawford curtly. Gilbeault shook his head.

"No. Ah'm not know him—come up from Charlevoix, mebbe. She's not be dead ver' long time; de gulls not touch him. She's come for steal de Mormon nets, eh? We take him to de mission. Dere's be plenty more for him to lie beside, Ah'm think. Put somet'ing over him."

Gilbeault made fast a line to the little skiff, and they resumed their course, with the barge of the dead bobbing grotesquely behind them. The callousness with which Gilbeault had received the incident spoke to Crawford better than words, told him clearly enough what awaited him in this land. The dead man behind him was but one of many—unknown men, shot by unknown hands, with none to tell or to punish. And man's law a jest in the land.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TWO PRESENTS.

CRAWFORD stood in the doorway of his own shack, holding back the oath that crept to his lips—an oath of disgust. In two days he had often followed the trail to the cliffs, a quarter-mile away, bearing his burdens and flinging them over to the waves below; burdens of empty whisky-bottles, of filth, of rags and squalor such as is left by careless men.

Now he had the place clean again, a fire upon the hearth, and waited in a grim mood until Captain Bennett's schooner might return. He meant to have a word with Bennett.

He took up his ax and fell to work upon a dead tree he had brought down. Limb by limb he lopped it; not for nothing had he been raised in the backwoods as a boy! His ax bit deep and true and hard. Then, suddenly, his eye caught a movement in the brush across from the little clearing around the shack. He dropped his ax and his hand went out to his rifle—a deer, perhaps!

"Don't shoot!" cried a voice. He halted, petrified, as a girl came into the clearing, her eyes fastened upon him in wonder and fear.

"Why—why—who are you!" she ex-

claimed, staring at him. "I thought—I saw the smoke and I thought Joe was here—"

Crawford set down the rifle and bowed. A pretty little thing, this girl, a creature of neatness and character, of blue eyes and yellow hair; over her shoulder was a canvas bag.

"Pardon my hasty movement, madam," he said. "I thought a deer might be in the bushes, and I came near to firing—thank God you spoke in time!"

"I think you were worse frightened than I," she said, laughing.

"That is true," said Crawford soberly. He gave his name. "I have bought this bit of land, madam. May I inquire if you live near by?"

"No, at Cross Village. I am Mary Hanlon, and—you say you've bought this place? From Cap'n Bennett?"

Crawford regarded her a moment.

"Why, no!" he answered, and then smiled slightly. "From the man that owned it—the man who settled here! He had a clear title to the land, I find. Bennett has none."

The blue eyes widened at him.

"But—but Joe has taken the place!" she said.

"Ah! And who may this Joe be?" queried Crawford, pleasantly enough. He was not apt at being pleasant with women.

"Why, Joe Bennett, of course!"

"Oh!" said Crawford. "You mean the smuggler, whisky-dealer, general scoundrel and pirate who has a schooner, eh? I hope he's not a friend of yours, Miss Hanlon, because if he is, he's bound to bring you trouble—"

A tide of crimson flooded into her face and ebbed again, leaving it very white.

"You had better guard your speech, Mr. Crawford," she snapped. Then, suddenly, tears choked her voice. "Oh, how dare you insult me—"

"My dear Miss Hanlon, I have not insulted you!" said Crawford, astonished and angry. "I am rather amazed to find that you, who seem to be a gentlewoman, claim Bennett as a friend—after the things I've heard about him. And he seems to have taken this land, to which he has no title,

and to which I have an excellent one. The fact that he has taken the place really has no bearing on the rightful ownership of it."

He was astonished again. He had half-expected vituperation, anger, more tears—anything! Instead, he found the girl gazing at him almost with sadness; her voice, now low and gentle, thrilled him with its throaty emotion.

"I told him so—I told him some one would come claiming it! And he promised me he would have it looked up, and get it legally—"

"He drove off the man who first owned it," said Crawford harshly, "and killed his wife and son—or at least, had some hand in the cause of their deaths."

"He did not!" cried out the girl, anger reddening her cheeks again. "I know myself that he did not! And he has promised me that he'd do no more smuggling—"

"Then pray God he keep his promises!" said Crawford, his voice grave. "For those are the hardest of all promises to keep. I know, for I myself have left a life of evil."

"You—you're a preacher?" The girl stared at him again; he thought hope lay in her eyes.

"No." Crawford shook his head. "I'm a settler, Miss Hanlon. Have you need of a preacher in these parts?"

"Some of us have." She seemed to hesitate. Then: "You seem to be a good sort of man, sir. If Joe comes here and—and makes trouble—please be patient with him! He's not what people say, indeed he's not! He has a heart of gold!"

Crawford's eyes were opened of a sudden, and he cursed his blundering speeches.

"See here," he said, "I—I didn't mean to be brutal, Miss Hanlon. I know only what I've heard in the past few days about Bennett. If he's your friend, I don't doubt there's been falsehood said of him, for your friendship could only go to a good man. If he comes, then I promise you that I'll be patient. Aye, and if I can get him set in the right way, I will. I promised the old man who converted me that I'd keep my temper down and strive to help other men to see the light—and I'll do it."

The girl regarded him steadily for a long moment while he spoke.

"You're a strange man," she said, as though he were not present. "At first I thought you old, then I thought you harsh and stern—and now I see I've been wrong. You're just a young man who's never known the right kind of playtimes! Come and see me when you come to town—I'm teaching in the school there—and here's a present for you. Good-by!"

With the words, she put her hand into the canvas bag over her shoulder, tossed out four gleaming brook trout, turned, and vanished in the brush. For a space Crawford stood motionless, staring at the greenery around, then relaxed in a noiseless laugh.

"What a fool I was!" he muttered, glancing at the trout in the grass. "She's been out fishing, saw the smoke here, thought Bennett was back, and dropped in. Friends, indeed! I'll warrant there's matrimony in the air! So she's been trying to twist Cap'n Bennett out of his lawless ways, eh? H-m! Some character to that girl. And she certainly put in a shrewd shot at me."

It was not yet noon. Crawford cleaned the fish and put them in the shack to serve for lunch, then returned to his chopping. He knocked off in order to get his midday meal, and while engaged on this task he saw the silent form of Gilbeault darken the doorway.

"Ha! Just in time, big chief!" he exclaimed. "Two fish for each of us, and some real cornpone like they make down South. Come in and rest your feet, as the darkies say."

"B'jous," grunted Gilbeault, entering and surveying the shack with admiration. "You make for clean her up, eh? Bah goss! Ah'm think me de cap'n be ver' surprised when she's come home. Ah'm run down for see how you get on."

"You should have come a little earlier—I had a visitor this morning."

The other nodded and grinned. "Sure. Ah'm see her track in de ground. De teach-air, eh? Mebbe she's make for marry de cap'n some day. S'pose you want de fine woman, den you grab her quick, like de partridge come through de snow-crust—bing!"

Crawford laughed as he turned out the fish.

"No, thanks! The less I have to do with women the better. Well, did you find out any more about that dead man since we left him at the mission?"

Gilbeault shook his head. "She's be de strangair," he said briefly, and devoted himself to the cornpone, which, made in the Southern fashion, was novel and delightful to him. He ate hugely, and did not speak again until, as he finished, he threw some crumbs through the open doorway to the ground outside.

"Make for give de birds some good grub, eh?" He grinned sheepishly at this baring of his French sentimentality. "Ah'm like dem little birds ver' much—Ah'm like for see dem come around de shack, ol' Pete's friends, eh? Say! Ah'm bring you dat boat for little present. Not de Mormon boat; Ah'm use dat maself. De one we came in, see!"

They went down together to the little half-sheltered cove along the rugged shore line of the property, and Crawford took over the gift with unassumed delight, but with few and wisely chosen words. He knew that such a gift was princely, here where boats and nets meant wealth; more, he knew that it had come from the heart—that he had found a friend. He was stirred more deeply than he had been stirred for many a day past.

Afterward, they climbed again to the crest of the bluff, where Gilbeault laid his hand on Crawford's arm.

"I want for show you somet'ing," he said. "Come!"

He led Crawford to an open space where they had a clear view of the lake's wide expanse of sparkling waters. To the west was a blue flake over the horizon—the mirage of the Beavers. Gilbeault lifted his hand and pointed to a tiny white speck well north of it.

"You see dat boat? She's come from de Beavairs, Ah'm think me, where she's left de tabac an' de w'isky—dat Canada West, she's be de hell-fire in de bottle, for de Injuns!"

"That's a smuggler, then?" queried Crawford, straining his eyes at the speck of sail.

"*Oui!* Dat's de Able, wit' Cap Bennett

at de wheel an' his eye on de sail, and she's make for land right here, bah goss! She get here 'bout five o'clock, eh?"

## CHAPTER IV.

### VISITORS AND VILLAINS.

IT still lacked an hour of sunset when the little schooner Able, fleet and agile as a swallow, rolled into the tiny cove. Her great wing-and-wing booms were hauled in, her canvas fluttered down, and she was laid alongside the big rock where the shore jumped down into deep water. Bennett leaped ashore, alone.

"Wait here for me, boys," he said, his voice deep and clear. "I'll see what that smoke means. Pile up if ye hear me call!"

"Aye," murmured the half-dozen men on the schooner's deck, and Bennett turned to the trail that climbed the cliff. He did not see the two mackinaw boats drawn up among the bushes.

He was a tall, lithe young man, his bare forearms corded with muscle. His unshaven features were powerful, a little arrogant. Straight brows and wide black eyes, combined with a shock of dark-red hair, gave to his face a challenging expression, much belied by the smile on his lips as he climbed the trail. Perhaps he had guessed that the bluish smoke upcurling from the shack chimney meant a welcome from Mary Hanlon; perhaps he had ordered his men to remain aboard the schooner in order that he might come alone to the meeting, lest it be spoiled by their rough jests and rude eyes.

He swung up to the bluff's crest and along the path that led to the shack. At the edge of the clearing he came to an abrupt stop. Crawford, pipe in mouth, left the doorway of the shack and sauntered toward him.

"Howdy, stranger!" said Crawford coolly.

"Who—who the devil are you?" demanded Bennett, choking with sudden rage.

"Not the devil, certainly!" Crawford smiled. "My name's Crawford. I've bought this place. Come in and you'll just about hit supper at the right moment."



The black eyes of Bennett flared in anger.

"I'm Cap'n Joe Bennett," he said, "and my schooner's down below. This is my place, and I want no squatters on it. Understand? You're to git off, and git quick."

Crawford removed the pipe from his lips and blew a shred of smoke.

"I heard about you," he said whimsically. "And I saw your schooner come in. And I've heard your ultimatum. Now that you have it off your chest, will you come in and have a bite to eat? Tea's ready; bacon in the skillet, cornbread getting hot—better come inside, cap'n!"

"You're damned cool!" said Bennett, drawing a deep breath. "You a Mormon?"

"No. I'm the owner of this property, which I bought from the man who owned it. Have I made that fact clear? Then suppose we arbitrate over a bite of supper—"

"Hell swallow you and your supper!" exploded Bennett suddenly. "You're goin' to git off'n this land, hear me? Unless you do it in a hurry, I'll have my men throw you off."

"Oh!" said Crawford, scrutinizing him calmly. "I did hear that you were a smuggler, a general sort of pirate and thief and murderer, but I never heard that you had your men do jobs you were afraid to tackle yourself, Bennett. I'm surprised at you! By the way, I found a keg of whisky stored under the cliff, so I set it out for you to take away."

"What d'ye mean—afraid to tackle you?" Bennett laughed harshly. "You poor fool! I'd break you in two with one hand; I'm afraid to tackle you, that's true, because I don't want to kill you. Anything else you've heard about me?"

"Some few," responded Crawford, with his Southern drawl. "That you have a heart of gold, that you're prolific in making promises of a better life, and that you could do it if you wanted to."

Black rage swept into the face of the smuggler.

"What are you talkin' about?" he demanded thickly. "See here! For two cents I'd have the boots into you—"

The face of Crawford changed suddenly and awfully. It became a cold and bitter

mask, a stony mask wherein the gray eyes glittered terribly.

"Stop that talk, you fool!" he snapped. "I'm tired of it. If I had so wished, I could have killed you from the moment your ship entered the bay. I could kill you now before you could strike me. You and your talk of using force! Don't be a child. Be the grown man you look!"

"Let me tell you something straight from the shoulder, Bennett! This land is mine, and it remains mine—that's all. I'm going to do my dam—my level best to be a God-fearing man and to live right. I'm not going to fight unless forced into it. Miss Hanlon was here to-day and I convinced her that I'd do my best to avoid trouble with you; and I will. You and I can settle matters in a better way than by force—"

At this point came interruption, in the shape of an unexpected voice. Bennett had been standing trembling, shaking with passion; the mention of Mary Hanlon's name had only served to add fuel to the swift flame of his fury. But now a new voice broke in upon them both—a laughing, leering voice that came from the pathway behind Bennett.

"What's all this, Joe? Dummied if I didn't think you were sneakin' up here to have a kiss with Mary on the sly—just like her to be comin' down here from the village to bring ye a bite of supper! So I come along to git a bite my own self. Who's this here gent? He seems to be a heap stuck on his oratin' powers."

Advanced a man great in size, a man built more like a gorilla than a human creature, his long arms reaching far down his thighs, his head protruding, his walk a shamle that held in it a frightful menace of potential activity. Inhuman, too, was his face, very simian in its hairy growth, its animal cunning; here, too, a deadly menace that glittered evilly. A man greatly feared was Eri Moore, who had been known to break an Indian's neck in his two hands, without exertion; and who, because of his great strength and the tricks he could put it to, sold copious quantities of his "Injun whisky" to the red men in order that they, too, might become strong as he was strong.

And it was Moore who had made him-

self famous by finding "whisky-trees," maples that would run whisky like sap under his clever hand, and selling them for huge prices to some simple band of red men. For in these parts the red men had money each year—thousands of gold pieces that come up from Detroit as bounty money.

"Out o' this, Moore," said Bennett in a low, stifled voice. "Out o' this!"

Moore, ignoring him, merely planted himself in the path and stared at Crawford, who smiled.

"So this is Moore, the whisky-trader!" he observed. "I've been hearing things about you, Moore—unpleasant things. Bennett, here, is merely a smuggler; a crime condoned by most men. But you're a whisky-dealer, one who trades whisky to the Indians; a murderer of souls and bodies in very face! And worse than this, Moore, I hear you've shot down more than one man on the lake or in the woods—shot 'em in the back. And there's a story about a Mormon woman whom you kidnaped from the islands last year—"

A growl rose in Moore's throat, a rumbling, discordant growl.

"Aye, beast, snarl!" said Crawford contemptuously. "I think I've been sent to this country to do God's work—and that a large share of this work consists of ridding it of you and men like you, Eri Moore. I've no quarrel with Bennett; what lies between us is our own affairs. But what lies between you and me, Eri Moore, is God's affair! So look out for yourself—I'm warning you!"

Moore took a step forward, his long arms swinging, an oath dribbling on his lips. Then he halted abruptly and swung around, as from the bushes to one side came a crackling.

"That's right," added Crawford coolly. "Have a care! You're covered from the trees; I'm not alone here. Bennett, will you accept my invitation to sup?"

"To hell with you an' your supper!" rasped Bennett, although no less startled than his partner.

"Very well. Then get off my property, and get your schooner off my property—and do it in a hurry. A bullet or two from the

cliffs would be a fine lesson, but let that wait. Both of you, get! If you choose to stick with this devil, Bennett, it's your lookout. No more of your oaths, Moore! I don't like 'em. Here, friend! The next time Moore says a word, put a bullet through his ear—nick him like the hog he is! Good-by, Mr. Moore."

Moore retreated in some haste.

"Trapped us, eh?" sneered Bennett, swinging up his fist. "All right, Crawford—you got us hipped this time, right enough. But wait a bit! You'll be cursed sorry for this day's work, you an' your friends!"

"And I'll take the hide off'n you with a whip!" howled Moore, then turned and ran through the bushes for the cliff trail. Bennett followed him, unhurried.

Five minutes later, Crawford and old Gilbeault, who was chuckling silently to himself, stood on the cliff and watched the schooner's sails flutter up. The moorings were cast off, and amid a huge sound of cursing and loud talk she walked out into the sunset-reddened water of the lake, heeled far over, and sped like a duck for the North.

"Cross Village," quoth Gilbeault sagely. "Ah'm think me Ah'm go home, ver' dam' quick! Crawford, you's be de big fool—but bah goss! you's be one fine man, eh? You make for watch out ver' dam' sharp. Some night dey catch you in de net like de sishcawet, mebbe."

Crawford's lips curved in a cold and bitter smile of scorn. Then the smile vanished.

"I'm sorry about Bennett," he said simply. "He's a good man. Let's get supper, Pete."

They turned together toward the shack.

## CHAPTER V.

### LIKE A WHITEFISH IN THE NET.

THE days passed gloriously for Crawford. A hundred years previously this whole shore-line had been cleared ground, occupied by many Indian villages centered about the St. Ignace Mission at what was now Cross Village; thus, in clearing his land, Crawford had no primeval forest to encounter.

Gilbeault dropped down from his farm with word that the Able had left the coast for parts unknown. The two men sailed down the coast to Charlevoix, where Crawford recorded his land deal and settled himself in the law's eyes. It was a good trip, and he learned much. They found no more floating dead men, although they witnessed a lively battle between two boat-loads of fishermen, whom Gilbeault declared to be Mormon and Gentile.

Lawlessness was rampant. Pine River, as Charlevoix was then called, had long been the resort of all outlawed men because of some twist in the surveys that placed it outside the pale of the courts. This fault had been corrected by Strang, the Mormon leader, who was in the State legislature; but the condition still obtained. In all the region, moreover, smuggling was considered a righteous evasion of the law—a "right-wise" thing in all verity! Saloons and traders did not pretend to deal in anything except Canadian whisky and the flat, black slabs of T. & B. tobacco.

Crawford found himself welcomed, along the shore beyond his farm, by many of Gilbeault's brotherhood, strewed through the woods and inland lakes; rough men, unlettered, many with weird minglings of French and Indian and Irish blood. Yet he was astonished by their rugged hardihood; by the difference between these silent, tight-lipped men, who would drink hard and fight hard, and the evil-mouthed, cursing crew whom he had known on "the river" in the old days. In this new environment of his there was a clean strength, he knew—there was good timber underneath everything!

If he enjoyed them, no less did they enjoy him, and his tales of slavery and river life. They were quick to sense the power in him—yet they pitied him for it. Even old Gilbeault would shake his head gloomily when among his friends.

"Bah goss!" he would say confidentially. "Dat fellair, he's be de dam' fine man! But some day dat Moore's she's goin' to get him—an' den she's be no good no more, Ah'm think me."

Thus lay matters when the midsummer storm swept on the coast.

Twice during that morning, while he worked extending his clearing, Crawford was certain that he had detected a stealthy form at the edge of the brush, although search revealed no one, and the ground was too dry to show tracks. He felt disturbed and uneasy, and blamed his feelings on the weather; the western sky was banking high with dark clouds, and by the middle of the afternoon the sun was gone from sight. Storm was in the air.

He worked that afternoon with his rifle close to hand, but nothing further occurred to alarm him, and his disquiet died out. For some reason the brutish figure of Eri Moore filled his mind. He determined that in another few days he would set forth, seek out the whisky-trader, and drive him from the northland. It would not be so hard a matter. Crawford was one of the few men in that day who had learned patiently the art of hitting a blow—not in the wild frenzy of the backwoods fighters, nor in the more skilled manner of the pugilists, but the art of landing a blow with weight and force behind it. It was this art which had made Wildcat Crawford a terror on "the river," for men could not understand whence came the terrific result of his hitting.

Toward evening, when the wind was beginning to hum and sing out of the northwest, Crawford went to the spring in the rear of the shack, bearing two buckets for water. The morrow would be Sunday, and as he came to the spring and stooped with one of the buckets, it occurred to him that the morrow would be a good time to tramp up the coast to Cross Village and see Mary Hanlon.

At this instant he felt a rope encircle him.

He leaped straight upward, in a sudden, frantic comprehension of danger; but the rope had hold, and another noose fell about him. The two ropes tightened—then came a swift and fearful wrench that threatened to tear him asunder.

"Loosen up, lads!" cried the voice of Moore. "We ain't ready to kill him yet. Tie him up an' toss him in the wagon—ye'll have to git to the bay 'fore the storm busts. Who's goin' back to the village with me? Hurry up!"

"Hey!" spoke out a voice. "Y'ain't

goin' to drag thet gal down from the village in the storm, Eri?"

"She ain't sugar, to melt in the rain!" jeered Moore. "Git busy soon's ye git there, an' put on the pot. We got to have the stuff bar'led up 'fore mornin', and, mind ye, don't give the game away to Bennett, neither! Pick yer chance to knock him on the head after his boys are drunk. Step lively, and I'll see ye later."

Crawford had been trussed with a stout rope while this dialogue was under way. A cloth was jammed between his teeth to serve as gag, another blinded him, and he felt himself lifted and carried. From the voices and steps around him, he conjectured that a considerable number of men were in the gang.

What was meant by Moore's words, he could not imagine, nor did he care greatly if bad blood had arisen between the trader and Bennett. He was carried for some distance, and at length was dumped into a wagon. From this he gathered that he had been taken to the rough road that lay back of the shore clearings—the road that wound about from a Mackinaw to Cross Village and on down to Little Traverse Bay. He was being taken to the latter point, evidently. Beyond a brief glimpse of Moore's figure, he had seen none of his captors.

As the wagon began to jolt along the road, he caught the raw odor of whisky, and the men riding and walking around him broke into rough song and rougher talk. From this talk, he came to the conclusion that they were fellow traders in liquor. He was soon unable to make out much of their conversation, however, for in the wagon were stowed casks and staves from the factory at Cross Village, and also kettles that boomed and banged furiously. The pace of the horses was increased recklessly in order to reach Little Traverse before the night storm broke, and the merciless jolting about kept Crawford's thoughts upon himself.

He was furious at the way in which he had been trapped—just as old Gilbeault had forewarned him, like a whitefish in the net! He realized now that some of these men must have been waiting about his place most of the day, in order to spring their

trap. He had been taken with not a blow struck; and now he was absolutely helpless. He could not loosen his bonds by the merest trifle.

The jolting seemed interminable, as though there were no end to this road. The wind had risen to a steady howl, that swept across the pines and hemlocks and cedars, stirring them into music as though some unseen hand had struck jarringly across the strings of a mighty harp. Beside this mighty threnody of nature, trembling before the coming blast, the lewd songs of the whisky-traders rang out with a blasphemous and jarring harshness.

But, at length, the exclamations and yells of joy told Crawford that the end of the road was in sight.

\* The wagon bumped down a sharp descent, rumbled and banged and clattered across rough ground, and presently came to a halt. Amid a babel of shouted orders, oaths, and loud talk, the horses were led away and the load was taken out. Crawford felt himself lifted, roughly jolted to the ground, and the cloth fell away from about his head, allowing him to see what was going on around him.

He was sitting, propped against a timber, at one corner of a long shed, roofed, but open at the sides and ends. Outside, the flare of a cresset showed a wharf, at which the schooner *Able* was tied up; thus, Crawford knew that the schooner was sheltered in the cove at the north side of Little Traverse Bay, where a few fishermen lived and where the old mission had formerly maintained a station.

Along the length of the shed, stones had been gathered to form fireplaces, and fires were already blazing. About these moved men, working furiously. At the wharf-end were several barrels of whisky, which were being rolled forward. Other barrels, as yet empty, were stacked high outside, to leeward of the shed, thus creating a draft for the fires.

Above the fires were placed gigantic kettles, which were being filled by a bucket-line of men to each one, with water from the shore. From the confused roar of voices Crawford made shift to discover what was going forward—"Indian whisky" was be-

ing prepared; he sat watching the work in fascinated interest, forgetful almost of his own situation, even as the men around seemed forgetful of him.

He conjectured that each of these huge kettles would hold about fifty gallons. From piles of wood already cut, the attendant workers fed the fires below the kettles. Others were busy shredding black plugs of smuggled tobacco into the water. Bennett came into sight with a case of red pepper on his shoulder, which was also measured off into the kettles. Then the whiskey-barrels were broached, and into each of the huge caldrons was poured somewhat over two gallons of whisky.

"Good Heavens, what a mixture!" thought Crawford. "I used to think that nigger gin was bad enough—but this beats anything they peddle down South!"

The mixing done, some stirred the heating fluid, while others passed around bottles of whisky, which were drunk with avid zest. The first drops of rain were beginning to pelt down on the shed roof. Presently Bennett, roughly refusing a cup of whisky pressed upon him, called the man who seemed at the head of the whisky gang and beckoned him aside from the others. They came toward the spot where Crawford lay, and the captive saw Bennett suddenly turn upon the trader.

"Where's Moore?" he demanded. "What kind of lies are you giving us?"

"No lies, cap," returned the other. "Looky here! Moore's comin' after us, see? He'll be along in an hour or less. What's the rush?"

"I'm sick of this business!" broke out Bennett, his high-carved features snarling at the lurid scene. "This is the last load o' whisky I bring, and I told Moore so. I'm done with the whole business. You boys get your own liquor after this."

"Got converted, have ye?" sneered the trader, a wolfish man of fifty.

"None o' your business, Trimble!" snapped Bennett. "Now, you come across with what you owe for this cargo, and I'll git out o' here."

"Git out!" repeated Trimble, astonished. "You gone crazy? You git outside o' this cove and the wind 'll lay ye on the rocks

over to Agaming sure's shootin'! Ye can't never claw around Three-Mile Point, ye wild man!"

"You run your business and I'll run mine," said Bennett. "Where's that money?"

"I ain't got it, ye derved fool!" retorted the trader. "Eri's got the money, an' you know it dummed well!"

Two of Trimble's men were coming toward them from the nearest kettle. Bennett disregarded them and shook his fist under the trader's nose.

"You hand over that money, ye confounded liar!" he shot out. "I'm sick o' seein' you cussed swindlers work; I'm done with ye for good."

To his evident amazement, the trader snapped up a blow to his mouth. Bennett emitted a roar of anger, and lunged forward. As he did so, one of the men behind him swung a length of cordwood against his head, a merciless and brutal blow.

"My Lord" Trimble looked down at the fallen man. "Ye didn't need to kill him—"

"He ain't dead," said the striker, callously. "His men are down to the schooner with a keg, so git him out of sight in a hurry! They'll be drunk soon enough, and we'll clap 'em down below. She's all clear sailin' now, soon's Moore gits here to handle things."

Bennett's limp body was bound and thrown beside Crawford, who lay wondering what these things portended. That Bennett had been running his last cargo of liquor was evident—was that why Moore and the traders had thus downed him? Very likely; yet, there must be some more definite reason behind it.

Then Crawford remembered Moore's words about the "gal."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE.

ONE by one the kettles were emptied into great pans, and refilled anew.

When the horrible trade liquor had cooled sufficiently, it was run into casks and the heads put in place. One of the party, a cooper, was kept busy.



The rain seemed to have blown over. The storm was now howling down in full fury, a wild gale out of the northwest that whipped over the sheltered bay in a manner that showed how fierce must be its sweep out on the open lake and coast. Thunder was muttering and rumbling, with every now and again a cracking, rending bolt that shivered down into the woods.

Crawford became aware that the schooner's owner had come to his senses and was cursing fluently. He turned his head slightly to the other man, and spat out the last of his gag.

"No need of blasphemy, Bennett," he said quietly.

Bennett ceased his struggles and glared up at him.

"Ah! I forgot they meant to get you, Crawford—havin' a hell of a sweet time, ain't ye? Don't pay to buck the whisky men, eh?"

"You're finding that it doesn't pay to be friends with 'em, aren't you? Has Moore turned on you because you wanted to quit?"

"Damned if I know why," snarled Bennett. "When he comes—"

A shout from the outer darkness drove a chorus of yells from the workingmen. A lantern bobbed, and there was a general outrush of men to greet Moore.

"Here's your partner now," said Crawford. "And listen, Bennett! If you could get your schooner out of this, could you manage her in this storm?"

"I could manage her in the bottomless pit," grated the other. "But they's no chance. Just let me get my hands on that devil Moore, that's all!"

Moore came into sight, the center of a shouting, riotous mob; there were a dozen men in all, in the gang. And with Moore, a shrinking, timorous figure, was Mary Hanlon. They respected her, those rough men, or perhaps they respected the brute savagery of Moore; under their eyes, less pitying than curious and leering, the girl shrank again.

"Where is he?" she cried out, clutching at Moore's arm. "Is he here?"

Trimble exchanged a few low words with Moore. Crawford, mean time, heard an incredulous gasp from beside him, and saw

Bennett painfully pulling himself up against the timber to a sitting posture.

"You'd better keep a grip on yourself," he cautioned, before the frightful fury of the man's blazing eyes. "He expects you to lose your head, and if you do he'll play with you. What's his game?"

"I don't know," muttered Bennett, staring at the group of figures.

Moore waved the others back, bidding them come only at his call. He started forward, and Mary Hanlon with him. An instant later, he pointed to the two bound men, and chuckled evilly.

"Thar he is, my dear—think o' me bringin' ye all this way by night to see him! Ain't he an ungrateful dog to lay so quiet an' not even cheep?"

The girl stumbled forward. An incoherent cry broke from her as she knelt beside the figure of Bennett.

"Joe!" she gasped. "Joe—there's blood on your head—oh, what does all this terrible affair mean—"

"He don't know, yet," chuckled Moore, staring down at them. "Do ye, Bennett? Well, my dear, I'll tell ye. This here young man o' yours, what's been my partner for a long time, has went back on me, that's what! No more whisky, says he, in his schooner; he's going to be a good boy—real religious an' gentle. Ain't it so, Joe?"

Bennett, gazing upward, spoke hoarsely, with an effort at self-control.

"Tell the truth, Moore!" he retorted. "I said it was the last time, yes. And when you wanted to use the schooner to raid those Mormon settlers on the islands, an' run 'em off into the wilderness—I said no. I'm done with you, you dog!"

"No, you ain't," said Moore, grinning. "You thought you was, but you ain't, not by a long shot! Now listen to me, both of ye! My check's good, ain't it? I got money in the bank to Pine River an' Grand Rapids, ain't I?"

To this Bennett merely nodded, puzzled. Above him, holding his head against her breast, crouched Mary Hanlon—she had scarce regarded Crawford. Watching her, Crawford felt a thrill at the face of her; into that face had come a new light, a light of motherhood, of deep solicitude for the

man she loved, of fear that was not for herself—a light of courage and faith and the great tenderness of steel that bends far but breaks not.

"All right," said Moore. "Ye've quit me, so I've gone pardners with Trimble. Him an' me ain't scarcely able to get along 'thout a schooner, though, and we got to have yours."

"You won't get it," snapped Bennett.

"We figgered ye'd say that," and Moore grinned again. "So we brung Miss Hanlon along to help persuade ye, Joe. Betwixt us, we're able to offer ye seven thousand cash for the schooner an' what's in her—here an' now. It's a fair offer, ain't it?"

"She's not for sale," said Bennett.

"We figgered ye'd say that, too," went on Moore placidly. "But it don't signify none. Now, Joe, ye know I got a couple o' women of my own, and I don't need no more; but poor Trimble ain't so well provided. He's willin' to take your gal, here. 'Course, we can leave ye in the lake, take the schooner, an' go ahead—but that ain't our style. No need to separate a lovin' couple, I holds. If ye sells the schooner here an' now, no harm to the gal nor to you neither. If not—you know what."

Bennett strained at his bonds and fell back, livid. Above him crouched Mary Hanlon, her gaze on Moore's bestial face; fear lay in her eyes, but a greater anger.

"You—you devil!" she breathed. "Joe, don't you do it—"

But Bennett knew with whom he dealt. A groan broke from him.

"Let me get my fists on you, Eri Moore."

"That's in the bargain, too," and Moore guffawed. "I'll cut ye loose the minute ye agree to sign, and stand up to ye fair. Huh?"

"Done," snapped Bennett. "Done! And I'll put the boots to you, curse you!"

Moore turned. "Oh, Trimble!"

Trimble slouched over to them, his wolfish features grinning.

"Got that deed I made out—bill o' sale and all?" said Moore. "Hand her over. The check, too. Let him sign, then cut him loose an' tell the boys to keep clear o' the fuss."

Trimble lifted his voice to the men, who came crowding about in a wide circle. Inflamed by whisky, their voices lifted in a raucous chorus. Bennett sat grimly silent, motionless, while his hands were freed.

"Bottle of ink and a quill from the schooner's cabin," ordered Moore. One of the men rushed away. Trimble produced papers, including a check already made out, which Bennett took and glanced over. He handed the check to Mary Hanlon.

"Take care o' that," he said. White-faced, she took it. Bennett glanced up. "What about this fellow Crawford? He'll witness the sales was forced—"

"Don't you worry 'bout him," said Moore, glancing at Crawford venomously. "I got a new blacksnake to wear out on his hide when I'm done with you. He's goin' for a sail on the lake, that's where he's goin'—in a canoe without no paddle! You leave him out of it."

The man came with ink and a quill. By the flaring firelight Bennett signed the papers. Moore handed them to Trimble, who stowed them in his pocket, then drew back.

"Let him loose, boys!" he said.

Bennett was freed. He came slowly to his feet, rubbing his wrists.

Mary Hanlon crouched beside Crawford now, and her face was strained with fear—pure terror for the man she loved. Crawford spoke softly, for her ear alone.

"No matter what happens, Miss Hanlon—remember there's always a chance! My turn will come next. There's a barrel of whisky with a spigot, to your left. At your first chance, open the spigot."

She gave him a distraught glance, uncomprehending.

"Obey me!" said Crawford with a snap in his voice. "Bennett's life may hang on it, girl!"

A shiver ran through her body, and she nodded and rose.

A wild yell of delight pealed up from the watching men. Bennett had hurled himself at the grotesque figure of Moore—hurled himself with a fury of vengeance in his face. He struck once, and took a blow without wincing; struck again, and Moore staggered under the impact. Then, too

eager, Bennett caught his foot against the same bit of firewood that had felled him previously, and he went to the ground.

Before he could recover, Moore was upon him. A shriek escaped the girl, unheard amid the uproar of yells and shouts. Moore landed with both feet, mercilessly. His heavy boots were calked with long lumbermen's spikes. He drove them into Bennett, and again—thudding, maiming blows. Then Bennett rolled clear, came to his feet, and stopped the next rush with his fist.

There was little force to his blows, however. He streamed blood from the "booting," and staggered on his feet. Laughing, Moore came at him and smashed him full in the face—drove in another huge fist to his chin, and as he fell, came up in the air and landed again upon him with the boots. He had drawn back for yet another jump at the senseless man, when Trimble jerked him sharply away.

"Don't kill him, ye fool!"

Moore halted. The bestial passion flamed out of his face, and he nodded assent. Crawford looked for Mary Hanlon and saw her lying in a crumpled heap. But his gray eyes lightened a trifle as he saw that she had turned the spigot of the whisky-barrel before she fainted.

"Throw 'em both into the cabin of the schooner," said Moore. He reached out and took a cup of whisky from one of the men, draining it in huge gulps. "Ah! That's good stuff—too damned good to waste on Injuns! We'll land the girl in the woods up Epoufette way, an' we'll put Bennett ashore on the Beavers; the Mormons will finish him quick enough.

"Now bring out that feller Crawford—an' the blacksnake I give ye yesterday, Trimble."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BREAKING OF THE BEAST.

"SURE he ain't got a knife?" asked Moore, as Crawford was hauled forward.

"Looked him over yourself when we got him, didn't ye?" retorted one of the men. "You got his money, I know that much!"

There was a general guffaw, in which Moore joined. Bennett had been carried away, and now Trimble picked up Mary Hanlon and lifted her out toward the schooner.

"Quite a cocky young man, ain't ye?" demanded Moore, glaring down at Crawford. "S'pose I let ye loose, now—huh? Think ye'd make any more show at fightin' than Bennett done?"

"Possibly," said Crawford. "At least, I'd not mind trying."

There was a general burst of laughter.

"Take him on, Eri!" yelled some one. "Put the boots to him 'fore ye give him the whip! Spike his white mug into the dirt!"

"That ain't a bad notion," said Moore reflectively. One of the men had given him a long "black snake" whip. Now he tossed it away. "Cut him loose."

The ropes were removed from Crawford. For a little he could not move, so tightly had they been drawn. By slow degrees the blood crept back into his hands and feet. He made no effort to hurry matters, rubbing his wrists and ankles. As he sat, he could look into the far corner of the shed where a whisky-barrel was sending forth its contents, unobserved, into a ruddy pool of whisky.

"I s'pose," said Moore, grinning, "that right now ye could kill me any minute ye chose, huh? Just like the last time we met."

"Certainly, I could," said Crawford calmly, glancing up at him. "Certainly! But I'd much sooner give you a good beating and drive you out of the country, Moore. A quick death is too good for a dirty beast as you!"

The cool assurance of his bearing drew gaping looks from those around. Whisky passed, and rough mirth flamed anew. Moore merely sneered at the threat.

"Ever seen a man that got the boots in his face?" he growled. "That's what you're goin' to get, pretty dum quick! I'll spike out every tooth in your head!"

Crawford glanced around. Trimble had returned, with those who bore Bennett; the circle was complete again. Crawford's eyes went from man to man.

"You're a fine crowd!" he observed unconcernedly. "So Trimble's the man that had hopes of securing Miss Hanlon?"

"That's me," and Trimble laughed jeeringly. "I still got my hopes, too!" he added with an oath. "Ain't it so, Eri?"

"Oh," returned Moore indulgently, "I guess you can have a palaver with the gal if ye want, 'fore we set her ashore."

"Well," said Crawford, looking up at Trimble, "just for that, I'll kill you as soon as I finish with Moore."

The quiet words were astounding enough, but the circle of ruffians yelled in drunken glee, and fired rough jests at Trimble from every hand. They quieted instantly, however, as Crawford came to one knee, rising.

"Anything barred?" he asked, looking up at Moore.

"Nothin'!" responded the trader.

"Then go ahead."

Crawford came to his feet.

Moore swung up his long arms and came forward, grinning widely. He ventured a blow which Crawford parried. A jeering laugh broke from the trader.

"Here's one o' them pugilists, boys!" he said, but not taking his eyes from those of Crawford; in their depths was a baleful glare that told of his deadly purpose. "Remember that fellow that come up from Detroit on the Wisconsin last year? They're meat for me!"

He feinted, then one of his boots swung up in a jarring blow that drove home. Crawford staggered under the impact as the calks ripped into his thigh. Instantly Moore was upon him with a vicious assault.

Crawford met it fairly. The two men stood breast to breast, and time after time Moore's fists drove home—yet his blows seemed to lack force. The slight movement of Crawford as each unavoidable hit landed, deprived those abnormally long arms of their vantage; a blow that should have beaten his cheek into a bloody pulp, barely left a red trace.

From Moore broke a howl of fury; it was checked mid-way by the impact of a tremendous jolt that bored home into the pit of his stomach, paralyzing him. In that instant Crawford's fist landed again in the same place, then rocked the simian head

with a jarring uppercut which would have knocked another man cold. Moore shook his head, gathered himself together, and hurled at Crawford with a storm of maddened kicks and flailing fists.

Under that storm nothing could stand. Crawford yielded ground; a flush hit on the point of his jaw sent him reeling backward, and the long arms took him off balance and knocked him headlong into a corner of the shed.

Moore was upon him with a howl of triumph, leaping high to bring down the boots. But Crawford knew his danger from this quarter, and as he fell he rolled sideways and came to his feet, catlike. The whisky-trader plumped down on the bare earth, and, like lightning, Crawford's fists smote him—one—two! Now, for the first time, Crawford struck for the face. The first blow broke Moore's nose; the second left of his mouth a red smear.

Again the trader flung himself at Crawford, but this time Crawford did not yield. Instead, he halted the rush with a whiplike crack of his fist; the two men again faced each other, their arms flailing. The crowd had fallen silent now, watching the fighters with a tense expectation, brutish faces lunged forward. As he fought, Crawford was keenly aware of them, aware of the ferocity that ringed him in, aware of the deadly hostility that held no mercy for him. From the corner of his eye he saw Trimble waiting, holding a pole ready to trip or batter him; and he did not turn his back on Trimble.

Nor was he unmarked. Red blotches touched his face, and one eye was puffing largely. Yet this was nothing to the horror that was Moore, plunging in at him with a bestial fury only to meet fresh blows that jarred and halted him. Each time Crawford's fists landed, they left red; his hands were crimsoned to the wrist.

Now he attacked, driving at Moore with his cold, deadly attack, whose very silence was ominous, his eyes flaming terribly. The watchers gasped with amazement as Moore recoiled under that fearful attack—recoiled from the battering, staggered back and sought desperately to land his boots again, reeled and brought up his knee viciously,

Crawford met the effort with a twist of his body that flung Moore off balance, and put his weight into a blow that sent the whisky-trader reeling and spinning against one of the shed-props. The roof shook with the impact. For an instant Moore clung there, helpless. Crawford leaped aside just in time to escape the pole with which Trimble tried to catch his feet.

Moore bubbled out a lurid oath, wiped the blood from his eyes, and came in. This time he walked straight upon Crawford, flung himself bodily, caught Crawford in his long arms. A yell from those around told that the fight was considered over.

"Hug him, Eri! Squeeze the heart out'n him! You got him now—"

Moore grunted as his arms swung Crawford up against him. His head drooped forward, and his teeth gripped into Crawford's shoulder; with his knee he tried to cripple his opponent. The first pull of those gigantic arms showed Crawford that this was the supreme danger. The spiked boots were reaching for his feet, trying to nail them down. Yet, as he writhed in that grip, his eyes looked over Moore's shoulder at Trimble, and his voice came cold as ever.

"Careful there, Trimble! Another move with that pole, and you die before your time—it's not far distant, anyhow."

His right arm was free, over the shoulder of Moore; he felt himself lifted, strained in an embrace that bade fair to crush his ribs. Already the breath was leaving him. Moore's head was bent forward and down, his teeth trying to bite into Crawford's shoulder.

Then, suddenly, the grasp of the whisky-trader relaxed slightly, and a shiver went through his great body. Crawford's right fist had stricken him at the base of his extended neck. Again the red knuckles struck where skull ended in neck—light blows, seemingly, yet terrible in effect.

The trader groaned, loosened his grip. The fist struck him a third time in the same place. Paralyzed, Moore opened his mouth to scream, and could not. Crawford stepped back and planted his fist in the center of that red, gaping face—a crunch of bones answered to the blow. Moore's suspended scream came forth, horrible and

animal-like. For an instant the great hulk swayed in the light of the fires, then Crawford struck home to the stomach, to the solar plexus.

Moore collapsed. He fell to the floor, turned on his back, and lay with one knee jerking up and down in a spasmodic contortion, his senseless ruin of a face upturned.

Stupefied by this unexpected result, those around stared at the sight. Crawford put his hand to the back of his neck, where, under his shirt, lay the derringer that had been missed by his captors in their search. He whipped out the weapon.

"You, Trimble!" his voice lashed into the silence. The derringer cracked, and Trimble fell forward and lay motionless.

From the men around broke a wild burst of shouts and yells. They hesitated ere they surged in upon Crawford. In that moment of hesitation, Crawford stooped to the nearest fire and seized a half-burned length of wood. He swung it up, flame leaping from it, and hurled it at the pool of whisky in the corner of the shed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CRAWFORD'S COMMAND.

"A MAD act indeed!" thought Crawford, crouching under the wharf and watching the scene. "Yet it served its purpose—and may lead to something."

Upon the explosion of that cask of raw whisky, he had been flung aside with the other men, and had escaped unperceived. Flaming whisky had penetrated everywhere; a second barrel had gone up almost at once, flinging fire throughout the place. Already one end of the shed was a roaring mass of flame, and hungry red tongues, fanned by the eddies of the high wind overhead, were licking at the empty casks.

Recovering from their first panic, the whisky-traders had dragged Moore out of danger and were now working like dogs to save what they could. Whisky was rolled away from the shed, and the pile of casks was attacked, but too late; flame swept into them, and they roared. The little harbor was lighted up by the conflagration.



gration, and seeing their efforts were useless, the traders snatched up their rifles and scattered in search of Crawford.

It occurred to none of them that he might be crouching under the shore end of the wharf. They scattered up and down the shore, some securing the frightened horses, others beating up the underbrush. Under the glare of the flames everything stood out distinctly across the whole narrow, land-locked cove. Crawford dropped to the ground, fearful lest he be descried.

By twos and threes the dozen men returned to the scene of their wrecked enterprise, viewing the ruin with lurid curses, and convinced that Crawford had escaped them for the moment. Having saved what they could, they made no further effort to quell the flames. A drink of whisky all around, and they began to confer.

"Trimble's dead, but the papers was signed," said one. "Where's Bennett an' the gal?"

"In the cabin," answered another.

"Then turn 'em out—put 'em in the men's quarters for'ard. Let's sling Eri aboard and let him lay. We'll take the cabin ourselves, huh? Then let her rain, for all we care! Come morning, if the rain blows over, no harm's done. Eri will be around by then, and we can scatter out after Crawford. Bound to catch him 'tween here an' Cross Village."

This line of action was acclaimed by all. Trimble's body was relieved of the documents concerning the schooner, and Eri Moore's unconscious form was carried to the craft and dumped beside the rail. At this juncture a shout of alarm was raised, and as the men hastened to catch up their rifles, Crawford peered out to see a figure come walking into the lighted stretch of ground.

"Don't shoot!" cried one of the traders. "It's ol' Pete Gilbeault—he's all right."

"Hello, boys!" sang out Gilbeault lustily. "Ah'm hear de schoonair she's be here, an' Ah'm come down for get some w'isky. What you's be doing—make de bonfire, eh?"

Gilbeault leaned on his rifle and looked at the lessening conflagration.

"Seen anything o' Crawford—that settler

up your way?" demanded some one hastily. The old woodsman shook his head.

"Ah'm not like dat fellair," he said positively. "Why?"

"Nothin'—thought mebbe you'd met him."

The men gathered about Gilbeault, proffering drinks and recounting fanciful tales to explain the scene of disaster. They evolved the story that Crawford had been here drinking, had shot Trimble, and that Moore and Bennett had laid each other out.

"Ah'm think me she's be de lively evenin', eh?" grinned Gilbeault.

Certain of the men who had been making arrangements aboard the schooner, now reported that "Bennett and the gal" were down forward and the cabins clear.

"Anybody got some cards or dice?" sang out a voice. "Let's take some liquor aboard an' make it a night!"

A yell followed the proposal, and the crowd trooped toward the wharf, Gilbeault among them. Crawford heard the stamping feet pass overhead, and caught a muttered warning between two of the rearmost not to "let ol' Gilbeault know too much." Then they were gone.

Crawford stretched out on the ground, gratefully relaxing. He was stiff and bruised, and this was the first moment in which his straining tension could find relief. He lay for a space, too weary to think, and only when he found drowsiness creeping on him did he stir and rise. The red embers of the dying conflagration still lighted the shore, and making his way to the water he washed his hands and arms and face.

As he turned, still beneath the wharf, it seemed to him that he heard the pad-pad of a moccasined foot above. He waited, suddenly intent; Gilbeault, alone of the men, wore moccasins! An instant later he heard his name breathed from overhead.

"Crawford!"

Unhesitating, he swung himself up. It was Gilbeault, who greeted him with a low and noiseless laughter.

"B'jou, b'jou! Ah'm see you run here, an' hide!" said Gilbeault. "You's make for raise de hell for sure, eh?"

"Where'd you come from, Pete?" queried Crawford.

"Ah'm come to de shack for tell you watch out, but you's be gone. Dat sign in de ground, she's tell me enough, so Ah'm come on here an' watch in de trees, ready for shoot dat dam Moore. Bah goss, dat's be de one fine fight—like de carcajou when she's mad!"

Crawford perceived instantly that Gilbeault had witnessed everything. There was no time to be lost in useless talk, and he jerked his head toward the schooner.

"They're all in the cabin?"

"*Oui.*" Gilbeault showed a jug in his hand. Ah came for get more wisky from de bar'l."

"They'll not get drunk, I suppose?"

"Non—not dem! Dey drink like de watair."

"Is there a hatch we can put on over that cabin?"

"Sure." Gilbeault peered at him.

"What you make for do, eh?"

"Clean out the gang, Pete. Will you help?"

"Sure." said the other laconically.

"What you want?"

"Come on, then."

Removing his boots, Crawford led the way to the schooner, which was lined fore and aft to the end of the dock. He climbed over her taffrail, and Gilbeault touched his arm, pointing to a black mass by the rail.

"Dat's Moore."

Crawford nodded and went on. The schooner's little stern cabin had no skylight, being lighted by a stern window. The noise of oaths and maudlin talk came from below, with occasional yells; dice and cards were holding the whisky-traders engaged. A narrow companion-ladder led below, and by this Crawford halted, pointing to the hatch.

Together they lifted the cover and put it in place, silently.

"Throw some coils of rope on it," said Crawford, "then tie up Moore hard and fast—lash him to the rail. When that's done, come to the men's quarters forward. Bennett is there."

Gilbeault muttered comprehension.

Hastening forward to the little forward companion, Crawford went down the ladder into the blackness. He caught a faint stir, and spoke softly.

"Miss Hanlon? Don't be alarmed; it's Crawford. Everything's all right."

He reached the stuffy little forecabin and halted.

"Where's Bennett? Has he come to himself yet?"

The voice of Bennett answered him from the blackness.

"Aye. What's happened? There was a fire—"

"I've no time to talk," said Crawford curtly. "Are you able to handle the schooner if I get your men out?"

"Guess so. Are you crazy, or what? Where's Moore an' Trimble?"

"Trimble's dead. Moore's lashed to the rail aft, pretty near dead, and the others are caught down in the cabin. Gilbeault is coming in a minute—he'll help you to the deck. I'll have to kick those drunken men of yours into life."

Hastily regaining the deck, Crawford met Gilbeault coming forward, and sent him on down to help Bennett. Turning to the forward hatchway that gave access to the cargo hold, Crawford got the cover off. He dropped from the coaming, missing the ladder, and landed amid the snoring crew who were stretched out on the cargo below.

He roused them with kicks and blows, then found the ladder and gained the deck again. He put on his shoes and ran to the wharf. There he loosened the heavy lines that held the schooner to the wharf, tossed them over the rail, and leaped after them.

As he ran forward, he met Gilbeault and Bennett, who was dragging himself heavily.

"We're drifting," he exclaimed sharply. "Get those drunken brutes of yours to work, Bennett! Once we get past the point, there'll be the devil to pay. Keep Miss Hanlon below. Gilbeault, give me your rifle and come lend a hand—"

"Bah goss!" cried the woodsman, alarmed. "You gut her loose—"

"Aye, and we've got a dozen men to handle. Hurry up!"

Bennett snapped orders at the men slowly scrambling up from the hold. Taking the rifle Gilbeault handed him, Crawford ran aft to the hatchway leading to the cabin. The after end of the schooner was vibrating to wild yells and poundings—the whisky-

traders had discovered that they were trapped!

Crawford thumped on the hatch-cover with his rifle-butt.

"Below there!" he shouted. A momentary silence answered him. "Come up one at a time, understand!"

He ordered Gilbeault to pinion the men as they came up, and aided the woodsmen to shift the coils of rope. He flung back the hatch-cover.

"First man up!" he ordered. "The rest of you wait, or I'll fire into you!"

One of Bennett's men came to help. Before the last of the whisky-traders, cursing but helpless, were bound and lashed to the schooner's rail, the little craft was out toward the end of the point that sheltered the cove.

The gale smote her like a blast, suddenly and with terrific force that laid her far over in the water.

"Can we make it?" Crawford stood beside Bennett, shouting against the wind.

"If we can't we'll hit the cliffs at Agaming."

The schooner lay over, heeled until her close-hauled boom was dragging in the water. Then she quivered suddenly, trembled in every timber, righted a little, and moved. Under her lee rail, rising until it swept the scuppers, crept a line of hissing foam. She was off like a bird.

In the cold dawning, Mary Hanlon brought a bucket of hot coffee to Bennett and Crawford, still at the helm, and gave it to them in pannikins.

A wild waste of tossing waters lay on every hand; in another hour, predicted Bennett, the gale would be blowing itself out. Gilbeault was down below, seasick and unhappy. Yet more unhappy were the miserable line of men lashed to the rail—half frozen, swept by the hissing seas and half drowned when theirs was the lee side; their curses had long since been altered to prayers, which had relapsed into a dumb and hopeless wretchedness. The eyes of Mary Hanlon went to them in pity.

"I'll give them some coffee. Joe."

"Let the devils suffer!" and Bennett laughed harshly. "I'm heading for St.

James—we'll land 'em on the Beavers, Crawford."

But Crawford had glanced at the girl, nodding slightly. She approached the line of men with her coffee, and Bennett did not interfere.

"Will they find help on the islands, then?" demanded Crawford. The other laughed again.

"Likely! D'ye know what Strang and his Mormons do to whisky-traders? Tie 'em up to a whipping-post and give 'em the lash. Got any objections?"

"None," Crawford said calmly.

Two of the men came to relieve the wheel. Bennett stepped away, beckoning Crawford. Together they went into the waist of the schooner and paused in the lee of the galley. Bennett turned and faced Crawford.

"First to last," he said abruptly, "I been a damned fool. You're a better man than I am; I heard how you handled Moore last night and you seen how he handled me. All that's done with, Crawford. I've quit the whisky for good. There's plenty other stuff to run over the line, and smugglin' ain't no crime. Far's I'm concerned, there ain't no feelin's between us. Will ye shake on it?"

"You bet."

"From the Beavers," said Bennett, "we'll run into Cross Village 'fore the wind, an' ought to get there this afternoon. Mary an' me aims to git married right off. Will ye take a hand at the weddin', Crawford? And afterward, I'll want a partner aboard this schooner—my mate's home-sick and he wasn't no good anyhow. What say?"

"As to the wedding, gladly. As to the partnership—"

Crawford stood a moment, gazing out at the gray horizon. Then, his lips compressed, he shook his head.

"I've got work to do," he said slowly. "Up along the north shore—and elsewhere. I think Gatch is coming up this summer—the Methodist circuit-rider. I'm going to help him. If things work out I may get to be a preacher myself some day. No, Crawford, our paths go in different directions; thanks all the same! I'll be mighty glad to have you as a friend—"

"You got me," said Bennett.

(The end.)

# Good References

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Elope If You Must," "Once Again," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN Mary Wayne, reduced by the sudden death of her father to earning her own living, applied at the Brain Workers' Exchange for a high-class position, she discovered in short order that skill, efficiency and respectability were all useless without the employers' fetish, *references*; and as she had yet to fill her first position she had none.

Turning sadly away she met another girl, Nell Norcross, who, being fortunately abundantly supplied with the great essential, had just secured a particularly fine position with Miss Caroline Marshall, of an old and conservative family on lower Fifth Avenue, and when later she, Nell, was taken ill and it became evident that it would be weeks before she would be able to work, she persuaded Mary to take her job, and incidentally her name and references.

Mary did so, and easily got the position, but discovered to her dismay that it was not with Miss Marshall personally, but as social secretary to her huge and vigorous nephew, Bill Marshall, a young man just out of college, who abhorred society, but was being forced into it by his rich aunt to maintain "the position of the family." Bill's position was peculiar. His aunt stood in the place of mother and guardian to him, and he was her only natural heir, but their ideas for his career were diametrically opposed. Also things were complicated by the fact that Bill had brought home a college friend, Pete Stearns, a practical joker of great genius, who, being of a family that Miss Marshall regarded much as a mountaineer regards a revenueur, had insisted as posing as Bill's valet, and who further insisted upon giving Bill a most enviable reputation, to his aunt, as a student and generally model young man. Likewise respectfully suggesting methods by which Bill might easily break into the loathed society.

Mary found the task set her far from an easy one, but Bill getting himself arrested one night when the police broke up a prize-fight, the pseudo valet being obliged to appeal to her in order to get bail, gave her a club which she did not hesitate to wield, with the result that Bill finally consented to allow a party to be given in his honor. The guests were all of the older and more conservative aristocracy of the city, Bill inviting only one friend, whom he described as Signor Antonio Valentino, a famous Italian sculptor.

Nell Norcross (the real one) was also there in the capacity of assistant to Mary, and it was she, who, going into the conservatory, found the irrepressible Pete dancing with one of the young guests. As soon as he was alone she proceeded to "call" the supposed valet for his presumption, but Pete did not seem much impressed. He placed a finger against his lips and glanced from side to side. "Suppose," he said, "I were to tell you a secret."

"Go at once!"

"Suppose we exchange secrets?" he whispered. That startled her. Did he know anything? He turned his head and listened. "Something is happening," he said. "Let's run."

And before Nell knew it she was running, her hand in his, for all the world like Alice in the looking-glass country, with the *Red Queen* shouting: "Faster! Faster!"

## CHAPTER XII.

SIGNOR ANTONIO VALENTINO.

AS they reached the front of the house they heard the voice of the announcer:

"Signor Antonio Valentino."

They saw Mary Wayne dexterously

crowding her way forward; they saw her look, gasp, utter a faint cry and freeze into an attitude of horror.

And then they saw Bill Marshall, wearing a whole-hearted grin of delight, rush forward to greet his friend, the eminent artist from Italy.

Signor Valentino was short and dark. He

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for June 12.

had a flattened nose that drifted toward the left side of his face. He had a left ear that was of a conformation strange to the world of exclusive social caste, an ear that—well, to be frank, it was a tin ear. He had large, red hands that were fitted with over-size knuckles. His shoulders rocked stiffly when he walked. His eyes were glittering specks.

"H'lo, Bill, yo' old bum," said the signor.

"Kid, I'm glad to see you. You look like a million dollars."

And Bill seized Kid Whaley's hand, pumped his arm furiously and fetched him a mighty wallop on the shoulder.

The signor did, indeed, look like a million dollars. He wore the finest Tuxedo coat that could be hired on the East Side. His hair was greased and smoothed until it adhered to his bullet head like the scalp thereof. There was a gold-tipped cigarette between his lips. The bow tie that girded his collar had a daring pattern of red. In a shirt front that shone like a summer sea was imbedded a jewel whose candle-power was beyond estimate, so disconcerting was it to the unshielded eye. A matchless brilliant of like size illuminated a twisted finger. His waistcoat was jauntily but somewhat sketchily figured in dark green, on a background of black.

"I got everythin' but th' shoes, Bill," confided the signor in a public whisper. "They gimme a pair that was too small an' I chucked 'em."

Thus it was that the signor wore his own shoes, which were yellow, and knobby at the toes and had an air of sturdiness.

"You're great," said Bill, as he pounded him again on the shoulder. "What made you so late?"

But the signor did not seem to hear. His glance was roving, flashing here and there with a shiftiness and speed that bewildered.

"Some dump and some mob," was his ungrudging tribute. "What's th' price of a layout like this, Bill? I'm gonna get me one when I lick the champ."

The rigid pose of Mary Wayne suddenly relaxed. She appeared to deflate. Her muscles flexed; her knees sagged. She backed weakly out of the crowd and found support against the wall.

As for Pete Stearns, there was a rapt stare of amazed admiration on his face. He turned and whispered to Nell, whose hand he still gripped:

"The son of a gun! He held out on me. He never tipped me a word. But, oh, boy, won't he get his for this!"

As for Bill Marshall, he was presenting Signor Antonio Valentino to his guests. Some of the bolder even shook hands, but the uncertain ones bowed, while those of unconcealed timidity or ingrained conservatism contented themselves with glances which might have been either acknowledgments or a complete withdrawal of recognition.

The signor was unabashed. The days of his stage fright were long past; to him a crowd was an old acquaintance. He turned to Bill with a bland grin.

"Gee, Bill, ain't it funny how I'm a riot anywhere I go? Y' don't even have to tell 'em I'm Kid Whaley."

Bill tucked the signor's arm under his and was leading him through the reception-room. In his own mind there was a faint twinge of misgiving. It was a great adventure, yes; it represented his defiance of Aunt Caroline, of the social secretary, of the career that they were carving for him. It was not open defiance, of course; Bill had intended that it should be subtle. He was undermining the foundations, while at the same time appearing to labor on the superstructure. Presently the whole false edifice would crash and there would be no suspicion that he was the author of disaster. That was the reasoning part of his plotting. The remainder—perhaps the greater part—was sheer impulse. He was cooperating with the devil that lurked within him.

Now the real test was coming. He summoned his moral reserves as he leaned over and whispered:

"Kid, you're going to meet my aunt. Watch your step. Spread yourself, but be careful. Do you remember what I told you?"

"Sure," said the Kid, easily. "I'll put it over. Watch me."

"If you fall down I'm gone."

"I ain't ever fell down yet. Ring the gong."



Aunt Caroline and the bishop were still in the backwater as Bill arrived with the new bit of flotsam. The amiable old chate-laine glanced up.

"Mercy!" she murmured.

"Signor Antonio Valentino," said Bill, with a bow.

Instantly Aunt Caroline smiled and extended her hand.

"Oh! Why, we had almost given you up. I'm so glad you did not fail us. William has told me—"

"Wotever Bill says is right," interrupted the signor. "He's a white guy. Pleased t' meetcha."

Aunt Caroline's hand crumpled under the attack, but she suffered without wincing and turned to the bishop.

"Bishop, this is the sculptor of whom I spoke."

The bishop was staring. His eyebrows were rising. For an instant only he was studying Bill Marshall.

"Pleased t' meetcha, bish."

It was a greeting not according to diocesan precedents, nor was the shaking of hands that followed it, yet the bishop survived. "It is very interesting to know you, sir," he murmured, non-committally.

Aunt Caroline was devoting her moment of respite to a study of Signor Valentino. She knew, of course, that it was not polite to stare at a man's ear, or at his nose, but these objects held her in a sort of wondering fascination. In advance she had formed no clear picture of what a sculptor should be; he was the first she had met. Yet, despite her inexperience and lack of imagination, she was conscious that this sculptor did not match very closely even the hazy ideal that was in her mind.

Bill nudged the signor, and the signor suddenly remembered. He was expected to explain, which he could do readily. It was merely a matter of feinting for an opening. Ah—he had it.

"It's cert'nly a grand little thing t' break trainin', lady. This here sculptor game is a hard life. Y' been pipin' me ear, ain't y'?"

Aunt Caroline lifted a hand in embarrassed protest and tried to murmur a disclaimer.

"W'y, it's all right, lady," said the signor, with generous reassurance. "It's one o' me trade-marks. Say, y'd never guess how I got it. Listen: I landed on it when I did a Brodie off a scaffold in th' sixteenth chapel. Uhuh; down in Rome."

"Sistine!" It was a violent whisper from Bill.

"Sistine," repeated the signor. "That's wot hung it on me, lady. I was up there a coupla hundred feet—easy that—copyin' off one o' them statues of Mike th' Angelus. You know th' guy; one o' th' old champs. All of a sudden, off I goes an' down on me ear. Gee, lady, it had me down f'r nine all right; but I wasn't out. Ain't never been out yet. So I goes up again an' finishes th' job in th' next round. That's th' kind of a bird I am, lady."

Aunt Caroline nodded dumbly. So did the bishop.

"I got th' twisted beezee in th' same mix-up," added the signor, as he scratched his nose reflectively. "First I lit on me ear an' then I rolled over on me nose. But, gee; that's nothin'. Guys in my game gotta have noive."

"It would appear to require much courage," ventured the bishop.

"You said it," advised the signor. "But y' gotta have noive in any game, bish. Yes, ma'am; y' gotta have guts."

Aunt Caroline steadied herself against the bishop's arm.

"The signor," explained Bill, "unconsciously slips into the vernacular."

"Slippin' it in on th' vernacular is one o' me best tricks," assented the signor. "Lady, I remember once I caught a guy on th' vernacular—"

Bill was pinching him. The signor remembered and shifted his attack.

"See them mitts?" he asked, as he held forth a pair of knotted hands. "All in the same game, lady. Y' see, I got a studio in Naples, just like th' one I got over on th' East Side. This is th' way I get from handlin' them big hunks of Carranza marble."

Again Bill pinched the sculptor, who inclined his tin ear for counsel.

"Cheese it, Kid; you're in Mexico. Get it right—Carrara."

"Sure," observed the signor, undisturbed.

"This here Carrara marble, lady, is all heavyweight stuff. It's like goin' outa y'r class t' handle it. I don't take it on regular."

"I—I've heard so much of the Carrara marble," said Aunt Caroline.

"There ain't nothin' better f'r hitchin' blocks, pavin' stones an' tombstones," declared the signor. Then, with an inspiration: "An' holy-stones, too. Get that, bish? Holy-stones. Ain't that a hot one? Hey, Bill, did you get it? I'm tellin' th' bish they take this here Carranza marble—"

Bill interrupted firmly.

"I doubt if the bishop would be interested in the details, signor," he said. "Your work speaks for itself. You see"—to the bishop—"while the signor fully understands all the purposes for which Carrara marble may be used, he is really a specialist on heads and busts."

"Portrait work," suggested the bishop, still a trifle dazed.

"Exactly. The expression that he can put into a face is often marvelous."

"Do you think," inquired Aunt Caroline, hesitating as though she were asking the impossible, "that he would consent to show some of his work here?"

"Any time, lady; any time," said the signor, heartily. "Only I ain't brung me workin' clothes an'—"

He broke off as his glance enveloped a figure standing in a doorway that led to the hall.

"My Gawd! It's Pete!"

And Signor Valentino was gone in a rush of enthusiastic greeting.

"Why, he knows your valet, William," said Aunt Caroline.

"I have had Peter over at his studio; he's interested in ecclesiastical art, you know."

"Of course; I might have known." Aunt Caroline hesitated for an instant, then: "William, does he always talk in that curious manner?"

Bill nodded and sighed.

"It's due to his spirit of democracy," he explained. "He chooses to live among the lowly. He loves the people. He falls into their way of speech. I'll admit that it may sound strange, Aunt Caroline—"

"Oh, I wasn't objecting," she said, hastily. "I know so little about the foreign artists that I am ignorant; that's all."

"Some time, Aunt Caroline, I should like to have the signor bring some of his fellow-artists here. At a small affair, I mean."

"And you certainly shall, William. By all means."

Now, Bill was not wholly satisfied with this. He had been relying upon the Kid to do him a certain service. He was using him in the hope of destroying Aunt Caroline's illusions concerning art, society and other higher things. He had no idea that the Kid would score anything that resembled a triumph. But now it was evident to him that in certain phases of life he had never sufficiently plumbed the innocence of his maiden aunt.

"He seems to interest you," he ventured, with a view to exploration.

"Strength and endurance are qualities always to be admired in a man," said Aunt Caroline, as glibly as if it came out of a book. "I had never dreamed that art developed them. Bishop, were you aware of it?"

The bishop was staring pointedly at Bill.

"I—er—no. That is—well, it is probable that I have never given sufficient attention to certain of the arts."

He continued to stare at Bill, until that gentleman began to feel that the bishop was not so unsophisticated as he seemed.

"If you'll excuse me, Aunt Caroline, I'll hunt up the signor. I wouldn't have him feel that I am neglecting him."

But the signor was no longer standing in the doorway, talking to Pete Stearns. Nor was he out in the hall, where Bill immediately searched. A hasty exploration of the dining-room did not discover him.

"Now, where in blazes did he go?" muttered Bill, in an anxious tone.

He started on a run toward the front of the house and barely managed to avert a collision with his social secretary.

"Say, have you seen—"

She checked him with a stabbing glance.

"Do you know what you've done?" she demanded.

"Why, I—"

"Are you sane enough to realize?"

Bill had never seen quite such an expression in her eyes. They fascinated him; almost they inspired him with awe. He even forgot the freckles.

"But I'm looking for the signor."

"Signor!" she echoed. "Well, never mind him. He's gone. Just for the moment, there's something else—"

"Gone? But he just came!"

Mary's jaw had developed an angle of grimness.

"I had him put out of the house," she said. "Yes, and I helped! I had him thrown out by servants. Do you know what he did?"

Bill experienced a sudden shrinking of the skin at his throat and down the sides of his neck.

"He met my friend—Miss Wayne—and—" Mary beat a clenched fist into her palm. "Because she spoke pleasantly to him he—he seized her! And he kissed her! And—*now* do you see what you've done?"

"I'm sorry," said Bill, in a stumbling whisper.

"Sorry!" Mary's face was aflame. "Sorry! But never mind that now. She has fainted. She was just recovering from an illness. It will probably kill her. Do you understand? I'll have to send for an ambulance. I'll—"

Bill led the way at a run and reached the second floor.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"You mean the sick lady?" asked the upstairs maid. "Peter has taken her home, sir. He asked me to tell you that he would use your car."

"Better, was she?"

"A little hysterical, sir; but she could walk."

Bill breathed more comfortable. He turned to Mary Wayne.

"Everything's all right, I guess," he said.

"You think so?" she inquired icily. "You are easily reassured, Mr. Marshall."

Bill shrugged.

"Oh, well; I'm sorry it happened, of course. I guess I'd better go back to the party, perhaps."

Not that he wanted to go back to the party; he simply wanted to get away from those awful eyes of Mary Wayne.

"There will be no need for you to do that," she said. "Everybody is going. Everything is ruined! Everything—oh, how could you?"

"I'll take a look around, anyhow," he said.

She reached forth a hand and seized him by the sleeve.

"You will not!" she said, hotly. "You won't look around anywhere. You'll come straight into the office and talk to me!"

"But—"

"At once!"

So he followed her.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### MARY RESIGNS.

WHEN the car reached a clear block, Pete turned his head for a hurried glimpse at the partly-huddled figure at his right.

"Air doing you any good?" he asked.

"I—I think so."

Miss Norcross spoke uncertainly. She was not quite clear concerning even such a matter as air.

Pete skillfully lighted a cigarette without checking the car's pace. He smoked in silence for several blocks.

"How did you like our little party?" he inquired.

No answer.

"He didn't mean any harm; that was only his way of being democratic."

There was no comment from Miss Norcross.

"Of course," mused Pete, "when you take the warm and impulsive Neopolitan nature and stack it up against the New England conscience you produce a contact of opposites. Looking at the matter impartially—"

"Please stop talking to me."

"Why?"

"For excellent reasons."

"Because I'm a valet?"

"Because you choose to forget your position," said Nell, sharply.

Pete sighed mournfully.

"Everywhere it's the same," he said. "They all draw the line. It'll haunt me

even when I'm a bishop. Did you know I was going to be a bishop? I am. But, of course, being once a valet will have its advantages as well as its drawbacks. I'll be able to clean and press my own robes. I'll be a neat bishop if I'm nothing else. If there's one thing I dislike it's a dowdy bishop. You just run over all your bishop friends and you'll appreciate what I mean."

"Stop talking!"

"I don't believe you mean that, Miss Wayne. I believe you have a secret liking for my conversation. Most people have. You see, it's like this: when I was a young boy—"

Nell sat up abruptly and looked about her.

"Where are you taking me to?" she demanded.

"I thought I'd drop you at the Ritz. That's where you live, isn't it? You have the Ritz manner."

"We've got to go back," she said, furiously. "I don't live up this way at all. I live down-town."

"Well, you didn't tell me," said Pete, mildly. "You just let me go right on driving. I never dreamed of taking you anywhere except to the Ritz."

She told him the address and huddled back into her seat. Pete merely elevated an eyebrow as he turned the car.

"To return to our discussion of the party," he said, "it is unfortunate that you fainted before Signor Valentino took his departure. There were features connected with his exit that were unique. But I am greatly afraid that my master, Mr. Marshall, will have difficulty in making explanations. To bring your dearest friend to your house and then—"

"If you don't stop talking I'll shriek."

"We shall see. To make it interesting, I'll bet you five dollars that you don't."

And he continued to talk, smoothly, placidly and without cessation. She did not shriek. She did not even whimper. She sat in outraged silence, her hands clenched, her brain swimming with the futility of trying to puzzle out this mystery of Bill Marshall's valet.

"And so we arrive," said Pete, as he stopped the car in front of the boarding house and glanced up at its gloomy front.

"No shrieking, no police whistles, no general alarm. Allow me."

He assisted her from the car and escorted her across the sidewalk. "You need not come up the steps," she said.

But already he was urging her up the steps, with a firm yet considerate grip on her arm. Also, he rang the bell.

"Thank you," said Nell, hurriedly. "That will be all, if you please."

"Suppose they should not hear your ring? Suppose you had to sit on the top step all night? No; I should never forgive myself. It is my duty to remain until— Ah! The concierge."

The door opened and the landlady peered out into the vestibule.

"Madam," said Pete, removing his hat, "I have the honor to leave in your charge Miss Wayne. May I ask that you show her every consideration, inasmuch as she is somewhat indisposed?"

"Miss Wayne?" echoed the landlady. "There's nobody here—"

And then, in a flicker of light that came from the hallway, she established an identification. At the same instant Nell pushed weakly past her and stumbled into the house.

"There! I told her she wasn't fit to go out," declared the landlady. "I warned her. I knew she'd pay for it. But you can't drill sense into some people; not a particle."

She seemed to be soliloquizing, rather than addressing the stranger on her doorstep. But Pete was not interested in the soliloquy. There was a matter that mystified him. He interrupted.

"When I presented Miss Wayne did I understand you to say—"

She suddenly remembered that he was there.

"None of your business, young man. And don't stand around on my front stoop."

Then she was gone, with a slamming of the door that echoed through the lonely block. Pete decided that her advice was sound: there was nothing to be achieved by standing there. He walked down the steps, climbed into the car and drove slowly off.

"Something is peculiar," he observed, half aloud. "Let us examine the facts."

All the way back to the Marshall house he examined the facts, but when he backed the car into the garage he had reached no conclusion.

Another conversation had been in progress during the time that Pete Stearns was playing rescuer to a stricken lady. It took place in the "office," a term that Mary Wayne had fallen into the habit of applying to the sun parlor where she transacted the affairs of Bill Marshall. For a considerable time all of the conversation flowed from one pair of lips. To say that it flowed is really too weak a characterization: it had the fearsome speed and volume of an engulfing torrent.

Bill walked during most of it. He could not manage to stay in one place: the torrent literally buffeted him about the room. He felt as helpless as a swimmer in the Niagara rapids. Never before had he realized the conversational possibilities of a social secretary. He was particularly disquieted because she did not rant. She did not key her voice high: she did not gesture; she did not move from her chair. She simply sat there, pouring scorn upon him in appallingly swift and even tones. She drenched him with it: she seemed in a fair way to drown him.

At last, inevitably, there came a pause. There was awe as well as surprise in the gaze with which Bill contemplated her. She sat stiffly on the edge of her chair, pinker in the cheeks than he had ever seen her before, with her lips tightly set and her eyes glowing.

"That's more than I ever stood from anybody," he said slowly.

"Then you have been neglected in the past," was the comment she shot back.

"My aunt never went as far as you have."

"She would if she appreciated what you have done. When I think of the way you have deceived that dear old woman it makes me want to be an anarchist. Even now she doesn't understand what you've done. She doesn't know that you deliberately ruined everything; she's too innocent to suspect. All your guests know; all the servants know—everybody knows except your poor aunt. But you've imposed on her,

you have deceived her, you have lied to her—"

"Oh, hold on there, please."

"Well, you have!" cried Mary. "And you've lied to me."

"How?" he demanded.

"You ask me that! Do I need to remind you? You said you were bringing a friend, an artist. You even lied about his name. And then you had the effrontery to bring into this house a disreputable bruiser—"

"Now, wait a minute," commanded Bill. "I didn't lie about his name. I told you the truth. His name is exactly as I gave it—Antonio Valentino."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Simply because you're ignorant about a lot of things. Probably you don't know that nearly every wop fighter in New York City goes into the ring under an Irish name. It's done for business reasons mostly. This man's name is Valentino; he was born in Italy.—But when he fights he's Kid Whaley. And if you don't choose to believe me, write to any sporting editor and he'll tell you."

But Mary was not to be trust aside.

"It makes no difference what his real name is, you concealed his identity. You deliberately deceived me. Not that I care," she added bitterly. "I'm thinking of your aunt and the reputation of her home."

"How could I help it if you misunderstood me?" demanded Bill. "I said he was an artist, didn't I? Well, he is. He's next to the top in his line and it won't be long before he takes first place. If you ever saw him fight you'd understand what art is."

"You said he was a sculptor."

"Well, he is, too, in a way. That may be a bit of artistic license, but he's a sculptor. I've seen him take a man, go to work on him, carve him up and change him so that you couldn't identify him with anything short of finger prints. He's a sculptor of human beings. He works on heads and busts; I said he did, didn't I? And I said he was an impressionist and a realist rolled into one. And he is. A man can do impressionistic work with a pair of six-ounce gloves just as well as he can with a paint brush or a chisel. And you yourself



suggested that his work must have strength, and I agreed with you."

Bill rather hoped that this would settle it: not that he banked heavily on the soundness of his defense, but rather because he felt that it was technically adroit. Mary simply curled a lip and regarded him with fresh scorn.

"That's what I call a very cowardly explanation," she said. "You know as well as I do that it's worthless. It doesn't explain the fact that you let me deceive myself and made me the instrument for deceiving your aunt. I'd have more respect for you if you came out boldly and admitted what you've done."

Bill was beginning to glare.

"If you think I'm going to throw down my friends in order to get into society, then I'll stay out."

"You'd better change your friends," she advised. "So long as you have friends who are an offense to decent people—"

"Stop right there!" warned Bill. "I pick my own friends and I stick by 'em. The Kid has been a good friend of mine and I've tried to be a good friend of his. He's helped me out of more than one hole. And I've helped him. I backed him in his first big fight and got him started on the up-road. I've backed him more than once and I'll back him again, if he asks me to. Why can't you be reasonable about this? Suppose he is a fighter. He's a friend of mine, just the same. And what's a little scrap now and then between friends?"

Mary stared at him in cold silence. He mistook it for wavering. He felt that it was time to fling back the tide.

"I didn't choose to go into society, did I? I was dragged into it—and you were hired to drag me. Now you take the job of trying to come between me and my friends. You try to make a Rollo out of me. Would any self-respecting man stand for that?"

Bill was working up to it as he went along.

"I think you'd better remember your position and mine. If I were you, I'd bear in mind that you're my secretary—not my boss. If I were you—"

Mary sprang to her feet. "I'm *not* your secretary!" she cried, in a trembling voice.

"Oh, but I think you've already admitted that," he said, with an angry laugh.

"Well, I'm not now! I was, but not any more. I resign! Do you hear? *I resign!*"

Saying which, she sat down again and burst into tears.

The wrath in Bill's eyes faded slowly. In its place came a look of dismay, of astonishment, of clumsy embarrassment. He began shifting his feet. He took his hands out of his pockets and put them back again. He chewed his lip.

"Aw, hell!" he muttered under his breath.

Mary did not hear him. She was too much preoccupied with her sobs. She began searching blindly for a handkerchief, and was not aware of what she did when she accepted Bill's, which he hastily offered.

"Don't cry," he advised.

He might as well have advised the sky not to rain.

"Oh, come, Miss Norcross; please don't cry."

"I—I *will* cry!"

"Well, then, don't resign," he said.

"I *will* resign!"

"Let's be reasonable. Don't let's lose our tempers."

Mary swallowed a sob and shouted into the handkerchief:

"I resign! *I resign!* I RESIGN!"

Bill gritted his teeth and planted himself threateningly in front of her.

"I won't have it! Understand me? I won't let you resign. I refuse to accept your resignation."

"You c-can't."

"Well, I do."

"I—I w-won't endure it! I've already resigned. I'm through. I'm—"

Right there she had a fresh paroxysm. Bill knew that he must be firm, at all costs. If only on account of Aunt Caroline she couldn't be allowed to resign. And then there was his own account to be considered. Any girl with such nice freckles— He was in a state of inward panic.

"See here; I'll try to do better," he promised. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"It's too—too l-late now," sobbed Mary.

"No, it isn't. We'll start all over again. Come, now."

She shook her head miserably.

"Pup-pup-please!" she wailed. "I—I want to resign."

Bill watched her as she curled up in the chair, tucked her feet under her party dress and hunted for a dry spot on the handkerchief.

"I wonder if it would be all right for me to cuddle her," he mused. "The poor kid needs it; maybe she expects it. Well, such being the case—"

A knock, a door opening, and Pete Stearns. He sensed the situation at a glance and winked at Bill.

"I just wished to report, sir, that I escorted Miss Wayne to her home and left her feeling somewhat better."

Mary hastily dabbed her eyes and looked up.

"She's all right? You're sure?"

"Miss Wayne is quite all right, ma'am." He accented the name, watching Mary as he spoke.

"Thank you very much, Peter," she said.

"Once she got out into the air, ma'am—"

Bill interrupted him with a peremptory gesture. Pete winked again and backed out.

Ten minutes later Mary Wayne was more concerned about the probability that her nose was red than she was about her status as Bill Marshall's secretary. Bill was smoking a cigarette and looking thoughtful. He did not know whether it would have been all right to cuddle her or not. The inopportuneness of Pete Stearns had left the question open.

"I think I'll go to bed," said Mary.

Bill went to the door and paused with his hand on the knob.

"That resignation doesn't go, you know," he said.

"Good night," answered Mary.

"Do you withdraw it?"

"I—I'll think about it. Will you open the door, please?"

He opened it a little way.

"I've got to know definitely," he said, with great firmness.

"Well, perhaps—if you really want—"

"Atta boy," said Bill, with a genial patting of her shoulder. "I mean, atta girl. But listen: if you ever pull a resignation on me again I'll—"

Mary looked up, a question in her eyes. Would he really accept it—really?

"Why, I'll spank you—you freckle-faced little devil."

Mary yanked the door full wide and ran down the hall. Bill watched hopefully, but she never looked back.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### REFERENCES.

TO the horror of Bill Marshall, the undisguised wonder of Pete Stearns and unexpected joy of Mary Wayne, Aunt Caroline announced herself as much pleased with the party. There were a few things she did not understand, others that she did not know—such as the manner of Signor Valentino's leave-taking—and, therefore, between unsophistication and ignorance, she thoroughly enjoyed matters in retrospect.

Upon Mary she heaped praise, upon Bill gratitude, while to Peter she confided the impression that the bishop was well disposed toward him and would doubtless supply him with any theological hints that he might find necessary in the pursuit of his life-work.

As for Bill and Mary, they were on terms again. Mary had not forgotten what he called her as she fled to her room; it was the second time he had alluded to her freckles, which hitherto she had been wont to regard as a liability. Nor had she forgotten the storm and the tears. It was all very unsecretarial, she realized, and it might easily have been embarrassing if Bill had not displayed a tact and delicacy that she never expected of him. He made neither hint nor allusion to the matter; he behaved as if he had forgotten it. He had not, of course, and Mary knew he had not; and Bill himself knew that it was still vivid in Mary's mind. It was a shunned topic, and underneath this tacit ladies' and gentlemen's agreement to shun it, it survived as an invisible bond.

In fact, a sort of three-cornered alliance had grown out of Bill's party, so that Pete came to be included in the triangle. This was also tacit as between Pete and Mary, although it was directly responsible for certain covert inquiries that Pete made from time to time concerning "Miss Wayne." His anxiety as to her health appeared to do great credit to his goodness of heart. Between Bill and Pete there was always frank discussion, in private, although on the subject of the social secretary it flowed with perhaps a trifle less freedom.

So greatly had the party furthered the innocent dreams of Aunt Caroline that she lost no time in urging further assaults and triumphs in the new world that had been opened to her nephew.

"My dear," she said to Mary, "I think it would be well to give a small dinner—very soon."

Mary agreed that it would be very well, indeed.

"I confess that I have certain ambitions," said Aunt Caroline. "I would like to have William extend his circle somewhat, and among people whom it would be a very fine thing for him to know."

Mary carelessly approved that, too.

"It would be wonderful, my dear, if we could have Mrs. Rokeby-Jones as a guest."

Mary glanced sharply at Aunt Caroline. She was suddenly trembling with a premonition.

"But do we know Mrs. Rokeby-Jones?" she asked.

Aunt Caroline smiled confidently.

"You do, my dear."

To which, of course, Mary was forced to nod an assent.

"I believe it would be all right for you to speak to her about it," added Aunt Caroline. "She thinks so highly of you that I am sure she would not consider it strange in the least. And besides, there is always the Marshall name."

The Marshall name was Aunt Caroline's shield and buckler at all times, and since Bill's party she had come to regard it as a password of potent magic.

Mary felt suddenly weak, but she fought to avoid disclosure of the fact. Mrs.

Rokeby-Jones! What could she say? Already, in the case of Bill's party, threads of acquaintanceship that were so tenuous as scarcely to be threads at all had been called upon to bear the strain of invitations, and, much to her astonishment, they had borne the strain. Thereby emboldened, Aunt Caroline was now seeking to bridge new gulfs. But why did she have to pick Mrs. Rokeby-Jones? Was it because— Mary tried to put from her mind the unworthy suspicion that Aunt Caroline was still delving as to the facts concerning what they said about the elder daughter. But whatever the motive, whether it be hidden or wholly on the surface, booted little to Mary. It was an impossible proposal.

"She will recall you, of course," Aunt Caroline was saying. "And I am sure that she knows the Marshalls. In fact, I have an impression that at one time William's mother—"

"But are you sure she hasn't gone to Newport?" asked Mary, desperately.

"I saw her name in the paper only this morning, my dear. She was entertaining last night at the theater."

Mary began wadding a handkerchief.

"And perhaps she could suggest somebody else," added Aunt Caroline. "At any rate, suppose you get in touch with her and let me know what she says."

Mary went up-stairs to nurse her misery. It was out of the question to refuse, yet she dreaded to obey. She could not call upon Mrs. Rokeby-Jones; even a blind person could tell the difference between Nell Norcross and Mary Wayne. She could not get Nell to go, for Nell was still overcome by her adventures at the party. She could not send a letter, because the writing would betray her. She could telephone, perhaps; but would Mrs. Rokeby-Jones detect a strange voice? And even if she succeeded in imposture over the wire, how was she to approach the matter of an invitation to the home of a stranger?

After much anguished thought, she decided upon the telephone.

"But even if she consents," murmured Mary, "I'll never dare meet her face to face."

A connection was made in disconcertingly

short time and Mary, after talking with a person who was evidently the butler, held the wire, the receiver trembling in her fingers. And then a clear, cool voice—

"Well? Who is it?"

"This—this is Miss Norcross talking," and then Mary held her breath.

"Miss who?"

"Norcross. Miss Norcross."

"Do I know you? Have I met you?" said the voice on the wire.

"This is Nell Norcross." Mary was raising her voice.

"Yes; I hear the name. But I don't place you."

"Miss Norcross—formerly your secretary."

There was an instant's pause. Then the cool voice again:

"Perhaps you have the wrong number. This is Mrs. Rokeby-Jones talking."

"Then I have the right number," said Mary, wrinkling her forehead in perplexity. "I used to be your secretary—Miss Norcross."

"But I have never had a secretary by that name," said Mrs. Rokeby-Jones.

Mary gasped.

"But the reference you gave me! Don't you remember?"

"I have an excellent memory," the voice said. "I have never employed any person named Miss Norcross, I never knew anybody by that name and I certainly never supplied a reference to any such person. You are laboring under some mistake."

"But—but—"

"Good-by."

And Mrs. Rokeby-Jones hung up.

Mary slowly replaced the receiver and sat staring at the telephone. A blow between the eyes could not have stunned her more effectually. Mrs. Rokeby-Jones had repudiated her reference!

Presently she rallied. She ran to her own room and began dressing for the street. She felt that she must escape from the house in order to think. At all costs she must avoid Aunt Caroline until she had been able to untangle this dismaying snarl. A few minutes later she made certain of that by slipping down the rear staircase and leaving the house by a side entrance.

Fifteen minutes later she was at Nell's boarding-house, impatiently ringing the bell.

Nell was propped up in a rocker, looking very wan as Mary entered, but brightening as she recognized her visitor. Mary drew a chair and sat opposite.

"A most embarrassing thing has happened," she said. "I have just had Mrs. Rokeby-Jones on the telephone."

Nell stifled an exclamation.

"And she doesn't remember me—or you, rather—or anybody named Norcross!"

"Oh, my dear!"

"It's the truth, Nell. Oh, I never felt so queer in my life."

Nell moistened her lips and stared with incredulous eyes.

"What—what made you call her up?" she faltered.

"Because I couldn't help it. I was forced to."

And Mary explained the further ambitions of Aunt Caroline and what they had led to.

"Oh, it was shocking, Nell! What did she mean? How dared she do it?"

"I—I— Oh, Mary!"

"But how could she?" persisted Mary. "That's what I don't understand. Even if my voice sounded strange I don't see how she could. Why did she deny that she ever wrote a reference?"

Nell Norcross pressed a hand to her lips to keep them from quivering. In her eyes there was something that suggested she had seen a ghost. Slowly she began to rock to and fro in her chair, making a gurgling in her throat. Then she whimpered.

"B—because she never wrote it!" she moaned.

"Why—Nell. Oh, Heavens!"

Mary suddenly seemed to have become as frightened as Nell. She glanced quickly over her shoulder, as though expecting to face an eavesdropper. Then she sprang up, went to the door and locked it.

"Nell Norcross, tell me what you mean!"

"She—she didn't write it. Oh, Mary! Oh—please!"

For Mary had taken her by the shoulders and was pushing her rigidly against the back of the chair.

"Who wrote it?" demanded Mary.

"I did."

It required several seconds for Mary to absorb this astounding confession. Then:

"You forged it?"

"I—I wrote it. It isn't forgery, is it? I won't go to jail, will I? Oh, Mary, don't let them—"

Mary shook her somewhat roughly.

"Tell me more about it," she commanded. "Did you lose the reference she gave you? Or did she refuse to give you one?"

Nell shook her head miserably.

"It's worse than that," she sobbed. "I—I never set eyes on the woman in my life."

Mary collapsed into her own chair. She seemed to hear the cool, clear voice of Mrs. Rokeby-Jones calmly denying. Now it was taking an accusative tone. She flushed to a deep red. The memory of that telephone conversation appalled her.

"But the other references?" she managed to whisper.

"All the same."

"All! You wrote them yourself?"

Nell answered with a feeble nod.

"Every one of them?"

"Every one."

"And do you know any of the women who—whose names are signed?"

"Two—one of them by sight."

"Nell Norcross!"

But Nell had reached a fine stage of tears and there was nothing to be had out of her for several minutes. Then Mary managed to calm her.

"Now, tell me about it," she said. "And stop crying, because it won't do a bit of good."

Nell swallowed a sob and mopped at her eyes.

"I—I was in the same fix that you were," she said shakily. "Only I guess I was that way longer. I didn't have any job, and I couldn't get one—without references. You understand?"

Mary nodded. "Indeed she did understand."

"I worked in a furrier's; one of the Fifth Avenue places. Stenographer, and I helped on the books, too. And then—well, I had to leave. It wasn't my fault; honestly, Mary. I couldn't stay there because of the

way he acted. And of course I wouldn't—I couldn't—ask him for references."

Nell was quieting down, and Mary nodded again, to encourage her.

"Well, you know how it is trying to get a job without any references. No decent place will take you. I kept it up for weeks. Why, I couldn't even get a trial. When I couldn't give references, or even refer them to the last place, they'd look at me as if I were trying to steal a job."

"I know," murmured Mary. "They'd look at me, too."

"So I got desperate. You know what that is, too. I had to have a job or starve. And I had to have references—so I wrote them!"

"Oh, Nell!"

Nell looked up defiantly.

"Well, what else could I do? And I didn't harm anybody, did I? I didn't say anything about myself that wasn't true. All I did was to use some good names. And not one of them would ever have known it if you hadn't called that woman up on the telephone. They were all customers of the place where I worked. I knew their names and addresses. I couldn't go and ask them to give me references, could I? I couldn't even do that with the one I'd spoken to. So I got some stationery and wrote myself references—that's all."

Mary pondered the confession.

"If it had only been one reference," she began, "but you had five or six."

"I only intended to write one," declared Nell. "But what was the use of being a piker, I thought. So—well, I plunged."

"Yes; you plunged," agreed Mary. "And now look at the fix I'm in."

"But you've got a wonderful place!"

Mary smiled bitterly.

"Oh, yes; it's wonderful enough. I'm not only holding it under a false name, but now it turns out that even the references were false. And"—she looked sharply at Nell as something else occurred to her—"perhaps it doesn't end even there. Tell me—is your name really Nell Norcross?"

"Why, Mary Wayne! Of course it is!"

"Well, how could I be sure. I'm false; the references are false. Why couldn't your name be false, too? That would be the



finishing touch; that would leave me—nowhere. And I'm just about there, as it is."

"But I *am* Nell Norcross, I tell you. I can prove that."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Mary, wearily. "So am I Nell Norcross, according to the references. If you've committed a crime, I suppose I have, too. They call it compounding it, don't they? Oh, we're both in it: I dare say I'm in deeper than you, because I've been taking money for it."

"You haven't cheated them, have you? You've worked for it."

"Yes, I've worked. But—why, in Heaven's name, Nell, didn't you tell me all this before I started?"

"I was too sick."

"You weren't too sick to give me the references and send me off to take the job."

"But I was too sick not to have you take it," said Nell. "One of us had to go to work. And if I'd told you, you wouldn't have done it."

"That's true enough," assented Mary. "I wouldn't have dared. It took all the nerve I had, as it was. But now what am I going to do?"

"Why, you'll go right on sticking to your job, of course."

"And keep on being a liar, and a hypocrite, and a falsifier, and maybe some kind of a forger— Why, I believe I am a forger! I signed your name to some kind of a bail bond!"

"Oh, well; you told me the case was settled, Mary. So you don't have to worry about that."

"I can worry about my conscience if I like," declared Mary, resentfully.

"Yes; but you can't eat your conscience, or buy clothes with it, or hire a room—or anything."

Mary stared down at the floor for a while.

"I suppose I've got to keep on taking care of you until you're well," she remarked.

Nell winced.

"I—I hate to be a charity patient," she faltered. "I'll make it all up to you some time. But if you'll only keep on for the present—"

Mary reached forward impulsively and took her hands.

"I didn't mean to suggest that," she

said. "You're not a charity patient; you got my job for me. Of course I'll look out for you, Nell. I'll see it through somehow, as long as it's necessary. There; don't worry, dear. I'm not angry. I'm just staggered."

Nell leaned forward and kissed her.

"You're a darling!" she said. "And just as soon as I'm strong I'll get a job for myself."

Mary looked at her thoughtfully.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I suppose you might write yourself some more references."

"Mary Wayne!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### TO SAIL THE OCEAN BLUE.

MARY WAYNE was in weak, human fear. The confession of Nell Norcross had not merely served to revive half-forgotten apprehensions, but had overwhelmed her with new ones. She wanted to quit. She did not dare. For where could she get another place, and who would take care of Nell? Circumstances were driving her toward a life of perpetual charlatanism, it seemed, but for the present she could not even struggle against them.

Mary was neither a prude nor a Puritan, so it may as well be said that what troubled her most was not the practise of deception. It was the fear of discovery. She now lived with an explosive mine under her feet. At any instant Aunt Caroline, for all her innocence and abiding faith, might inadvertently make the contact. Then—catastrophe! Even that queer valet might make a discovery: she was by no means certain that he was without suspicion. Bill Marshall himself might blunder into a revelation; but Mary feared him least of all. She did not regard him as too dull to make a discovery, but she had a feeling that if he made it he would in some manner safely remove her from the arena of disturbance before the explosion occurred.

All the way back to the Marshall house she was seized with fits of trembling. The trembling angered her, but she was unable to control it. Suppose Aunt Caroline had taken it into her head to seek a personal

talk with Mrs. Rokeby-Jones! Or, even if matters had not gone that far, what would she say when Aunt Caroline asked for the result of Mary's interview?

"The city of New York is not large enough for Mrs. Rokeby-Jones and me," declared Mary. "I feel it in my bones. One of us must go. Which?"

She had reached a decision when the butler opened the front door and informed her that Mr. William would like to see her. He was the very person that Mary wanted to see. She found him in the office.

"Say, what's this I hear about a dinner?" demanded Bill.

"Has your aunt been speaking to you?"

"Uh, huh! I don't want any dinner. Good Lord, they'll ask me to make a speech!"

Mary smiled for the first time in hours.

"Of course," said Bill, uncomfortably, "I promised to do better and all that sort of thing, and I don't want to break my word. But a dinner—oh, gee!"

"I don't favor the dinner idea myself," said Mary.

"But it looks like Aunt Caroline was all set for it. What's the answer?"

Mary laid her gloves on the desk and removed her hat.

"It seems to me," she said, "that the thing to do is to go out of town for a while."

Bill looked at her with a hopeful expression.

"You see, Mr. Marshall, the town season is really over. Most of the worth-while people have left the city. It's summer. There will be nothing of importance in society before the fall: nothing that would interest you, at any rate. So I would advise doing exactly what the other people are doing."

Bill rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Trouble is, we haven't got a country house," he said. "We don't own a villa, or a camp or any of that fashionable stuff."

"I understand," said Mary. "But how about a yacht?"

"Don't even own a skiff."

"But we could hire one, couldn't we?"

Mary had unconsciously adopted the "we."

Bill regarded her with sudden interest. He stopped rubbing his nose, which was always one of his signs of indecision.

"Say, where did you get that idea?" he demanded.

"Why, it's a perfectly obvious one to arrive at, considering the season of the year."

"Have you spoken to my aunt about it?"

"Not yet. I wanted to consult you first, of course."

Bill liked that. It was another way of saying that she was still *his* secretary.

"You've got a whole beanful of ideas, haven't you?" he exclaimed, in admiration.

"Well, I'm for this one—strong!"

Mary breathed a little more deeply. It seemed as if she had already removed herself a step further from Mrs. Rokeby-Jones and other perils of the city.

"I'm glad you like it," she said.

"Like it! Why, man alive—I mean little girl—well, anyhow, it's just the stunt we're going to pull off."

"It's not really a stunt," Mary reminded him. "It's not original at all. We do it simply because it is the right thing to do. Everybody of any account has a yacht, and now is the time for yachting."

"Now, don't you go crabbing your own stuff," said Bill. "This thing is a great invention, Secretary Norcross, and you get all the credit. I wouldn't have thought of it in a billion years. Now, what's your idea about this yacht? Do we want a little one or a whale? Where do we go? When? And who's going along?"

"Well, I don't know much about yachts," confessed Mary. "But it seems to me that a medium-sized one would do. We're not going across the ocean, you know."

"We might," declared Bill, hopefully—"we might start that trip around the world. I'm supposed to be on my way to Australia, you know, studying crustaceans."

Mary laughed.

"Do we cart a gang along?"

Mary had a vision of a tin ear. She shook her head.

"I see no occasion for a large party, Mr. Marshall. We might ask one or two besides the family; the bishop, for instance."

"Now you're joshing me. Into what

part of the world do we sail this yacht, if you don't happen to be under sealed orders!"

He was traveling somewhat rapidly, Mary thought; and she was right. Bill was already cleaving the high seas, perched on his own quarter-deck and inhaling stupendous quantities of salty air.

"I think we'd better obtain your aunt's approval before we plot out a cruise," she advised. "Also, there's the problem of getting a yacht."

"We'll get one if we steal it," Bill assured her. "I'll talk to Pete about it. He's amphibious. He's a sort of nautical valet. He knows all about yachts."

"I dare say. He seems to have a wide range of information. Suppose you consult him, while I speak to your aunt."

A frown clouded Bill's face.

"Do you suppose Aunt Caroline will want to go?" he asked.

"Want to? Why, she must."

"I don't see why. I don't believe she'd enjoy it a bit. We can have a barrel of fun if Aunt Caroline doesn't go. Let's leave her home."

Mary shook her head decisively.

"That's out of the question. Of course she'll go."

"But, listen: I don't need any chaperon."

"Well, perhaps I do," said Mary.

"Oh!" Bill was still scowling. "Why couldn't we let Pete be the chaperon?"

Mary squashed that suggestion with a glance.

"Then don't blame me if she turns out to be a bum sailor," he warned.

"I think I'll speak to her now," said Mary.

Aunt Caroline was frankly surprised. It had never occurred to her that there were times when society went to sea. Yet, to Mary's great relief, she did not prove to be an antagonist. She merely wanted to be shown that this cruise would actually be in furtherance of Bill's career.

"Of course it will," urged Mary. "It's the very thing. We'll take the regular summer society cruise."

"And what is that, my dear?"

Mary bit her lip. She did not have the least idea.

"Oh, I suppose we'll stop at Newport, Narragansett, Bar Harbor, and such places," she said, dismissing the details with a wave of her hand. "We'll make all the regular society ports—that is, of course, if you approve the idea, Miss Marshall."

Aunt Caroline smiled.

"Certainly I approve it, my dear. Although I admit it perplexes me. What sort of yachting flannels does an old lady wear?"

"Oh, they dress exactly like the young ones," said Mary, hastily.

"Which reminds me that we'll both need gowns. So, please order whatever you want."

"You're awfully generous with me," and Mary laid an impulsive hand on Aunt Caroline's. She felt very small and mean and unworthy.

"I want you to be a credit to the family, my dear. So far, you're doing beautifully! Have you spoken to William about buying the yacht?"

"Oh, we don't have to buy one! We just hire one—charter it, I think they say."

"It sounds like hiring clothes," said Aunt Caroline. "Still, I leave it all to you and William. But if it's necessary, buy one. And please get it as large as possible. We wouldn't want to be seasick, you know."

"We'll only sail where it's nice and calm," Mary assured her.

"And where there are the proper sort of people. Very well, my dear. And, oh, I've just remembered: have you done anything yet about Mrs. Rokeby-Jones?"

That lady had passed completely out of Mary's head.

"Why—er—you see, this other matter came up, Miss Marshall, so I haven't done anything about her as yet."

"Never mind the dinner, then," said Aunt Caroline.

"I'm afraid we wouldn't have time for it," agreed Mary.

"Probably not, my dear. We'll do better. We'll invite her to sail with us on our yacht."

Mary groped her way out of the room.

The business of fleeing the city went surprisingly well, notwithstanding Aunt Caroline's obsession on the subject of Mrs. Rokeby-Jones. Bill consulted Pete Stearns, who

numbered among his friends a marine architect. The marine architect believed that he knew the very boat they needed. She was not a steam-yacht; most of the steam-yachts, he pointed out, were too large for a small party and a lot of them were obsolete. What they wanted was a big cruiser with Diesel engines, that ran smoothly, noiselessly and never smokily.

So through the offices of the marine architect, who made a nice commission, of which he said nothing at all, Bill Marshall became charterer of the yacht *Sunshine*, an able yet luxurious craft, measuring some one hundred and twenty feet on the water-line, capable of all the speed that was required in the seven seas of society and sufficiently commodious in saloon and stateroom accommodations.

Mary Wayne was delighted. Any craft that would sail her away from New York City would have been a marine palace, in her eyes. She would have embarked on a railroad car-float, if necessary. There was a vast amount of shopping to be done, which also pleased Mary. Aunt Caroline insisted upon being absurdly liberal; she was in constant apprehension that the ladies of the party would not be properly arrayed for a nautical campaign. So Mary presently found herself the possessor of more summer gowns than she had ever dreamed of.

Even when it came to the business of seeing that Bill Marshall was adequately tailored for the sea Aunt Caroline proved prolific in ideas. Somehow, she acquired the notion that Bill would need a uniform; she pictured him standing on the bridge, with a spy-glass under his arm, or perhaps half-way up the shrouds, gazing out upon the far horizon; although there were no shrouds on the *Sunshine*, inasmuch as there were no masts. But Aunt Caroline did not know that. To her, Bill would not merely be the proprietor and chief passenger of this argosy, but the captain, as well.

Mary saved Bill from the uniform. She did it tactfully but firmly, after explaining to Aunt Caroline that only the hired persons on board would wear uniforms. Nevertheless, Aunt Caroline insisted on such a plethora wardrobe for her nephew that for

a time she even considered the advisability of an assistant valet. Pete fell in with that idea instantly, but again there was a veto from Mary. One valet was trouble enough, as she well knew.

When it came to the matter of Mrs. Rokeby-Jones, however, Mary was hard put for a suitable defense. Aunt Caroline mentioned the lady several times; she hoped that the negotiations were progressing favorably; in fact, she at last reached the point where she decided upon two additional evening gowns for herself, because she was certain that Mrs. Rokeby-Jones would come arrayed like the Queen of Sheba. Poor Aunt Caroline did not know that the Queen of Sheba, in these times, would look like a shoddy piker beside even the humblest manicure in New York.

Mary had consulted Bill about Mrs. Rokeby-Jones. She could not explain as fully as she would have liked just why it was impossible for her to transmit Aunt Caroline's invitation; but she did not need to. Bill was flatly against his aunt's scheme. He declared that he would back Mary to the uttermost limit of opposition.

"But opposition is exactly what we must avoid," said Mary. "We mustn't antagonize—and yet we must stop it. Oh, dear! It seems a shame for me to be plotting this way against your aunt; she's been so wonderful to me. But there's no way to make her see that a perfect stranger is hardly likely to accept an invitation to a yachting party. Of course, your aunt is relying on the Marshall name." Bill nodded.

"And names don't get you anywhere; except, perhaps, in society. I knew a youngster who called himself Young John L. He kept at it for quite a while, but the only thing he was ever any good at was lying on his back in the middle of the ring and listening to a man count ten. That's all his name ever got him."

"But to get back to Mrs. Rokeby-Jones," said Mary, with a slight frown. "We've got to appear to want her, but we mustn't have her."

"We won't; don't you worry. We'll count her out or claim a foul. We'll leave her on the stringpiece, if it comes to the worst."

"It isn't quite so simple as that, Mr. Marshall. Do you know what your aunt did to-day? She wrote her a note—personally."

"I know it," said Bill.

"She told you?"

"No; but here's the note."

He delved into a pocket and produced an envelope. Mary's eyes became round.

"Why, how in the world—"

"You see, the letters were given to Pete, to put stamps on and mail. And—well, he thought I might be interested in this one."

"But—that's a crime, isn't it?"

"Why do you have such unpleasant thoughts, Secretary Norcross? Pete says it's no crime at all; not unless it's been dropped in a letter-box. But if you feel finicky about it, why here's the letter. Mail it."

Mary shook her head.

"I'd be afraid to touch it."

"Thought so," said Bill, as he returned the letter to his pocket. "I'll hold it for a while."

"If the boat was only sailing now!" exclaimed Mary.

"That's a good suggestion. I'll hold it till we sail."

"Why, I never suggested anything of the kind, Mr. Marshall."

She made a very fair show of indignation, but Bill simply winked at her. Mary turned away for fear of betraying herself. Nevertheless, she knew that it was all very discreditable and she was not in the least proud of herself. It was a comfort, though, to have somebody else sharing the guilt.

The day came for the sailing of Aunt Caroline's armada. The *Sunshine* lay at anchor in the Hudson. From early morning a launch had been making steady trips from wharf to yacht, carrying trunks, boxes, grips, hampers, and packages. A superficial observer would have been justified in assuming that the *Sunshine* was documented for the Philippines, or some equally distant haven. All of Aunt Caroline's new gowns, all of Mary's, all of Bill's wardrobe, all of Pete's, and many other things that might prove of service in an emergency went aboard the *Sunshine*.

At the last moment there was great diffi-

culty in persuading Aunt Caroline to leave the house. There had been no word from Mrs. Rokeby-Jones, and the good lady who was determined to be her hostess insisted that she would not depart without it. Bill fumed; Mary twisted her handkerchief. Aunt Caroline was displaying stubborn symptoms.

"Madam, I telephoned myself, only half an hour ago," said Pete. "She was not at home."

"She's probably on her way to the yacht," said Bill, with a glance at Mary.

"We'll wait a while and telephone again," announced Aunt Caroline.

"But if she's on her way," said Mary, "wouldn't it be better for you to be there to receive her?"

Aunt Caroline hesitated. It was Pete who saved the day.

"If I may make bold to suggest, Miss Marshall, you could go to the yacht at once. If Mrs. Rokeby-Jones has not arrived you could then telephone from the boat."

Mary turned away and stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth. Bill went out into the hall to see if the taxis had arrived.

"Peter," said Aunt Caroline, "that's a most sensible suggestion. I never thought of the telephone on board."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THREE ERRANDS ASHORE.

**I**F Aunt Caroline had been bred to the sea, and familiar with its customs that have practically crystallized into an unwritten law, she would have written in her log:

Aboard the yacht *Sunshine*—Latitude, 40° 43' North; Longitude, 74° 0' West. Weather, clear; wind, SSW., moderate; sea, smooth. Barometer, 29.6.

But not being a seafaring lady, she phrased it in this way in the course of a remark to her nephew:

"William, isn't it lovely to be sitting here aboard our own yacht in the Hudson, and isn't the weather superb?"

The *Sunshine* still lay at her anchorage, with every prospect auspicious, except for the fact that nothing had been heard from



Mrs. Rokeby-Jones. The sun had set somewhere in New Jersey and the lights of New York were shining in its stead. There was a soft coolness in the air, so that Aunt Caroline found comfort in a light wrap.

Bill had decided that they would not sail until later in the evening. This was not because of Aune Caroline's anxiety concerning the missing guest, but for the reason that he had an errand ashore which he had been unable to discharge during the busy hours of the day. It was an errand he could trust to nobody, not even to Pete Stearns. In fact, he did not consider it wisdom to take Pete into his confidence.

Aunt Caroline had, indeed, discovered a telephone aboard the Sunshine. It was in the owner's stateroom, which had been set apart for her because it was the most commodious of all the sleeping apartments. Three times she had talked into this telephone, on each occasion giving the correct number of the Rokeby-Jones house, of which she had made a memorandum before leaving shore. But each time she was answered by the voice of a man, always the same voice. The second time he laughed and the third time he hung up with a bang! So Aunt Caroline, after vainly trying to lodge a complaint with "Information," made a personal investigation and discovered that the other end of the telephone system was in the cabin of the sailing-master.

She made an instant complaint to Bill, and Bill referred her to Pete. The latter explained it very easily.

"You see, madam, through a mistake the telephone company was notified that we were sailing several hours ago, so they sent a man out in a boat to disconnect the shore wire. I'm very sorry, madam."

Aunt Caroline accepted the explanation, as she had come to accept anything from Pete Stearns, although it did nothing to allay her anxiety as to Mrs. Rokeby-Jones.

Dinner had been over for more than an hour and darkness had settled upon the river when Bill Marshall announced that he was going ashore. He said that it was expressly for the purpose of pursuing Aunt Caroline's thwarted telephone inquiry and that he would not come back until he had definite news. His aunt thanked him for his

thoughtfulness, settled herself for a nap in a deck-chair and Bill ordered the launch.

He was about to embark upon his errand when it occurred to him that perhaps his secretary would also like to go ashore. Bill had it in the back of his head that there might be time to pay a short visit to a roof-garden or seek some sequestered place for a chat. He had been trying for some time to have a confidential chat with Mary Wayne, but she had an annoying way of discovering other and prior engagements.

"You mean the young lady, sir?" said the second officer. "She went ashore an hour ago, sir. I sent her across in the launch."

Bill became thoughtful. Why hadn't she mentioned the matter to him? And who was the boss of this yacht, anyhow? Could people order up the launch just as if they owned it?

He made a search for Pete Stearns and could not find him. Again he spoke to the second officer.

"Oh, the young man, sir? Why, he went ashore at the same time. I believe I heard him say that he had a few purchases to make."

Bill gritted his teeth. Here was a piece of presumption that no owner could tolerate. They had gone away together, of course; they had been very careful not to say a word to him. What for? What sort of an affair was in progress between his valet and his secretary? The more he thought about it the higher rose his temper.

"I'm going ashore myself," he said shortly. "Please hurry the launch."

Ten minutes later he was hunting for a taxi along the Manhattan water-front, deeply disturbed in mind and with a fixed resolution to demand explanations.

But the suspicions of Bill Marshall did injustice at least to one of the missing persons. Mary Wayne had gone ashore on a purely private mission, and she was not only surprised, but annoyed when her employer's valet also stepped into the launch.

"If you don't mind, miss," said Pete, apologetically, as the launch was headed for the wharf. "I have some purchases to make for Mr. William."

Mary answered, of course, that she did

not mind, and after that she kept her thoughts to herself. Where the wharf entrance opened on Twelfth Avenue, Pete lifted his hat respectfully, bid her good evening, and went off in an opposite direction.

But he did not go far; merely far enough to conceal himself in a shadow from which he could watch without fear of discovery. Mary was without suspicion; she walked briskly eastward, glad to be so easily rid of her fellow passenger. When he had permitted her to assume a safe lead, Pete stepped out of his shadow and followed.

It was fortunate that there were two taxis at the stand which Mary discovered after a journey of several blocks through lonely streets; that is, Pete considered it was fortunate. He took the second one, giving the driver the order and promise of reward that are usual in such affairs. This nocturnal excursion on the part of Mary Wayne had piqued his curiosity. He knew that she had not spoken to Bill Marshall about it; he doubted if she had said anything to Aunt Caroline. The clandestine character of Mary's impressed him as warranting complete investigation.

The two taxis had not been in motion for many minutes when Pete became convinced that he could name Mary's destination almost beyond a question. They were headed downtown, with occasional jogs toward the East Side. So certain was Pete of his conclusion and so anxious was he, purely for reasons of self-gratification, to prove the accuracy of his powers of deduction, that he halted his taxi, paid off the driver and set off at a leisurely walk, quite content in mind as he watched the vehicle that contained Mary Wayne disappeared from view.

Twenty minutes later Pete found himself vindicated. In front of the boarding-house where Nell Norcross roomed stood a taxi. Sitting on the top step of the porch were two figures. As he strolled slowly by on the opposite side of the street he had no difficulty in recognizing Mary Wayne's smart little yachting suit of white linen. Of course, there was no doubt as to the identity of the second person, even though the street lights were dim and there was no lamp-post within a hundred feet of the

boarding-house. Pete walked as far as the corner and posted himself.

The conversation between Mary and Nell proceeded in low tones.

"We shall be in Larchmont to-morrow," Mary was saying. "I'll try to send you a note from there. After that I'll keep you informed as well as I can concerning the rest of the trip, so you can reach me, if it's necessary. We're not traveling on any fixed time-table."

"I'll feel dreadfully lonely, Mary."

"I'd have brought you if I could, Nell; but there wasn't any legitimate excuse. And besides, I don't think you're strong enough to attempt it."

"If there was only somebody staying behind that I knew," Nell sighed. "I'll be so helpless."

"Nonsense. Besides, who would stay behind?"

Nell did not answer, but if Pete Stearns could have read a fleeting thought from his point of observation on the street corner his waistcoat buttons would doubtless have gone flying. Mary Wayne, however, read the thought.

"You don't mean that valet who brought you home from the party?" she demanded suddenly.

"Oh, I didn't mean anybody particularly," answered Nell, guiltily. "But of course even he would be better than nobody."

"Nell Norcross, don't let that young man get into your head. There's something mysterious about him. He may be only a valet, but I'm not certain. I'm suspicious of him. He has a habit of forgetting himself."

"I know," assented Nell, nodding.

"Oh, you know, do you? I might have guessed it. Take my advice and give him a wide berth."

Nell regarded her friend with a look of speculative anxiety.

"Of course, Mary, I don't want to interfere with you in any way. But—"

"Interfere with me?" exclaimed Mary sharply. "Do you think I am interested in valets?"

"But you thought he might be something else. At least, you hinted it. He's a divinity student, isn't he?"

"Divinity!" Mary summoned all her scorn in that word. "Oh, very likely. But what sort of a divinity is he studying? Perhaps you're a candidate for the place."

"Mary Wayne, you're mean! I think that's a nasty remark."

"Oh, well; I didn't mean it. But you'd better take my advice, just the same. I've seen much more of him than you have."

Nell sighed again.

"Now, my dear, I must be going back. They'll be sending out a general alarm for me, I suppose. I didn't ask anybody's permission to come, you see."

"There isn't much doubt Mr. Marshall will be alarmed," remarked Nell, who was not above seeking a legitimate revenge.

"You're in a rather silly mood this evening," said Mary. "Well, good-by. I'll send you some more money as soon as I'm paid again."

Nell looked gratefully at a small roll of bills that lay in her hand.

"You're awfully good to me," she murmured. "Good-by. And if you see—"

But Mary ran down the steps, popped into the taxi and was driven off.

Pete Stearns aroused himself, crossed the street, and walked briskly in the direction of the boarding-house. He arrived in time to intercept Nell, who had risen to go in. She sat down again in sheer surprise, and Pete seated himself without invitation on the step below.

"It's a fine night, isn't it?" he said. "Now what's your real name?"

Nell gasped and could only stare.

"Is it Wayne?" he demanded.

"Of—of course, it is!"

"I just wanted to see if I'd forgotten. Sometimes my memory walks out on me. Amnesia, you know. It's lucky I never suffer from aphasia. A bishop with aphasia wouldn't be able to hold his job. Let's talk about the bishops."

And he did, for ten solid minutes, until Nell began seriously to wonder if he was in his right mind. Suddenly he dropped the subject.

"You said your name was Wayne, didn't you?"

"Why in the world do you keep asking that?" she parried.

"It's the amnesia. Excuse it, please. Now let's talk about ourselves."

Eventually he said good night; he would be delaying the yacht, he explained. But he promised to write, which was something that had not even been hinted at during the conversation. He also shook hands with her, begged her to have faith in him, urged her to believe nothing she might hear, reaffirmed his purpose to become a bishop and perhaps even an archbishop, told her that she inspired him to great things, as witness—a kiss that landed on the end of her nose. Then he ran.

Nell Norcross was still sitting on the top step half an hour later, trying to muster sufficient confidence for the climb up-stairs.

At about the same time Bill Marshall was taking leave of a friend in the back room of a hostelry that had descended to the evil fortunes of selling near-beer.

"I'm sorry I won't be able to be there, Kid," he said, "but go to it and don't worry about any cops butting in to bust up the game."

"I'll run it strictly Q. T., Bill. Doncha worry about nothin'."

"I won't. But I owe you that much for the way they chucked you out of the house the other night"

"Sall right, 'sall right," said Kid Whaley with a generous wave of his hand. "They didn't hurt me none."

Bill handed him something, and the Kid pocketed it with a wink.

"I'd like to take you with me, Kid; but you understand."

"Aw, sure. Sure—I'm wise. I ain't strong for yachtin', anyhow. That's why I blew me roll in a buzz-wagon. Well, s'long, Bill. This here little scrap's goin' t' be a bird. I'll tell y' all about it."

When Mary Wayne arrived at the wharf there was no sign of the launch. She remembered that she had said nothing about the time of her return. Out in the river she could see the riding lights of the Sunshine and the glow from the saloon windows. But she had not the least idea of how to make a signal, nor any notion that they would understand a signal. The wharf was lonely. It seemed to her, as she seated herself on the string-piece, that she was as

remote from civilization as though she were sitting at the north pole, although she knew there were seven or eight million people within a radius of a few miles. There was nothing to do but wait, even if it was a creepy place for waiting.

She had been sitting there for what seemed like half the night when a sound of footsteps startled her. Out of the murk a figure was approaching. An instant later, to her relief, she perceived it to be the valet.

He bowed in his mock deferential way and seated himself beside her.

"No launch?" he inquired.

"I forgot to speak to them."

"So did I. Well, the yacht's there, anyhow, miss. They won't leave without us. Is Miss Wayne better?"

Mary experienced a shock. She leaned closer toward him and stared through the gloom.

"You followed me!" she exclaimed.

"I'd hardly say that, miss. You see, I was quite certain where you were going."

She had an impulse to sweep him off into the water.

"I shall speak to Mr. Marshall about this," she said hotly. "I do not propose to be spied upon by a servant."

Pete made a gesture of deprecation.

"Why be nasty, miss? Let's talk about something pleasanter. You know, if we both started telling all we knew there might be a great deal of embarrassment."

"Just what do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"I leave it to your imagination," he said cryptically.

"I can tell things myself," she said savagely.

"Exactly, miss. So why shouldn't we be friends? Why can't we establish a real democracy? I won't always be a valet, miss; some day I'll be a bishop."

"I believe you're nothing but a fraud!"

"Well, now," observed Pete in a mild tone, "I might remark, on the other hand—but I think the master is coming."

Mary jumped to her feet with a sense of confusion. There was no doubt that the

large figure emerging out of the darkness was that of Bill Marshall. How was she to explain the valet?

"Oh, hello!" said Bill as he identified her. "Waiting here all alone, eh? Well, that's a darn shame. Hasn't the launch—oh!" He discovered the presence of Pete Stearns. "Didn't know you had company," he added, his tone altering. "Beg your pardon."

"I—I haven't," said Mary, defiantly.

"I'll see if there is any sign of the launch." Bill walked to the end of the wharf, where he stood staring at the river, raging with and almost bursting with questions that he scorned to ask.

"Why didn't you explain to him?" snapped Mary, whirling upon Pete.

"I pass the question back to you, miss." And Pete lighted a cigarette, the glow of the match illuminating for an instant a pair of eyes that were regarding her with unveiled amusement.

When the launch came, after an uncomfortably long interval, Bill helped her into it, with cold courtesy. The valet scrambled aboard and took himself off to the bow. All the way to the Sunshine the three sat in silence—Bill smoldering with anger and curiosity, Mary humiliated and resentful, Pete content because they were as they were.

The social secretary hastened to her stateroom as soon as she stepped aboard; she did not pause to speak to Aunt Caroline, who was dozing in her chair. Pete disappeared with like alacrity. It remained for Bill to arouse his aunt and suggest that it was time for her to retire.

"But Mrs. Rokeby-Jones?" asked Aunt Caroline.

"Had her on the wire; she can't come," said Bill. "Says she wrote a note, but it must have gone astray. Very sorry and all that sort of thing."

Aunt Caroline sighed.

"At any rate, I have done my duty, William. When do we sail?"

"Soon."

Bill went forward to give an order to the sailing-master.

**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.**

# ENVIRONMENT

BY MELBA PARKER

I AM  
So tired of this  
Narrow existence that I lead.  
I want  
To see, to feel, to learn!  
I am  
So tired of these  
Emotions, commonplace,  
Hate, love, anger, and  
Their stone-age ilk.  
They are so old.  
I want  
To feel some new sensation  
Surging through my soul.  
I want  
To see the weirdly wonderful  
Lights of the North.  
I want  
To see a savage, hideous.  
Dancing wildly, naked  
By a jungle fire.  
I want  
To dream away an hour  
Lulled by the chimes,  
The temple chimes of Mandalay.  
I want  
To gaze into  
The slant eyes of the Orient.  
I want  
To smoke a cigarette  
In the half-world  
Of any great metropolis—  
Paris, perhaps.  
I want  
To feel the lust of battle in my blood,  
To plunge a bayonet  
Into a soft, proud Hun.  
I want  
To live.  
To live—perhaps to die,  
But yet—  
To live!



# Moosum in Perigee by



Herman Howard Matteson

**T**SOLEPAT GIFFORD, who was rich, and Mudhook Lennon, the village's wickedest man, who was very poor, had both rowed past the Lucy Dale where she lay at the kiln dock, loading lime. Mudhook followed Tsolepat into the settlement store, which was also post-office and public forum.

"You take a rotten old scow like the Lucy," said Tsolepat, bobbing his peaked head with an air of finality, "a rotten old scow, and a know-it-all book navigator like Moosum Barnes, and that craft will never see port with the weather rolling outside like it is now. I'll bet five dollars she never sees port."

"So?" said the wickedest man, turning his black eyes like search-lights upon Tsolepat's countenance. "Well, I hain't got five dollars; but I got 'a watch—a good watch. I lugged her forty years to sea and know she keeps good time. I'll bet you."

Laying hold of a sort of leather lanyard, one end of which was made fast to a suspender button, Mudhook began hoisting away, and presently from the depths of an abysmal pocket appeared an immense silver watch, with thick, bulging crystal. Mudhook shoved the watch through the window to the postmaster, Tsolepat handed in his

five dollars, and the bet was duly made and attested.

Mudhook, giving Tsolepat an aggravating, sneering grin, left the store, made his way down the beach to the driftwood cabin that he called home. Tsolepat walked to the beach, climbed into his dory, rowed down the bay a distance, tied up his boat to the float before the salmon cannery of which he was foreman, general manager, principal owner.

Seated upon the edge of the cannery dock, Tsolepat glowered through the gathering darkness to where the crew were making frantic effort to complete the Dale's loading in order that the ancient tub might advantage itself of the tide which would turn to ebb at four bells, ten o'clock.

At half past nine Tsolepat entered the cannery building, emerged with two small strips of old canvas. Winding the canvas about the oars, he settled them carefully in the oarlocks, rowed silently away toward the Lucy Dale.

Moosum Barnes, pacing the Dale's lumpy deck, paused now and then to gaze longingly ashore where a light gleamed brightly from a cabin window. From his innermost being he summoned resolution. His almost overpowering impulse was to climb down the sea-ladder, row frantically

ashore, burst into Nattie Deane's cabin, and, blubbering like a schoolboy, confess that he had been a failure. Then he would absolve her from further loyalty to the hopeless cause of a failure, clasp her once more in his arms, if she would suffer him to do so, then go away, never, never to return.

It was a touching picture. A lump came into his throat.

But at the sudden consciousness that he was indulging the luxury of feeling sorry for himself, he clenched his fist, gave himself a knock alongside the head.

Never! With this crazy tub of a Lucy Dale, her very masts wabbling in the step-pings, a numbskull crew of Aleuts, Kanakas, Finns, a terrific northwester blowing out of Charlotte Sound, there were a hundred chances to one that the voyage would end disastrously.

Well, let it. Maybe he had been a sorry crow attempting an eagle's flight, but he would go down like an eagle, fighting to the last.

His great hands clutching the rail, he stood looking toward the light blinking in the cabin. The ship's clock struck three bells. Presently they would cast off, drift out upon the ebb.

"Good-by, Nattie," he said in a whisper. "Good-by, little matey. Good-by."

When Moosum Barnes, secretly longing to free himself from the dragging narrowness and limitations of the remote Puget Sound island where he had been born and raised, declared that he was going to sea, nearly everybody in the settlement approved.

That was the way—go to sea; learn navigation in the only right way. In fifteen or twenty years, then, he might be a mate, even a skipper if he proved extra smart.

After a year before the mast on a lime-juicer, Moosum returned to the island for a visit. Nattie Deane cross-examined him. He had saved no money, and of the theory of navigation he had learned nothing at all.

"I don't know about this, Moosum," said Nattie earnestly, shaking her head dubiously. "I—I just wish I had the money. A year in the navigation school at Seattle,

you'd learn to shoot the sun, lay a course. Trouble is, Moosum, these coast skippers don't know how to teach a party, even if they're willing. It's rule of thumb. That's why it takes a man twenty years to be a master. If I—if we had the money—"

Nattie looked down at her folded hands, sighed.

"I wish I had the money. But I hain't. You see, Moosum, ma is trying a new kind of medicine now. Costs seven dollars a bottle. Ma says it stands to reason it's better than the last kind that didn't cost but five."

Moosum flushed. The idea of hard-working little Nattie loaning him money, even if she had it to loan!

"Now, Nattie," he began to expostulate, when she lifted her hand and imperatively motioned him to silence.

"Moosum, Mudhook Lennon, that used to skipper before he got into the penitentiary for smuggling, he's got navigation books. He don't know much out of 'em, but he's got 'em. Let's borrry the loan of 'em."

Nattie borrowed the books, formidable leather-bound tomes, filled with hieroglyphic mysteries, Mercator's charts, formulas for determining altitude of stars at sea, tables of time and tide, cross bearings of the sun.

When it became known that Moosum Barnes had quit the sea, had taken a job in the salmon cannery where Nattie worked, was studying navigation at night, out of books, and that Nattie, a smart girl, was helping him, the village jeered. Navigation was never learned that way.

"Listen, Moosum," Nattie encouraged, "when these human jay buzzards start to yawp, you just laugh—laugh loud."

Every evening after Nattie's mother had taken her tablespoonful of the seven-dollar medicine, had had a hot sandstone placed at her feet, an extra comfort piled upon the high bed, and the windows tightly closed against the night breeze that was so hard on a party's "bronichals," Nattie and Moosum would draw up to the kitchen table. Heads very close together, they would venture the hazardous intricacies of the big books.

Nattie, her mind quicker, bolder, led the way. And Moosum followed.

When finally he had mastered the significance of the orbits of moon and earth, the resultant tides, his florid face fairly glowed. his blue eyes gleamed. He reached forth a vast paw, folded it about Nattie's hand.

With his free hand he stabbed at the spread chart.

"That fool moon there, Nattie, skally-hootin' in space, that's me. You're the honest, sensible earth that holds me in orbit. Without you, Nattie, I'd go shooting off like one of them idiot meteors and just plumb bust, or burn up. Long as I stay in Perigee, Nattie—"

Nattie's brown eyes, shining gloriously, rested upon the big boy's freckled face. Her lips parted in a tender smile.

The big books shoved back, their heads so close together that Moosum's stubborn red hair mingled with Nattie's wavy brown, they began haltingly and abashed, then less confusedly, to chart out the course that they hoped to travel. Moosum would first learn navigation—oh, he'd master it! He'd get an officer's berth on a good ship—and then—

"I favor, strong, a cabin of three rooms," said Nattie, gazing dreamily into space as her fancy filmed the picture—"three rooms. In the setting-room I'd have four windows. Double curtains to them windows, draped back, v-shape, and a red geranium setting between—reddest geranium we could get. I always did set my heart on a double boiler and lots of sharp knives. Course, Moosum, we'd build our cabin near here, so I could run in night and morning and rid up for ma."

"You'll have it, Nattie, this cabin, and them knives and geraniums. Why, skip-pers get two hundred dollars a month, Nattie. Your ma can have a slush-bucket of medicine every week if she wants it. Yeah."

But the village could not get over the fact that Moosum Barnes was trying to take a bookish short cut to the skippership of a boat. Of course he would fail, deserved to fail. And he was beginning to put on airs—a boy born and raised on the island, folks poor as frozen-footed gulls,

putting on airs. In the street and cannery he was called after derisively by the titles "skipper," "commodore," "admiral."

Mudhook Lennon, meeting Nattie before her cottage, came to a pause. The black eyes of the village's wickedest man began to twinkle.

"Years aback, Nattie," he began abruptly, "when I'm a youngster, my horns in the velvet, so to speak, and we used to run deer with dogs in these islands, I makes a observation. You take and turn loose a pack of dogs on a scent. Away they go friendly, 'shoulder to shoulder, yelping like they'd start a seam. But you just let one ambitious pup forge ahead. Poolie! Them other jealous pups will turn on him like he was the varmint. It's a law of critters, brute and human, Nattie—hunt with the pack, or feel the fang of jealousy. This village figures you and Moosum is getting ready to bend on more canvas and pull ahead. It won't do."

The wickedest man laughed, gave Nattie's shoulder a fond pat, walked on, wagging his head sagaciously.

Nattie's work in the cannery was at the lacquering bench, dipping the tins. Moosum worked in the storeroom, piling the cases of salmon.

Tsolepat Gifford, foreman, part owner of the cannery, though he was but three or four years older than Moosum, was fast becoming rich. Besides his cannery interests, he did a brokerage business—pawn-brokerage. Whenever a fisherman or a beach-comber was in straits, which was rather often, Tsolepat would buy for cash marine engines, propellers, gear, nets, dories, anything.

For the reason that several times Tsolepat had purchased articles from persons who were not actual, lawful owners, Tsolepat, as a measure of precaution, had got into the way of clapping his trademark onto everything he bought. Possession, with Tsolepat, was nine points of the law; the presence of the Tsolepat trademark, was the tenth point, and the last.

Tsolepat's trademark was a rude caricature of a draw-purse. It was really more than trademark; it was his biography.

Having discovered that the acid used in

soldering tins would bite an enduring mark into any metal, Tsolepat proceeded to burn his draw-purse brand upon every engine, wheel, shaft that he bought. Every metal thing that he possessed bore the device. Further, upon the selvage of old sails, tarpaulins, binding of drift and purse seines he caused to be securely sewed a piece of canvas upon which the mark had been made with India ink.

Everybody began to say that Tsolepat was plenty rich enough to take him a wife. The cannery boss, his mind centered upon fish in the warehouse and money in the bank, paid little attention to the chaffing until one morning he hurried to the lacquering table to put down a work-delaying laugh that echoed through the big building.

Some cannery hand, with a crude sense of humor, had marked with a pencil upon Nattie's white work gloves and apron the Tsolepat mark of ownership, the little draw-purse.

Tsolepat went back to the office, his head bent in thought.

"Nattie is the usefulest girl on the island," Tsolepat that evening declared to his mother. "She don't appear to have no fool notions. I know she's wore the same shoes now going on to two years. I—"

Nattie, deftly dipping the tins, placing them upon the conveyor which bore them to the drying-racks, became aware that some one was leaning over her bench. She turned her head. Tsolepat's long, slim nose that terminated in a mobile, meaty tip, was almost in her face. His mouth was stretched into an ellipse that bore no hint of mirth or well-wishing.

"Nattie," said Tsolepat in a whisper, "what would be the matter of I and you marrying?"

Nattie's lower jaw jarred loose. An angry, embarrassed flush overspread her features. The gentle, brown eyes grew hard.

"Matter!" she exclaimed disdainfully. "Nothing the matter, only that the head lunatic-collector would grab me before ever I could even get on my white silk mitts." Then she laughed.

Tsolepat quietly bought up the tide-flats

before the cabin of Nattie's mother, and charged Nattie moorage for the right to anchor a rowboat. When Moosum entered the cannery to work, Tsolepat found many occasions to reprimand him, ordered him about, bawling at him senseless, unnecessary directions. Every persecution, petty tyranny, Tsolepat heaped upon Nattie and Moosum.

Worse—with nod, whisper, confidences aside, he blasted Nattie's fair name and fame. The two persons of the settlement who never knew of this were Nattie herself and Moosum Barnes.

But the island's wickedest man knew. In the darkness, when Tsolepat was locking the cannery office door, an ominous shadow moved from the corner and stood before him.

"Looke, Tsolepat!" commanded a cold, incisive voice. "You take and foul the name of her again, I'll give you ten jumps start and begin to shoot. I'll run you through the village like you was a mad dog. Take a observation! I mean it!"

Mudhook held up to view an ancient six-shooter of the siege-gun type.

Evenings, Nattie and Moosum continued to pore over the books of navigation. Long before Moosum was able to comprehend, Nattie's quick mind grasped the subtle intricacies of logarithms, of sines and cosines. Then, patiently, she would explain to Moosum.

"Nattie," said Moosum proudly one evening, when the girl had solved a particularly perplexing problem, "with such a brains like you got, quick at figuring so, I wouldn't be none surprised to see you president of a big corporation some day."

The hurt upon Nattie's face told him that he had blundered.

"Moosum," she said with gentle earnestness, flushing and averting her gaze, "I don't want to be president of no corporation—I want to be president of a home. Maybe, though, better," she added embarrassedly, "just secretary and treasurer."

Moosum's great paw dove in under the cover of the book, brought forth Nattie's hand.

Then they forgot about sines, cosines,

and angles. To the inventory of the double boiler, the geraniums in the sitting-room windows, and the sharp knives for the kitchen, Nattie added an ingrain carpet with lots of red into it because red was so cheerful.

The utter senselessness of the village's animosity toward Moosum, though she bravely smiled, hurt Nattie frightfully. Secretly she took tearful counsel with Mudhook, the wicked.

"You mind the observation I makes a while aback, Nattie, about hunting with the pack, and so forth. That's two sides to your angle. The third side that you're hunting is this: Moosum hain't going according to rule. No.

"The island hain't used to a man climbing to be skipper except through the hawse-hole, like old sailors say. Moosum is absorbing up book navigation. In two years he'll be where, island rule, he hadn't ought to be for ten, fifteen. They don't like it. Mainly, they don't understand it."

Mudhook waved his arm in a complete arc of the circumference.

"That hain't water surrounding this island, Nattie. No. It's a stone wall, a sea-league high, a wall that's idea-proof guaranteed. Yeah."

Familiar all his life with boats, gear, the rough and ready sailing of the islands, with an actual year at sea before the mast, to these added the year of study with Nattie, Moosum passed his examinations rather creditably. With a paper stating that Moosum Barnes was licensed to be first officer of sailing craft upon the high seas, he came back to the island. So glowing confident was Moosum that even the islanders began to bob their heads, call one another to witness that *they* had always known and said that Moosum had the stuff in him, and was bound to win.

"I got a berth, the first clatter." Moosum reported proudly to Nattie. "We weigh from Seattle next Thursday. Fore-and-after schooner, she is, Nattie—seven hundred ton. I—now, Nattie—"

He drew her to him, whispered in her ear.

But she shook her head, no. Not yet, not yet the geraniums, the double boiler, the ingrain carpet.

As officer of the fore-and-after, Moosum made abundantly good. He was promoted to the command of a small coastwise ship, then to a barkentine carrying lumber to the South Seas.

Now Moosum was receiving two hundred dollars a month. But still, when he returned for a week, Nattie shook her head, no. Her mother was very miserable, was going to change medicine, see another doctor.

But she had a reason, to her a sufficient reason, why she a little longer deferred materialization of the dream of a cabin with three rooms. She had caught just a breath of the word going about the village to the effect that, now Moosum was getting two hundred a month, Nattie would lose no time getting him into the bight of a matrimonial hawser.

She was no fair-weather sailor. A little longer they would wait.

Then, presently, there came tidings of the loss of the barkentine on a coral reef of the South Seas. Seven men had drowned. Moosum Barnes, the mate, the cook, and three hands had reached shore safely.

Had some universal good descended upon the village, the rejoicing could scarcely have been more exuberant. Toluks Henderson, a clam-digger, perpetrated a jest that all the village swore was laughable.

"Oh, yes," sneered Toluks, "Moosum Barnes is a navigator just like a Chinaman has got a pocket in his shirt."

Accepting the challenge of the village, Nattie, in the street, the cannery, anywhere, shrilled her defense of Moosum Barnes.

Alone, in the kitchen of the house, she would bury her face in her arms upon the deal-table and weep. Though Moosum had returned to Gray's Harbor, headquarters of the shipping company that had owned the barkentine, he had written her no word.

Deep indeed, she reasoned, had been his hurt, his humiliation, when he wouldn't even drop her a line.



For many weeks Moosum remained at Gray's Harbor. Finally, one day, he was called to the office.

"Barnes," said the manager, "you can have the Lucy Dale. You'll load lime at the bunkers in Puget Sound, deliver it here. It's your last chance with this company, or any company, on this coast."

The lime bunkers were located upon the island where Moosum Barnes was born, where Nattie lived, and Tsolepat Gifford and Toluks Henderson. For discipline, the company was going to send him home, in the Lucy Dale, to face the jeers of the islanders.

For a moment Moosum was tempted to give the manager a broadside of colorful sailor's profanity, shoulder his ditty-bag, and walk out. He clenched and unclenched his hands, swallowed hard.

"All right," he said cheerfully, "I'll take the Lucy Dale. I can sail her. Sure, I'll take her."

Moosum knew the Lucy Dale. To accommodate varying cargoes, hatches had been cut into her sides and stern, and every hatch rattled in its rotting frame. The masts wobbled in their steppings. Some of the ratlines were gone. Even the tiller line was frayed and worn.

Her present crew, almost never the same for successive voyages, was made up of Finns, Aleut Indians, Kanakas, not a real sailor among them. Vega, the Portuguese cook, abominably filthy, set forth such wretched fare as to render any crew stubborn and mutinous.

Sailing light, the Lucy Dale made out of Gray's Harbor, tossing, pitching, flirting her dirty rags like a witch in a death-dance.

But she made safely into Puget Sound as had been destined. One of the Aleuts, who knew what it meant when five crows flew west and three white gulls flew east, declared that the Lucy would go down only with cargo aboard and full complement of crew.

In the early dawn the Lucy Dale made into the harbor of the village where Moosum Barnes was born, tied up at the lime-kiln dock. Tight-lipped, Moosum directed the loading of the ship.

He hadn't written to Nattie. What had there been to write but failure? What had he now to report save failure? He flushed with shame as pitilessly he cross-examined himself. He had been hiding behind a woman's skirts. Nattie had coaxed, encouraged, prompted, guided, all but carried him.

For that accident in the South Seas he, in a measure, had been to blame. The village had been right—he was a failure. The least that he could do to repay Nattie for her abiding loyalty was to stay away and link no more his unlucky name with hers.

All day the loading of the barrels of lime went on. As rapidly as a square of the hold was filled with the barrels, heavy planks were stanchioned in between to prevent the barrels from going adrift in the roll of the sea. Also, to keep out the water, one spurt of which would render a barrel of lime more deadly than a cargo of gunpowder, strips of tarpaulin were laid over the hatches in the ship's sides, tacked down securely.

Night came on. The loading had almost been completed. Vega, the cook, came up the companionway, approached the skipper where he was pacing the uneven deck. Vega said that he would take the dingey, go ashore to the settlement store for some needed supplies.

Moosum nodded his head. Vega lowered away the dingey, climbed down the sea ladder, rowed away. The ship's clock had struck three bells. It lacked but half an hour of sailing time. Darkness, thick, impenetrable, had settled down about the ship. Ashore, a light twinkled cheerily in the window of Nattie's cabin.

A rowboat slid by in the darkness, but Moosum could not make out the identity of the occupant.

Vega returned, rowed in under the overhang of the ship's stern, thrust his purchases through an open port.

Then he climbed the sea-ladder to the deck.

"I go ashore again," said Vega to Moosum. "But I hurry."

Moosum leaned forward to gain a better look at the cook, who stood twisting and

turning, looking everywhere but at the skipper.

"What for?"

Vega's snaky, black eyes shifted.

"I—'cause why a girl ashore she tell me to come. She says she do up little bundle currant jelly and little cakes for you. She says it you more happier if you have little home snack to eat."

Moosum could only fling out his great arm as a signal to Vega to go upon his errand, quickly go.

Once more Vega rowed ashore. Presently the dingey returned, came in under the ship's overhang. A flirt of the falls told that the cook had made fast the hoists to the rings in the dingey's stem and stern. Then the cook climbed into the galley through the stern port, and two sailors hoisted the dingey to the davits.

The head line and the spring were cast off. The Lucy Dale drifted out. Her dirty sails caught the breeze, and she heeled away toward the Straits of Fuca and the open Pacific.

With early dawn the Lucy Dale emerged from the shelter of Vancouver Island. The gale with a general direction from northwest was twisting, cyclonic. The old tub began to roll.

A rotten skys'l fetched away at the clews. The ship began to yaw, jerk, threatening to fling her sticks from place. One rail would bury itself in the spume, then the other.

A Kanaka, eyes starting, an animal-like scream of terror issuing from his throat, swarmed up the companionway howling fire.

"Fire! Fire! Lime barrel go on fire!"

The crew made a rush for the starboard life-boat. Even the helmsman deserted his post.

With all his might, Moosum put the wheel over, shrieking, cursing his recreant crew that had dropped the life-boat into the water, that were rowing frantically toward the jagged shore-line that lay astern.

Moosum flung back his head, uttered a raucous, maniacal laugh. Alone, he was alone, sailing this devil's sieve that they called the Lucy Dale.

He looked after the fleeing life-boat, shouted mockingly.

The cry died in his throat. In the life-boat were seven men.

Where was the eighth? The crew of the Lucy Dale had been eight men and a skipper.

He turned his head. From up the companionway drifted the sweetish smell of slacking lime.

Then suddenly, from below, came the sound of a tremendous thumping, blows of an ax, maul. A crash of splintering wood! A splash! The side hatch gave way, went plunging into the sea.

"Wear her! Wear her!" screamed a voice from below.

Moosum spun the tiller spokes. The old ship labored, buried her starboard rail.

A hiss, a spurting, half a dozen barrels of lime went hurtling through the hatch, into the water.

"Luff!" cried the voice below. "Luff! Luff!"

Again Moosum twisted the tiller. The old Lucy slowly answered. She no longer rolled athwartways, but only plunged to the rollers fore and aft.

Footsteps clattered up the companionway.

"Quick, Moosum! We spilled out the only lime that was wet! Quick! A tarpaulin over the hatch inside. I hain't tall enough to reach."

Nattie laid her strong little hands to the wheel while Moosum went plunging below. Swiftly he spread a tarpaulin over the open hatch, tacked it in place, reenforced it with boards and plank.

When he returned to deck Nattie averted her face as if she had some guilty thing to confess.

"I—I bribed Vega to jump ship, Moosum. I give him ten dollars. I figured if you had good home cooking, you'd—you'd—"

Standing watch and watch about, Moosum and Nattie sailed the Lucy Dale down the coast and into the snug shelter of Gray's Harbor.

Upon the Ventura, the company's finest barkentine, Moosum and Nattie returned

to the island—Moosum in command, Nattie as supercargo.

Old Mudhook went storming into the post-office to collect his five-dollar bet, recover the big silver watch.

Moosum and Nattie had been pacing over a stretch of water-front property that they both thought would make a fine site for a three-room cabin. Only Moosum had insisted upon adding a room for Mudhook, who was getting very old.

"If so be Mudhook has a notion to visit us, Nattie, then we got a room."

Nattie nodded her head. She agreed.

Nattie, walking down the beach, met Tsolepat Gifford.

"Tsolepat," she said, looking him di-

rectly in the eye, "the reason the lime took fire on the Dale was because some one had run a knife-blade through the tarpaulin, all around the edge of the hatch. I hain't told Moosum yet, but I found this sticking in beside the hatch."

She held up to view a broken knife-blade, marked with the draw-purse trademark of Tsolepat Gifford.

"Had I better tell Moosum about it, Tsolepat?"

The man's face went a fish-belly white, and he clutched for the blade, but Nattie put it behind her back.

Laughing, she walked on and came to a stop in exactly the spot where presently there would be the middle window of the sitting-room of a four-room cottage.

## A SONG OF LIFE

BY DIXIE WILLSON

WHO sings—who dares sing  
Of a "last rose of summer"  
That buds—blows—and fades—  
And that dies—and is *gone!*  
Who sings—who dares sing  
Of a world—or a garden—  
That lives and that dies  
For *one* summer alone!

Who dares to say the *rose* is *dead*  
When *petals* fade and fall!  
Who dares to say November's day  
Blows Death across the wall!  
Oh, hear your heart!  
The very wind  
That brings the winter's sting  
Is just the breath that blows the trail  
That is the way of *spring*  
With roses trooping back again  
In fragrance phantom sweet  
To make a world of bursting life  
With sunshine at your feet!  
Through all of time—and all of storm—  
Have roses ever *gone!*

The summer *has* no "last rose"  
While the hope of man lives on!

# The Frigate Bird

by Lee Bolt

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ESCAPE.

THE thirst of Sahara lay concentrated in the throat of Clune when he woke. It was this thirst which had cut short the riches of his dreams and hurried him back to life and waking thought. He lay for an instant on the dirty bunk. The fire in his throat cleared the mists from his brain. He remembered. His boy, John Axson, was to die that night in the Hole-in-the-Wall.

He sprang to his feet. How long had he slept? It might have been an hour; it might have been twenty-four. By the consummate torture of the thirst he guessed it to be more. Yet to make sure he peered earnestly at the grating toward the top of the cell. Past that grating ran a narrow tunnel carrying down air from the street close above, and since this room was near the end of the tunnel in the daytime a faint light filtered to the grating. He shaded the sputtering oil lamp with his hands in order to make sure. No, the grating was pitch black without. It was full night.

But there were degrees to the night. It might be nearly morning; hopeless. It might be late evening. But even if it were the latter, where was his hope?

He sat down on the edge of his bunk and took his shaggy head between his hands to think. It was many a year since he had wasted a thought on another human being.

The wonder of the new sensation dazed him.

Also, the thirst was in his throat like hell-fire. He looked up with an oath, and the first thing his eyes dwelt upon was a pitcher of beer on the little stool beside the bunk. A little gurgling cry came from the bottom of Clune's throat—yes, from the very deeps of his soul. He reached out his talonlike fingers. He seized the pitcher of beer with both hands—he lifted it to his mouth.

But at the first mouthful he jerked the pitcher down again, started to his feet, and stood cursing, spitting, swaying with weakness.

"Laudanum!" groaned Clune.

Well, he was used to that. Perhaps Lu Chi had fixed this for him. It was good of Lu. The Chink had a heart, if a man could only find it. He raised the pitcher again toward his lips. And once more he lowered it with a jerk.

What if it was placed here by the command of that devil of a girl? What if it was to lure him back into a second long sleep, and by the time he awoke the body of his son would float in the steel-gray waters of East River.

The pitcher dropped from the hands of Clune and crashed on the floor. The golden fluid lurched across the boards. At that, a demoniac wail of woe rose from the lips of Clune. He flung himself prostrate and strove to lap up some of the precious stuff.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 29.

Only the splinters of the boards touched his tongue.

He sprang like a panther at the door and struggled with the knob. It was securely locked, and Clune, recoiling from it, raised his bony fists above his head and shrieked: "I'll get you yet—all of you—all of you—damn you—all of you—damn—"

The struggle with the door, the excitement, drained his strength. He fell back upon his bunk and began to sob heavily. In his lungs there was a disease which would soon put a period to his life. Now every one of those violent sobs tore at his vitals—stabbed him with poniard points of fire. As he sobbed he writhed his whole long, lean body. Finally he lay on his back with eyes starting, strangled, gasping for breath.

This quiescence lasted for several minutes. Finally he could breathe. Instantly the thirst seized his throat again, burned him. And he was burned in another way. He was seeing again that picture of the body floating in the East River. He had actually discovered such a body, once. It had been a moonlight night. His oar had struck something soft and heavy floating. He had thrust at the thing with the oar—it had turned—a white thing that had been a face stared up at the moon—horror!

What could he do even if he were away from the Hole-in-the-Wall? The police would laugh at him and throw him in a cell to sleep off his jag. It might mean thirty days—thirty days without dope—thirty hells! Not the police, then, but Windsor! That had been the name of the man who had taken his boy—James Gordon Windsor. He had promised to educate Johnny and give him a new start in life. And now all this education—all this chance was reduced to—

Here Clune sprang once more from his bunk. He leaped with a frenzy of strength at the grating high up on the wall. There he wrenched and strained in vain until, falling suddenly limp, his whole relaxed body jerked down against the bars. There was a straining, a wrench, and a continual creaking above him.

The astonishment of it made Clune relax his hold. He slipped down, struck the floor with a jolt, staggered, and fell. In

falling, his forehead struck on a corner of the bunk.

When he awoke, it was with a feeling that hours had passed, and a black despair swept over him. But he looked at the oil lamp. As far as he could remember, the oil had not sunk much within the glass.

With new hope to strengthen him, he whipped out a dirty handkerchief and bound it hastily around his bleeding forehead. Then he leaped again, caught a firm hold, and let his entire weight come down with a jerk on the grating. It sagged, it gave way. He tore it completely from its socket.

That, however, was only the beginning of his labors. His strength was the strength only of sudden, brief frenzies. Each effort was succeeded by qualms of cold terror, weakness of heart and body and mind, and while it was one thing to drag down the grating from the wall, it was quite another to lift his palsied body into the opening.

Thrice he essayed it, and three times he dropped back, half-fainting. His heart, long undermined by the use of deadly drugs, now beat and flurried like a trip-hammer. Sometimes he did not know why he was struggling to get into the narrow tunnel. Still he persisted in a daze. And finally he managed to get a toe-hold on the side of the wall and then wriggled with difficulty into the little tunnel.

It was barely wide enough to admit his body. It was pitch black. It was hot. It carried not a breath of fresh air, but the fumes of tobacco, of opium which drifted through the gratings of a dozen filthy chambers. He had only to go a few feet. He knew this. Otherwise he would have turned back, for he choked in that fetid atmosphere. A number of times in his snake-like, wriggling progress he had to stop and lie flat on his breast, drawing great, rattling breaths. And now he would have turned back, but he could not. It was hard enough to continue a forward progress; it was physically impossible to move backward.

This knowledge filled him with the strength of terror. He began clawing his way forward like some burrowing animal, fleeing for life. And so he came at length



to the shaft of the unused elevator which sank from beneath the sidewalk to the Hole-in-the-Wall.

Here the air was comparatively fresh, and he drank it deep as nectar of the gods. Sitting on the half of a rickety box in the darkness he waited for strength to return in some measure to his shaking limbs. And he considered his next move.

It was possible for him to turn back and go through the main part of the Hole-in-the-Wall tunnels and out by one of the more commonly used exits. But in case he did this the chances were one in three that he would be seen and taken back to captivity. Undoubtedly the guards had been warned to hold him back and were even now looking for him.

So he discarded this alternative. It remained to make his way up the elevator shaft. The distance was short—not more than ten feet. To a younger or more active man the feat would have been nothing. To the ringing head and the weak heart of Clune it was next to the impossible.

Yet he essayed this impossible task. A frayed wire cable remained along the wall and there were frequent notches along the sides. This he made out by scratching several matches and holding them above his head. So he began the ascent.

The way was doubly difficult in the darkness. His trembling feet were continually slipping in their precarious holds. Once both feet missed their places and he swung down, gripping only by the cable. The protesting ends of the frayed wires cut into his hands terribly, but still he clung. And the pain of his hands was an added spur in enabling him to accomplish the rest of his journey. At length his head touched the iron doors above. He tested the door carefully and then pressed up with his hands. It did not stir!

A sense of horror and choking grief swept over him. He had come to the very gateway to escape and then failed! He tried again with the energy of that despair. At once the door lifted. It had been rusted hinges and not a lock that held it.

A moment later he was clear and running down the street. Straight ahead was the

illuminated dial of a clock. It was half past eight. Something like a prayer of gratitude escaped from the withered lips of Clune.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

ELIZABETH DORN.

**H**ARDLY half an hour elapsed after the departure of Axson before the bell of his apartment rang and a moment later Bacon announced his Elizabeth Dorn to the astonished ears of Windsor.

He found her in the reception-room. A tailored suit, a tailored hat, tan gloves—nothing about her to distinguish her from thousands. Nothing except an extraordinary whiteness of face which was the more pronounced because of one bright, burning bit of color in each cheek. She was standing beside the table, her hands clasped loosely before her, one narrow, pointed toe tapping the floor uneasily. At sight of Windsor the color from those two bright points spread hurriedly across her face.

Then she seemed to take her courage in both her clenched hands. She stepped half a pace toward her host.

"Mr. Windsor, I've come at an odd time and on an odd errand."

"Will you take this chair?" he asked.

"I haven't time to sit down."

"Oh!"

"It's a matter of—more than life and death."

He knew at once that it was at least an errand which did not affect him directly. He had been very close to her that morning. He was a thousand miles away from her now.

"You will use me in any way you can," he said formally.

She did not pause to thank him.

"I want you to help me find a man."

He might have known! Yet foreknowledge did not prevent his flushing and paling in turn.

"Who?"

"I don't know. I don't know his name. But I mean the man I talked to you about this morning. You said you thought you knew him."

"I thought so."

"I can give you more clues about him now. I have seen his face!"

She caught her breath and visibly was trembling, though whether from fear or sheer excitement he could not tell.

"I told you that I had a most extraordinary interview with him the other night. He said good-by to me."

"But he came again?"

"How did you know that? He came again. Yes. He came to-night."

She stopped, hunting for words.

"I heard his signal and came down at once. He was in the usual place, in the arbor. But this time he stood at the mouth of it. The window just above it was open and a shaft of yellow light fell down close to the opening of the arbor. As I came out through the door I called: 'Is it you?'"

"And his big, deep bass voice answered: 'It is I.'"

"Then I saw the shadow of him in the arbor, but as I came toward him he stepped forward with his hat off and stood directly in the path of the shaft of light!"

She paused abruptly once more and caught a sharp breath.

"I have never seen such a face! It was the face of a sphinx. A swarthy skin, deeply buried eyes with points of light in them, a high, cruel nose, a crueler mouth, a powerful, jutting jaw. It was like the face of some Egyptian king—some conqueror who didn't care for human life or death. It was a mixture of the sardonic and the malicious, of mockery and wisdom."

"The shock of it—it was like a physical thing—upset me. I couldn't help it. I cried out and started back toward the door. It was as if I had stepped out and met a ghost. Only no dream of a ghost could be as terrible as that face was."

"But even as I started back I saw the face changed. It contorted with a terrible pain as if I had struck him with a whip—across that face! Oh, I shall never see such a thing again! There was an unspeakable grief—and something like a wild reproach. Then he was gone into the night."

"I stood still a while, too stunned to even cry out. Finally my voice came back to me. I called after him, but there was no answer. Then I ran after him through the

garden, but I was too late. He walked very quickly and must have passed beyond reach of my voice."

"I went back to my room—tortured. I tried to think. The only suggestion I reached was to go to you. You had said that you might know him. And that's why I'm here. Mr. Windsor, can you give me the slightest trace of him?"

"If you had come half an hour earlier, you would have found him here," he said.

She made a little grimace of pain and disappointment.

"But if he has been here—if you know—"

"I haven't the slightest idea in the world where he may be!"

She grew suddenly and seriously calm.

"You say that with a strange accent, Mr. Windsor."

"I didn't mean to."

"But you did. You said that as if—as if—"

Her pallor completed what she did not say. For the first time Windsor knew all that Axson meant to her. He had refused to admit it to himself in spite of her coming at this hour and all she had told him. Now the mixture of terror and grief and excitement was far more eloquent than words. He had no sooner seen what it meant than he made up his mind. It was hard to do. But the blood of twenty generations of spotless gentlemen flowed in James Gordon Windsor 4th.

"I haven't the slightest idea where he is" he repeated. "But I think that he *may* come back."

How the color came and went in her face, and the light dimmed and flickered in her eyes. She was radiant again. It wrung the heart of Windsor.

"I will tell you everything I know," he said quietly.

"I won't thank you. It's too important for thanks!"

"I think I understand," he said. "The name of this man is John Axson. He was, in a way, a bequest from my father. He came to me shortly after my father's death. It seems that dad was in some sort obligated to Axson or to Axson's father. At any rate, Axson wanted to learn something

of—what you might call the social world. And I was to teach him whatever I could.

"I never learned what or who he is. He remains merely a name to me. I don't know anything of his past life.

"I do know that there is some mystery behind him.

"Also, I know that he came to me equipped with the most unusual assortment of knowledge that was ever collected in the brain of any one man. Scientifically he is a prodigy. In mathematics and in chemistry and allied studies he is marvelously learned. In the 'humanities' he is as ignorant as a child. When he came to me he had never really read a poem in his life!

"I suppose you know what that means?"

"But that's impossible!"

"It sounds impossible, I know, but it's true. Beauty meant nothing to him."

"And yet," she cried, "I have heard him speak as if he were—"

"A poet," nodded Windsor. "I tried to educate him in the liberal sense. I tried to make him understand verse and things like that. It wouldn't work. Keats and the rest were closed books. But all at once—only a day or so ago—he woke up. At least, the change in him was as great as the change from sleep.

"I left him one day a mere powerful machine. I found him the next day a human being. I suppose you know what made the change?"

"I never knew him before," she said.

"He left me to-night after saying something which led me to infer that he might not come back."

A sharp little cry from the girl.

"But I am going to find him for you," he concluded.

"If you do—" she commenced.

"You don't have to explain," said James Gordon Windsor. "But just what message shall I give him from you?"

"From me? Nothing! But yes—you may tell him that I—that there is something which I would like to explain—I mean—"

"I understand you perfectly," said Windsor.

She looked to him with moist, tender eyes.

At length she said gently: "I am very proud to number you among my friends. My close friends, Mr. Windsor."

"Thank you."

"But if you should not be able to find him?" she cried in sudden renewal of her terror.

It was the greatest of all wonders to him to see this girl who all her life had walked inside the sternest conventions, now toss them to the winds and confess—almost in so many words—that the only thing she cared for was a man. Confess it to another man—a discarded wooer! He lied smoothly: "There is no doubt that I shall be able to find him."

"Ah!" she sighed, and then: "You will come often to see me?"

"I shall report regularly while the search continues."

"And afterward?"

"After I bring him to you," said Windsor sadly, "I hope that I shall never see you again."

She studied him with whimsical eyes that lighted finally to a suggestion of a smile.

"May I tell you a very deep secret?" she murmured at length.

"I should be very glad," said Windsor stiffly.

"Then listen. In five weeks you will have forgotten that you ever met me."

"Do you think I am so fickle?" he said bitterly.

"I think," she said slowly, "that you are a Windsor."

He bowed with his hand upon his heart.

"And a gentleman."

He bowed again.

"And my very dear friend."

"Are you mocking me?"

"Until I am forgotten," she said.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### REVELATION.

EVENTS moved swiftly for James Gordon Windsor 4th this night. The girl was hardly gone, the thrill of her smile was still tingling in him, when he was called to the telephone.

A voice so hurried and broken that he

could hardly make out the jumbled syllables called over the wire: "Is this the house of Windsor? J. G. Windsor?"

"It is."

"Is Axson stayin' there?"

"He lives here."

A sigh came audibly across the wire. Then there was a fit of coughing.

"Is he there now?"

For an instant Windsor hesitated. Then he spoke in the hope that here might come some clue as to the errand which had called out Axson that night so solemnly.

"This is Axson speaking."

"You? You Axson?"

"I am," said Windsor defiantly.

"Then for God's sake don't go out to-night! The Hole-in-the-Wall—but will you stick close under cover till I c'n get out to you? I got a word for you that 'll turn your blood cold! Will you wait for me before you step out?"

"I will," said Windsor, feeling a chill work a zig-zag course up his spine. "But hurry."

"That's my middle name," answered the voice, and hung up his receiver.

The fear that whatever news came to him might come too late was in Windsor; but at least here was the manifest possibility of a clue. He decided to work an elaborate bluff.

First he retreated into the living-room and there arranged the lights so that at one end of the room there was a semidarkness. The glow of the fire from the hearth was the only real illumination. In that faint light he could depend on passing off as Axson. By lowering his natural speaking voice several tones he could even imitate the voice of the giant. At least, the deception might hold for several minutes, and in that time he hoped to learn all that he needed as to the whereabouts of Axson.

Then he called to Bacon, saying: "I am expecting a man here who will ask for Mr. Axson. I want you to show him in here to me and name me Axson to him. Do you understand?"

"Axson?" repeated the stupefied Bacon.

"Axson! There's the matter of a jest in this."

"Very good, sir."

Soon in due time Bacon stood at the door of the living-room saying: "Mr. Clune is here to see you, Mr. Axson." And then a form as tall as his own stepped into the room. By the faint light Windsor made out a stained handkerchief tied around the forehead of the stranger. It was an old man, a marvelously gaunt body, a bony, shaking hand, a horrible air of poverty and uncleanness exuded like an odor from him.

As Bacon withdrew, shutting the door behind him, Clune slipped back against the wall and darted furtive glances here and there about the apartment. Finally, as if some worry were set at rest, he fixed his gaze in the direction of Windsor. The light fell far more on his face than it did on the face of his host.

"Yo're Axson?" he said, his forehead puckering with the effort to pierce the gloom.

"I am," said Windsor, and stood up.

His height seemed to identify him to Clune.

"Name's Clune," he said, and advanced with extended hand.

"I'm glad to meet you," said Windsor coldly. "What business brings you to me?"

"Kind of offish, ain't you?" snarled Clune, and dropping his arm slowly to his side, he glared through the gloom.

"You mean there isn't much light?" said Windsor easily. "The fact is, I've a very bad headache and have to keep all strain away from my eyes."

"Any way," said Clune, discarding his hostility with a single shake of his bony shoulders, "you're here, and that's the main squeeze. You're here! Thank God for that!"

He spoke with an amazing heartiness.

"Sit down," said Windsor, but his grimy guest had forestalled the invitation by sitting—or rather collapsing—into a large, easy chair. There he remained for a moment. The glow from the hearth struck fully upon him and revealed a state of dirt and rags which appalled Windsor. The chest of the old man was heaving slowly like that of one who has run a great distance at a high speed.

At length he was able to speak.

"All in," he said. "Damn near done." He leaned forward and squinted again at Windsor.

"Ain't got a shot of sky handy, eh?"

Windsor sent for a flask of liquor and had it placed on a small table at the side of his visitor. Bacon reviewed the guest with a singular interest and then retreated slowly, reluctantly, like one who hopes to hear the beginning of a conversation.

"This," said Clune, "ain't half bad."

He downed the first glass, and filled a second as full as his shaking hand permitted.

"'S a matter of fact, it's all to the good. Here's in your eye."

The second and third drinks followed in order. And after these mighty potations Clune leaned back at ease.

"And now," said Windsor impatiently, "what brings you here in such urgent haste?"

"No hurry," said Clune, stretching his hands toward the fire. "No hurry—now that I'm here. What hurried me was to keep you from leavin' the place." He shuddered. "Yep, that was the main squeeze!"

He went on:

"It was all a plant, see? The girl was makin'. *She* wasn't in no trouble. Trouble? It ain't sticky enough to stay by Martha Perce. Yep, that's her name. Not the monniker she handed you, bo. Not at all. Martha Perce is *her* record, and she's got a record as long as your arm. Only point is that that record ain't writ up. The dicks got nothing on her. Oh, she's slick."

Windsor waited. He dared not speak too quickly for fear of betraying his ignorance. But he was filled with a trembling eagerness to know where this strange Martha might have taken Axson.

"Let Martha go. She framed up a pretty keen layout, all right, but she crossed wires with old Jimmy Clune. That's where she made her big mistake. Yep, the laugh's on her. And now we come down to something that's worth knowin'."

Here he straightened in his chair, and turned until he faced Windsor more directly.

"I kep' my hands off while you was running straight. I kept my word to old Wind-

sor. I didn't interfere none. But when it comes to you tanglin' with the Triple X it's time that Jimmy Clune take a part in the millin'. Damned if it isn't! Now I'm goin' to put you straight on some things. Before old Windsor went out, did he hand you the straight on where you come from?"

"He did not," said Windsor cautiously.

"Damn his eyes! That's where he busted the bargain. He promised to tell the whole yarn to you before he went out. Now here's where you get the truth: Johnnie, Windsor bought you, same's I would buy an old coat!"

He stopped, choked with a violent fit of coughing.

"Bought me?" echoed Axson.

"Sure he did, and I'll tell you why. It took me a hell of a while to dope it all straight, but now I've got it. He bought you because he wanted to have some way of supportin' his damned good-for-nothing dude of a son, James Gordon Windsor 4th. That's what he wanted you for. His kale was runnin' low. He used you like an investment. He give you an education, sure. What for? To make coin for young Windsor!"

"Oh, I been watchin'. You've already give him how much? Thousands, it must be. He got nothin' from his pa. All he's lived on for the past few weeks has come from you. But sure he told you how you had to take care of his brat. And you're livin' up to the bargain. But I tell you, Johnnie, the bargain ain't worth a damn any more. He busted the bargain his own self by not tellin' you about me."

"And you?" cried Windsor. "How do you know these things? Who are you?"

"Ain't you got half an eye?" grinned the grotesque, and he leered toward Windsor. "Look at me again. Don't you recognize your dad?"

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A PARTNERSHIP.

ODDLY enough out of all the tangle of thought which the words of the strange fellow had raised in the brain of Windsor, one picture outtopped and out-



shone the rest: it was a vision of Elizabeth Dorn in the full radiance of youth and beauty and charm facing this horror of horrors and knowing him to be the father of—John Axson.

"Dear God!" said Windsor, in hardly more than a whisper. "You! You!"

"Me! Me!" snarled the old man. "Is that all the love you got for your old man?"

"You've lied like a dog!" cried Windsor. "No Windsor ever took charity from any man!"

"Bah!" growled Clune. "D'you mean to say you're goin' to lie to *me* about the money you've given Windsor? What's your point?"

"Nothing," muttered Windsor. "And you—you are my—the father of John Axson?"

"Kind of like a knife between your ribs, is it?" sneered Clune. "That's the kind of gratitude you give me, eh? And yet this very night I've saved you from hell, hell, hell!"

His voice rose with each of the last words, until it was a scream of hate and defiance.

"What do you mean?"

"The Hole-in-the-Wall, you fool; the Hole-in-the-Wall."

"What's the Hole-in-the-Wall?"

"Another name for hell. The place she was going to take you. And d'you know who'd have handled you there? Louis Masters, my boy; yes, Louis Masters! Oh, you'd like to be helpless with Masters, wouldn't you?" I tell you, he's got a heart that's a cross between an Indian and a devil. That's what I've saved you from. And look at the way—"

The large hand of Windsor fell on the shoulder of the old man and dragged him to his feet. The frame was not heavier than so many unfleshed bones. He shook the wreck that had been a man. He shook it with all the strength of grief and shame and horror, for suddenly he had seen many things. Some of them were vague—almost shapeless—but all had a meaning for Windsor.

He knew in that flash of illumination that Axson had actually been bound over by James Gordon Windsor 3rd to support his son. He knew now the meaning of the

five thousand he had received so providentially not many days before. He knew the meaning of Axson's strange desire to see his host make a rich marriage alliance. It was perfectly, damningly clear.

"Stand up!" he commanded.

He had already dragged the man to his feet.

"What's up?" asked Clune, shrinking away. "What's eatin' you, lad?"

"Take me instantly to the Hole-in-the-Wall."

"Take you there? Johnnie, you got a wish to die? Die a slow death—inch by inch—without a hope of help? I can tell you where they'll put you—"

He came close; he whispered with a horrible harshness in his rattling voice: "In the last cell."

He stood away, grinning his triumph.

"What's the last cell?"

"The place where they put the men that have knifed the Triple X, the place"—a shudder shook him violently—"the place where they'll put me if they ever know where I've come this night, and what I've talked about. Understand? I'd rather be burned alive than put in the last cell!"

But now, as he spoke, the positions of the two men had altered. The back of Clune was now to the light of the hearth, where a smoldering log, falling apart, sent up a sharp tongue of flame. The brighter glow fell full on the face of James Windsor, and for the first time Clune saw the blond, handsome youth.

It was as if he had been struck in the face with a heavy fist. He dropped into the chair behind him and remained staring mutely.

"You!" he said at last. "But where's Johnnie? Where's my lad?"

The anguish of the question gave him strength. He was on his feet again. The skeleton hands locked on the arm of Windsor, and his flesh crept under that touch.

"Who are you? And where's Johnnie?"

"I," said the other bitterly. "am James Gordon Windsor."

"And Johnnie—my boy?"

"He left this place not long ago," said Windsor.

"But not for the night," gasped Clune.

"For God's sake, don't say he ain't comin' back agin?"

"Beyond a shadow of a doubt," said Windsor heavily, "he's at this moment in the Hole-in-the-Wall."

"No, no!" shrieked the death's-head.

And then, as if calm came in the midst of a convulsion, he straightened, his face cleared. A certain dignity came upon him.

"It was doped this way," he said. And then he added in an undertone: "But they'll have to take me, too."

He turned and started to leave the room at a slow pace.

But Windsor ran after and turned him back.

"Are you going to give up?" he cried.

"The police, man! Get them. We'll go together and get them. We'll go to headquarters and get a whole squad and go down to this Hole-in-the-Wall, or Triple X, or whatever you call it—"

"Police?" mocked Clune. "I tell you, the man who heard your story across the desk at the station would be in the pay-roll of the Triple X."

"It isn't possible that they have bought up the entire police department!"

"I tell you, five minutes after you spied your spiel at the desk, the Triple X will know all the dope and have you planted. They'll be trailin' you before you turn away from the desk-sergeant. Don' I know? I tell you, bo, I've done that trailing myself."

"Then you're one of them?"

"And I'm going back to 'em."

"Then surely your influence, Clune—"

"You fool! One of the main squeezes is down on Johnnie—Masters. Masters runs everything—him and two more, and the girl is up with the best of 'em. With them two ag'in' me, d'you think I can stop 'em?"

"Then why do you go back?"

"I'll have a talk with Johnnie in the 'st cell."

"You say that as if—"

"Aw, they'll croak me, straight enough. Don't I know that? They'll be after me by mornin'. Why not go straight to 'em as soon as be bumped off a day later? S'long!"

"Wait!" said Windsor. "I have given

a sacred promise to bring Axson back alive from to-night's work. Clune, will you make a fight for your—son?"

"A fight—ag'in' the Triple X?" said Clune contemptuously.

"There are such things as surprises—a sudden rush—will you take the chance, Clune?"

"With you behind me?"

He measured the vast bulk of Windsor with a gleaming eye.

"With me behind you."

"Why not this way?" muttered Clune to himself.

## CHAPTER XL.

### WATER.

IT was the first time that Mac, into whose guardianship Clune and Axson had been given, had held an important commission from the Triple X. This itself would not have fallen his way had he not been opportunely near when Martha Perce was attacked by Clune. But having begun so well the rest of the work was left in his hands.

Like all men new to a large task, he was nervous concerning his trust and spent his time wandering back and forth from the cell of Axson to the room of Clune. All seemed well. In every case the cell of Axson was silent as a tomb. In fact, this silence continued so long, in spite of his challenges, that finally Mac pushed back the shutter in the door and flashed his pocket-lamp within the place. He made out the glitter of the eyes of Axson. That was enough for him. With a shudder he closed the shutter once more and continued on his rounds toward the room of Clune.

The first time he paused outside this room all was hushed within, but listening carefully at the keyhole he made out the faint, regular, rattling breath of the dope-fiend asleep. On his next round the sleep was ended, for a furious cursing poured from the room. It was the wild rage of Clune as he bound a handkerchief around his forehead and stared up at the half torn-down grating. On the third round of Mac the cursing had given way to deep sobs.

To Mac it seemed the surrender of a weak spirit to the inevitable. In reality it was the despair of Clune who, after having torn down the grating was unable to work his body up to the tunnel.

On the fourth of his rounds the indefatigable Mac heard nothing and took it for granted that old Clune had fallen asleep again. So he passed on smiling to himself. It was on his fifth round, the one on which he took the look at Axson and was startled by the gleaming eyes of the prisoner, that Mac stopped once more at the door of Clune, and though he made out no sound at first, he bent his ear at the keyhole to hear the harsh breathing of the sleeper. There was not a sound, however. It was a slight thing to alarm any guard, but Mac had been shaken to the heart by the sight of Axson only a few moments before, and he was ready to become suspicious at the slightest clue. So finally he opened the door and peered within.

He made out something lying on the bed and was about to withdraw, contented, when the shape of that something on the bed made him look again. It did not look as a sleeping man should have looked. So Mac raised his electric-lantern and sent a shaft of telltale white light on the bunk. What lay there was only the fallen grating. He looked up with a cry of horror; the mouth of the tunnel was open.

For the moment he was too stunned by the misfortune to think or to act. Then, with a childish hope rising in his brain, he began to search the room thoroughly. At that moment, if he had acted promptly, he would have been able to catch old Clune struggling heavily up the elevator-shaft toward the street. But first, Mac had to convince himself more thoroughly that the prisoner was not there. He looked behind the door; he looked under the bed. And all the while terror had him by the throat. What would they do to him when they learned that Clune was gone? And what would Clune do when he was gone?

It was too much for Mac. He turned instinctively to ask council of a wiser intellect than his. He raced to find "Whitey" Morgan.

Mac found him easily enough in his room,

in the upper tier of apartments in the Hole-in-the-Wall. Whitey Morgan was an albino. His smile was as pale as his eyes, and his heart was as colorless as either eyes or smile. If it had not been for his cowardice, indeed, Whitey would have been one of the most formidable even among the followers of the Triple X. As it was, he was much esteemed by the bolder spirits who could execute but never plan.

He listened now to the tale of the white-faced Mac with the most utter placidity. It always warmed the craven soul of Whitey to see another man terror-stricken. It justified his own existence, in a peculiarly pleasant way. He was grateful to Mac for that very whiteness of the face. Finally he said: "Now just what are you afraid of? That old Clune will double-cross the Three X as soon as he's in the open?"

"No," stammered Mac. "It ain't as bad as that. He won't double-cross the Three X. He ain't damned fool enough for that. But he'll work some way of getting this Axson out."

"Stand guard over Axson, then."

"Clune was always a foxy old bird. He might come at me with a gang."

"Let the guards know that Clune ain't to come back—that's what they're there for. Or, if they let him in, they mustn't let anyone with him. You sure ain't afraid of Old Clune alone?"

"Damn his soul, no! I'd break him with one hand!"

"But you're afraid he'll work a trick? How bad does the chief want Axson?"

"How bad? He wants to finish him, that's all!"

"Ah-h-h!" sighed Whitey Morgan. "Then that makes it easy!"

"How d'you mean?"

"Finish Axson before Clune gets a chance for any funny play."

"Finish him? Say, Whitey, have you seen this Axson?"

"Nope."

"I'd as soon go in to finish off a tiger! He's got eyes that—see in the dark, by God! You ought to see the way they shine! And he's big as a bull!"

"You don't have to finish him off man to man."

"Talk straight!"

"Ain't I doin' it? Am I shootin' you any con?" snarled Whitey angrily. "Mac"—here he leaned over with an evil grin and whispered at the ear of his companion—"there's a water-pipe that runs down into the last cell, ain't there?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Suppose you went up to the room right over the last cell, and drilled a hole in that pipe?"

"What of it?"

"You block-head! Wouldn't the water run down into the last cell?"

"God!" gasped Mac, suddenly seeing light.

"If he ain't a fish," grinned Whitey, "that's going to finish him. The last cell is water-tight."

"Drown him?" muttered Mac at length.

"I ain't got the heart to do it!"

"That 'll be nothin' to what Masters 'll do to you if Axson gets away. And you know what Masters does when he's worked up? When he's honest to God sore?"

Mac choked, loosened his collar, swore softly and fluently.

"Was a feller ever in a hole like this?" he growled. "I wish old Clune was in hell—and when he comes back, by God, I'll send him there!"

"That ain't a half bad idea," nodded Whitey. "He ain't any good to anybody. But that don't help you with Axson."

"I got to do it," muttered Mac. "I leave it to you, Whitey, I don't *want* to croak this Axson gink. Do I?"

"Sure you don't," nodded the amiable Whitey. "You got to. That's all. Well, what 're you waitin' for, Mac?"

"I dunno. I was just thinkin'! Suppose *you* was locked up in a room like that and had the water begin to rise around you. Suppose you kept swimmin' till your head bumped the ceilin'—and the water kept right on risin'—till it got past your lips—and you tried to breathe—and couldn't—and you started to yell—and just a bubblin' sound come—and—"

"Stop!" yelled Whitey.

He had retreated to a far corner and sat with bulging eyes, hugging his frail body.

"Still, I got to do it. Whitey. Only, you can tell the world it wasn't no choice of mine. Old Clune drove me to it, damn him!"

He turned and left the room and made his way to the apartment above the last cell. About his right to finish off Axson he had not the slightest doubt. A man who was in the last cell, as they called it, had a life that wasn't worth a damaged copper, in the parlance of the Triple X. He was merely hurrying the call for Axson.

On the way, he had equipped himself with a length of hose and this he carried from the faucet in the room above the last cell to the corner of the apartment. Here he tore up a board and below it worked with a will for a full half hour before he had picked his way with hammer and cold chisel through the concrete lining of the last cell. But at last there was an aperture large enough for the admittance of the nozzle of the hose. He turned on the faucet and at once the stiff stream began to splash on the floor of the cell below.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### VITRIOL.

**F**OR two hours that evening Louis Masters had sat playing fan-tan, dealing the cards with incredibly swift movements of his slender fingers. His face was colorless but impassive—that impassivity which lies in the eyes of the master gambler when he is playing for tremendous stakes. Twice Masters came within one card of winning. He was dealing again after one of those close calls to success when the telephone rang. He reached the receiver in a single leap. It was the voice of Martha Perce at the farther end.

She said simply: "He's in: I'm coming up. S'long!"

And then she rang off. But Masters, as though he were still hearing tidings of incredible good luck stood with the receiver pressed to his ear, and a smile gradually growing on his wan lips. Finally, the voice of central calling for his number cut into the joyous daze of his brain and he replaced the receiver on the hook.

After that he was busied in making quick preparations. They were interrupted by the arrival of Martha Perce.

Many a general with a battle won has lost it again through overconfidence. And therein lay the great mistake of Martha Perce. She had fought the great fight; she was completely successful, but overconfidence ruined her at the last moment.

For until she entered the room Louis Masters had made up his mind to fulfill his part of his bargain with her. He was determined to go through with the scheme exactly as the two had planned it, but when he saw her his convictions were altered.

All would have been well if she had paused for half an hour between the Hole-in-the-Wall and the apartment of Masters to make a simple change of dress and rearrange her hair and remove the white from her face. But she did not take these precautions. It was strange, for she, better than any one in the world, knew the delicate and changeable nature of Masters' tastes. But Martha was tired—very tired. She wanted rest and relaxation more than anything else. She wanted a glimpse of the man she loved to idolatry, to relax her mind.

So she came to the room of Masters in the same gray overcoat in which she had met Axson on the street not long before. She came in the same shapeless, cheap straw hat, with wisps of hair hanging down around her face. She came with the artificial whitening still on her cheeks. If she had only given her natural great beauty half a chance—if she had only paused to tuck up that straying hair and rub off the white—she would have won. But Martha was overconfident. She had made up perfectly for the drab part she had wished to play with the somber giant Axson. The trouble was that she was still in that part when she entered the rooms of Masters.

Not that she was ugly. Not even the artistic deformation of her face and figure could have made the classic regularity of her features ugly. But she was worse than ugly. She carried with her, like an aroma—a suggestion of the sinister and the worldly—whereas the thing that Masters, like all roués, prized most, was freshness.

Or if she had roused her nimble, graceful wit all would have been well. But she thought that her work was done. She entered without a greeting. She sank limply into a chair and stared at Masters. He came hastily to her and held her hands.

"All in?" he asked gently.

"Down and out," he said huskily. "Rotten mess, Louis."

The smile grew dim on his lips. He turned back to his work, where he was collecting a number of small flasks and other articles and storing them away in a little hand-grip which stood on the table.

"Rotten mess," she repeated heavily. "D'you know who Axson is?"

"Well?"

"Clune's son."

"Ah?" said Masters noncommittally. "Was it hard work?"

"It is hard to trap a fox in broad daylight! What a man that chap is, Louis! I tell you, his eyes were like gimlets. They bored through me."

"But not deeply enough," he chuckled.

"He would have seen if something else hadn't been on his mind. He gave me the impression of a man who doesn't care whether he lives or dies. I think he *knew* something was wrong, and if he'd been himself he would never have come a step of the way with me. As it was, he took me by the throat down there in the Hole-in-the-Wall. All he had seen was a glance between me and Jimmy. That was enough. I bluffed him out, but my heart was between my teeth while I was doing it. I tell you, there isn't another like that fellow in the world!"

"He'll be still more different," said Masters coldly, "when I'm through with him."

She said sharply: "Louis, you've promised to go not too hard with the poor devil. He had my life in his hand. Ugh! If he had only closed his fingers once! Well, you've got to let him off a little more lightly."

"I'll leave him alive," said Masters calmly. "That's all I promised you."

"And just what are you going to do?"

"A number of things," said Masters, and smiled quietly to himself.



He went on: "Have you heard of a fine old Spanish torture? Where a man is bound so that he can't move hand or foot and then water falls on his head, drop by drop?"

She shuddered.

"Horrible!" she muttered. "But he'll recover from the effects of that. It'll be a living death, but he'll recover."

"However," said Masters, "I've improved on the Spanish. I'm going to drop on him something like water—only it is different."

He held up a little flask.

"Vitriol," said Masters, and smiled upon her again.

"You devil!" gasped the girl. "You utter, perfect devil! Would you do that?"

"Why not? Are you so fond of this fellow, Martha?"

"Don't look at me like that! Of course I'm not! Well, do what you want with him; I can't change the Satan in you. But be quick about it. You have this evening. Our boat sails to-morrow. Don't forget!"

He studied her. His eyes noted every wisp of that bedraggled hair. He took in every detail of that artificially wan face. His mind was working with camera rapidity. He was seeing a thousand pictures. He was seeing this woman five years hence, with those pasty cheeks hollowed, those eyes still more sunken.

"That boat may sail without us," he said at length.

"Say it slow, Louis," she answered slowly. "Say it slow so I can gather it all. D'you mean we're not going on that boat?"

"I need time," he argued. "I want to do an artistic job with Axson. It will take more than one evening."

She rose and went slowly to the table, facing him there and resting the tips of her slender fingers on the board.

"You mean more than that."

"Don't be so irritable, Martha. Are we to start like this—on our long program?"

Her face softened instantly.

"I thought you were figuring on—double-crossing me, Louis!"

It was her greatest mistake of all. The thought had been vaguely in his brain before. Now her own suggestion riveted it home.

"Not a bit," he said lightly. "Now run along, Martha. I've got—business—ahead of me!"

It was spoken just a little *too* lightly.

"I'll go," she said in the same low voice, "but I'd like to know first just how long our trip will be put off."

He answered with a rather artificial irritation. "Good gad, my dear, don't nail me down with questions like this. It really won't do!"

"Come, come," she challenged him harshly. "Don't dodge, Louis. Don't beat me down with words! I want an answer; I've earned it!"

"You have," he said, and a gleam came in his eyes as he looked at her, but he checked himself. "So I'll be calm and collected. But I'm hardly myself to-night. I'm not myself with such work ahead of me! I don't know just when we'll sail. Surely before many days."

"Surely!" she repeated. "And I'd like to know just what you were thinking this moment, Louis?"

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you?" she said ominously.

"Martha, are you trying to irritate me? What the devil is in you that makes you badger me in this way? By God, I won't stand it!"

"Swearing so early in the evening?" she queried, a perverse spirit driving her on to exasperate him.

For she felt that now was an excellent time for her to test the strength of her hold over him. She forgot, for the moment, that the hold of a woman has to be won before it can be strong—has to be won through a long process of time, perhaps.

"What did you mean?"

"There was something in your eyes a moment ago."

"Nonsense."

"A picture, I tell you. You looked at me, but you were seeing something else."

His anger flared beyond control.

"You're very anxious to know what that picture was, Martha?"

"You're going to be vicious, but—I think you're going to tell the truth. Yes, go ahead and tell me what the picture was."

"I looked straight into your eyes, my

dear," said the criminal coldly, "and I saw between your face and mine the picture of—"

He stopped and smiled with calm malice.

"I really shouldn't tell you, Martha."

"You must!"

"Must?"

"Louis, you're playing with me! What was it? The face of a woman?"

"You were always clever, Martha, but this is the first time I've known you to read a mind."

"It was a woman," she said, and the pang of jealousy made her almost hideous.

"It is—it is—Elizabeth Dorn!"

"Elizabeth Dorn!" he echoed.

And they glared at each other across the table. His eyes were so steadily fixed on hers that he did not see her hand steal out softly, gradually, and the fingers curl about the little vial of vitriol.

"Do you mean it?" she whispered, and then her voice broke, her eyes clouded with hot tears: "You don't mean it, Louis!"

The tears streamed down her face; it grew convulsed with the suspended sob. It takes a lovely face, indeed, and a very great love to endure the ravages of weeping.

"Every word," said Masters calmly. And then as his rage and disgust loosed itself. "You've been a fool, Martha. A blind fool for all your brains!"

She said with thick, stammering lips: "Louis! You've not—you've double-crossed—me!"

"I needed a tool," he answered coldly, "and you were temptingly near. That's all."

"Wait!" she said, and appeared to master herself. "Don't rush to any conclusions. Think it over."

"I've thought it over enough."

"But think again."

"It wouldn't change my mind."

"Pray God it would!"

"Don't be mysterious, Martha. It buys nothing from me."

"You're insane if you cut me loose like this, Louis. I swear you are!"

"Perhaps. I'm tired of this chatter, Martha. It points nowhere!"

"Listen," she said, "if I don't have you, no one else will!"

"More mystery. Not the old gag of the jealous, dangerous woman, Martha? Please, not that!"

"Do you doubt that I'm dangerous? But tell me this: How long has your mind been made up to double-cross me?"

"I don't know. Since a moment ago—since I saw between your face and mine—like a mist—a thing of true beauty."

She cried: "Louis, don't say it—for your sake, for the sake of both our miserable souls, don't name her to me!"

But an ungovernable fury had seized him.

"You witch!" he answered with a rising voice. "You detestable witch, why shouldn't I name her? I'll say it in your teeth! It was the face of Elizabeth Dorn!"

She shrank away with a piercing cry and caught her hand to her heart.

"Hysterics?" he sneered, and began to laugh softly.

"You utter devil!" she cried, as she jerked the glass stopper from the vial of vitriol and flung the contents into his face.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE SONG.

WHEN Axson first entered the last cell and leaned above the huddled figure at the farther side of the room his reaching hand touched not the warmth of human flesh, but the unyielding surface of concrete covered with clothes. Only his haste and the dim light had prevented him from detecting the cheat at the first glance. So he had turned with that panther speed and leaped back for the door. The least fraction of a second sooner and he would have been out; but the lock clicked at the very instant of his impact.

After the first two efforts he resigned himself passively to his fate. He retreated across the concrete floor and sat down on the great chunk of the same material which, through some careless freak of the masons, had been allowed to project above the floor. It had served, perhaps, as chair and couch for all the unfortunates who had been confined in this dungeon. Here he took up his position and the dull minutes walked past

him. There was only one interruption---the opening of the shutter by Mac.

The next thing that roused his attention was a dull pounding on the top of his cell. It grew louder and louder until he could distinctly hear the chink of steel cutting stone. At length the hole was drilled and an uncertain finger of light pointed down at him. It was immediately removed, however, and in its place came a strong stream of water which dashed a thick spray over him.

He sprang up and retreated to the farther side of the room, where the spray did not carry. However, the water almost instantly covered the floor of the room, and he was forced to take his stand on the block of concrete.

It was such a strange occurrence that at first he could make neither head nor tail to it. It could not be a leak in a water-pipe, as he at first thought. The drilling with hammer and chisel precluded that. It suddenly came to him that the thing was done purposely; this was to be the manner of this death!

Death in any form is terrible, but death divorced from any possibility of a struggle for life is a ghastly thing indeed. The shipwrecked have hopes even as they fall into the water. At least the fresh blue sky is over them. But to be drowned in a dark hole, like a rat---

Axson stepped from the concrete block and made his way about the walls, testing every inch of them thoroughly. But it was as he almost knew before. All was smooth concrete. The door is the vulnerable spot in most rooms, but in this one the door was almost as strong as the rest of the wall. He knew by experience. Twice he had thrown the compacted, tensed weight of muscle and brawn against it, and twice he had been thrown back.

The door had shaken, indeed. It was proof that it was of nothing but wood. But without a tool he could never batter down that solid slab.

But what sort of a tool could he use against it? The heaviest sledge-hammer would have rebounded from that smooth, strong surface.

And while he pondered the water was

rising. When he stepped off the concrete slab to make his exploration it was already ankle-deep. It was rising fast. The hiss of the stream was like the threatening of a snake. He felt that if that ceaseless noise could be stopped he would be able to think.

Then he began to visualize the future. Within an hour at the most---yes, within half an hour, he would have to start swimming---the water would be up to his mouth. He would be able to keep himself afloat until the room was filled. Yes, the ceiling, at length, would force his head under the water. One last heart-breaking straining of the lungs, and then---

His mind reverted to the subject of the tool---the instrument with which it might be possible to beat in the door. Then a wild hope came to him. The projecting slab of concrete might be breakable. Only his desperation, indeed, could have sent that wild hope into his brain. But now he was willing to try anything, even the manifestly impossible. It might be that under a strong pull a portion of that block would give way. He had only his hands---but those hands had bended strong iron.

He waded to the side of the cell again and leaned over. The water was as high as his waist, now. In order to explore the edges of the concrete with his hands he had to plunge his head beneath the water. In that first hasty examination he ascertained that the concrete was roughly finished. The jagged surface afforded many an excellent hold.

He straightened, drew a deep breath, and leaned beneath the surface again. This time he settled his hands around opposite, partial projections, planted his feet more firmly, and heaved up.

There was no answering result.

He stood up again with sweat of horror pouring from his forehead. He had not known how keen his hope had been, until it was thus disappointed. In a sort of frenzy he leaned again through the water, shifted his grip to new places, and once more tugged. And this time the whole energy of his frenzy went into the effort. The two great columns of muscles along his back cracked and tensed under the strain.

It seemed as if such a lift must have torn up a very mountain by the roots.

And there *was* a result.

It was a stir, only, but it supplied him with the tremendous added might of hope; it sustained his stifled lungs. He tore upward once more, and this time the mass parted from the substance that glued it down, parted and slowly rose under his effort. He stood, like a Titan, armed with a Titan's weapon.

He saw plainly now that the concrete mass had not been a portion of the floor. Perhaps it had been the filling of some unused or discarded mold. It had been thrown to one side, perhaps when the cell was being built, and it had been left there. Who cared to finish carefully the floor of a dungeon? The concrete of the floor had been simply worked up around this obstruction and the job was called finished. In his heart Axson blessed the carelessness of that mason.

But it was no child's burden that he carried in his arms. Even his vast corded shoulders ached under the strain; and as he waded through water which had already risen to his breast he stumbled—slipped—the rock plunged back into the water.

No time to lose. A few more inches of rise in the tide of water and even the concrete lump would be useless to him. He tore off his outer clothes. There must be no binding clothes to interfere with the Titan labor of his muscles.

He leaned again through the water and fumbled about. He found the block, but by the time he did so his lungs were stifled for lack of air.

He straightened, drew down a few vast breaths, and plunged beneath the surface once more. This time he arose with the mass safely in his hands.

He waded on; he lifted the strange tool above his shoulder and lunged against the door. It shook, and groaned, but there was no splintering of wood.

He tried again, but with no better result. Then, desperate, he lifted the mass clear above his head, swayed far back, and drove the concrete forward. Something yielded, he thought, but the impact drove the concrete from between his hands and it

crashed back in the water. He felt the door. No, the yielding had been only in his imagination.

Once more he dove and lifted the rock. It was no longer simple to wield it. The water was at his breast. It impeded his every movement. It lessened subtly but terribly the forward lunge. But again he reared the concrete—again he struck out. The blow was wild in the utter dark. The concrete struck the solid wall and once more it was driven from his hands.

But now, as he plunged once more and recovered the rock, a strange change came over Axson. He knew surely that he was come to the moment of his death, but he felt no fear. The terror of the thing was gone from him. He felt only a wild exultation in the strife. Not the strife of man against man, but the struggle of man against wood and rock. Not a confidence that he would conquer, but a fierce delight in the struggle. Once more he reared the mass. The water was at his armpits—it was lapping at his throat. High, high, he lifted the mass. The grip of his hands was the grip of hot steel shrinking as it cools. He struck again—again—again.

There was no perceptible yielding—only a groaning of the staunch timbers. But now Axson began to sing. A terrible wordless song, it rose in a harsh chant. It thundered through the last cell. It was the song of battle; the delight of equal conflict; the giant mated to his task!

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE FACELESS MAN.

LET it be said to the last honor of Mac that he did not wait before the door of the last cell to gloat over the yells and pleadings of his victim.

Instead, he took up his position at the very end of the corridor which ended with the massive door of the prison room. Here he could observe that the water did not trickle through the door, and in this position he could hear as little as possible of the last despairing struggles of Axson. Of the many sinister deeds of Mac this was the most displeasing to his tastes. He felt this to be a

lasting stain on the honor of a well-known yegg; he performed the deed only because necessity pressed him.

But there was no sound of struggle. For long minutes there was only the slowly deepening purr of the dropping water, like a great bottle being filled by infinitely small degrees. Now by the edges of the door, beginning half-way up its height, dark stains appeared and slowly ran down to the base and formed little dark splotches there. The room was at least half filled. He drew out his watch and computed the length of time it would require to complete the inundation.

And while that watch was still in his broad palm he heard a tremendous blow, a knocking which seemed to come from directly behind him. He rose and turned but at the same time he heard a second sound—a mighty splashing. And he whirled about again. Plainly that sound must have come from the last cell.

He would not believe his senses, but stood there transfixed, watch in hand. He might have seemed the blaster who times the fuse and waits for the great explosion. And at length, indeed, the same stroke was repeated. This time he could make no mistake. He saw the door of the last cell shake and quiver. He saw two tiny streams of water pulse out at the sides of the door. He heard the same violent splashings follow. It was incredible. It was uncanny, unearthly. But the fact was slowly riveted home in his knowledge. The giant in the last cell was armed with a giant's weapon and was battering his way out!

At that Mac turned and fled; up out of the low corridor, up the stairs beyond, and raced down the lowest tier of the Hole-in-the-Wall. At every one of the dozen doors he paused only to smash once with his heavy hand and shout the alarm and name "The Last Cell." By the time he had completed that round and started back, the inhabitants of that nether region were already tumbling out of their dens. A dozen men—yeggs, check raisers, roustabouts of the Triple X—they poured into the narrow passages armed with the first thing that had caught up. Two or three carried revolvers or automatics. Others bore clubs of various descriptions.

If Mac had taken two minutes more he could have carried his alarm to the upper regions of the Hole-in-the-Wall. He could have carried down with him three times that number of men and all better armed. But speed was the imperative thing to Mac. He shouted his orders as he flew past the little host and they thronged after him, silent. Half of them were bare-footed, on the verge of going to bed, partly naked.

But they followed Mac with a will. It was the greatest of tributes to the discipline of the Three X that these men ask no questions. There were undoubted cravens in that group, but not a man among them but would rather have faced certain death than shrink from the summons of the Society. They followed, then, not quite so rapidly as Mac ran, but quickly enough, and behind him they tumbled down the steps and poured at last into the corridor which was ended by the massive door of the last cell. A sight of tremendous moment to every one of them, that solid door. For in the legends of the Three X, this was the place where the traitors, the double-crossers of the order were held in their last confinement. Grim stories clustered about the last cell. And now it was as if the spirits of the dead had risen with power. Thundering blows were dealt upon that barrier from within, blows muffled by the solid boards, but picked up by the long dull echo in the corridor and brought heavily to the ears of the servants of the Three X.

"He's gone nutty," suggested one half-dressed, lean fellow to Mac. "He's batty, and hittin' the door with his head. That'll finish him in a minute!"

"His head, you fool?" cried Mac. "I tell you, that devil has a club of some kind. And if he gets out there'll be a raging bit of hell among us!"

But here a short, squat, middle-aged fellow with a shining bald pate addressed Mac with a grin: "Nope. Not much hell. It won't last long. He may yell a lot now, but when this little gat speaks just one word, he'll be quiet, all right!"

And he raised into view the long and shining barrel of an old-fashion forty-five—a weapon that could be used either as gun



or club. He balanced it with a dexterous hand.

"Good boy, Billy!" grunted Mac in great relief. "You're what I need! Get close to that door and if it opens out plant that bird as he comes, eh?"

"Right you are," said Billy, "it'll only—"

But he was stopped short by a thunderous singing that burst from the depths of the last cell. A wordless song that was winged with triumph, with the joy of battle. The retainers of the Three X stared at one another agape. Louder rose the song: in tune with its slow and mighty cadence was the regular crashing against the door.

"What'll these birds do if he busts out?" snarled fat Billy suddenly to Mac. "They're petrified just listening to his voice. And good God, Mac, *what a voice!*"

"Right you are," said Mac, setting his teeth hard, and he turned upon his followers.

"Buck up!" he yelled. "You look like a lot of scared kids. Bos, there's only one bird in there and when he flies out, Billy will wing him. If he don't, I will. But the rest of you get behind us and get ready. If he comes through us, you tackle him. See? And just remember, the Three X is watchin' you. The guy that shows yellow will get hell from the chief!"

It was another version of the famous order: "England expects every man to do his duty."

And they rose to the occasion solemnly, as the British tars had risen to the spirit of Nelson. Their eyes narrowed, their jaws set. Hands and feet became steadier. They were prepared for the struggle. No dozen of common men who will flee from the first shock of danger. They were hardened veterans. Not one among them but had dealt death before, or had at least seen it dealt under his eyes.

Now a silence fell over them. If Mac had been wise he would have kept up a steady stream of comment and orders and threats and promises. As it were, during that silence the terrific voice of Axson burst out among them like his spirit of battle coming before him. The blows continued, more rapidly and each one had the effect

of a rock hurled by a catapult. The mighty boards of the door sprung and shivered under those attacks. They bulged at the sides. At every stroke the water leaped out through newly-formed flaws in the sides of the door.

Yet the fabric held staunchly. Mighty is the Heart of Oak!

And the water was rising. Through the intervals of singing they could hear the dull bubbling of the falling stream. The bottle was filling. The life within would soon be choked. Yes, the door would hold.

A sudden silence fell within and without the cell. There was only the murmuring voice of the falling water—a deadly and insistent sound. What did the pause mean? Was it the silence before or after battle? Was it that the rising tide had crept to the lips of the singing madman inside? The smile of triumph and infinite relief was just beginning to grow on the lips of Mac when, louder than all the other blows, the door was smitten again.

Not a dull, thudding sound like the rest. There was a crack and tearing in this, and a long division appeared straight down the center of the door. Through it half a dozen little jets of water instantly spurted. The weight of the water was telling in favor of the prisoner now.

"Steady!" yelled Mac, dancing with anxiety.

And ever as he shouted, a second terrific blow widened the crack and made the door shudder from top to bottom. Billy and Yegg drew closer. He kneeled upon one knee close to the door. He rested his left elbow on his knee, steadying the gun so that his shot would be as sure as the crack of a long rifle. He squinted his eye along the barrel and waited—as he had waited times beyond number for the explosion of the "soup" around the door of the safe.

There was no quivering nerves in the staunch heart of Billy the Yegg!

Another pause, and then a third blow mightier than the rest. Wide flung the door, and through the aperture showered the vast fragments of a crumpled mass of concrete, weakened and shattered by that long battering. And beyond the door, his hands, bleeding from the grasp of the rough

concrete, his mighty naked arms still reared above his head in the very act of striking, the last shout of his song still upon his lips, was Axson.

It was the water that was overwhelming him that finally saved him. It was the water which made the aim of Mac false and sent his bullet wide from the towering figure of Axson, it was the water which leaped like a live thing through the doorway and rushed upon Billy the Yegg. His gun spoke—at random. He was picked up and rolled head over heels down the concrete floor. And the same wave flung Mac to his knees, choking and floundering. But it had diminished when it struck the mass of the fighters who stood a little to the rear of the two leaders. It knocked down two of them, but the rest retained their feet and swarmed through the swift tide of water towards the giant.

The first man, red-eyed with fighting rage and a two-day debauch, leaped with his knife extended before him. He came as straight and swiftly as a striking snake. But Axson, up to his knees in water, and leaning back against its rush, struck out full from the shoulder with all his might. He had never struck before with all his power. The blow shot out like lightning; it stopped the lunge of the knife-fighter in mid-air. And it blotted out his face as a smear of ink blots out written words. The features became a mere red smear and the knife man toppled back and was rolled idly along by the last wave of the water from the cell.

Then the crowd was upon Axson. They came like a back rush of water, thickly, and they slipped upon him as upon a rock. He swerved from under the downrush of a club and struck the man in the body. There was a sickening crunch of broken bones as that man went down. And Axson waded through the rest with darting arms. One blow, and a man was down.

But they were not down to stay. In the wild melee it was impossible for him to plant every punch accurately. The strokes glanced from vital places. His knuckles cut and tore the flesh. But these men were trained bull-dogs. They rose bleeding and circled back to the attack.

He had to leap back against the wall and begin a sidling progress toward the other end of the corridor. They leaped at him in wave after wave, and still, like water splitting on a rock, they curled back from him. Three men were down; they would never fight again.

Then the faceless man, he who had made the first attack, leaped again. In his fall he had kept his grip on the hilt of his knife now and came once more as Axson gained the very end of the corridor.

It was accident that saved Axson. The water from the cell, distributed over the length of the corridor, was less than knee deep. It served now to make the foot of Axson slip as he stepped forward to meet the lunge of the knife-fighter. He went down upon one knee and the sudden change of position made the knife dart over his shoulder and strike vainly against the solid concrete of the wall behind him.

Rising, as the other crowded in upon him, his chances were small indeed. He had kept them at arm's distance hitherto. But the attack of the knife bearer, and his slip, had given them their opportunity to crowd in. Half a dozen clubs and knives were ready for the stroke. He could not strike back at all of them at once.

But rising, he grasped the faceless man by the ankles, swung him about his head like a tremendous bludgeon, and flung the body in the face of his assailants. They were bowled over like ten-pins. And the body of the faceless man flopped in the water beyond.

Yet that water broke his fall, and his clutching hands, as they reached the floor below the water, gripped by Providence on the butt of the revolver. It was the gun of Mac, flung far from him in his first fall. And the touch of it, like the touch of Excalibur, brought renewed life to the heart of the crook. He rose to one knee. Before him his fellows were tumbled to all sides, picking themselves up by degrees. And the way lay clear between Axson and the door. He alone was in the path, and he was enough. As he squinted down the sights, it was impossible for him to miss. The taste of his own blood on his lips assured him of that.

But the Providence which had given him the gun destroyed his chances again. Above and behind him, as he rose to his knee, the door flung open and the gaunt form of Clune showed with the bulk of Windsor close behind. There was no time or place for warning or advice. For Clune saw the gun leveled.

Before he could speak he leaped straight from the door and his bony knees struck the shoulders of the faceless man. Down they went in a rolling tangle. They came up on their knees, facing each other, oddly enough. The bony fingers of Clune held a death grip on the throat of the crook, but the hand of the faceless man had never relaxed from the butt of his gun. He pressed it now against the breast of Clune and drew the trigger. That pressure pumped seven shots in swift succession into the body of Clune and he crumpled face downwards in the water.

As for the circle of wolves who had rushed for the last time on Axson, they were split to pieces now by the attack of Windsor behind. An attack hardly less terrible than that of Axson himself. As for that giant, he reached the faceless man too late to save Clune, but as the old man crumpled in the water, Axson caught the slayer by the hair of the head, pressed his knee against the nape of the neck, and jerked back. It was like the work of the hangman's knot.

Then he jerked Clune from the water. Dead, glassy eyes stared up at him.

"Out of it!" cried the voice of Windsor behind him, and they turned, burst through the door, rushed up the steps, and fled down the long and narrow passage.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### EPILOGUE.

THE white road wound with many an inviting curve through the lower hills of the Apennines. It was doubly white as it carried its trace among the green vineyards. A lazy, slowly changing road twisting idly here and there with no apparently important destination—certainly none to which it hurried. It seemed as if it

lingered purposefully to enjoy the memories of twenty centuries that lay along its edges.

Now the automobile rolled over a hill-top and purred softly down the slope toward a little village. It had been a city once. Now it was only a small, living heart in the midst of a great body of ruins. Through the outskirts the machine traveled more slowly, for history spoke from every building on either side. Now came the first sign of life. It was a beggar crouched by the roadside with hand extended.

Perhaps twenty tourists passed through the village every month. Perhaps one in ten of these gave alms. But somehow the crippled body lived on. Yet now his hand dropped to his side as he stared at the two in the automobile. It was not the beauty of the woman which overwhelmed him. It was the dark, the Satanic ugliness of the man—a face carved from sombre granite—a grotesque! It left the beggar voiceless. He did not even gather from the ground the hasty coin which was tossed to him.

As the automobile rolled on the man turned to his companion.

"Will it always be like this?" he asked sadly.

And even her eyes, falling upon that sardonic face, wavered away. It seemed as if she forced them back to meet his glance; and hers were misted.

"You have been very thoughtful, lately," she said gently as last, "and when you are thoughtful, people are afraid."

"I suppose that is it," sighed Axson. "But I wish, sometimes—"

He did not complete the sentence.

"Ever since we left Florence," she went on, "you've been like this, now and then."

"I'll tell you why," said the giant in his deep, quiet voice.

The girl looked away. It was her habit, indeed, to half close her eyes when she was speaking—to avoid his face and his gleaming eyes and listen only to the sound of that low, mellow, organ voice. And she listened always, as now, with a half smile that was strangely yearning, strangely pathetic.

"We were at the theater the last night, you remember?"

"Yes."

"You remarked on a very beautiful and sad-faced woman who sat in the box opposite ours."

"I can still see her. A rare, dark beauty. An Italian type, I think."

"I knew her in New York," said John Axson.

"Ah?" she queried rather sharply.

"In the shadows of the box, behind the woman," said Axson, "there was something else. It was a man. The shadow of the half-drawn curtains—you remember that?—almost blotted out what was in the interior of the box. But I was interested because the woman seemed to be continually turning and speaking over her shoulder to some one behind her. Even in the midst of the most exciting scenes she continued to speak. But she never made a gesture in speaking!"

"It was unusual. So I concentrated on the shadows behind her. At last I made out the figure of a man. His face was only a smear. Then, as the lights went up at the dropping of the curtain on the second act, before the curtains of that box were drawn, as usual, I caught a full glimpse of him. I saw that his face was a blur indeed. There was no face. A piece of white cloth was tied completely across it."

"And yet I thought I recognized the man. I knew the build, the size of his shoulders, and particularly the leanness and activity of his hands. By connecting him with the woman I linked together a missing chapter in a strange story which I never quite understood before."

He was silent and she asked: "Can you tell me the story?"

"Some time," said Axson, "I may be

able to tell it to you. But not for many years, I'm afraid."

"A tragic story, at least," she said. "I guess that much of it. One that concerned you?"

"And you," said Axson. "In fact, we are both inextricably tied up in it. And that is what has made me—thoughtful, as you call it."

There was a silence.

"Some day," she said at length, "you will be less bitter. Let's talk of more cheerful things. For instance, you haven't told me the contents of the last letter you had from James Windsor."

One of those rare smiles touched at the lips of Axson.

"Haven't I told you that?" he murmured. "Well, it's what you have always prophesied. Windsor's deal went through, you know."

"Then he's well to do? I'm glad of that!"

"He's what the average man would call rich, in fact. And he'd no sooner made his fortune than he began—"

He paused, apparently at a loss for words.

"He began to make love to some girl?" laughed Elizabeth.

"You always said that he would recover," nodded Axson.

"And the heiress looks favorably on him?" asked Elizabeth, still smiling.

"That is one of the points of the story," said Axson. "She isn't an heiress. She's a country girl he met on a vacation."

"I'm glad of that," said Elizabeth. "I know he'll be happy with her!"

"I doubt it," said Axson. "You see, she's already married!"

(The end.)



## A QUATRAIN

BY HELEN KORTE

THE sweetest fruits the gods bestow  
Do best in thine own garden grow;  
Till well the soil, for if not there,  
Thou wilt not find them anywhere.

# The Howler



by  
George J. Brenn

CARLTON TOTTEN was not the first notch on Nick Napoliello's gun. Totten was the first to cause him any concern, however. Not that the assassination of Totten had been fraught with anything resembling danger to Nick, but the gunman was one of the nervous, imaginative, drama-living and drama-loving Sicilians, and the circumstances of the episode had worked on his fertile imagination.

Nick had swung several little jobs for Armstrong successfully in the past. That was the reason Armstrong, the political boss of the county, had conscripted him for the Totten case.

Totten, a young lawyer and politician interested in reform, had encountered certain skeletons in the Armstrong closet which spelled Grand Jury indictments, ruin and disaster for the boss. Failing to secure Totten's promise that the information would not be used, Armstrong had abandoned bribery, threats and minor forms of coercion, resolving to remove Totten from his path. That was where Nick came in.

"You get two hundred bucks," said Armstrong.

"All right, boss," agreed Nick.

"Know where Totten's office is?"

"Lawyer's Building—Room 302."

"That's right. Totten is working almost every night up to six or seven o'clock. His clerk and stenographer go home at five. All you've got to do is to go to the rear of the building, climb the fire-escape to the third floor and plug him from behind, through the window."

"I always work my 'gat' from behind," said Nick proudly.

"It's the only way," approved Armstrong. "If there's a slip up of any kind, and you miss your mark, the fellow never knows who tried to do him."

"Right, boss!"

"No bungling, though. Be sure to get him. And keep a still tongue in your head if anything happens. I can't openly assist you, but even if you don't hear from me you will know that I am quietly working to help you, and that there is nothing to fear."

So the bargain was struck, and two days later, at 6.45 P.M., Nick was stealthily engaged in climbing the rear fire-escape of the Lawyers' Building. Arriving at the third floor he cautiously peered through the open window he had previously identified as the proper one, and was rewarded by seeing Totten emerge from behind a screen drying his hands on a paper towel.

"Washin' up," Nick decided. "Guess he's goin' home. Good."

Totten cast the towel into a receptacle and walked over to an office wardrobe. He threw the door open just far enough for the door and wardrobe to form a right-angle, the inside of the door facing the window.

From a hanger in the wardrobe Totten took a light overcoat which he hastily donned. Then he reached up to the top shelf for his hat, and standing in front of the door, his back to Nick, prepared to put it on his head.



Nick's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He had pictured just such an occurrence as this. Stepping full into the window, an automatic revolver extended in his right hand, he took deliberate aim at the lawyer. Then things began to happen!

A terrifying, prolonged shriek came from Totten, who seemed to be rooted to the spot. Simultaneously Nick pulled the trigger twice, and the vicious little blue-steel instrument spat forth its leaden pellets of destruction. Nick was down the fire-escape in half the time it had taken him to ascend. Ten minutes later he was playing pool in the back room of Giordano's saloon on River Street.

It must be confessed that Nick's mind was not on the game. His nerves were somewhat shattered. As he had so truthfully remarked to Armstrong, he "always worked his gat from behind." But he had not noticed until Totten's cry alarmed him, that there was a mirror attached to the inside of the wardrobe door.

When he had stood in the window, secure in the belief that the lawyer was unconscious of what impended, Totten had been gazing into this mirror and was plainly aware of what was going on. The lawyer's eyes were boring into his at the moment the shots were fired. They might just as well have been face to face. And how was he to have guessed that Totten was a coward?

"The damned howler!" was Nick's thought as he tried to announce casually to young Giordano his intention of putting "the five ball in the side." It was the first time that a victim of his had been given an opportunity to cry out—the first time that the prey had had an idea of what was to occur.

With his cue poised for the shot, Nick was startled by a sudden, long, drawn-out wail from an infant somewhere in the neighboring slums. He miscued badly, and muttered "The damned howler!" The cry had been somewhat similar to the one that had escaped Totten.

"Who's a howler?" asked young Giordano, but before Nick could reply, Giordano, Sr., entered the room rather hurriedly.

"Totten is dead—killed!" he announced in Italian. He watched Nick's face closely. Not a flicker of the features betrayed him.

"Well, that lets Jim Armstrong out, if the newspapers haven't got Totten's dope," commented Nick casually.

Again came the cry of the infant. Nick started, then dropped his cue. As it clattered to the floor he stooped to recover it, and a fourth person entered the room.

Nick was bent over and could only see the square-toed shoes, but that was enough. He was in no hurry to retrieve the cue or to lift his head.

"Come along, Nick," commanded the newcomer. "You're invited down to headquarters."

"Sure," agreed Nick, standing erect and facing the detective's calm gaze without flinching. "What's-a-matter?"

"Time enough for that," grunted Bourke, and the two set off, arm in arm.

At headquarters Bourke took Nick into the little room with the big windows—the windows that look directly out on two tiers of cells. Nick knew the room; he had been there before, and had always left it scot-free. There was one small table in the room, only one chair, and over the chair was suspended a green-shaded electric-light bulb.

There were two doors in the room—the one through which they had entered, and another which led to Inspector Corson's office. Nick knew that room, too; it contained a big desk, filing-cabinet and book-case.

"Sit down!" Bourke commanded.

Nick seated himself in the only chair. Bourke walked across the room, entered Corson's office, and closed the door after him. A momentary glimpse before the door closed disclosed to Nick the fact that Corson and two other men were seated within.

He looked about him cautiously. "All the old stuff!" he decided. They were rounding up suspects. Thank goodness he had worked alone this time. No one to squeal.

Squeal? The word sent his thoughts off at a tangent. It suggested "howl."

"The damned howler," was his silent thought once more, his alert mind picturing like a cinema-drama his recent exploit. Well, they would probably pull some "third-degree" stuff now. He hoped Bourke would be in charge.

Bourke was harsh, brutal at times, but Nick would never fear to match wits with him. Corson he had a tremendous amount of respect for, but he did not fear Corson, either.

The silence grew on his nerves. He wished the big grandfather's clock in the corner wouldn't tick-tock so emphatically. Why didn't they get a noiseless clock, electrically controlled, from the telegraph company? He knew all about them—one had to in his business, for such clocks are sometimes adjuncts to a burglar-alarm system.

Nick didn't know, however, that Corson was a psychologist, and that the loud-ticking clock in the silent room had been a contributing factor in shattering the nerves of more than one criminal who had been given the third degree in that very place.

The door of Corson's office swung open and Bourke emerged, followed by Clark and Conroy, two "bulls" of lesser repute. Corson remained at his desk where Nick could catch an occasional glimpse of him.

Bourke walked directly up to Nick, followed by his satellites. They ranged themselves about him, Clark at his left and Conroy at his right, both a trifle to the rear of his chair and just out of the line of his vision. Bourke stood directly in front of him and wasted no time on preliminaries.

"Why did you kill Totten?" he shouted.

"You're forgetting something," warned Nick quietly.

"What is it?" Bourke demanded with an air of uncertainty.

"The nitrogen light," he informed the detective irrelevantly, indicating the bulb over his head. "Don't you always use it for the third degree?"

"You're too smart to live," spluttered Bourke, visibly annoyed, as he snapped on the light.

"That's better," commented Nick quietly. "Now, boys, shoot the question!"

"Why did you kill Totten?" rasped Conroy's rough voice.

"Aw, cut it, cut it," admonished Nick wearily. "Try some of the other stunts! Haven't you rounded up a pal of mine who has confessed? Sure you have! Well, trot him by the window, handcuffed, so I can see him. I believe that's according to Hoyle."

Bourke's face grew purple, and he fairly bristled with ire. As a matter of fact he had rounded up Joe Socio, who occasionally assisted Nick, and the stage was all set to exhibit Socio to the prisoner in the hope of securing a confession. Baffled, Bourke thrust his huge fist within a foot of Nick's eyes.

"Why did you kill Totten?" he demanded.

Nick ignored the question entirely. He did not even look at his inquisitor. He was wondering how the crime had been discovered so soon. The noise of the little automatic would not attract any more attention than a tire blow-out, and was probably unheard above the din of the passing traffic. Ah, yes—the scream of Totten had attracted attention! He had not realized that a grown man could give vent to such a plaintive wail—like a woman's cry it was—or a child's. Funny how it kept ringing in his ears, though!

Bourke's knuckles crashed against Nick's face. The impact knocked him from the chair. Clark and Conroy lifted him to his feet and forced him back on the chair. All three detectives spoke at once.

"Why did you kill Totten?" they asked.

Nick's lips were bruised and bleeding. There was a cut at the corner of one eye from which the blood ran freely. But his face still wore a smile.

The three continued their tiring-out process. They took turns at putting the question, and occasionally the monotony of the proceedings was varied by the introduction of Bourke's fist.

Nick still remained silent, and viewed the three with indifference or contempt. He tried to avoid thinking of the crime, for he knew that their object was to compel him to think of it, break down his nerve and compel a confession when his mentality could no longer stand the strain.

Try as he would, however, to shut from

his mind the vivid picture of Totten's face as seen in the mirror, his ears would ring with the dead man's wild cry of mingled fear and anguish. It was the cry that obsessed him, not the tragedy itself, and it always suggested a mental review of his activities from the time he climbed the fire-escape of the Lawyers' Building.

The telephone in Corson's office rang and offered a short but welcome respite. The three detectives called a halt while Corson answered the telephone in a low voice. The conversation was a brief one, for in a few moments Corson passed out of his office and stood regarding Nick with interest.

"Go ahead," was his curt but quiet order.

"Why did you kill Totten?" asked Bourke.

"Why did you kill Totten?" echoed Clark, and Conroy rounded out the ceaseless refrain with "Why did you kill Totten?"

Still there was no response.

"Come, Nick, we've got the goods on you, and the man higher up," put in Corson, not unkindly. "It's the big fellow we want. Give us the whole story and make it easier for yourself."

Nick smiled grimly and said nothing. He was doing a heap of thinking, though. But he couldn't marshal his thoughts correctly. They were a chaotic jumble, a sort of kaleidoscope in which suggestions of Jim Armstrong, Carlton Totten, and Bourke appeared.

Then there was the mirror and the gun in the picture. The "bulls" would never know about either of them; the mirror could not speak and the "gat" would never be found. He did wish, though, that Totten hadn't screamed. "The damned howler!" he thought, and as he thought it he knew that he was weakening.

This conviction was forced upon him as he realized that he could not free himself from contemplation of the crime, try as he might. It was all due to Totten's screams!

Suddenly the inspector, the three detectives and Nick were tense, alert. From Corson's office there issued the most uncanny wail that can be imagined! Another

and another followed. It was supernatural—a cry from the grave!

Nick's blood froze; his face blanched and his eyes rolled furtively.

"Totten!" he cried. "My God—Totten! Shut him up—stop his damned howling! I'll tell you—only shut him up. It was for Armstrong I did it!"

Nick slid from the chair to his knees, cringing—then he fainted. His nerves had failed him utterly; the "old stuff" had worked!

The wail still proceeded from Corson's office, growing in volume and intensity each moment. Corson went to his desk, and in a short time the sound ceased. He remained in his office.

Bourke summoned a stenographer, dashed some cold water over Nick's face, and presently the gunman was dictating a confession involving Jim Armstrong. Nick's voice quavered, his body trembled, and he had lost his air of nonchalance by the time he signed the typewritten confession and was led by Bourke into Corson's office.

"Got the confession, chief," Bourke announced with a triumphant grin. "Big case, too, with Jimmy Armstrong instigating it, as you suspected! But what in hell was that noise that come from your office here?"

"Do you know, Nick?" asked Corson.

"Not Totten—it was a trick. You knew how he screamed before I got him. It wasn't Totten," said the gunman in a dull, hollow tone.

"No, it wasn't Totten," said Corson, "and it wasn't a trick. I'm going to tell you a few things that will explain this apparent mystery. Before I left this office and interrupted your 'degree' work I was talking at the telephone. I forgot to hang up the receiver when I finished—I just placed it on my desk. Do you know what happens at the telephone company's central office when that is done?"

Corson paused for a reply, but Bourke and Nick both shook their heads negatively. Corson proceeded.

"Whenever any telephone user leaves the receiver off the hook after a conversation has ended," he explained, "it causes a tiny light to appear on the switchboard

at the point which marks that particular station. Ordinarily this light only appears when you lift the receiver to make a call, and signifies to the operator that she is wanted.

"With a receiver left off the hook the light shows steadily and is constantly engaging the operator's attention, but when she talks to the station no one answers. The 'steady light' can be cut out by putting a plug in at that point on the switch-board. That is what used to be done to save the operators annoyance and waste of time, and then the telephone company would send a man down to the place where the telephone is located, and he would see that the receiver was put back where it belonged."

"Why can't the operator ring the telephone bell, and when some one answers, tell 'em to hang up the receiver?" suggested Bourke eagerly.

"The bell won't ring when the receiver is off," said Corson. "A bright young fellow who had studied engineering and worked for the telephone company before he turned crooked and went into politics, invented something better. When his device is applied to a telephone line while the receiver is off the hook it causes tremendous vibration, and the noise is sufficiently loud and startling to draw the attention of a person in the next room, on the next floor, and sometimes it can even be heard across the street.

"The operator merely depresses a button which releases a high-frequency current, and the vibrations produce a series of noises, no two of which are ever alike. Operators are not permitted to use this device until they challenge the offending station several times by saying 'Will you please hang up the receiver?' Then—"

"Why is that, chief?" asked Bourke, thoroughly interested.

"Well," Corson answered smilingly, "if they didn't do that and you had the receiver up to your ear when the button was depressed, you'd get such an earful of noisy noise that you wouldn't regard things as really quiet again until the bells and whistles were going full blast on New Year's Eve."

"Then the noise I heard was just the telephone—just an accident?" asked Nick incredulously.

"Exactly."

"Well, I believe it was the telephone if you say so, chief," said Bourke, who sometimes attributed occult powers to his superior, "but don't tell me it was an accident! Who invented this hell-raisin' device?"

"I happen to know that, too," responded Corson slowly, "because I have recently had professional occasion to look up the inventor's record. It was invented some years ago by a man named—Armstrong!"

For a second there was silence—then Bourke guffawed loudly until Corson checked him. Nick's face twitched visibly—it was as though he had lost the power of speech.

"The crook—the big, good for nothing—" he managed to articulate before Bourke interrupted him by asking "What do they call this device?"

Corson was silent for a moment. He was mentally considering the poetic justice of Armstrong's own invention betraying him, and he was wondering whether Nick felt the most resentment against Totten or Armstrong.

"They call the device a 'howler,'" said Corson finally.

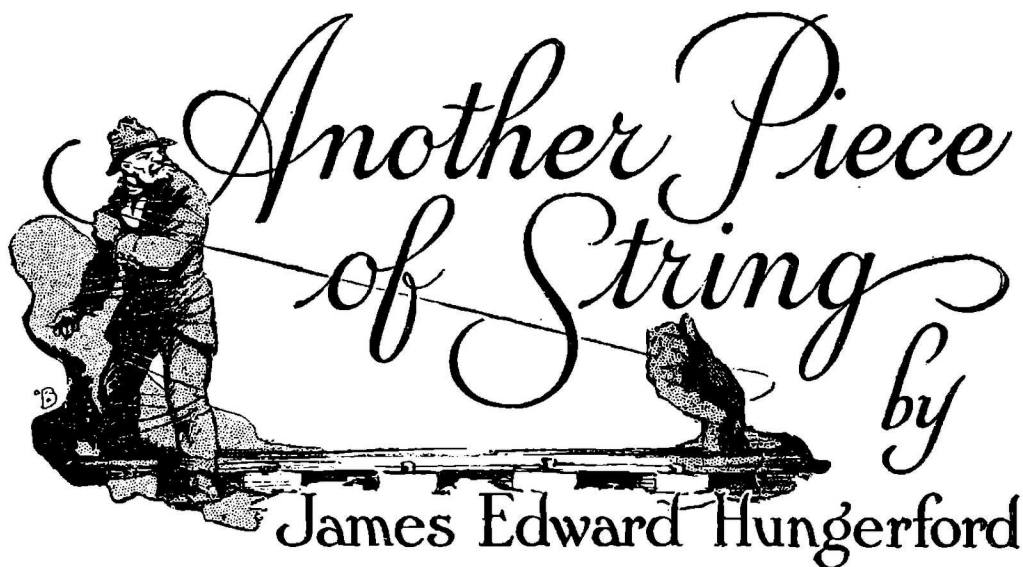
It required a visible effort for Nick to compose himself. His face finally assumed an expression of resignation.

"It's no use tryin' to buck a jinx," he announced. "The damned howler!"

Another Everglades Story by the Author of "The Lone Seminole"

**THE ONE GIFT**  
BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN  
Author of "The House With a Bad Name,"  
"White Tigers," etc.

Complete in  
Next Week's  
All-Story



# Another Piece of String

by  
James Edward Hungerford

**M**R. DE MAUPASSANT, whose genius was "discovered" even before he died, once took a bit of string, and strung thereupon an ingenious tale of an honest—and simple—minded agricultural gentleman, who had the misfortune to pocket the bit of hemp, while a small-town saddler, with unbridled curiosity, was lounging in his doorway. As a result, the aforementioned garnerer of carrots and cabbages was harnessed with the heinous crime of appropriating unto himself another citizen's "leather," and— But why string it along?

This is the simple tale of *another* piece of string.

"Round-About" Riley—citizen of the world and soldier of misfortune—sat upon the end of a railroad tie, and dreamily contemplated the uninviting surroundings, wherein fate—aided by the muscular paw of a freight brakeman—had precipitated him from the breakbeams of a "rattler."

The environment—a small, midwestern town, with not even a chamber of commerce to recommend it—was in keeping with his mood; gloomy, unfriendly, hopelessly "bone-dry."

Round-About's gaze presently shifted to his rusty, worn-out shoes—shoes that he had once aided in the manufacture of, during a term of incarceration within the grim, gray walls of a distant prison.

One of the "kicks" was minus a shoe-string.

Getting stiffly to his feet, Round-About shuffled from the right-of-way, and started for nowhere-in-particular. Ten minutes later, he issued forth surreptitiously upon the main street of Biddlesville.

A scowlingly impressive, bewhiskered gentleman, wearing a sizable nickel-plated star and clutching a hickory club, loomed in the perspective.

Round-About blinked his red-rimmed eyes rapidly, several times, and paused, pretending to be suddenly engrossed in the doings of a small boy, who was poking about industriously in the gutter with a stick.

"Lose somethin'?" questioned the on-looker curiously.

"Yeh—a quarter," answered the youth snappishly. "Dropped it on the sidewalk, a few minutes ago, an' it musta rolled into the sewer. My pap—the constable," he finished a trifle bombastically, "give it to me, this mornin', fer helpin' 'im clean the jail."

Round-About Riley shot an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. Obviously, the jail was *empty*, or the constable wouldn't have paid out a perfectly good "two-bit" piece for assistance in cleaning it up! A strong, husky prisoner, with some experience in janitor work, was needed!

Round-About started to move away, but suddenly paused. His eyes had lighted upon a bright bit of string, lying near the curbing. Stooping, he plucked it from its resting-place, and thrust it into his pocket.



"Hey, you!" challenged the youth, suspiciously. "What 'd ya pick up, just then?"

"A piece of string!" answered the other curtly, and started to move on.

"No, it wasn't!" shouted the urchin. "It was my *quarter* you picked up—I seen yer!"

Round-About's jaw dropped. "I tell ye, it—it was a piece er string!" he retorted. He fished the cord from his pocket, and held it out for inspection. "Here—have a look fer yerself!"

"Pap!" screeched the boy. "This tramp found my quarter! I—I seen 'im snatch it outa the gutter!"

The constable hurried forward.

"Dig it up!" he commanded threateningly. "I seen you put whatever it was, in yore pocket!"

"It—it was dis piece er string," reiterated Round-About in an exasperated tone. "I was lookin' fer somethin' to—to tie my shoe wit', an' I happened to see it!"

The constable seized him roughly by the arm, and ran a hand into his pocket, where the string had been thrust. When he withdrew it, the fingers encircled a *quarter*!

"That's it!" gleefully shrilled the boy. "Give it here!"

"Thought you was lyin'," gritted the constable. "You kaint fool *me*—I reckon I know a *crook* when I see one!"

"But—but—" stammered Round-About frenziedly, "I made dat two-bit piece splitting wood over to Mayville, yestiddy! A kind-hearted leddy give it to me, an'—"

"Beat it!" snarled the constable. "I got a notion to run you in, you gosh-darned—"

Round-About waited to hear no more. He thrust the string into his pocket, and shuffled away, in the direction of the freight yards.

"Let me ketch you tryin' to ride a freight out of here," shouted the constable, "an' I'll clap you in the calaboose! This ain't no hobo town—so, git a move on, an' don't stop movin' 'til you git to the city limits!"

Round-About hastened his footsteps. He had found a piece of string—and been outrageously "riffled" of two-bits—which, in truth, he had earned the previous day by

the sweat of his brow! Unfortunately, it had happened to be in the same pocket where he had carelessly thrust the string—and now he was penniless!

It was in a decidedly pessimistic frame of mind that he reached the freight yards, and once more seated himself on the end of a tie.

"A hobo's luck!" he muttered dejectedly. "It follers yer like a shadder!"

Fishing the bit of string from his pocket, he contemplated it ironically.

It was not an ordinary piece of string, but consisted of three strands—a red one, a white one, and a blue one, artistically interwoven.

He glanced at his stringless shoe, and swore huskily. With the two-bits that had been "frisked" from him, he could have purchased any number of shoestrings!

As he set to work fumblingly, to insert the multi-colored cord into the eyelets of his rusty boots, his gaze suddenly lighted upon a near-by rubbish pile—and he sat up with a grunt.

Inconspicuous among the jumble of tin cans and sundry refuse—*was a better shoe than the one he was wearing!*

Dropping the piece of string, Round-About scrambled to his feet, and pouncing upon the shoe, snatched it from its resting-place.

It was an army shoe—run down at the heel, mud encrusted, the veteran of many rigorous drillings—but the sole was intact, and it boasted a somewhat shriveled and warped, but still serviceable, leather shoestring!

Riley looked around for the mate, and burrowed gopherlike in the heap of rubbish—but the search proved fruitless.

Gratitude shone in his face, however, and presently, making his way to a tool-shed, he slumped down in its shade, and proceeded to don his find, with sundry gruntings.

The shoe was a perfect fit!

As he viewed it approvingly from various angles, a sudden sound caused him to sit up with a jerk.

Not far distant, on a side-track, was a string of empty box-cars. The screechy opening of one of the big sliding doors had

centered his attention. Presently a head was thrust out—cautiously.

The head was an ebony-black one, with rolling, white eyeballs, which were darting about furtively. Another minute, and the African gentleman's anatomy appeared, and he dropped to the cinder path, running beside the car—a bulky, thick-set figure clad in ragged blue overalls and a tattered black coat. A caved-in derby hat, that was several sizes too large, rested upon his ears.

All in all, he was a villainous-looking specimen, and his manner was in keeping with his appearance.

As Riley watched him, peering out breathlessly from behind the tool-shed, the negro moved swiftly about the freight-yard, his eyes darting here and there, as though he were seeking something. Presently, he bent to the ground with a swift movement, and, snatching up some object, thrust it into his pocket. Another minute, and he had vanished into the car.

Riley emitted a pent-up gasp of relief. "Acts like he's committed a crime!" he muttered. "Now, whaddaya reckon he's up to?"

With Riley, curiosity was not only a weakness—it was an obsession. "To see things," had made him one of the weary, though unresting, fraternity of "rolling stones," who gather a gloss—of coal-dust.

Emerging cautiously from behind the tool-shed, he pussyfooted it stealthily across the intervening tracks, to the string of empties, on the "spur." Edging along the side of the car, into which the "black bird" had vanished, he reached the door, and breathlessly peered in.

The occupant, whose back was toward him, was bent over a gunny-sack—the contents of which moved slightly, as Round-About's gaze focused upon it!

The negro suddenly cast a glance over his shoulder and an exclamation escaped him. His jaw dropped, revealing two rows of startlingly white teeth, and his eyeballs bulged. For a moment, his orbs rested glassily upon the face in the doorway—then shifted to the yards beyond.

With a whoop, he dropped the end of the sack, which he had been clutching, and leaped out the opposite door.

Round-About Riley stared for a moment, stupidly, then hoisted himself into the car. A sudden pandemonium had broken loose in the gunny-sack, which was jerking about the floor in a most uncanny fashion. Riley seized hold of it, and—

"Chickens!" he blurted.

Presently his gaze rested on the mouth of the sack, which was held together by—Riley again uttered an exclamation—*the red, white and blue string*, which he had picked up on the street, and tossed aside in the freight-yard!

So *that* was what the ebony-colored gentleman of mystery had picked up, as Riley had watched him from behind the tool-shed—a piece of string, to fasten the mouth of the gunny-sack!

The rest of the mystery was a matter of simple deduction. The negro had stolen the chickens, and hidden himself in the box-car until the next freight train, passing through Biddlesville, would whisk him away to safety. He would dispose of the fowls in some other town—or feast upon them in a distant hobo "jungles."

A sudden noise from behind brought Riley's attention from the gunny-sack and over his shoulder, with a jerk.

The constable loomed in the doorway.

"Hands up!" he commanded tersely.

With a gasp, Riley relinquished his clutch on the sack, and mechanically raised his arms. The pandemonium of cackles and squawks issuing in excited volume from the bag was sufficient evidence of its contents.

"I knowed you was a *crook*!" went on the constable triumphantly. "It was *you* that stole Squire Eggleston's chickens last night, an'—"

"I didn't steal 'em!" blurted the prisoner. "I seen a coon sneak outa the car, actin' funny, an' snatch somethin' up fr'm the ground! He beat it back to the car, an' when I looked in, to see wot he was up to, he jumped out the door, an'—"

"Bosh!" interrupted the constable. "Lyin' agin, same as you did about that *quarter*—you kain't fool me!"

He seized hold of the mouth of the gunny-sack, and examined it. "That's the *very* piece of string you had in yore hand. up-

*town, a while ago*—when you tried to cheat my boy out of his two-bits!”

“But—but—” stammered Riley, as the handcuffs snapped on his wrists, “I—I threw it away, after I got back to the freight-yards, an’—”

“Rot an’ nonsense!” interjected the constable. “You kin tell *that* story to the judge!”

At the trial, Round-About Riley reiterated, again and again, the story of the “mysterious” negro, whom he had surprised in the box-car—and of the piece of

string which he had carelessly flung away, and had later found tied about the mouth of the gunny-sack containing Squire Eggleston’s stolen chickens.

The judge insisted that the prisoner was trying to “string” him, and—

“Six months on the rock-pile!” was the verdict.

Those six months of honest toil and regular hours, served to rehabilitate Round-About Riley, into a respectable, law-abiding citizen.

Thanks to a piece of string!



## INTERWOVEN

BY KATHARINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

*“This is a good little model, madam. The stitching makes it attractive, . . .”*

MY heart is parched for an open space;  
For the honest look of a country face;  
For sunlight and shadow, both deep, intense;  
For shining pails on a picket fence,  
For *green!*

(And me thinkin’ I could rest a while,  
With the boss sneakin’ soft-footed down the aisle,  
“‘Crooked’? It’s this machine.”)

My soul wants the look of the little lane,  
All hazy and gray in a slow, spring rain,  
With puddles that mirror the earth’s new dress—  
 (“Used too much? Well, I couldn’t use no less,  
Them cuffs has gotta be right!”)

The cows would wander the hillside free,  
And I hated the getting them—hated it—me!  
Oh, now for a country sight!  
*A gray-greened barn and apple trees;  
The scent of clover in the breeze;  
The cluck of a mother hen, song of a bird;  
The drone of the bees in my heart is heard,  
They call in my heart, till I think it’ll break—  
Oh—the ache!*

(They call me “Greeny,” they think I lack,  
Because I wanta go back!  
Yes—you can make money at these here machines, but—  
*I want the greens, the greens, the greens!*)

*“You’re right. It is good. The stitching isn’t quite straight, but then—it doesn’t matter. I’m going to wear it in the country.”*

# Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



THE rarefied atmosphere of the mountain, as a permanent habitation, would prove too great a strain on the lowland lungs of most mortals. We are happier and more comfortable in the valley. But if we are to keep our souls alive and to retain our faith in the things not seen with bodily eyes, we must, at stated times, escape food, and clothes, and company, and in the teeming solitude of the mountain speak alone with God. The outward retina of the mind cannot envisage the mysteries which are only revealed to those who walk in high places. If you want to learn what a mountain-dweller of the spirit taught a social butterfly of the valley, you must read the inspiring novelette which opens next week's magazine:

## THE ONE GIFT

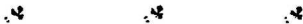
BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "The House With a Bad Name," "Up-stairs," "If You Believe It, It's So," etc.

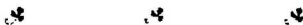
We have been speaking of the mountain in a purely figurative sense, and in this sense Mr. Sheehan's story is a very high mountain indeed. Geographically, the tale is laid amid the Everglades of Florida, and the mountain-dweller is a young Seminole Indian, whose soul is pure gold, and whose understanding of love, no mere dweller in the valley will ever be able to encompass. Do you live in the valley or on the mountain? This story will give you your rating.



TEACH: PIRATE DE LUXE" isn't exactly a useful citizen of the world, but he has his points. Mary Arcliffe had to admit that much after an adventure with a certain blond gentleman on a lonely sand cay. Read about it in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—"BEAUTY AND THE BEAST," the seventh of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's great series.



HERE's a great little yarn of the West—real cowboy stuff!—by John H. Hamlin. Look for "BY HOOF AND TIRE" in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—you will enjoy every word of it.



YOU've often read about ardent and persistent lovers who keep on asking the girl until she either consents or in desperation sends them away for good. Billy Knapp, the hero of Robert J. Horton's good story in next week's issue—"THE NINETY-NINTH PROPOSAL"—was one of these persistent gentlemen, but he believed in mixing persistency with variety. What happened

on his ninety-ninth proposal we will leave for the author to tell you. It's interesting.



## WANTS SEQUEL TO "TH' RAMBLIN' KID"

TO THE EDITOR:

We have been constant readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about six months. We just simply could not give it up. It is our favorite book among all magazines that we read. We are strong for every one of the stories. I never miss one of them. I love the short stories, and nearly all of the serials. They are all great.

We both read "Th' Ramblin' Kid"; in fact, I read it three times. It sure is a world beater. We both read "The Hidden Kingdom," and thought it was rich. You couldn't tell what was coming next. And that's what I sure do like about a story. I think Earl W. Bowman should be a real nice chap and give us a sequel to "Th' Ramblin' Kid," because he just gave us enough to make us hungry for more of it. Won't he? Please. He just possibly can't leave *Caroline*

*Junc* and the *Gold Dust Maverick* there to wait for him all that time. Why can't he be good and tell us all about th' *Ramblin' Kid's* adventures and then let him come back to her and the lilly in the end? It sure would be great.

Among other stories I have read and thought real interesting are "The Gold Girl," and "The People of the Golden Atom"; that last one was dandy. It can't be beat. While I was reading it my husband was working for a man in his orchard, and I was just rumbling around, and I found the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the date of March 15, 1919. And it had the first part of my story. It was "The Girl in the Golden Atom." Now, maybe you think I didn't sit right down then and there and read the story. When I finished it it was time to come home. Then I started "The People of the Golden Atom" all over again. It sure was more interesting then. Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the very best success, I will close with best regards.

Cashmere, Washington. MRS. LEONA MOORE.

## UP-TO-DATE WESTERN STORIES BEST

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading a story entitled "Th' Ramblin' Kid," and, believe me, that story certainly was a corker. I've read all kinds of magazines, novels, and papers, but none suited me more than the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and now, when I read "Th' Ramblin' Kid" story, what can I say about the ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine? I surely do appreciate that story more than any I've read, as I was getting a little tired of Western stories in general. They seemed too much alike to me. I always hated Western stories and pictures until I read "Th' Ramblin' Kid." Believe me, "Th' Ramblin' Kid" story is a story all by itself, a story different from any I ever read. I just couldn't wait until I finished it. I love that story because it's up-to-date, not like the stories of olden times. Almost all the stories of the West are of olden times, and an up-to-date story like "Th' Ramblin' Kid" certainly is appreciated by all my friends and family. The writer of "Th' Ramblin' Kid" seems to be a new one. Well, I wish him all the luck and success in the world, as he surely, in my opinion, does deserve it, and I wish, dear editor, you'd please publish some more stories written by Earl Wayland Bowman, something like "Th' Ramblin' Kid." I'm just crazy over that story, and I love you, dear editor, for publishing it, and Mr. Bowman for writing it. Wishing you luck and a long continued success,

Raritan, New Jersey. MISS MARION BISHOP.

## LITTLE HEART-BEATS

As the ALL-STORY WEEKLY has always been my favorite magazine, I am writing for the first time in its defense. I have taken the magazine since the *All-Story Cavalier* days, and I will say that in all

these years I have never received a copy I was dissatisfied with. There are only two writers whose stories I do not care greatly for, and they are Tod Robbins and Edgar Franklin. To my mind Stephen Allen Reynolds's "Going North" was not quite up to his usual standard, but was a very good story at that.

When I read kicks I wish the kickers' copies might be delayed for about two weeks. That would be long enough, and hear the racket they would raise. When one can read stories as well written and clean as those of Brand, Reynolds, Katherine Taylor, Sanders, Sheehan, and others I haven't time to name, then I don't think they have very much to knock about. One other thing is the lack of mistakes in printing. One rarely finds a mistake. When do we get another serial from the pen of Harold Titus? I have never forgotten his "Stallion Shod with Fire," in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I find, as do other of your readers, many hours of real enjoyment in reading your magazine, and as long as you keep your present standard will have a reader in

Beardstown, Illinois. MRS. HOWARD NUNN.

I am writing to express my admiration for your magazine. I have read your stories for a great length of time, and I appreciate a good story when I see one. My favorite authors are: Achmed Abdullah, E. R. Burroughs, Max Brand, E. K. Means, and Perley P. Sheehan. "The Ten-Foot Chain," written by four of the above authors, was very good, especially the two written by Brand and Abdullah.

"The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is what I call an "honest-to-goodness" story. That is according to my opinion, but still I have read letters which knock this wonderful story. The explanation of these letters is that the authors of them have not enough imagination to comprehend such a wonderful story. They might at least realize that a story cannot be the truth; if so, it wouldn't be a story. Mr. Editor, please get a hold of E. R. Burroughs, author of "Tarzan," and make him let us have a story in every issue, if possible. No matter if it is just a couple of pages. I remain an admirer of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

St. Louis, Missouri. H. G. HIFENDECK.

I like your magazine, and have been reading it for over two years. On Wednesday night of each week, and even before that, I wait for dad to bring it home, or else go and get it myself. Some of your best stories were: "Miscry Mansions," "The Untamed," "Th' Ramblin' Kid," and the "Nan Russell" stories. I think we should have a sequel to the "Flying Legion." Your magazine cannot be improved, so I wish it all success. I remain until the end your very interested reader.

W. SPARROW.

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

I have been a reader of your magazine since 1913, and will say the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is my



favorite. There are some wonderful stories, and now and then will crop out a poor one, but they don't come so often that it matters much. I must say Hulbert Footner and Captain Dingle are among the best writers. Captain Dingle don't write about things he don't know anything about; being a sailor myself I know his work is not hearsay. Just finished reading the "Great Miracle" in April 24 ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and imagine such a story if you can. But, anyway, if the author can get away with it, he's all right. Still hoping the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will continue to give us the good serials, I won't kick, so best of luck. O. H. T.

Brooklyn, New York.

Three years ago, when I first subscribed for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, you printed a letter of mine in the Heart to Heart Talks, and at that time I was going out on a homestead, and said as much, and from that letter I received letters from all parts of the United States, inquiring about homesteads and other subjects. Three of the boys came here and took up land. One of the boys was here to see me a few days ago. He was looking at the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and he said, "Willard, I owe my thanks to you and the good old ALL-STORY WEEKLY for my piece of government land. If the ALL-STORY WEEKLY had not printed that letter of yours, I would not have known about this country." So, Mr. Editor, we thank you very much, and we like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY fine. It is great company, and the stories are good. Enclosed find one dollar.

Gillette, Wyoming. WILLARD G. BUNNELL.

I noticed a letter in a recent issue which makes me laugh. Tell Mr. Haines to come to Globe, Arizona, and I will show him several cowboys who wear chaps. I would like to see some of those dudes riding through the mesquite and cat-claw in their velveteens and corduroys. After a few hours they would look ready for the rag-bag. The cowboys around here wear overalls and jumpers. Of course they don't wear their spurs and chaps when they go out riding with their best girls nor take their guns to bed. But if a man goes out alone in the hills, he feels safer with a gun, if only to shoot an occasional rattlesnake or jackrabbit. Tell any author looking for material that this section is rich in stories of buried treasure and lost mines, *et cetera*.

Globe, Arizona. MRS. HENRY FOERSTER.

The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best magazine published. "Th' Ramblin' Kid" was great. Give us some more of that author's stories.

Prineville, Oregon. LEE C. HUDSON.

Here I arrived and not an ALL-STORY WEEKLY in town. No, not one! So poor little me is destitute unless you will accept enclosed one dollar and send me one dollar's worth of ALL-STORY WEEKLYS, beginning with April 17 issue. I

bought April 10 before I left the city of Iola. I never have written you, but if all the authors received all the thought-waves I sent out, also the publishers, you know how you stand with me. Come on, "Nan Russell." That reminds me. She said something about symbolic sevens. Advertise for all of them. I'd like to hear them. Here's how.

SADA BATES.

Bronson, Kansas.

I enclose ten cents in stamps, for which I wish the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for August 2, 1919. It contains the last instalment of "The Mouthpiece of Zitu," which I thought was an excellent story. I think all the stories are good, and I cannot tell you how anxiously I wait for the magazine to see "what they did then."

LUCY B. REID.

Manchester Green, Connecticut.

The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is a wizard; the price still remains the same. How can it be done? Its stories surpass all others in interest and truth. Let's hope that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will always be with us.

JOSEPH DELAHANTY.

Elgin, Illinois.

I just had to write and tell you how much I like your magazine. We try to get it every week, but sometimes we fail to do so. I read all the stories, and think they are all simply ripping; some, of course, I like better than others. For example, "The Red Seal," "The Gold Girl," and "Shea of Shanghai."

My favorite authors are: James B. Hendryx, Natalia Sumner Lincoln, Carolyn Wells, Stephen Allen Reynolds, and George Dilnot.

I am now interested in "The Big Story," by George Dilnot, and find it very interesting, so far as I have gone. Well, having no more to say, I will close. Wishing you all a success which is so well deserved, I remain,

Buenos Aires,

A. C. T. II.

Argentine Republic, South America.

Just a line of praise to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY; it's the best on the market. Its variety of stories suits me. I like the serials.

I also like the Heart to Heart Talks; I read them every issue. Would like to hear from some of the Heart to Heart readers.

Edgar Rice Burroughs's story is starting fine; I'm anxious for the end. Hoping to see this in print soon, I remain an ALL-STORY WEEKLY fan.

Harlan, Kentucky. LONNIE H. SNODGRASS.

I have been reading your magazine for several years, and I find it the best that I have ever read. I do not subscribe to any magazine as yet, but I expect to join the ALL-STORY WEEKLY soon. However, I get it every week at a drug-store. The best writers are: F. R. Burroughs, A. Merritt, J. U. Giesy, E. K. Means, and Max Brand. There are many other authors that are good whom I haven't time to name. One more thing before I

close: We readers *must* have a sequel to that splendid story, "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." It is "king" of all. I close, wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY many years of success.

Atlanta, Georgia. THOS. W. HASLAN.

Have never written you before, but guess you can stand it this once. You certainly do put out a fine line of stories in your magazine. But best of all I like your "different" stories. Would like to have more of them, because there don't seem to be as many as usual. Don't pay any attention to the knockers. "There's one born every minute," they say, and if they don't want to read the "different" stories, there are lots of others in your magazine. Marion A. Campbell has the right dope on that. She don't kick, but finds solace elsewhere. Won't say anything about the authors. They all have their good and bad points. With every wish for your success,

EARL SABIN.

Onaway, Michigan.

I have been a reader of ALL-STORY WEEKLY many years; in fact, since the days of the *Cavalier*. To me each week's issue seems better than the last, if possible. I look forward to the return of *Whistling Dan*. It doesn't seem right for him to leave *Kate* for such a long while. I haven't any favorite author, for all of the writers for ALL-STORY WEEKLY are top-notch, right up to the minute. I read the many comments and think: does one expect to read a magazine and find each story to their special liking? I don't, for it is impossible to please all. Just let ALL-STORY WEEKLY continue as it is. It surely suits me, and must suit many others, by the number of subscribers. With my best wishes for a long life to ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

JAMES A. EVANS.

Ocean View, Virginia.

I'm not a subscriber to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but I've read it for over four years, and must say it is the best book ever. All the stories are good, but some are better. I'm waiting for a sequel to "The Gold Girl" and "Th' Ramblin' Kid," as they are the best Western stories I've ever read. And please tell E. K. Means to come back. I read his story of "Diada, Daughter of Discord," about four years ago, and would like to get it in book form. I could not be without the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Hope we won't have another strike.

MRS. VIOLA GRIFFIS.

Jacksonville, Florida.

NOTE:—"Diada, Daughter of Discord," is published in the second volume of short stories by E. K. Means, brought out by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, under the title, "More E. K. Means." Price, \$1.50 net.

Enclosed find money-order for one dollar, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, beginning with the April 17 copy. I do not care very much for the "different" stories, but love the Western stories and those of

the sea. I would rather not have *Whistling Dan* come back, but do think we should have a sequel to "The Texan." Max Brand and Captain Dingle are two of my favorite authors, and there are others I like as well. Can't we have another "Janie Frete" story? So long as ALL-STORY WEEKLY continues to be as great as it is at present I'll never willingly be without it.

MRS. JOHN R. HINES.

Wyatt Ranch, Ault, Colorado.

I am writing to let you know how much I enjoy ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It certainly is in a class by itself, when it comes to good stories. I agree with Mr. Deppe, of Idaho, about "Th' Ramblin' Kid," and certainly hope it won't be long before we can have another like it. Some of the stories I like most are: "The Gold Girl," by Hendryx; "Trailin'," by Brand; "Eastward Ho!" "Don't Ever Marry," "Elope If You Must," and others too numerous to mention, but of them all "Th' Ramblin' Kid" was the winner. I would certainly like a sequel to it, also "The Gold Girl." I have no kicks to make. Of course some of the stories are better, but all are good. Say! What's the matter with E. K. Means? I'd like to see another novelette from him. Please tell him to write one soon. Hoping to see this in Heart to Heart Talks,

CRYSTAL DAMREN.

Waycross, Georgia.

Just a few lines from a most ardent reader of your magazine. Am not a subscriber, but get the book from the news-stand every week. Must say it is the finest magazine I have ever read. I like all the stories, but here are a few of my favorites: "The Untamed," "The Moon Pool," "Th' Ramblin' Kid," the "Koyola" and "Janie Frete" stories, and others too numerous to mention. I should like to see a sequel to "The Untamed," so get after Max Brand and have him bring *Dan* back to *Kate*. Also a sequel to "The Moon Pool," by A. Merritt. Would be glad to hear from some of the readers, and will answer all letters. Will close, hoping to see this in the Heart to Heart Talks.

MISS LOUISE USSERY.

Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I have been wanting to write and tell you how much I think of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine. You can bet your life that Friday, when I get the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I hurry through with my work so that I can read it. I think that Max Brand had better hurry up and write a sequel to "The Untamed." "The Mucker" and "The Return of the Mucker" were the best stories I believe ever written, except "The Texan." I also think we should have a sequel to "Th' Ramblin' Kid." After he left *Caroline June* we would like to know where he went and what he did. E. K. Means is great. He would make anybody that felt blue laugh and be glad. Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the best of success in the future,

Lead, South Dakota. MRS. B. SREDANOVICH.