PRICE 20 CENTS

NOVEMBER 1919

NOTICE TO READER. When you finish reading this magazine bearing this notice, place a 1 cent stamp on this notice, mail the magazine, and it will be placed in the hands of our soldiers, sailors and marines. NO WRAPPING, NO ADDRESS. A. S. Burleson, Postmaster General.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

derick R. Bechdolt, Frank L. Packard, Everett Rhodes Castle, ank Davis, Clarence Herbert New, Edison Marshall and others.

THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

Copyrighted, [illegible], by The Story-Press Corporation.
Copyrighted, [illegible], by The Story-Press Corporation, in Great Britain and the Colonies.

COVER DESIGN: Painted by FRANK STICK

A Complete Novelette

Riders of the Fog By Frederick R. Bechdolt 150

A fascinating romance of a remote California coast, recounted with all that vivid sense of drama for which the author of the "Lighthouse Tom" and "Sindbad of Oakland Creek" stories is famous.

Twelve Spirited Short Stories

The Champion of the World By Everett Rhodes Castle 1

A really unusual prizefight story that has a punch of its own quite aside from the knockout in the climax.

We Have with Us To-night By Elmer E. Ferris 11

Salesmanship such as is here described by Mr. Ferris is a mighty interesting thing: don't miss this.

Through the Storm By Clem Yore 17

A powerful story of the Rockies, written by a man who lives in the mountains and knows them well.

The Fifth Continuance By Chester T. Crowell 27

That silver-haired darling of the Southwest, Senator Logwood, adopts adventurous legal methods.

The Serpent City By Edison Marshall 37

This striking story "From a Frontiersman's Diary" is one of the finest things Mr. Marshall has written—and that is saying something.

THE STORY-PRESS CORPORATION, Publisher, 36 South State Street, Chicago
LOUIS ECKSTEIN, President CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager

RALPH K. STRASSMAN, Advertising Manager, 33 West Forty-second Street, New York
R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 20 Boylston St., Boston. LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.
Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 1919

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

HEADINGS: Drawn by QUIN HALL

The Lady-Killer By C. S. Montanye 45

A lightsome story of love and baseball and divers other interesting things narrated with infectious humor.

It Can't Be Done By Harold Titus 84

There's just one thing impossible to achieve in this curious world—as the hero here discovers.

The White Moll By Frank L. Packard 91

"The Door Across the Hall," the fourth adventure of Rhoda Gray, is distinctly the most thrilling of all.

Leatherneck Tales By Barney Furey 107

The U. S. M. C. shows all of its customary pep in this vigorous narrative—"Across the Bay."

The Misfortunes of Mose By William Goode 114

A darky story of the most amusing sort imaginable, written by a man with a real sense of humor.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 129

"The Ironville Experiment" reveals a remarkable undertaking of the Free Lances that has its climax right here in America.

Exploits of an Honest Grafter By Wm. O. Grenolds 142

Here Honest John the circus-fixer, gets involved in the oil-boom in characteristic fashion.

A Remarkable Serial

The Chinese Label By J. Frank Davis 54

The second third of this absorbing novel contains its most interesting episodes; be sure to enjoy it.

TERMS: [illegible] a year in advance; 20 cents a number. Foreign postage [illegible] additional except on subscriptions for soldiers overseas on which there is no extra postage charge, the price for the subscription being the same as domestic subscriptions, viz. [illegible] per year. Canadian postage [illegible]. Subscriptions are received by all newsdealers and booksellers, or may be sent direct to the Publisher. Remittances must be made by Post-office or Express Money Order, by Registered Letter, or by Postage Stamps of 2-cent denomination, and not by check or draft, because of exchange charges against the latter.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe to THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event, of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date, and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on railway trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.

November 1919

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

Vol. XXX No. 1

AN exciting story of prize-fights as they are sometimes fought, written with the fine skill and spirit so typical of Mr. Castle's work.

The Champion of the World

by Everett Rhodes Castle

THE fly-specked fan behind the bar whined lazily in the still heat of midafternoon. Through the light rattan doors the scorch of frying asphalt came to join the whine of the fan. At one end of the bar, beside a sawdust-filled box, a gray cat sat and bathed in a vain attempt to cool herself. The mirror behind the stained mahogany was frosted to a deceptive frigidity that irritated rather than cooled.

The dark green shades on the windows were pulled down to the drooping tips of pot after pot of ferns which were fast growing brown and tired. A row of scarred tables stretched along the wall to the rear, where a brilliantly painted automatic piano held the place of honor. In the farther corner empty beer-cases were piled high.

But the walls were the distinctive feature—that is, the walls and the man slumped in the chair at the farthest table. They were covered with photographs of slim-waisted men, mostly crouching, all young. Here were the champions of yesterday, to-day—and to-morrow: featherweights dancing on their toes, lightweights with folded arms or feinting cleverly, middleweights running to heavy necks and cauliflower ears—near bruisers. All were autographed in scrawls which nearly all began: *"Yours truly—"*

In the rear to the left of the brilliant piano was the dwelling-place of the gods that be. A huge American flag was draped above four photographs. Three of them were placed, like smaller stones in a piece of jewelry, about a larger one. They were the champions of the moment. To the left of the larger picture was Battling Yelski, whose two-round knockout of Young Sullivan had given him the lightweight crown. To the right was a full-length snap of McTigue as he handed the count to the Frisco Kid, thereby annexing the middleweight belt of the world. Below the main picture could be seen a photograph of the featherweight king, Johnny Gaines.

BUT the close-up of the mighty Ginley was the pride of the Broadway Café—gilt and black sign proclaimed it the headquarters for sportsmen. The picture was three feet by four, and showed the heavyweight champion of all the world in all his glory. As the patrons of the Broadway had it, it was Big Bill Ginley to the pink. There was the bulging mauled ear of the championship battle and the triumphant cunning smile of victory. The close, small eyes seemed to be set in a mass of neck rather than within a skull. The huge shoulders, even in the photograph, seemed to move with feline swiftness. Across the chest in scrawling letters was written: *"To Jim Hinkly, with my compliments."* Hinkly was proud of that picture. He had it framed in gilt, so that something else besides the size stood out from the rabble. He spoke of it now to the one patron who leaned against the bar.

"There was a guy," he said, shooting a stream of charged water into a glass of gin and lime, "that you should have been on."

The patron nodded. He was a large man in loud checks and a glistening, luxuriant mustache; and the diamonds that bedecked his hands and necktie to say nothing of his watch and cuffs were real.

"Yeh," he agreed.

"Too bad!"

"Yeh."

"But that's life, aint it?" Hinkly pushed the tall glass toward the patron. "You can't never tell anything about it. Who would 'a' picked Ginley to hand the K. O. to a champion like that one of yours? Nobody picked Ginley. They played Ferguson for everything—that is, everybody but Ginley and his manager. What a clean-up those boys must have made with odds at five to two!"

The manager of the former champion nodded again. He gulped the drink before him with noisy appreciation.

"They cleaned up then," he assented. "But every dog has his day."

"You don't think Ferguson can come back?"

Curly Thomas, manager of world's champions, fight-promoter, smooth guy, laughed loudly. "Not me!" he declared. "Ferguson is through. He's a has-been. But that aint why Ginley licked him."

"No?"

"No."

"He sure packed a punch," ruminated the man behind the bar.

Curly pushed his glass across the board to be replenished. "He did that," he conceded. "But it wasn't a punch that licked Ferguson. It wasn't anything Ginley had that won for him."

"What did?"

Curly Thomas answered as a man who has given deep consideration to his subject.

"Psychology," he answered. "That's what the wise guys call it. You get me? Press-agent stuff. They had Ferguson licked before he put on a glove. They had him buffaloed with newspaper talk about Ginley's reach and Ginley's wicked left hook an' his foot-work an' his this an' that. That's what licked Ferguson, an' I couldn't do a thing."

Mr. Hinkley nodded his head and wiped his brow with a wisp of white apron.

"Aint it hell?" he agreed sorrowfully.

THOMAS nodded and tipped the tall glass. A moment later he brought it down with a shivering crash.

"But I'm going to get him," he cried. "I'm going to get him where it hurts him the most—in the pocketbook. Listen: You can hit Ginley in the head, an' he'll laugh at you—but take some money from him, an' watch him lose the sunny smile."

It was Mr. Hinkly's turn to nod. "They do say he's tight," he agreed.

"Tight!" Curly Thomas laughed bitterly. "A tightwad is a Coal Oil Johnny compared to him—the dirty rat."

He sipped in silence for a moment.

"How you goin' to do it, Curly?"

A look of deep cunning crept into the eyes of the fight-promoter, a wolfish look that in some curious way made his broad features resemble the picture of the champion of the world grinning in the gilt frame—a kinfolk look.

"You just wait an' see," he promised. "You just mark my words. I aint sayin' anything now; but wait—he'll get it where it hurts him most—an'—an' at his own game."

He turned to stare at the picture in mute defiance—and then he noticed the lumped figure at the last table near the brilliant piano. At first his glance was indifferent; figures such as the lumped one were common enough along Sixth Avenue. Then as he gazed, his eyes brightened, and he sucked his breath in

an audible whistle. For two full minutes he studied as much of the figure as he could see.

"Who's that?" he asked with an effort at indifference.

Hinkly shook his head. "You got me," he confessed. "Some bird that's been hangin' around here lately with just enough jack to buy two or three drinks a day—to keep him from bein' kicked out. But aint he a big one?"

Curly Thomas nodded indifferently, but his eyes were bright. "Guess I'll go over an' see what's the matter with the poor devil."

HE walked slowly toward the table in the rear, through the soggy heat-haze. The figure was spread over the table, almost covering it with his huge breadth of shoulder. At the farther side were two glasses—empty. The coat that covered the shoulders was old and lumpy. The head, as much as there was to be seen, was covered with thick, coarse hair of a dull tow color.

Quietly the promoter drew a chair to the opposite side of the table.

"Hello, brother!" he greeted amiably.

The other raised his head slowly, like some prehistoric animal, and the other stirred in surprise. For the face was young—hardly twenty, it seemed to the closely scrutinizing Curly as he noted the pink and white of the face against the mop of tow. It was a face free of lines, and the eyes were blue and staring.

"Hello!" The bulk, now straightened, towered far over the erstwhile manager of champions, and gazed thoughtfully.

"Hot! Eh, brother?"

"Yes." The stare did not bother Curly, who continued to smile amiably.

"Have a little drink?"

The bulk stirred slightly.

"Yes."

When the drinks were on the table, the promoter paid for them from a roll that was golden with hundred-dollar bills. The bulk twisted, and his eyes brightened. Curly waited till the proprietor had retreated out of earshot. He leaned forward and fingered a hundred-dollar bill.

"Brother," he questioned, "how would you like to make a lot of easy money—like this?"

The other shook his head, jerkily, as if awakening.

"No," he said, "I aint like that."

"What you mean—aint like that?"

"Crooked."

Thomas laughed heartily. "Crooked!" he chortled. "How do you get that way? Do I look like a second-story worker? Do I look like a Jesse Jimmy? Huh?"

The other sipped his drink in silence.

"All you have to do," Curly continued, lingering on the words for emphasis, "is to sit still an' be a good boy, an' you get five thousand berries."

The bulk shook its head cunningly. "That aint no work," he whispered, "for five thousand dollars."

Mr. Thomas mopped his brow. "You're a smart one, all right," he assented. "No putting anything over on you; I can see that. But you need the cash—don't you, brother?"

The other licked his lips, which were dry. He nodded.

"Have another snifter, broth— What is your name?"

"Chris," said the other. "Chris—Swanson."

"Mine," said the promoter, "is Thomas—Curly Thomas."

"Yeh."

"You may have heard of me—I held the ribbons for Ferguson."

"Yeh?"—uncomprehendingly.

"Fighter," explained the promoter vigorously, "heavyweight champion of the world. I was his boss—manager."

"Oh!"

"There was a boy that had a chance to pull down some real coin, if he'd 'a' followed my advice. He could 'a' made a half-million if he didn't have a yellow streak."

"So!"

THEY had another drink. "There's the guy that beat him." Thomas pointed to the large gilt frame. "See him? The big stiff! The dirty rat!"

"You don't like him, huh?"

The little dark eyes of the promoter grinned evilly. "You said it, brother. An' listen. When I don't like a guy—well, I get him. See? Get him where it hurts! That's why you and me—"

Swanson thrust his huge bulk back in alarm. "I aint in it," he proclaimed. "You were sayin'—"

Thomas thrust his head forward as the other retreated. "Listen, brother," he commanded. "You aint New York, are you?"

"St. Paul," said the towhead.

"You're young, aint you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Married?"

"No." A light flared—and died.

"Girl?" The promoter knew men.

The towhead nodded.

"Like to get married, huh?"

A nod.

"Come down here to make the price?"

"I was driving a moving-wagon in St. Paul for three-fifty a day. In the paper I saw where in New York they struck for six dollars, so—I came."

"No job?"

"I aint union."

"Broke?"

A silence. "Yeh."

"Wanta go back?"

"Not now. In St. Paul I said to Jennie I wouldn't come back without—without the— An' Jennie, she said to me—"

The promoter nodded sympathetically. "Sure," he assented. "The Jennies, they all say that."

In the heat-laden silence they sat for a moment.

"What d'ya suppose," the promoter insinuated softly after the silence had lasted some time, "Jennie would say if you came home with five thousand great big dollars—eh, brother!"

What Jennie would say was mirrored in the staring blue eyes of the bulk. A fly buzzed in the space between them. Mr. Thomas played his fish in silence. Finally with a quiver of white flesh the fish arose to the fly.

"What is it I do," he whispered, "for the five thousand dollars?"

The manager of champions tapped the table with a pudgy forefinger while the other stared.

"Listen!" he commanded finally. "You say yes, an' you get a century right off the bat. Then we go away from here up into a little town in the New England hills. There you live soft, like a king, for about five months. All you have to do all day is let a coupla friends of mine show you how to box. See? Nothing crooked about that, is there?"

"N-no."

"After that, you go into the ring an' box aroun' awhile with a man, an' then you leave the man knock you down; an'—an' the five thousand is yours—an' Jennie's."

"Who—who is the man?"

Thomas turned in his chair and stared at the picture in the gilt frame. "That's the one," he said.

The towhead drew back with a jerk. Frank fear lighted his eyes. He shook his head slowly.

"I like the money," he said sorrowfully, "but not like that. Besides, Jennie— A mover, yes; but a fighter, maybe no."

"Don't you worry about that, brother." Mr. Thomas reached forward and grasped the huge forearm of the youth. "She'll never know anything about it. We'll give you another name. See? One short half-hour, an' everything will be over—six months—five thousand berries—nothing crooked—easy money—eh, brother?"

The big hulk still teetered; but the manager of champions, watching, smiled a wolfish grin.

"Why do you do this for me? Some friend maybe—"

"Brother,"—Mr. Thomas spoke in the flat voice of one who knows his explanation will be wasted,—"it's psychology. You don't get that, but that's what the wise boys call it. I'll give it to you straight. Sure! There's a hundred friends of mine I'd rather give the five to, but brother, they aint built for the psychology game. Better fighters too, brother, than I could ever make of you—but they don't look it. See?"

The towhead shook in negation.

"Sure you don't, an' that's an advantage too. What you don't know wont hurt you. Listen: For two years I've been looking for a man like you—a guy that looks like a champion of the world. I didn't care whether he couldn't hit a windmill or whether his footwork was punk—because—because, brother, we aint goin' to make ours that way. An' why, brother? Simply because it wouldn't hurt the rat I'm after enough. See? I gotta get him where it hurts. He took my meal-ticket away from me, an' Curly Thomas aint forgetting it."

"An' I don't have to fight hard—like—like a fighter?"

"Not you," Mr. Thomas grinned. "It wouldn't hurt Ginley enough to suit me."

MR. CURLY THOMAS walked into the executive offices of the Prairie Silver Lode Securities Company and requested a languid telephone operator to shoot his name into the office of Mr. Ben Murphy, director of publicity.

"An' make it snappy, sister," he re-

quested. "Put a little pepper an' vinegar on it."

"This aint a eating-place," the girl informed him tartly.

"What do they do, swallow them whole?"

At this jocular reference to the simpletons who crowded the office eager to buy the pretty certificates of the Prairie Silver Lode Securities Company, the girl smiled. A moment later he was advancing on a ground-glass door marked *Mr. Murphy, Private.*

He found the gentleman carelessly scratching the mahogany of his desk with highly polished tan boots, while he read the pink sheet of a sporting journal. He was a young man with a heavy, glistening head of black hair, whose dark eyes and sallow blue-white skin belied his name. He wore a light tan suit, and a diamond horseshoe in a purple and red cravat.

"Hello, Curly!" he greeted.

The manager of champions nodded and sat down. "Benny," he said tensely, "I found him."

"Found who?"

"The bird to hand it to Ginley."

"Yeh?" Mr. Murphy removed his feet in tribute to the importance of the news and leaned forward. "Shoot," he directed.

"He's as big as a house, Benny. Honest, when I put the tape on him, I couldn't believe my eyes. Seventy-nine an' a half inches of reach! Think of it! Six foot seven, an' a pair of shoulders like nothing you ever saw before."

"Boy!"

"An' that aint the best of it, Benny. Listen! He's a Swede, an' his brain don't work any faster than a rheumatic snail. Believe me, Benny, he's made to order."

"You interest me strangely," said Mr. Murphy facetiously. "Where did you pick him up?"

"Hinkly's. He's from St. Paul. He came up to the big town to make his fortune as a mover. Aint it a scream! An' he has a girl named Jennie who is waitin' for him back in St. Paul. Oh, he spilled a lot of chatter when I got him over to my boarding-place. They don't need much—just enough to buy Jennie a pink cameo and a imitation fumed-oak sideboard with glass knobs. Can you beat it, Benny?"

Benny was inhaling a drooping cigarette, holding it between yellow-stained fingers. "So," he murmured, "we're all set for the killing."

Mr. Curly Thomas nodded vigorously. "You said it," he responded. "Are you all ready to go ahead? Can you get Ferrity to let you get away from skinning suckers long enough to put this over?"

Mr. Murphy nodded, smiling softly. "It's a case of where he's gotta. Aint I the best little silver-tongued typewriter-slinger in the old town? Where would Ferrity an' the Prairie Silver Lode be without me an' my little typewriter? An' Ferrity knows it—in fact, I'm aiming to borrow some of the money I'm goin' to use to put me over in this, from Ferrity himself."

"Atta boy! Remember, every dollar we get up will bring us back three. It's now or never."

The other licked his lips hungrily.

"Where do we go from here?"

THE manager of champions drew a gold-edged wallet from his pocket and extracted a paper. From an upper vest pocket he withdrew a gold pencil. Cramped over the paper, he began:

"Here's the way I got it figgered out: I talked to Young Sullivan last night — you know, Benny — that big wop that works as a barber between fights over on Twenty-eighth Street? I told him to get ahold of Freddy Doherty an' come around to-night. I am figgering on having those two boys take him up into New England somewhere an' keep him busy for two months getting hep to the game. Right now he don't know a left and right hook from a square piano."

"Does—does he know he's got to lay down?"

"Yeh!" The promoter laughed. "He likes that, Benny—honest, I'll bet you he's got a yellow streak as wide as a house."

"That helps," Mr. Murphy assented.

"Now, as for you, Benny—well, they wont be much for you until I get Ginley signed up for the fight. Blank contract, promoter to furnish opponent for twenty-five-round bout to a decision. Victor to get the heavyweight belt. Champion of the world!" Mr. Thomas laughed loudly.

"How much you goin' to offer him?"

"Seventy-five thousand dollars, win, lose or draw."

"But that will probably be eighty per cent of the gate receipts."

"Sure, it will! But there also is a—a—kicker."

"How—"

"If he don't want to take seventy-five thousand, he gets ten thousand to sign the contract, an' seventy-five per cent of the gate."

"But that's more than the other way."

"Sure, it is—an' it's the proposition that Ginley will fall for. Why? Simply because he's a smart guy. Don't ever forget that, when you start to figger on Bill Ginley. Ginley will figger this way: If the gate is worth seventy-five thousand to Thomas, it's worth that much to me—an' that's the way I want him to figger."

"Why?"

"Honest, Benny, you surprise me! What are the gate-receipts to me? Why should I worry whether he gets ten thousand more that way—don't you see? It leaves me all my capital to put out where I can get three for one—an' where I aint got a chance in the world to lose."

Mr. Murphy nodded. "Good head!"

"An' then, when I have him signed hard an' fast, you let lose—see. Open a headquarters an' send out your stuff to every paper in the country. You know: young New England giant to box champion of the world for his title. Utmost secrecy surrounds personality of contender for title. Found by Promoter Curly Thomas far up in the hills; he is being trained in hidden spot. Astounding developments concerning gigantic physical strength of new pugilistic star, promised later by Promoter Thomas. Get it?"

His subordinate nodded, eyes half closed in contemplation of the wonderful setting that had been provided for his art. He whistled softly between yellow teeth. "It's the greatest stuff that was ever put over in the history of the game," he whispered. "Lord, but wont they fall for that mystery stuff—an' the young giant coming down out of the virgin hills! It's a world-beater, I tell you, Curly."

Mr. Thomas nodded complacently.

"I always said it would be," he answered.

"But how about Ginley? Wont it maybe scare him?"

Mr. Thomas shook his head in mock sorrow. "Honest, Benny, I am getting ashamed of you," he said. "Didn't I tell you that Ginley was a smart boy? Didn't I? Don't you suppose that the minute your stuff starts to come out, he is going to find out about it—and what is he going to find? He is going to find out that the big stiff don't know enough about boxing to ruffle his hair—that I have fallen for a great big hunk of cheese. A great big Swede stiff! An' he's to act accordingly. Get me, Benny?"

Smiling wolfishly, Mr. Murphy nodded and looked less than ever a son of Erin.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Chris—Chris Swanson."

The other wrote the name on a sheet of white paper that lay before him. Still smiling, he picked up an ink-bottle and poured a small portion of the blue liquid over the name.

"Chris," he chanted slowly, "I christen thee *Hurricane Kelly*."

THE space of time intervening between the sixth day of June and that Monday in September dedicated to the cause of labor was crammed with interest for the world of sport. On the day that Mr. Curly Thomas, through his director of publicity Mr. Benny Murphy, announced to the newspaper world that he had signed Big Bill Ginley to defend his title in a twenty-five-round battle to a decision, a thousand sporting-editors emitted a long sigh of deep content. Who Big Bill would battle was a minor consideration. Here was a big hunk of daily space filled for three months with stuff that was bound to go big. Big Bill had been a champion of champions, and the man that faced him in the arena had to be a superchampion. On the strength of this the gambling confraternity promptly offered five-to-two odds on the champion, regardless of the second man in the ring.

But Mr. Curly Thomas and his director of publicity were not interested in any such odds.

"Wait till we pull our superman stuff next week," chortled Benny, "an' see the odds jump right off the bat."

And they did. With the announcement that Promoter Thomas had signed an unknown giant from a remote little hamlet in the White Mountains, the odds strengthened to five to three. But the wise Mr. Thomas and his associates were biding the day—the day when the great mass of the day—the day when the great mass of boxing-lovers the country over had been well fed with the news from Hurricane Kelly's camp in the little New England

town—until they saw pictures of his huge figure clad only in fighting-trunks, beside that of his sparring partners Young Sullivan and Ferrity.

They were busy days for the director of publicity. His first story of the contender for the championship was a masterpiece of sucker literature. He read it over to the promoter the evening before its release. It read as follows:

> Out of the New England hills he has come to challenge the champion of the world. He calls himself Hurricane Kelly, but up in the hills a proud old family is sheltered. A child of nature with a body like a huge bronze god, he is confident that a new champion will arise on Labor Day. He does not talk much for publication, and his trainers keep him closely guarded, but Mr. Curly Thomas, world-renowned sportsman, who discovered him, had this to say:
>
> "Never in all my ring-experience have I seen a fighter to equal Kelly. Six foot seven, four inches taller than the champion, he is the fastest big man I ever saw. His reach, seventy-nine inches, is five inches greater than that of the present holder of the title. I don't believe there is a man alive who can stand the terrific speed and force of this twenty-two-year-old youth."

Mr. Thomas laughed loudly. "Benny, you certainly do take the come-on palm."

Benny nodded modestly. "Thanks," he said. "But that stuff aint a patch on what's coming. Ferrity's got the big stiff moving now so he looks like a regular fighter. Wait till my follow-up stuff comes along. 'Young Kelly Knocks Two Trainers Cold in Two Rounds.' 'Boy Wonder Says He Always Knew He Would Be Champion.' 'Ed Snap, World-Known Sport-expert, Picks Kelly.'" He hesitated for a moment. "That last cost us five hundred."

Mr. Thomas nodded, and lighted a large black cigar.

"Dirt cheap," he said.

"That's what I thought."

"How about Ginley? Is he saying anything?"

"Says he'll win by a knockout before the bout is half over."

Mr. Thomas laughed. "Sure he will," he chuckled, "but he aint going to make me mad. But he—he must have had somebody down to see our big Swede."

"Maginis," said his subordinate. "Hung aroun'—said he was looking for a job. Ferrity gave him all the chance in the world to see that the big boob was a frost."

"Ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Thomas. "Aint it the truth about there being no greater boob than a wise guy?"

"Yeh."

"What are the latest odds you get?"

"Five to four."

"When we get the suckers offering even money on our bronze youthful wonder," instructed Mr. Thomas, "you pick up all the money you can on Ginley. They aint no need to tell you to be careful about it, is there?"

Mr. Murphy grinned understandingly. "Not me," he said.

A MONTH passed—a month in which Mr. Curly Thomas selected the city of Bigburg as the place where the battle for the heavyweight crown should be fought. Out in the western section of the city, where a natural amphitheater was owned by the city, an arena was erected with seats for sixty thousand people. The champion of champions came to the city the first day of August and established a training-camp out along the Cuyahoga River, where he shadow-boxed and toyed with his assistants before a crowd that gasped and marveled—and paid fifty cents each for the privilege.

But the astute Curly kept his huge bronze god up in the hills until just two weeks before the day of battle. It whetted the public appetite and fitted into the picture the fanciful Benny had drawn of the youth. Sporting editors and special writers by the score traveled up into the hills to see this alleged wonder, and went away dazed by his size. Calm, cold-eyed men who wagered thousands calmly traveled up to the quiet little town where the pine trees whispered at night; and these men went away puzzled. If size and youth went for anything, the big tow-headed youth was a sure winner. On the other hand, if deep cunning, a wicked left hook and long experience were commanding factors, the champion of champions had the call. Opinion was divided—which pleased the promoter.

"It makes it look more regular," he explained to Murphy, "an' it helps the odds."

"Anyway," said Benny, "we know."

Mr. Thomas laughed. Of late he was laughing frequently. It was a great old world when you were in on the know, as Mr. Benny Murphy expressed it. A great old world when you could look ahead and

see three dollars coming in for every one that went out.

"We do that," he acknowledged. "An' it's a funny proposition, aint it? So does Ginley know it. It don't happen that way often in a fight."

"It don't, at that," the publicity director acknowledged. "But there's a funnier thing than that about this scrap. Have you ever stopped to figure this out, Curly? If we are putting up every plugged nickel we can get ahold of,—an' Ginley is doing the same,—where is all the dough that is covering these bets coming from? The Kelly money?"

The manager of champions stroked his glossy mustache and flashed the two-carat diamond on his third finger in the glare of the desk-lamp.

"It's like this guy Barnum said," he chortled. "They like to be fooled. All you have to do is give them a little guff that strikes their imagination, an' they rush to hold the bag. Aint it a scream? The boobs! Bettin' against a sure thing."

THE story of the last two weeks and the last night: The two weeks were hectic with babbling, seething excitement, filled with people rushing and whispering—rent profiteers with brazen faces demanding twenty dollars for a room, bootleggers winking toward back rooms. But the last night was calm with the menacing stillness that precedes a storm at sea.

The two weeks began with the arrival of Curly Thomas, manage of champions, and the young giant he had discovered in the virgin hills. The two were accompanied by Mr. Benjamin Murphy and two dozen servitors. For Thomas was a wise man. He spared no preliminary expense in teaching the big Swede, whom the world called Hurricane Kelly, all there was to know about the intricate art of self-defense.

"It takes an expert to get knocked out convincingly," he told Ferrity and the wop called Sullivan who had charge of the training. "Keep him at it."

And they did. They kept him boxing, ignoring the hand-ball and the other adjuncts of fistic training. Crowds filled the long dusty road out to the young giant's camp and felt well repaid when they were allowed to watch him box two rounds with the wop—six short minutes for fifty cents per head.

And they liked him, these dusty spectators, experts and otherwise. They liked him for his size and the clear color of his eyes. He boxed freely now, with none of the self-consciousness that marked the early days of training. Ferrity had done a good job. Kelly's foot-work was easy, and his mighty arms, like bronze pythons, moved with lightning speed.

Experts representing papers from all over the country only found one fault with the contender.

"He does it all so mechanically," they asserted, "—for all the world as if he were doing a day's work in a boiler-shop."

But other experts had an answer for this. "He's a perfect fighting machine," they answered. "No emotions, no temperament, just a unified knockout."

From the camp of Big Bill Ginley came the news that never in his ring-history had the champion been in such perfect physical condition. Every visitor to his training-camp came away with the same words upon their lips:

"If it wasn't for the boy's size and youth, he wouldn't have a chance."

And so it went. Each day was filled to brimming with close-eyed men peddling hot tips straight from the various training-camps at whatever they would bring—bookmakers offering even money, hard-faced women sitting about hotel lobbies. So it went until the last night.

THEN came a hush. People no longer babbled and seethed, but moved quietly. Motorcars with the dust of seven States upon them stole into town and sought some place—any place to park.

Nightfall found the camps of the champion and his challenger still and dark. Each gladiator was to retire early, announced the trainers. Guards lolled about each camp to enforce the quiet.

But in one camp no one was sleeping. Around a little table in a room with windows closely shrouded, five men sat whispering. One was a large man with a glossy mustache and a two-carat diamond. Another was a tow-headed giant who sat lumpily staring. Two were trainers, to judge by their sweaters and closely drawn blue caps. Another and the last, was a blue-faced young man with yellowed fingers.

The large man with the large glossy mustache was speaking.

"Do you get it all?" he was demanding.

The towhead nodded.

"Keep right after him," the big man continued. "Hit him all you can in the first five or six rounds—he wont go after you until then, anyway."

"Why?"

"Because of the moving pictures. What kind of a paying proposition would it be for him if they only lasted a hundred feet or so? No! He wont go after you until later—so go in an' scrap. See? If you fight hard at first, they wont say you laid down later. Get me? Make it look real. Remember everything Ferrity has told you. An' remember this when you do go down—stay down until you get the count of seven—then stagger up—see? Act groggy, as if you didn't know what you were doing. The fans will like that, call you game. Take away any suspicion. Then when he hits you the second time—go down an' stay down! Get it all?"

The challenger nodded, his huge tawny head lowered. On the eve of the most momentous episode of his life, he was absolutely calm—like a man waiting for the whistle to blow before resuming work.

"How about my pay?"

"My boy, after to-morrow we'll have all the money in the world." The gang around the little table grinned.

The big hulk stared straight ahead. "I'd like it now," he said. "Jennie, she always said—"

"Sure she did," the big man interrupted. "An' she was dead right, brother. Here you are!" He peeled ten golden bills from a thin roll that would not be thin after the morrow. The big stiff had no kick now.

"Everything all set?" he demanded.

Around the table they all nodded, still smiling with wolfish glee.

The big man stood up. "I've waited a long time for to-morrow," he crowed, "an' believe me, boys, it looks like a sweet day. I wouldn't trade that minute when Big Bill gives our boy the K. O. for anything in the world. Can't you see him looking over into the corner at me expecting to see me looking into the sawdust for all my lost coin—and see me smiling instead?"

Over in the other camp the champion of the world slept easily, a crooked, cunning smile upon his lips.

THE heat was terrific. Not a wisp of breeze came to relieve the torridity of the great arena. Thousands sat in their shirt-sleeves, broiling under a sun of polished brass. Gray dust hung like a pall above the single road that led to the main gateway. A straggling line of spectators moved between honking motors. There were many women, and even children in the great crowd that gathered. Venders of refreshments filled the air about the main gateway with shrill calls. It was the biggest day that Bigburg had ever known.

Within the arena interest was intense. People who had arrived early in the morning clutched their seats, blistering with heat, and stared into the heat-haze about the ring. Men in their shirt-sleeves with handkerchiefs tied about their necks cursed the heat and shouted gleefully about the battle, all in the same breath.

Preliminary bouts went forward continuously but attracted scant attention. A Greek boy sent another in red tights to the floor with a sickening crunch, but the crowd hardly noticed. Some one was shouting, in a voice hoarse with excitement: "Here comes Kelly!"

But neither Kelly nor the champion of the world arrived. The crowd grew restless and began to cat-call. At fitful intervals they clapped and stamped their feet on the rude planking at their feet.

And then from aisles on opposite sides of the ring came the champion of the world and the challenger, each with his trainers. The crowd shouted themselves hoarse.

"Hurrah for Ginley!" shouted a fat man in a ringside seat, and the crowd cheered with him. Then with might and main they shouted for the huge towhead as he went to his corner.

The towhead's face was serious, and the muscles in his thighs twitched nervously. The champion stood at ease, leaning against the ropes, the same crooked, cunning smile upon his lips. He nodded to an acquaintance outside the ropes. He was the picture of a cool, experienced champion about to exhibit his skill.

Across the ring the Swede was listening to the final words of the wop and Ferrity.

"Go after him until the sixth," they hissed into his ear, "an' then drop the way we showed you."

Just without the ropes the fight-promoter sat. Guessing the gist of the whispering, he nodded encouragingly and smiled. For Mr. Curly Thomas it was the

big day, with the big moment fast approaching.

Around the great bowl all was still. Even the telegraph-instruments and typewriters of the news-writers had stopped.

The champion of the world went to the center of the ring first. The challenger followed him out. They shook hands as the movie-camera clicked. There was a striking contrast between the men that the crowd appreciated: the challenger, huge, young, blue-eyed, serious, like some ancient Viking come to life; the champion smaller, with his wicked bullet-head showing the signs of many battles, but wearing that same crooked, cunning smile. They went back to their corners.

The bell rang!

OUT of his corner like a streak of light came the champion. The big tow-head followed him more slowly. The champion measured the huge torso before him, danced lightly about and then lashed out with his arms.

The fight was on.

The champion swung twice and touched the huge face lightly. The serious stare in the blue eyes of the challenger deepened. He jabbed at the moving bullet before him and missed. The other smiled. Slowly the huge bronze bulk advanced toward the dancing form. The champion stepped away then turned like a flash to meet him. While the other lunged, the champion shot a lightning left through the upraised arms. Unmindful, the big hulk continued to do the things he was taught. They went into a clinch as the bell rang. Over the challenger's heart a large blob of red marked the target of the left. The champion was still smiling. Down by the ringside the promoter was also smiling.

They went back at it, and before the echo of the starting gong had died away a dull thud rocked the champion's head. The crowd howled with glee. Big Bill moved more cautiously and used the years of his experience to lash a wicked left hook to the jaw and another to the stomach. In turn he took a terrific right to the jaw that made his knees sag.

At the conclusion of the round the promoter was not smiling. He moved closer to the corner where the blond giant was being sponged.

"What the hell!" he said to Ferrity. "Tell that fool to take it easier."

They fought silently for three rounds, the champion taking rocking bows to the head on several occasior but fighting with that same crooked, cunning smile.

"Leaving the youngster tire himself," was the consensus of expert opinion.

As the gong rang at the end of the fifth round and the men moved to their corners, Mr. Thomas leaned forward. Just before the three-minute period of rest was up, Ferrity looked down at his boss. The latter winked and then smiled. Ferrity placed his broad lips at the tow-head's ear and whispered something. The challenger nodded. The bell rang.

THEY went forward carefully. The referee hovered about them, watching. The manager of champions was leaning forward in his chair, a huge black cigar locked in his closed jaws. Would the big saphead do it without a flaw? Would he slump, head and shoulders forward, stomach in, in that convincing way he had been drilled?

They went to a clinch without striking a telling blow. In parting, the champion landed a loud tap on the side of the tawny head. The Swede feinted with his left and reached forward with his right—forward and up. It was not a hard blow by the sound, but the champion teetered, wabbled and fell, head down, shoulders forward. The referee hovered over him, counting. He was moving his head in a queer lolling fashion and moaning.

Suddenly the significance of it all came to the vast assemblage. A mighty roar welled up. Scores of excited men jumped toward the canvas ring.

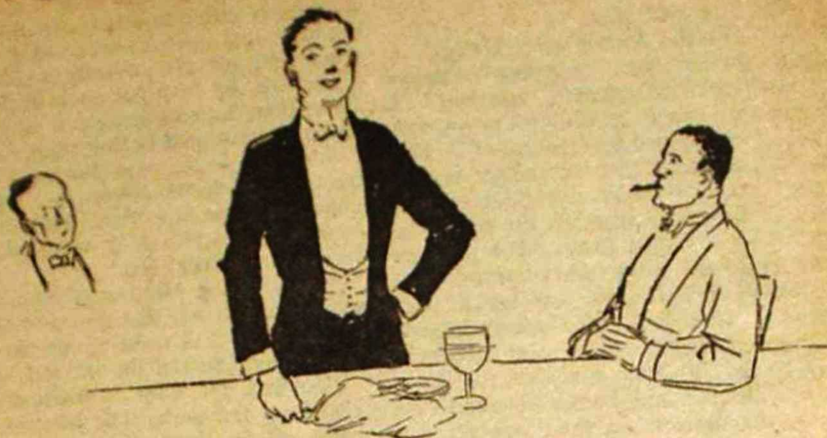
Slowly the referee counted nine, while beside him the new champion of the world stood in foolish bewilderment.

Beside the ring a large man with a glossy mustache and a two-carat diamond sat as if dazed. Then with the roar of an angry bull he shook himself and rose. He made his way to the floor-level of the ring. From this position he could see the face of the old champion of the world as it lay partly turned to the floor. And the face was smiling—a crooked, cunning smile.

With a sickening jolt it came to the large man where all the Kelly money came from. He slumped back into his ringside seat.

Up on the canvas floor of the arena, excited men held aloft the new champion of the world.

We Have With Us To-Night



By Elmer E. Ferris

"WHAT is this that the boys are telling about Billy Thomas at the Gordon-Johnson banquet?" asked Ben Clark of Tom Dawson as they met in the hotel lobby.

"Billy was there, all right," responded Tom.

"Were you there?" asked Ben.

"No, Sam Agnew told me about it—he is their sales manager, you know."

"How did Billy come to tackle a stunt like that?"

"Well, I guess I had a spoon in that dish," said Tom. "I met Agnew about six weeks ago, and he was preparing a program for their sales-conference. Once a year they have all their salesmen come in,—about a hundred and fifty salesmen,—and they hold a sales-conference that lasts four or five days. They always end up with a big banquet, and they usually have two or three speeches at the banquet by prominent men; but Sam wanted something different this time, and he asked me what I thought would be a good stunt.

"'That depends on what you are after,' says I. 'If you simply want to entertain the boys, that is one thing; but if you want to ginger them up and put pep into them for business, why, that of course is something else again.'

"'I would like to give them something they could use,' says Sam, 'but of course we hand them all kinds of business dope at the conference, and so what we give them at the banquet ought to be different.'

"Just then an idea popped into my head. 'I know what would be a big thing for you,' says I, 'if only you could work it.'

"'What?' says he.

"'Get a first-class salesman that sells some other line,—some fellow that has a reputation,—and let him cut loose on your men and sell them some big idea.'

"'What idea?' says Sam.

"'Why, his own big idea,' I says. 'It's like this: Every man that does things in a big way has got some big principle or idea that he works on, and whether he knows it or not, that idea has a whole lot to do with his success.'

"'That is a pretty large order for a salesman,' says Sam. 'Have you got some man in mind?'

"'Yes,' I says, 'I know just the man for the job — Billy Thomas. He travels for the Boyd & Bidwell Coffee and Spice Mills, and believe me, that boy is some salesman.'

THIS is a story you have been waiting all your life to read—and that you will remember for a long time.

"'Yes, I met him once,' says Sam. 'He is a regular fellow.'

"'But I see some difficulties in the way,' I says.

"'What?' says Sam.

"'Well, in the first place,' I says, 'if Billy thinks that you are trying to bunco him into making a speech, you couldn't get him to do it in a thousand years, and then if you do get him to come in and pull off a selling-stunt, the danger is that he would try to make a regular speech, and then he would sure fall down.'

"'I get you,' says Sam. 'The problem would be to get Billy to act natural.'

"'That's it,' I says. 'When a man tries to be what he is not, he isn't himself or anybody else; but if you could get Billy to go in there and just be Billy Thomas, believe me, he would stand that bunch of salesmen on their heads. But then,' I says, 'I am not saying that you could get him, or that he could deliver the goods if you did get him.'

"'I understand,' says Sam; 'but your scheme is worth considering.'

"WELL, Sam got to thinking the thing over, and the more he thought about it, the more favorable the plan looked; so he got into touch with Billy. Now, Sam is an old salesman himself, and he did a pretty smooth job with Billy. He told Billy that they were pretty well fed up on speeches at their banquets, and they had decided not to have a speech this year. 'What we want,' says he, 'is something practical. We want a regular traveling salesman that has had a lot of experience to take some big idea or principle that he has always worked on and go right after the fellows hammer-and-tongs, and sell it to them just as if it was a bill of goods.'

"But Billy was foxy. 'I don't see much difference between that and making a speech,' he says. 'A man would have to get up in front of those guys and talk, wouldn't he? How is that different from a speech?'

"'See here!' says Sam. 'Supposing that you went down here to sell a man a stock of goods; you would have to get up in front of him and talk, wouldn't you? But that isn't a speech.'

"'No, but if there was a hundred and fifty of him, it would sure be a speech,' says Billy.

"'Not unless you made it so,' says Sam. 'What we want is to have you talk just as you would if you were selling one man—sell the idea just as you would sell a barrel of coffee to a new customer. We don't want a speech—we want a selling-stunt, and you are the man to pull it off. There will be fifty dollars in it for you. Now, then, haven't you got some big idea that you have used in the selling game?'

"'Sure I have,' says Billy. 'I have a motto that I have used for over ten years, and believe me, it works to beat the band. It has been worth fifty thousand dollars to me—not a cent less.'

"'That's the idea,' says Sam. 'Now, then, you can sell that motto to the boys—just go in and make a sale, no speech, no oratory, just put the sale over—see?'

"So Sam got Billy to skidding, and he closed up the deal. The banquet was to come off in thirty days; so Billy had plenty of time to think the thing over. And then Billy's trouble began. At first the scheme looked fine to him, and that fifty dollars looked like easy money, but when he began to plan out a sale to a hundred and fifty guys sitting in their seats, why, the more Billy thought about it the more that sale idea looked like a pipe-dream. Sam had simply camouflaged the thing and put one over on him—he was in for a speech.

"Well, Billy made up his mind to be a good sport and go through with it anyway; so he went to work on the speech, and about that time he saw in a newspaper that President Wilson usually writes his speeches out and reads them when he makes a speech; and that looked pretty good to Billy, because then a man couldn't possibly fall down. So Bill starts to write his speech, and when he gets ten or twelve pages written, he mails them to Sam and asks him to look it over, and he tells him about President Wilson, and says that he guesses he will do the same thing if Sam is agreeable.

"OF course Sam sees that Billy is gumming the whole thing up; so he writes Billy a letter and hands him some hot stuff. 'For the love of Mike, Billy, don't get any such idea as that into your head,' says he. 'Because if you try to do like President Wilson does, you will fall down on it and make a devil of a mess out of the thing. We don't want a speech; we just want Billy Thomas to get into action—see?'

"Well, that set Billy right back where he began, and two weeks were gone. Then he went to work in dead earnest trying to figure out how he was going to get next to that bunch of men with his proposition. But when the day of the banquet arrived, and Billy started for Gordon-Johnson's, he had no definite idea how he was going at it to put over that cussed sale, and he felt like a man going to jail.

"Sam gave him the glad hand and asked him how he felt. 'I feel like damnation,' says Billy. Sam laughed, and said that Billy would feel easier after he got started, but all the same Sam began to feel uneasy himself. Billy got there in time to attend the afternoon session of the sales-conference. They were having a discussion of the four steps in a sale; first, attention; second, interest; third, desire; fourth, action; and all at once Billy got an idea. He asked Sam if he could have a room all by himself for an hour or two, and Sam got him one. Then Billy shut himself up in the room and paced up and down the floor working out that sale along the line of those four steps. He got his talk sort of whipped into shape, and while he was doing it, the plan looked pretty good to him, and he got excited over it; but after he completed it and began to fix the different points in mind, why, the whole thing looked rotten to him, and he could just see that bunch of salesmen guying the life out of him. He would have given a month's salary to get out of that fix.

"WELL, when the banquet came on, Billy and Sam sat with the nabobs at the main table, and Billy felt like a four-flusher. He didn't have any appetite, and when Sam asks him why he doesn't eat, Billy says it's because he has got cold feet; and Sam told me afterward that his own feet were getting cold too. Well, after they all got through eating and lighted their cigars and sort of squared themselves as much as to say, 'Now start your fireworks and let us have something classy,' why, Sam started to introduce Billy. He intended to get off some jokes and be funny, but he was sort of flabbergasted, and instead of being funny he made an ass of himself so that when Billy got up he faced a situation that would have took the nerve out of Chauncey M. Depew. Then something happened that the men at the main table weren't looking for. It seems that some of the salesmen that knew Billy had put up a job on him—just out of deviltry—to try and get his goat; and so when Billy got up, why, a bunch of men down in the center began to sing out, 'Oh say, can you see—' and another bunch began to yell, 'Why, look who's here,' and half a dozen other guys got up and says: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, we have with us to-night—'

"Sam told me it was the worst jazz he ever heard at a banquet, and he glanced up at Billy to see how he was taking it; but Billy was standing there grinning, with his hands stuck in his pockets, and Sam said there was a glitter in Billy's eye, and all at once Sam saw that this was the very best thing that could happen, because the boys were stirring up Billy's fighting spirit, and a ballyhoo like this was Billy's favorite dish.

"'All right, go to it, good people!' shouts Billy with a laugh. 'I am going to get under your epidermis when it comes my turn, so just enjoy yourselves while the kidding is good.'

"By the time they subsided, Billy was right up on his toes. 'This isn't a speech,' says he. 'It's a sale. I am going to sell you men something. Now, this afternoon you were discussing the four steps in a sale. You remember the first step is attention; so I must have your attention first. I am going to get it this way. I am going to stand here with my mouth shut till every man of you comes to attention. Now, then, boys, sit still and keep your eyes on Billy.'

"Then Billy stuck his hands into his pockets and kept perfectly still, and of course it was only a minute when every one of the fellows was still too.

"'ALL right, I have got your attention,' says Billy; 'and now the next step is to get your interest, and that is going to be easy, because this thing I am about to hand out to you is something that a man can cash in on, and there isn't anything quite so interesting as good old spondulix. This proposition of mine is worth an investment of twenty thousand dollars to each one of you if you will take it and use it. You can actually cash in on it every year—more than five per cent on twenty thousand dollars. I have done it in my selling, and you can do it in yours.'

"'What is it, Billy? Oil stock for a side-line?' says one of the men.

" 'No sir, oil-stock is a gamble,' says Billy with a laugh. 'There's no gamble about this proposition. It's a sure thing, and twenty thousand dollars is a low estimate—it has been worth more than fifty thousand to me. Now, before I tell you what it is and what it will do, I want to tell you a few things that it wont do.'

" 'In the first place, it wont take the place of hard work—see? I have been selling goods on the road for sixteen years, and each year I have learned to have more confidence in plugging. I believe that things are so constituted that you can safely bank on the ultimate results of an honest day's work, and if any of you fellows are kicking and grouching about your luck, the chances are you are loafing on your job.'

"Well, this was pretty warm stuff, and Sam said that some of the fellows began to wriggle around in their chairs.

" 'Then again,' says Billy, 'this twenty-thousand-dollar proposition wont take the place of a square deal. In the long run of things a business man has got to be square or go broke.'

" 'Hold on, Bill—let me ask a question,' says one of the fellows.

" 'Shoot,' says Billy.

" 'Commodore Vanderbilt didn't go broke, but didn't he say the public be damned?'

" 'Maybe he did say that,' admits Billy, 'but wait a minute. Who gave the American people their first high-class railway? Who gave them the best transportation service for the money they ever had? Wasn't it the old Commodore?'

" 'Say, Billy,' calls another, 'didn't P. T. Barnum say the American people like to be humbugged?'

" 'Yes, but who gave the people the best circus for the money? Didn't Barnum have the largest show and the biggest elephants and the funniest clowns? Sure, Commodore Vanderbilt and Phineas T. Barnum gave the people a pretty square deal for their money.'

" 'All right, Billy,' says one of the salesmen named Farnsworth, 'but what about that twenty-thousand-dollar beauty? What is it?'

" 'That's what,' calls out some other fellows. 'Trot it out, Billy! Lead us to it!' And then they all began to stamp and whistle, the way the gallery does when they want the show to begin. But they didn't get Billy's goat.

" 'That's the stuff,' he says. 'That is the kind of a rise I want out of this bunch. 'Cause why? Because it indicates that you are interested—you want to be shown. So now we have taken the second step—interest. This sale is half made. Now, then, the third step is desire. I must make you want it. You will want it, all right, when you really see it; so it is up to me now to uncork it.'

"The men really were interested, and it took Billy only a minute to quiet them.

" 'This proposition is in the form of a motto,' says Billy. 'I saw it in a book years ago, and I took it and began to use it. A motto, you know, is a boiled-down idea in handy form so you can pull it out like a foot measure and slap it right onto a situation. So here is the twenty-thousand-dollar proposition—listen: *It is always best to affirm the best.* Now I am going to repeat it and let it soak in.'

" 'Oh, for the love of Mike,' says Farnsworth, 'are you handing us some of that Oh-be-joyful-Pollyanna stuff?'

" 'Not on your life!' says Billy. 'There is no hot air about this proposition. It is as solid as real estate or a national bank, and I will show you how a man cashes in on it. But first let us understand just what this motto means. When I say *affirm,* I don't mean *talk.* I mean the affirmative mental slant at a thing—a sort of positive mental habit—see? And when I say best I mean the best there is in the thing or the man—there's always a best in everything, so this motto means where a man's mental slant is always toward the best that is actually there.'

"THEN Billy goes on to apply the proposition to a man's own self, and he shows that when a man affirms the best about himself, why, that is what he sizes himself up to be, and then he begins to act as if it was so; and Billy claimed that that helped to make it so, and then he went on to show that fifty per cent of sales are put over by the personality of the salesman. Then Farnsworth, he butts in and asks Billy what he means by personality, and Billy comes back with the statement that personality is what a man sizes himself up to be. 'Billy Thomas is what I affirm about Billy Thomas; and don't you forget it!' says Billy. And then he points out how men usually take us at our own valuation, and by golly, I guess Billy was right."

"Oh, I don't know," said Clark. "Take one of these conceited cusses, now, and—"

"I'm not talking now about conceited cusses," retorted Tom. "Conceit is where a man affirms something about himself that isn't there—see?"

"All right; go ahead with the banquet."

"Then Billy takes the same proposition and applies it to a line of goods, and he goes on to show that when a salesman affirms the best there is in his line of goods, then his line is the best. Well, of course, that started something. The fellows began to call Billy down.

" 'Just suppose, now,' says one of them, 'that his competitor has a better piece of goods than he has, can a salesman make his goods superior by just turning on the hot air?'

" 'I am not talking about the other man's goods,' says Billy. 'Let him look after his own line. I'm talking about you and me and our line. When I affirm the best there is in my line, that's the kind of a line it is to me, and that will help to make it look that way to a customer too.'

"WELL, old Farnsworth, he backed up. He said that such talk as that was all tommyrot. 'A thing is what it is,' says Farnsworth, 'and you can affirm till you are black in the face and not make a dang bit of difference with it.'

"And then he calls on Billy to show how you can change anything by just thinking something about it.

" 'All right,' says Billy. 'I ran across a statement the other day by one of these psychology experts, and I saw it was a scientific explanation of my motto. So I cut it out and saved it, and here it is.' And Billy pulls it out of his pocket and reads it: 'Every affirmative thought that relates to action generates in the human organism a motor-impulse that tends to corresponding action.'

" 'There you have the whole thing in a nutshell,' says Billy. 'An affirmative mental slant starts something inside of a man that gets him going in that direction. It makes a man act as if the thing was so, and that helps to make it so.'

" 'But supposing it aint so,' says Farnsworth. 'Can you make it so if it's something else, by just affirming that it is so?'

" 'See here, Farnsworth,' says Billy: 'The best there is in a thing is so, isn't it? And when I affirm it, why, then it is so to me, isn't it? And that helps me to make the other fellow affirm it, and then it's so to him, isn't it? The big point is that when I affirm it, why, it makes me dig my toe-corks in—see?'

"Then Billy goes on to show that the opposite of this is where a man takes the negative mental slant at a thing—Billy said that some one had called it *negativitis*—and of course that works just the opposite and paralyzes action, and Billy shows that the groucher and the kicker and the guy that's always putting up an alibi for not selling more goods is simply suffering from a case of *negativitis*. Then Billy goes on to describe the symptoms of *negativitis*—where a salesman sits around the hotel and cusses the town, or where a customer kicks on some goods and the salesman takes it for granted without looking into it, that the house had put something over on him, or where a competitor has worked the town ahead of him and the salesman concludes that there's nothing doing, and dozens of other ways that a salesman shows that he has got the negative slant at things.

"Now, of course we have all got more or less of that negative stuff in us, and Billy had something on those boys right, and he kept rubbing it into them about that *negativitis* until some of the fellows threw up their hands and yelled, '*Kamerad!*' and then they all began to applaud and gave Billy a great hand.

" 'Now, then,' says Billy, 'I am going to tell you about two salesmen that I know. One of them has got an affirmative slant at things, and the other has got *negativitis*. If I should tell you their names (which I am not going to do), why, some of you fellows would know them. They both work for the same company, and they are about the same age, and have about the same natural ability—both of them are good fellows, too.'

"THEN Billy went on to tell about one of the fellows that he called Jim. Now, Jim is one of these guys that sort of automatically raise a presumption against everything that comes up. When Jim goes into a town, the place looks kind of bum to him, and every customer in that town has got something about him that makes it hard to sell him, and every bit of tough luck that Jim ever had in that place sort of stares him in the face, and his selling-job looks kind of punk to him anyway, and he will be mighty glad

when he can quit the road and go into business for himself or something.

"'Now, then,' says Billy, 'this boy is a good hustler and a good talker, and he has been with his company for eight years, but he is only about four hundred dollars a year ahead of where he started. He is plugging along on about two thousand when he ought to be pulling down twice that much. Jim thinks that it's circumstances that keep him back, but it isn't—it's *negativitis*, and everybody can see it except Jim. One of these days the company will can him, and then Jim will bawl them out for playing dirt on him, and I guess he never will see that the thing that queered him was that negative slant at things that prevented him from going at the game like a winner, because when a man sees himself up against it in advance, why, he's going to make a poor showing as sure as guns—and that is what ails Jim.

"'Now, the other salesman we will call Al,' says Billy. 'He is just the opposite. Al always takes an affirmative slant at everything. When he goes into a town, it looks to him as if the chances to sell goods in that town are thicker than huckleberries. If one merchant turns him down, why, there's another one up at the next corner that is sure to buy, and Al has a friendly regard for every merchant in the town; and as for himself, why, Al has no doubt at all of his ability to put the sales across, and when it comes to a bully job, why, selling goods has got them all faded, especially a traveling salesman's job.

"Al wouldn't trade jobs with the president of the company; and talk about a line of goods—oh, boy, that line of Al's! Just let Al get to talking about their brands, and his eyes will shine like a couple of shooting-stars. Al was talking to me one day about their brand of baking-powder,' says Billy, 'and I says to him: "See here, Al, just between you and me confidentially, why, we both know that anyone could go and get some cream of tartar and cornstarch and soda and mix 'em up according to any good formula and make just as good a baking-powder as yours."

"'And say, you should have seen Al go up in the air. "Why, great Scott, Billy!" says he. "Are you aware that the cream of tartar in our baking powder is made from the finest selected grapes out of the best vineyard in California? And that the soda we use is not common powdered soda but genuine granular soda, the best in the world; and we pack that baking powder in lithographed tin containers with a friction top cover that keeps it as fresh as if it was hermetically sealed?" And so Al went on about that baking powder until he made it look as if a man who didn't have some of it in his house was missing the chance of a lifetime.

"'NOW, that is Al. And how does he cash in on that affirmative slant at things? Well, I happen to know that he pulls down a salary and commission over five thousand a year, and that is going some for a traveling salesman. Now, then, when Mr. Agnew introduced me, he was good enough to say that I am the star salesman in our company. I wont say whether he is correct in that statement or not, but when I started sixteen years ago selling goods, I didn't have a dollar. To-day I own a two-hundred-acre farm all paid for, worth a hundred and fifty dollars an acre, and I own fifty shares of stock in our company. I wont tell you what my salary is, but it is some salary, and I have done it all selling goods; and this motto has been the biggest selling asset I have ever had. So here it is: *It is always best to affirm the best*. Now, what are you men going to do about it?'

"Then Farnsworth jumps up and says: 'I move that we buy this proposition!' And a lot of other fellows second the motion, and Agnew says: 'All in favor of the motion stand up.' And they all got up and then jumped up into their chairs, and Agnew said they gave Billy the greatest hand he ever heard at a banquet or anywhere else. They wouldn't stop until Billy got up again.

"'Good!' says Billy. 'This is what I call action, so this closes the sale. The proposition is yours, boys. Go to it, and good luck to you.'

"Sam said that the next day he sent Billy a check for one hundred dollars instead of fifty, and that it was cheap at that."

Ben rubbed his nose reflectively. "Well, say, Billy did make a speech after all!"

"Speech—sure he made a speech; but he didn't know it."

"Why Not I?" is the title of the next of Elmer Ferris' practical business stories, which will appear in the forthcoming, the December, issue.

Through the Storm

By
Clem Yore

A TREMENDOUSLY dramatic story of a mountain adventure and of a real and vital love-affair.

EVERY Saturday the mail came over the range, for the widely scattered inhabitants of the Cache le Poudre and the Grand River valleys. It was brought by carrier through the defile known as Squaw Pass, and every Friday left "Four Mile," the stage-town on the eastern side of the mountains, thirty-six miles away as the magpie flies.

On one of his February trips the mail-carrier had struggled all night through the drifts, carrying forty pounds of mail. His "webs" were ice-enameled; his heavy socks and moccasins were stiff, and they were spangled with a sparkling beadwork of frost. The morning sky was ash-colored, somber and ominous.

At seven o'clock, as he swung down the north fork of the Grand River, tediously toiling through the snow, his tired eyes caught a thin spiral of smoke spinning from a cabin chimney and losing itself in a background that stretched for more than one hundred miles in a solid, pitiless white.

He knew that the smoke meant conversation with a human being, rest, breakfast and warmth; so he quickened his pace until a scant fifty yards lay between him and the cabin.

"Hello, Buck!" he shouted.

A man opened the cabin door, filling the frame with his form. He called to the carrier as he waved a hand of welcome.

"Hello, Jim. Fling your feet. The pancakes are waiting."

When the carrier had removed his snow-shoes and pack and had placed them behind the kitchen stove, he took off his mackinaw, tossed his cap into a corner and began to talk. All men crave speech who travel trails alone.

"Some mush down the Michigan!" he began. "Snow—why, man, it was like traveling through smoke and as fine as flour, but it sure stung when it had the wind behind it. It took me four hours to do that three-mile stretch between the Blasted Pine and the White Owls. I moled my way into a drift, and I let her howl. If the postmaster general knew this, he'd laugh hisself silly. Say, you ought to see Chapin and Cachita. If the gable end of hell blew out and it rained fire and brimstone for forty days and forty nights, it wouldn't melt enough snow on them hills to wet a pair of socks."

FROM the north room of the cabin came a woman, slender, willowy and strangely incongruous to the surroundings. There

was a gentleness and a sureness about her that added to the charm of her face and form. Her hair was heavy and coiled in braids. It was creamy gold and shadowy. The color in her eyes was like a patch of cloudless mountain sky on a May morning. Without knowledge, one would have estimated her as belonging exclusively to the hills.

"Hello, Bubbles!" greeted the carrier. "What you doin' here?"

"Sick," the girl replied. "I petered out last week when Big Sam, Snaky and I were coming over to the ski-tournament at Steamboat. Buck's been nursing me. I sure was weak when we came down the Poudre, wasn't I, Buck? I thought I never was going to hit this cabin."

"You certainly were," replied Buck. "Any mail, Jim?"

The carrier took the pack and held the fastenings to the stove, thawing them. He brought forth a package and gave it to Buck. There were magazines and newspapers and a letter. The man tore the letter open and read it. The contents numbed him; and as Bubbles and Jim watched him, they saw the corners of his mouth tighten and grow into hard, pale lines. He reread the letter:

> Buck:
> It is one great thing to have lived a dream, and another to have dreamed a life. I have learned that Bubbles is wintering with you. Circumstances demand this letter, but they do not occasion a reply. There is such a thing among men and women as being too deeply, too cruelly hurt to forget. I fancied you *real*, and find you *rowdy*. My appreciation of you was, after all, only complimenting you, for appreciating unworthiness is of itself an unworthiness.
>
> VIRGINIA.

Outside, the wind blew little swirls of snow along the cabin roof and around the window of the kitchen. Inside the room, the silence was broken by a crackling, snappy discord from the dry pitch in the stove.

Buck laid the letter on a shelf beside the clock and walked past Bubbles into her room.

"Now, aint that hell!" whispered Jim. "He's read his dishonorable discharge."

"What's the matter?" asked Bubbles.

"The story's all over Four Mile that Snaky and Big Sam was paid a hundred by Buck to bring you over Squaw Pass to winter here. They told it themselves."

Bubbles laughed—but there seemed a far-away hollowness in the sound.

She was at that moment a woman of her kind, the kind that make up the feminine part of the dance-hall as it exists in the mining-camps. She was twenty and wise. She could deal faro and stud better than any man in the State. Her mother had been Cincinnati Sadie, also of the dance-hall, a renowned beauty. She had married Dutch Dave, a notorious gambler, who had been shot by Texas Charlie at Hot Sulphur Springs for sleeving cards.

The uncomfortable atmosphere that filled the room was broken by Jim.

"How about pancakes, Bubbles? I'm some wild for food."

WITHOUT answer the girl fried bacon and pancakes and placed them before the carrier, who ate them as fast as they came from the stove.

After breakfast, he slung his pack on his back, took his snowshoes outside and tied the thongs in place about his feet.

"Eh, Buck!" he shouted through the open door of the kitchen. "I'm goin' to beat it down to Grand Lake. *Adiós!*"

In answer to Jim's call, Buck came out of the room, from the window of which he had been gazing at the storm that was gathering its forces on top of the Divide.

"What do you think she's going to do up there?" He indicated the range.

"There'll be merry hell inside of three hours. Why?" replied Jim.

"I'm thinking some of going over Flat Top to Four Mile," said Buck. "I'm in a hurry."

"Flat Top!" cried Jim. "Flat Top! Why, man, you couldn't get over Flat Top. Look at 'er up there. That breeze is dancing sixty miles right now, and she'll be kickin' eighty by early afternoon; and if you're caught up there—good night! Why don't you go over Squaw Pass?"

"It's time I'm after. I'm going over Flat Top."

"Fare-thee-well, old porcupine! The best you'll get is the worst of it, but I aint aimin' none to tell you nothin' about these hills."

Jim hurried off down the creek, leaving a dainty imprint from his shoes in the soft drifts. Buck looked after him until he disappeared in a thicket of quaking aspen, and then turned and caught Bubbles observing him abstractedly.

"Buck," she said, "come inside. I want to talk to you."

He closed the door and walked to the

wood-box, above which hung his snowshoes. He took these down and from the floor picked up a bottle of linseed oil and rubbed the rawhide lacings of the shoes with it. The girl followed the movement of his hands for some seconds.

"Surely you're not going over Flat Top to-day," she said.

"Yes," he replied, looking coldly, candidly into her eyes.

She noted that his face was ashen, the lips cruelly tight and white-spotted, and in his half-closed eyes an expression of tenacious resolution was bitterly forming.

"Why?" she whispered weakly, seating herself beside him.

"Read that," he answered, pointing with the bottle of oil to the letter on the shelf. Bubbles read the letter, replaced it, and without speaking or looking at him, walked into her room.

After oiling his shoes, he filled the pack light. In it he put half a loaf of bread, a piece of bacon, some sweet chocolate, a flask of whisky, some small, heavy pieces of solid pitch for starting fires, a can of coffee extract; on top of these he rolled his rubber poncho.

When the pack was filled, he said through the door:

"Stay in there a moment; I want to change my clothes."

BUBBLES and Buck had been living for more than a week in the small cabin, she using his bed and he a shakedown on the kitchen floor. Quickly he made the change to the heavier garments of the trail. When dressed, he called to the girl.

"I'd like a word with you before I hit the trail."

She opened the door, and he saw that she was attired in the heavy clothes in which she had come to the cabin.

"I'm going with you," she said simply. "Get my webs, please."

"You can't go with me; you're too weak."

"Weak? I'm not weak. I *was*, but I'm not now."

"What do you mean?" he asked; for somehow the emphasis rather than the words conveyed to him a double meaning.

She spoke quickly in reply, and from her eyes there flashed truth. Conviction bore in upon Buck's mind.

"I got a hundred to frame up on you. Big Sam and Snaky told me that if they could prove that we had been living together, they could contest your last filing on your prospect. I was to pretend illness so that you would have to take care of me all winter. They were coming over later with an agent of the land office and find me here with you. After your arrest and the claim relocated, I was to get a third interest in it. But that wasn't all I came over for."

"Who paid you that hundred?" demanded Buck.

"Big Sam," she admitted.

"But a hundred is nothing to you, Bubbles."

"Maybe I didn't do it for the hundred; maybe I didn't intend to let them get away with it; maybe you don't know any more why I did it than I do. Get my webs ready. I'm going with you."

"Why do you want to do this?" questioned Buck.

A new light was beginning to dawn upon him. He saw a strange expression in the girl's eyes as she looked at him.

"They made a monkey out of me. That letter shows they were after Virginia, but you don't think I'd frame on a woman, do you? I've bluffed a lot of men, but I never hurt a woman in my life."

"This is square of you, and it would be the *real* answer, if you could go with me," said Buck.

"Go!" shouted Bubbles. "I'm *going*. Get my webs, please."

"You're great," Buck smiled, extending his hand to her. The girl grasped it, and the man's emotion almost crushed the fingers of the little woman. The pain was a relief to the heart of her.

THEY stood there typifying the country in which they lived. Buck was a lithe giant. Trained as he had been in the old college days back East, his ten years of hill life had made of him an Apollo of tan. His broad shoulders, narrow hips and straight legs manifested an incomprehensible extent of strength, agility and endurance. Incased in heavy winter clothes, he contrasted strangely with the little figure beside him in woolen cap and high-collared sweater-jacket and deerskin pants.

After Bubbles' shoes had been treated to the oil, the pack was thrown across the man's shoulders, a belt and six-shooter buckled about him and a heavy cup tied to the belt with a bunch of extra thongs. Tucking a woolen scarf into the front of

his mackinaw, Buck closed the cabin, examining the thermometer beside the door.

"Five below," read Bubbles. "I'll bet there's no bottom to it, on top."

It was past nine o'clock as they set out up the little branch that is the north fork of the Grand River of the Colorado. The man "mushed" ahead, breaking trail through the willows.

The sun tried to break through the heavy banklike clouds that were being forced downward on the tree-tops by their swirling brothers above, but it succeeded only in making itself a wallow of yellow in a setting of drab.

A great storm-center of the North American continent, where blizzards are born and sent hurtling across the withered breasts of the great plains, is that wonderfully rugged range lying slightly below the Wyoming line in Colorado. These mountains rear their heads almost three miles into the air from the level of the sea. They catch the west and east winds and trap them into great vacuums, which, when released, spell wintry blasts for all the Mississippi River valley. Here the west wind blows furiously and steadily from September until May—and to cross the range over Flat Top trail any time between these months is a man's work. During a February storm it is considered impossible.

ON the other side of the Continental Divide and almost opposite to Buck's cabin lay the little mining-town of Four Mile. Sheltered as it was by the backbone of the continent, and scattered under the steep sides of Prospect Mountain, it was snug from the great winds of winter, save only when the east wind drove storms from the plains. Here dwelt a most peculiar people, some of them rough, but all of them men and women, gauged by the sterling standard of the hills. This standard was never talked of; it was achieved; and the greatest feat that man could do, in order to receive the plaudits of the village, was to be able, ever able, to cross the divide over Flat Top in the dead of winter when the west wind blew a gale.

On the western slope of the range there grows a mighty forest of giant Engelmann spruce, a virgin forest, for the fire-monster has never entered it. Some of these trees are one thousand years old, and they rear their heads more than one hundred and fifty feet into the air. The hardest winds cannot penetrate far into the forest, but the snow finds its silent way everywhere, settling amid the trees, sometimes to a depth of thirty feet.

Out of the willows and quaking-aspen thickets of the bottom, the man and the girl wound upward into the silence and comfort of the forest. The snow was better here, without a crust, so that shortly before noon they came to a prospector's deserted cabin and rested for the midday meal. They talked but little. Bubbles had the fear of the trail always before her, companioned with a constant questioning whether she would fail; but most of her time was spent in covertly glancing at Buck, estimating him.

"Dear God," she mused, "if he were only mine!"

After lunch they took the trail refreshed. The snow lay higher than the blaze of the ax on the trees, which is here placed at seven feet, but Buck knew that forest and all of its short-cuts, so the hidden trail did not make them lose time. At two o'clock they felt the wind whipping around their legs. They had passed the big trees and were now in open sight of the trail that led for more than a mile along a narrow, barren shelf, reaching upward to the top of the range.

At timber-line they rested and tightened the thongs of their snowshoes. From above them they heard the crash, collision and kick of the wind; and nowhere else on earth is the littleness of man so emphasized as at timber-line when he stands alone and looks upon a battle between the forces of the air and the earth. The two stood looking up at the awesome conflict that raged amid the ledges, towers, pillars, highland flats, inclines, stupendous domes and soil-less reaches. The air in motion was using its entire tribe of destruction.

Wind, wind, nothing but wind, in blast, gust, tempest, whirlwinds, tornado, little capfuls, that scurried here and there sucking the snow from sheltered places and hurling the clouds up; while over all hung a murderous, fear-breeding sky. There was no terror of its punishment in the heart of the girl, only a sense of regret that she could not make it, and thereby would be unable to help the man—to what?

IN the mind of Buck there arose a bitterness as he saw the region through which he must drag Bubbles. Turning to her, he asked:

"Don't you want to back-trail to the cabin?"

"Will you go?"

"No! But I had no idea it was as nasty as that!"—indicating the path over which they must travel.

"I'll go where you go," she said.

"I don't feel right about it, Bubbles; you don't know what it means; it is gilt-edged, smothering hell; that's what it is. You don't know what it means."

"Oh, yes, I do, but I'm willing to gamble."

"It might mean that I couldn't get you down—fast enough."

"Then I'd die farther from hell than I've ever lived," she answered, a tone of finality in her voice.

"All right," he said. "Come on, and keep your webs so that the wind can't get under them."

As they broke into the open, the cold became intense. They labored amid the drifts of the timber-line willow-beds and crossed them. Then upward they began the mile zigzag that would reward them only with the sheer shock and strain of the wind's fury. Now the clouds were piling about them, carrying a deadly burden of snow and ice that stung into their faces like iron-filings.

After a while the trail led them to the exposed face of a giant pinnacle known as the Big Chimney. To pass this they had to walk along a narrow path or trough that had, through some freak of the ages of wind and erosion, been cut into its sheer side. Above the trough the Chimney arose more than two hundred feet, and below it a chasm yawned wide and cloud-filled to a tremendous depth. The path was cleanly swept of snow, so that the jagged rock-corners and ice-ridges made a menace to the rawhide bottoms of the shoes. If these were severed, both were truly at the mercy of the storm, for without snowshoes, they could not plow through the great drifts of the forest below in the event that they were compelled to return to the cabin. The wind and the cold forbade the removal of the "webs," and the thongs were stiffly frozen, making this almost an impossibility.

Along the path their steps were now shortened to about ten inches; hand to hand, leg interlocking leg, they moiled along the ledge. Here the wind drove with three forces—downward from the Chimney, up from the gorge, and against them. The gale came in gusts, some of these of unbelievable intensity.

WHEN they were slightly more than halfway across the Chimney's shelf, Bubbles was struck in the face by a terrific gust as she bent her body to take a forward step; and before Buck realized what had occurred, she was slammed directly between his legs, her snowshoes blown at right angles to the trail. The air was dense, with a fine swirl of ice and snow, so that he could but dimly discern her form below him. A cloud-bank whirled about them, and he clutched her hand more tightly, slipping his glove along her wrist and taking a firm grip upon her forearm, she grasping his in like fashion.

Whether she was blown or attempted to arise, he did not know, but with a fresher and stronger wind-effort, he felt her slipping from him and away from the trough. Involuntarily his arm went above his head to the wall for a hand-hold, and he caught a sharp-edged jutting cleft and clung to it. As he did so, the girl was swung clear of the path and blown in a semicircle behind him. His grip upon her compelled the driving force of the wind to swing her back to the path, after having tossed her over the abyss. She weighed slightly over a hundred pounds, but Buck's shoulder-blades were ground together by the wide circle she had followed. He felt he could hold the position no longer; his muscles were jumping, and a band of pain shot across his abdomen.

"Grab my belt and pull yourself up!" he shouted.

Bubbles released his hand, grasped the belt above her, arose and forced her body against the wall beside that of the man. Still holding to the wall, Buck looked at her and saw that she was deadly pale and horrified as she glanced over the ledge into the foggy clouds below. The fury of the wind abated, and grasping hands once more, they hastened across the remainder of the trough, coming out upon the long, smooth incline that reaches away to the real summit of Flat Top. Here in desperation they threw themselves flat to rest, side by side, head to head.

His eyes were so close to the girl's face that he noted for the first time, that the journey across the Chimney had frozen two patches on her cheeks. Fumbling beneath his mackinaw, he brought out the scarf and with difficulty tied it about her head until

all her face was hidden except the eyes. From these there shone a light of thanks.

"Let's go at it again," she said after the rest had rallied her.

"That's the girl," encouraged Buck as they arose and began to cross the incline.

To do this they were compelled to select an oblique course in order to save two miles across the mountain's top, for Flat Top is, on its summit, a table-land twelve miles square, and their course would bring them out upon the down-trail of the eastern slope. The wind blowing as it was, and they traveling aslant it, made the journey one of great trial and necessitated the expenditure of as much effort to hold what they gained as to proceed on their way.

Buck now began to feel Bubbles stumble and weaken, so that he slackened the pace as much as he could. From time to time he stole side-glances at her and saw that her eyes were drawn tight as though in suppressed agony. At last the incline ceased, and before them the great boulder-field of the summit stretched—gray, echoing and desolate.

BUCK pulled the girl around a large boulder and let her slip to rest out of the wind. Time and again they resumed their monotonous journey, dropping behind boulders to gain relief from the killing gusts. Now the daylight faded, and their troubles increased because of their inability to see. The girl was becoming weaker, so that the rests were longer and more frequent. Buck tried to limit her to a minute of repose, for he was fearful that her muscles would stiffen with the inactivity and cold and that she would be unable to move. Many times he rubbed her arms and legs and struck her between the shoulders to maintain circulation. The exhaustion and drowsiness that had been an agony of apprehension to him now began to assail the girl. In the darkness they had strayed out of their course, and the thin snow over which they had been traveling of a sudden became deep, so that Buck, "mushing" ahead, felt his webs settle into it eight or nine inches.

Instantly there came into his mind the thought of the snow-cornice that hung over the gorge between Flat Top and Notch Top mountains. They had lost more than a mile. Their added weight to the cornice might make the overhanging monster give way and carry them with it into the gulch below. Abruptly he turned about, dragging the stupefied and half-dead girl with him, not ceasing the scrambling pace until he felt the solid earth beneath the thin snow. Then he stopped with his back to the wind. Bubbles leaned her head against his arm and clutched his body with her hand. If the danger had been close, it had also been valuable, for Buck now found his bearings; he knew intimately the locality of that snow-ledge. Pulling the girl along, he hastened toward the down-trail of the summit, resting on the way in the refuge of boulders.

At each rest the girl talked less, though she did try to reassure him that she could go on; and she did go on, many times after he thought it was the last effort. At length, as he attempted to rouse her after a rest which had been purposely made longer than was his wont, she made no response to his urging.

THE night had now settled about them and he could not see her face. He dropped to his knees and felt for her head. It had fallen to one side, and she had thrown an arm over it. In the shelter of the boulder he struck a wind-match and saw that her eyes were wide open, a small bead of frozen tears holding them so that they could not drop down. The ball had rolled backward, exposing the white. The sight was ghastly. He chafed her hands and limbs, but she gave no evidence of reviving.

"Great God!" he cried aloud. "And the timber is four miles away!"

All man though he was, the hammering of the trail was now beginning to get him. He knew that his cheeks were freezing. The pangs of hunger and thirst were shooting and racking him with a gnawing torment, sapping his vitality and staying powers. Without hesitation he unslung the pack from his shoulders and took out the poncho. He then stowed the bacon, whisky, coffee and chocolate into his mackinaw pockets, together with a few pieces of the pitch. With some of the extra thongs he bound the hands of the girl together and then lifted her so that they dropped over his head. He arose, and she hung from him a dead, swinging weight. He swung her about until she hung behind him. Then he passed the poncho beneath her and made a sling of it, so that with a hand grasping either leg, she hung without swaying.

He stumbled on blindly through the

storm. Bubbles' snowshoes, still upon her feet, ever and anon caught in the wind and twisted him about. On he staggered, gaining headway at the price of excruciating agony, the girl's head bobbing about his shoulder. Every time he raised a foot, a great shiver ran along his leg. His head burned and throbbed, and he bit into his frozen lips. When he wanted rest, he backed into a boulder, taking the weight of the girl from his body. He was mortally afraid of stopping; yet he knew that the sudden renewal of his strength which he now felt was unreal, uncanny; and he recalled that it comes always to the one who is about to collapse. He recognized it as an approaching disaster and took advantage of it to hasten his pace. . . . . At last he could discern the tops of willows as he plowed through them and felt them stinging his legs.

"Timber-line—timber-line—timber-line! The big trees are just below me. I'll make it—damn you, I'll make it!" he yelled into the night air.

The girl stirred on his back in a writhing convulsion. The feel of her involuntary action nauseated him. Now the wind was beginning to whimper overhead.

"I'm under it!" he thought.

He *was* under it.

No longer was there sensation in his face, and when he opened his mouth, he could not feel the contact of his lips as he closed them. Behind a clump of boulders, willow-bound, he laid Bubbles against the rocks and released his hands from her legs, striking them together. They responded. They were not frozen. Feeling ran up his arm.

Now the storm could no longer be heard; it was only a mutter above his head. The silence drove in upon him.

"I've got you, I've beaten you, and I've dragged her with me!" he shouted into the scurrilous sky.

The voice of the girl sounded at his ear. "I must get over."

He felt that he was raving, that his own mind was now wandering. He was not certain that he heard aright, and so he asked:

"What is it, Bubbles?"

"Dear God, if he were only mine!" the girl muttered, and then she shrieked into the stillness of the night: "I'm clean. I'll swear I'm clean."

Realizing that she was delirious and that it might not be too late to revive her, Buck jerked her from the boulder and broke again into his stride. Stumbling, swaying, zigzagging down the trail, he went toward the timber, the ghoulish voice gibbering on his shoulder, making each step hideous. At last he was amid the big trees, and there was a tremendous quietude about him and a high happiness as he placed Bubbles in a snow-bed, wrapped in the poncho, and stood off looking into the gleeful flames of a roaring fire.

AT midnight the storm blew itself out and the moon cast fascinating purple shadows into the forest and long, slender blue streaks of light across the snow that lighted the dark recesses of the thicket. An owl, lured by the fire, awakened the night with its mournful voice. Coyotes yapped in the distance; a mountain lion cried afar off. A snowshoe rabbit skipped into the edge of the fire's glow and scampered frightened into the brush of a ravine. The heat of the fire had revived the exhausted girl, and Buck had succeeded in getting her to drink some hot whisky, after which she had eaten some chocolate and bacon and drunk a large cup of coffee. He felt an overpowering craving for rest, and the soft, white, warm snow called to him to burrow into it and sleep—sleep. He knew that one moment's forgetfulness would mean that the wolverines and coyotes would be scattering their bones along the ridge. Every few moments he stirred the girl to keep her from too deep a repose. The very minutes dragged themselves by his brain to the rhythmic beat of his thoughts.

At last the night wore itself into a mistiness of gray; the moon sank to rest behind the range. Gradually from the east through a rift in the trees below him he saw streaks of pale amber shooting up from the horizon. The sight gladdened him, and he turned to call the sleeping girl. She had arisen on one elbow; she was weeping.

"That's better, Bubbles," he said joyously. "I love to see you cry."

"Oh, Buck!" she sobbed. "If I could make you understand, if I only could!"

"Make me understand what?" he queried.

"About the frame-up," she replied. "I never intended to let them get away with it."

"That's all right, Bubbles," he said coaxingly. "You and I have passed through the storm to understanding. We've been to hell and back, and nothing counts now."

The girl looked at him through her tears.

"Nothing counts now," she thought. "I've got to tell him."

THE fire was dying. Buck left the girl and went to gather the dead, low-hanging dry branches from the trees. He came back with both arms full and tossed the load on the fire. The flames sprang upward and illumined the forest about them—the snow hanging on the pine needles, sparkling like some gigantic page from a fairy book, sifted with diamond-dust.

"I want to tell you something, Buck," the girl pleaded. "I may never get another chance."

"All right, girlie—go ahead!"

"Do you remember when my mother brought me over from Hot Sulphur, after Dad was killed?"

"Yes," he answered.

"I was just sixteen then. I was full of the hatred my mother had put into me for men. Dad's death added only to Mother's frenzy, to teach me to despise everything that was not a woman. I played with dolls in a dance-hall, and knew faro when I was seven years old. At sixteen I was as wise as a woman of thirty. Every man I had ever known had the same look in his eye. When we came to Four Mile, I met you, and you didn't even look at me. During that fall I dealt you many a game, and I tried to make you notice me. But you wouldn't. There was something about you that I couldn't get through. You were different. It doesn't matter now—but since that winter—I have loved you."

She turned her face away from the fire. Buck watched her.

"Everything I've done since then I've thought of you—whether you would like it or not. I have saved myself for you."

She looked at him. The condition of her face, frozen as it was, and torn by her weeping, touched his heart.

"You know how they maul a girl around Big Sam's?" she continued. "Well—I wasn't any different than the rest—except that I was clean. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes," Buck said faintly.

"But do you believe what I say?" she pleaded. "Do you believe what I say?"

"Yes, I do believe you, Bubbles; I know what you mean."

"Well, when Virginia came to town last year and I saw how hard she had hit you, I lived a perfect hell. I never saw you after that at the Silver Dollar. I did everything I knew to throw myself in your way. Once when you were going home I went up the trail ahead of you, thinking I could meet you, make you see me, but you went up Black Cañon, and I failed."

"You poor little kid!" His voice was full of comfort, without the humiliating quality of pity.

"Another time, when they were giving a dance at the schoolhouse, I tried to go, but they wouldn't let me—they just wouldn't, and I stayed outside and watched until the dance broke up."

Buck listened, wholly stunned, struck as much by the agony in the girl's voice as by the revelation of her words.

"Last winter when Mother died, I wanted to come to you and tell you of my grief. You were the only person alive that I looked up to as I had looked up to Mother. I believed in her. I don't care what they say about her; I knew her; I lived with her. She was clean at heart. Love did it—whatever went wrong in her life, it was love for my dad that did it."

SHADOWS, gray and slanting, were creeping over the snow. The streaks in the east were changing from amber to lilac, and great shafts of color were shooting pearl tones to the sky. Buck felt a smothering sense of comparison. Virginia and Bubbles flashed into his mental vision, one with a cloak of his own making about her, the other naked—with a woman's soul baring itself for his scrutiny. One was there in the warmth and contentment of respectability, framed in a setting of his own desire; the other half frozen, black of face, features distorted and drawn, numb beside him in a bed of snow—a piece of human driftwood whose name was known wherever ribaldry held sway. One had condemned him without a trial; the other had believed in him and gone clean—a diamond thrown into the pigsty of destiny.

Again the voice at his elbow:

"Every morning I would write you a letter. They are under my bed in the trunk. I told you of my love for you, that I was staying just the way I thought you'd want me to stay. I answered all manner of questions as though you had asked them. When Sam and Snaky came to me to *get* you and your claim, as I thought, there was something inside of me

that cried out: 'Here's your chance; let him see that you are clean.' So I agreed. It was because I loved you!" she sobbed on her arm in a wild agony.

She wept long, then turned her face to Buck, smiles trying to play over it and making it only the more hideous.

Swift, sure, satisfying comprehension came to Buck, just as the sun rose over the distant flatness of the prairies far below them. It burst through the trees and tipped the mountains with a pale gold. Birds twittered, and a camp-robber flew to a limb above them.

"I'm all right now," she said. "Let me see if I can walk. Oh, what a wonderful sunrise!"

"It's the dawn, Bubbles," he said, "—a new day for us. Do you understand? A new day!"

"I hope it is," she said simply, and then: "I feel that I can go on now."

She was too weak to stand; so they had to rig the sling and travel as they had from the top of the range—only that Bubbles' webs were now tied on her back, and she was able to clasp her arms about his neck. The feel of him to her breast thrilled her with a deep peace.

IT was noon as they entered the street of the village. A strange sight they made as the man staggered down the snow, legs widely separated, his body bent slightly forward, his hands beneath the legs of the girl, Bubbles' head lying against his cheek, her eyes closed and her face drawn in pain. As they passed the "General Store," both of them saw Big Sam leaving the door. He saw them, but he gave no sign of recognition; he walked ahead of them to the end of the village, where the school-children were strolling homeward at the side of Virginia, their teacher. Buck went on until he came to the platform that was built up from the ground in front of the dance-hall owned by Big Sam. Out of the door of the dive came men and women. Buck sidled up to the platform that reached waist-high and set Bubbles upon it. The denizens of the Silver Dollar watched him remove the poncho that held her to him and untie the webs from her back. Then he turned to the crowd and said:

"Some of you women take care of her."

Down the street he looked, his eyes seeking the form of Big Sam. When he saw him coming back up the street with Virginia, he advanced to meet him.

Bubbles divined his intent.

"Don't let him go," she cried. "He's exhausted—don't let him go. Wont somebody stop him?"

She tried to rise, to go to him, but she fell back in weakness. Some of the women from the Silver Dollar attempted to assist her.

"Let me alone," she screamed. "I want to go to him."

Buck stood in the middle of the street, untying the thongs of his shoes, glancing now and then at the couple approaching him. When Virginia and Sam had come abreast of him, Virginia paled as she recognized the blackened face and bent figure before her. Buck flung the shoes from his feet and smiled.

"Stay here a minute," he said to her, "I'm going to answer that letter." And then catching Big Sam eying him, he continued:

"I've just crossed Flat Top and packed Bubbles from the top down here."

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd and along the platform where Bubbles sat stupefied, mouth open, filled with a silencing terror.

"I'm dog-tired and sleepy, but that makes the odds just even for you. Peel that coat and jump into me; I'm going to give you the beating of your life."

Big Sam was well named. He stood eye to eye with Buck, an even six foot two, especially made for manhandling. His huge box chest stood out from his body amazingly. His neck was thick and set close to his shoulders, which sloped downward like those of an ape; and he had immense arms and oversized hands that hung even with his knees. His massive muscles evidenced themselves beneath his clothes; and his eyes, steely gray, shone wickedly from brows that were patches of bristles. His jaw was very long; and his chin, seamed from the nostrils to his jawbone by two scarlike snarling depressions, indicated a violence of temper and obstinacy like that of a bulldog. He was known as a man who had never been beaten in a rough and tumble fight, and he was just as good with a gun or a knife as he was with his bare hands.

"Somebody take this crazy man away from me or I'll kill him," he said in answer to Buck's challenge.

"Toss that coat and gun to her!"—indicating Virginia. "I'm going to clean you."

Both men removed their coats, caps and

guns. In taking off his gloves, Buck tested his hands, opening and closing them, and gloried in the fact that they were "working."

Bubbles watched the men approach each other.

"Wont somebody stop them?" she cried.

"Let them go," said Snaky. "He's got it comin' to him."

THE men came together, sparring lightly in a circle for an opening. Buck was the first to land. The blow was a light counter to the forehead. It reddened Sam's scalp where it glanced. Sam then placed a right uppercut to the chin of Buck, who laughed in his face as he threw back his head, weakening the force of the punch, and danced away. In breaking from this blow he slipped, and before he could recover, Sam shot forward and completed the fall by tripping him, first with one foot and then the other. But he did not succeed in taking advantage of the effort, for when Buck had fallen to the ground, he side-rolled; and Sam, attempting to fall upon him, found that he had jumped to his feet and stood smiling.

"Everything goes now," said Buck as Sam arose. "I'm glad you pulled that foot thing. I'll teach you something about feet."

Gray fire flashed from the eyes of Big Sam, and his chest worked like a bellows. He rushed Buck, flailing his arms in great circles, head down and legs wide apart, to withstand the uppercut he felt must come, but willing to take it if he might get his arms around the man in front of him. Buck neatly sidestepped, and as Sam passed him, he sprang in close and swung a terrific right-hand punch into the body just over the kidney. The big hulk staggered a few feet, the knees sagging with the last step, then dropped prone to the ground, with hands extended and face in the snow.

Buck seemed as though new strength had come to him; a freshness that was truly wonderful to behold seized him. Leaping forward, he grasped the right toe of the fallen man and with it bore the leg backward until the abdomen was lifted from the snow; then he reached downward, kneeling upon the back, and with the other hand raised the chin, pressing the body down with his knee, drawing the toe and the head together. The first position of the hold sent a pain through Sam, and he tried furiously to break the grip. But the application of that punishing grip, the toe-hold, sickened Sam, and his struggles were futile. The foot was laid almost flat upon the lower portion of the back. Buck watched the progress of the grip and its effect upon his antagonist. At last, under the constant pressure of his fingers, the foot came exactly where he wanted it. He then let go the head, and seizing the toe with both hands, he raised his body a trifle for better purchase, then suddenly shot the foot down to the back. For an instant it resisted him; then it went crashing into the soft mass and turned flat.

An exclamation of wonder and horror went up from the onlookers. A wild shriek of pain, as though emanating from an inhuman throat, broke into the chill air. Buck took his hands from the foot and stood up. Sam had fainted; his leg had been broken.

"That's my answer," Buck said to Virginia. "Appreciating unworthiness is an unworthiness."

He put on his cap and coat and strapped his gun in place. Turning to the crowd, he said coldly:

"If there's anyone else who believes the lies this skunk has spread about Bubbles and me, now's his chance; for when I hit the hay I wont be receiving callers for a week."

Not a voice was heard.

Bubbles saw Virginia move as though to speak to Buck. The little frozen girl was amazed a moment later as Buck staggered toward her, smiling. He picked her up in his arms and walked around the corner of the dance-hall to her cabin.

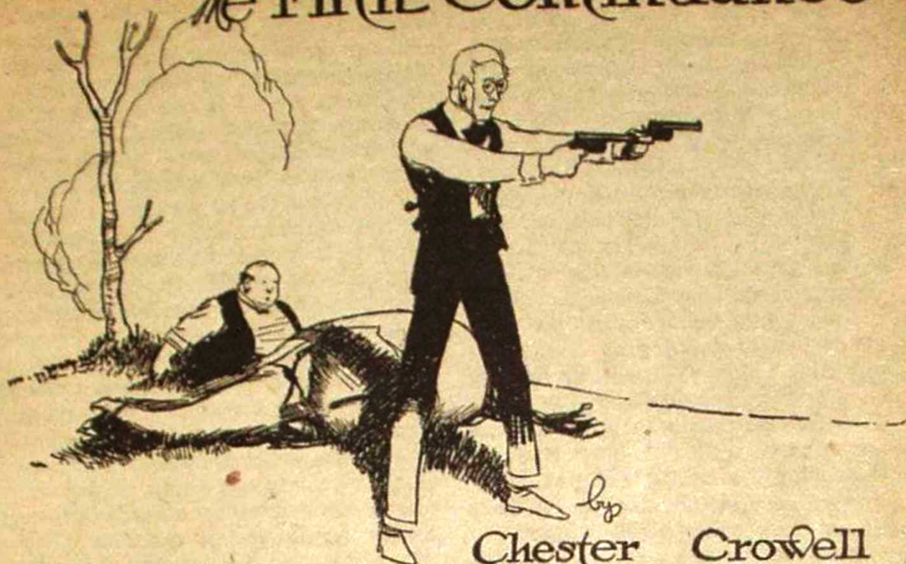
"There goes a he-man," said old Black Jack Ike. "They sure busted the mold after they made him."

BUCK laid Bubbles on the bed and built a fire. He stood looking into it a moment and then sat down on the bed beside her, looking at the two black spots in her cheeks where the frost had laid its finger. Her hair was a mat of gold about her face. She smiled at him.

"When we've caught up on our sleep, and you're able to travel," he said, "we're going back home, Bubbles, over Square Pass—double."

She closed her eyes and felt for his hand which she laid upon her throat.

"Dear God!" she murmured. "To give me such a man!"



The Fifth Continuance

by Chester Crowell

A VERY Texan episode is described in this story—wherein that silver-haired old darling Senator Logwood puts over a spectacular stunt.

SENATOR ROBERT CULPEPPER LOGWOOD'S aged, smiling negro servant opened the heavy door leading to the Senator's private office and bowed low as William J. Scott, President of the Mesquite, Gulf & Southern Railway, entered. Senator Logwood rose from his leather-upholstered chair and bowed with his accustomed dignity. As he did so a last pink ray of sunlight from the western window touched his silver-white hair and framed his classic countenance in a gentle glow that seemed to express his pleasant personality.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said the Senator. "Have a seat." Turning to the negro, he said: "George, move that ash-tray a little nearer."

"Can I have half an hour?" asked Mr. Scott rather timidly, as was the custom of all of Senator Logwood's clients.

Senator Logwood slowly lighted another cigarette, then reached into a drawer of his desk and extended a box of cigars. "My friend," he replied, "you can have all night. It is a great pleasure to have you with me again. I have just been reading a rare old document which refers to the early history of the State of Mesquite, and I have wanted some one to enjoy it with."

Scott looked embarrassed. "Senator," he said, "you know we all love you because of your interest in the early history of Mesquite, but the truth of the matter is that I know so little about it that you would just be wasting your time on me; and I am full up to the neck with trouble."

"That is an unfortunate shortcoming of yours," remarked Senator Logwood as he flicked some ashes into an ornate brass container at his elbow—"always in a hurry. Where do you think you are going? As my friend John Ruskin says, —now, I venture to state you never read Ruskin, and yet that old gentleman knew more about railroads even back in his day than you do now—we are all in a hurry, and we don't know where we are going. Don't ever worry; this is a lovely world, and a man ought to get a lot of pleasure out of running a railroad."

Scott laughed heartily. "The hell he ought!" he exclaimed. "I wish you had mine."

"I can see right now," said the Senator, "that you are in no mood to talk about anything but some pesky little trouble that you have had with that streak of rust you own. What have you done—run over somebody's cow?"

"You didn't miss it far," said Scott. Senator Logwood prepared to listen.

"WE have a lot of suits pending in the lower counties," Scott began, "and they are coming up at the next term of the district court, which will be held in Carrizo day after to-morrow. These are damage-suits; some are for personal injuries, and the amounts asked are quite large. The smaller suits we have settled as they came up. On the suits we can beat, we went to trial. The cases now pending are suits for considerable amounts of money, and we have obtained continuances as many as three or four times. The biggest case now pending is a suit for damages to a cattle shipment, amounting to twenty-five thousand dollars, and that one is the first on the docket for day-after-to-morrow morning. Now, we want to pay these claims, and we will pay them, but you understand how hard it is to finance a young enterprise like ours. In short, what we want to do is put these cases off just as long as we can, and eventually pay interest to the injured parties for the delay. It is hard to go into the market now and get money at even a fairly high rate of interest."

Senator Logwood interrupted: "Then what you want me to do is get these cases continued again until the next term of court, which would give you six months?"

"Yes," replied Scott.

"How many times has this twenty-five-thousand-dollar suit been continued?"

"Four times," Scott replied.

"That's a good many times," remarked Senator Logwood with a faint smile.

"It sure is," said Scott. "That's the reason we are coming to you, Senator. Our local attorney down there, Mr. Sullivan, has done very well for us on these cases, but he is at the end of his rope."

"And you think I can go down into a section of the country where I am not known, and get you a fifth continuance in a suit in which the other side is probably represented by very able counsel?"

"I am not handing out any compliments, Senator, when I say that I believe you can do just about anything you start out to do," said Scott.

SENATOR LOGWOOD stared blankly at an old-fashioned horse-pistol which rested on a velvet cushion under a glass case close to his desk. It was a relic of early days in the State of Mesquite. Scott observed the Senator's fixed attention, and hoped earnestly that it did not portend a long account of some forgotten skirmish and the family history of the user of this barbarous-looking implement of warfare.

"That is a very interesting part of the State, which you gentlemen are developing," mused the Senator. "I think it would be a pleasure for me to ride over it on your railroad. You know, I went over the country as a young man on horseback. I feel a great deal of pride in my connection with the gentlemen who are aiding those brave pioneers to realize the glorious possibilities of that section of our great State. I will go to Carrizo, Mr. Scott, and see what I can do. I cannot promise you anything. The trouble with you business men is that you do not adequately respect the judiciary, and as a matter of fact, you ought not to be coming to me to ask me to throw an obstacle in the way of the functioning of our courts; but I can understand the peculiar difficulty of your present situation, and I will do what I can for you. We will not discuss my fee in this matter, because I know that you will be glad to do what is right if I succeed; and if I do not succeed, I will not feel that you owe me anything. I am very hopeful that I may meet some old friends of mine down that way, and if I do, it will be my pleasure to entertain them while I am there. I would like to give them an old-fashioned barbecue. I will just ask you to leave with me a check for one thousand dollars for my expenses, and that will probably be all I shall want."

SCOTT drew out his check-book, and Senator Logwood handed him a pen. As he wrote, Senator Logwood continued: "Is Judge Woodward still the district judge down there?"

"Yes," replied Scott, blotting the check.

"Well, then, I am glad you came," said Senator Logwood, "because I have always wanted to meet the Judge. He is a distant relative of an old friend of my father's, and my father mentions him in some letters written before the Civil War. I would be glad to show you those letters," said Senator Logwood, and he started to rise.

"Now, listen," objected Scott: "I have no doubt that those letters are very interesting to you, but to tell you the truth they would bore me to death. I wish you wouldn't get them."

Senator Logwood resumed his seat. "I feel sorry for you, Scott," he said, "you get mighty little out of life, so far as I can see. All you have on your mind is that petty trouble about those suits, while I am looking forward to a very pleasant visit in your section of the country. You ought to read more of the history of the State of Mesquite and learn something more than the mere topography of the ground your railroad covers."

"I don't doubt you are right," said Scott; "and some day I am coming up here to the capital and buy you a good dinner and let you tell me about the history of Mesquite until we both drop dead." Scott laughed and tossed the end of his cigar into the ash-tray. "Good night, Senator!" he said. "I may be on the train with you, or I may go on down there ahead of you. Good night and good luck!"

"Good night, young man!" said Senator Logwood. "I hope you will not be too busy to attend the little barbecue I am planning. I see they have some bandit raids down along the border. I hope they do not become serious. I don't see how those bandits found their way through the border-guard."

"Neither do I," said Scott as he opened the door. The aged negro servant bowed low and closed the door behind him.

GEORGE was grinning from ear to ear as he laboriously climbed aboard one of the dingy and weather-beaten passenger coaches of the Mesquite, Gulf & Southern Railway the following day. He had placed the Senator's three heavy leather traveling-bags on board and had made the Senator comfortable. Now he was climbing aboard with his own baggage, which consisted of a sauce for the barbecue in a large glass container wrapped in a woolen blanket.

George had two virtues which made his position secure with Senator Logwood, regardless of his feebleness. One was that he bowed in precisely the way that Senator Logwood liked to have a servant bow when a guest entered his office; and the other was that he could mix a barbecue-sauce which the Senator declared no man had equaled to his knowledge during forty years.

George seated himself and his precious package in the Jim Crow compartment. The bell rang; some one shouted, "All aboard," and with several nervous jerks the little train rattled away over the uneven roadbed toward the dusty hills in the distance with their scraggy growth of stunted bushes and trees.

The train had been on the road two hours when Senator Logwood drew from his vest pocket his heavy gold Swiss watch and consulted it as though the action were a ceremony, as indeed it was. Eleven o'clock! He opened one of his traveling-bags and drew from it a vacuum bottle and poured a drink. The conductor standing in the doorway in front of him watched the Senator with growing alarm and then walked toward him.

"Don't you know it is against the law to drink on the train, Colonel?" he asked.

"I am not a colonel," objected Senator Logwood as he took his second drink. "Logwood is my name—Senator Robert Culpepper Logwood. I live in the capital of the State of Mesquite. I am not now a senator, but I did have the honor of serving my State as a senator many years ago, and I am proud to say that the people who knew me, knew that I served my State well, and the title 'Senator' has stuck to me. You probably do not know that a member of the State senate is not subject to arrest?" The Senator lifted his eyebrows by way of demanding an answer to the question and poured another small drink.

"I don't know anything about that," said the conductor, "but I do know that it is against the law to drink on a train."

"Well, I can inform you quite extensively on that subject, then," continued the Senator. "In the next place, you are trying to enforce a law which is retroactive so far as I am concerned. I have been taking a drink at eleven o'clock every morning for forty years. In brief, I have been following that custom for nearly a quarter of a century before this law you are talking about was ever heard of; so you see your law is retroactive so far as I am concerned, which makes it unconstitutional, contrary to the Bill of Rights, and God only knows what would become of you if you were to enforce that law against me. You just keep that law to enforce against young folks. How old are you?"

"I am fifty-two years old."

"Well, then you are old enough," said Senator Logwood, "to know, without having studied law, that my statements are correct. Now, if you will just step back

here, we will have one more little drink, and then if you catch any young man on this train drinking liquor, by Gad, sir, you and I will throw him off this train!"

"That's what we will do," said the conductor. "In the meantime, put that bottle under your coat while you walk through the car."

"I see you are a man of understanding," remarked the Senator. "Discretion is always the better part of valor. Are you acquainted with Judge Woodward, the district judge of this judicial district of the State of Mesquite?"

"I am," replied the conductor.

"He will get on the train at Brushy Creek, I am informed," said Senator Logwood. "When he gets on, I want you to point him out to me without attracting any attention at all. I want to meet the Judge. I have some matters pending in his court."

AT one o'clock that afternoon the train stopped at Brushy Creek and one passenger got on. The conductor led him to a seat across the aisle from Senator Logwood, calling him by name in a voice that was audible the length of the car, and telling him the names of the various attorneys who were on the train en route to Carrizo to try cases during the session which was to open the following day.

Judge Woodward was a man of enormous bulk, with cheeks burned red by the glaring sun of a semitropical climate. His blue eyes were merry, and even in repose his countenance suggested that he was thinking about something very funny.

He caught hold of the seat in front of him with both of his fat, hairy hands and let himself down into his own seat with about the same sound that would have been made if a large sack of bran had been dropped. He exuded a sigh and placed his feet on the window-sill.

Senator Logwood did not look at him. The Senator was never in a hurry. He drew his silver cigarette-case from his coat pocket, lighted his cigarette very slowly and fondled the case a few seconds, admiring the monogram, before he replaced it.

Judge Woodward watched the operation with interest. He was impressed with the neat appearance of Senator Logwood. He looked at the Senator's silver hair and then studied his perfect profile. Senator Logwood knew exactly what the Judge was doing and gave him plenty of time. Then he turned very slowly in his seat and met Judge Woodward's eyes. Instantly Senator Logwood's face lighted up with interest. He stepped into the aisle and extended his hand.

"Have I the honor to meet Judge Horace Woodward of the seventy-third judicial district of the State of Mesquite?" he asked.

"That very same," said the Judge as he attempted to rise and failed. "Sit down."

"I am Senator Robert Culpepper Logwood," the Senator stated, "and I am delighted to meet you. Some clients of mine asked me to come down to your court, and I told them that I didn't think they had a leg to stand on in any court, but that I would be glad to spend some of their perfectly good money to come down here, because there are some people in this part of the State I know, and more than anything else, because I wanted to meet you. You are a distant relative of my father's closest friend, and he mentions that friend several times in some letters which I have preserved."

"Yes, I have been told," interrupted Judge Woodward, "that you have one of the finest collections of original documents and letters in this State."

"It is pitifully small," said Senator Logwood. "All our collections of historical documents and relics are pitifully small, but I am proud to say that I have not been unmindful of the duty of a patriotic citizen in this regard. I want you to read these letters." He drew them from his coat pocket and handed them to the Judge. Judge Woodward handled the aged brown paper very carefully and read the letters.

"Those are very interesting, Senator," he said. "I remember my father mentioning both the writer of the letter and the man referred to."

"You are a younger man than I expected to meet," said Senator Logwood.

JUDGE WOODWARD was so pleased that he could not help showing it. "To-morrow will be my sixtieth birthday, Senator," he said.

"Well, now, who would believe it!" exclaimed Senator Logwood. "I knew you ought to be a man of about fifty. I had not the remotest idea that to-morrow was your birthday, and I hope you will not

say anything about it to these other gentlemen, because I have a little treat in store, and we will just consider the matter of its being a celebration of your birthday as private between us two. My old servant George has got a bottle of barbecue-sauce up there in the other car, and as I said to you before, I am not coming down here with any expectation of winning a lawsuit; the fact of the matter is, when you see my performance in court to-morrow morning, you will realize that I have about the poorest case that a good lawyer ever traveled two days to try. We are going to have a barbecue. I didn't know what the occasion of it would be when I started, but now we know what this barbecue is going to be about. It used to be no uncommon thing in this State, Judge, to have a barbecue when district court met. No political campaign was ever considered a complete success without a dozen barbecues, but the good old times are about gone, and I reckon George is the only one left in the great State of Mesquite who knows how to mix a barbecue-sauce. Judge, do you reckon we will have any trouble getting a yearling or some sheep down there?"

"I don't think we will have a bit of trouble," replied the Judge. "And so far as that barbecue-sauce is concerned, you set entirely too much store by that—because, to tell you the truth, there never was any burr-headed darky could mix a barbecue-sauce as good as I can mix it myself."

"I am delighted to hear that," said Senator Logwood, "because it would be a great pity to have such a noble art die with our generation."

Judge Woodward slapped his fat knees with his fat hands and roared with laughter.

"I am serious about that," said the Senator.

"I know you are," replied Judge Woodward, "and that is what makes it so funny. I have heard about you, Senator Logwood, but nobody ever could describe you one half as fine as you are. I can see right now that the rest of this trip is going to be a pleasure to me. If you will excuse me a few minutes, I will go back in the other car and pick up one or two choice spirits with whom I have years of acquaintance anteceding my judicial capacity, and we will go up into the baggage-car and play a little poker."

TEN minutes later the game was under way.

"Senator, you recall the Hogg-Clark campaign, do you not?" asked the Judge while he shuffled the cards.

"I most certainly do," replied Senator Logwood. "The primary was in the summer, and I was making speeches while the snow was still on the ground. That was a terrible campaign."

"Which side were you on, Senator?"

"I was a Hogg man," replied Senator Logwood. "However, I never entered into the animosities of that campaign as bitterly as many of the young men of that day did. They were both fine men, Judge. Nearly everybody knows it now, but I knew it then. To tell you the plain truth, Judge, it was a toss-up with me which side I would be on."

Judge Woodward clapped his hands and laughed heartily.

"I wanted to get into politics," continued Senator Logwood. "I heard Judge Clark speak, and a short time later I heard Hogg speak. I counted the ponies tied to the railing around the courthouse each time, and there were three times as many ponies tied to that railing when Hogg spoke as there were when Clark spoke; so I decided to support Hogg."

"Senator, if you aint just a plumb delight!" declared Judge Woodward as he pounded the table and laughed again.

The first hand was being played when William J. Scott came into the baggage-car. "Gentlemen," he said, "there is a small party of bandits raiding through this section of the country to-day. It is just barely possible that they might stop this train. Are you gentlemen armed?"

"That is a very embarrassing question," declared Senator Logwood. "You have no right to force members of the bar of this State to testify against themselves in the very presence of the court. Moreover, as I stated to you a few days ago in my office, you are a born kill-joy; *Gloom* is your middle name. We will all appreciate it very much if you will get out of this car. Speaking *amicus curiæ*, I will state that your presence in this game will be distasteful to the judge before whom you have litigation pending, and we will thank you for your absence."

HALF an hour later Scott again invaded the baggage-car. "The bandits are headed toward Carrizo," he said. "I do

not think they would attempt to attack us near so large a town, but they are going through that county. They may cross in front of this train. Would you gentlemen mind bringing your suit-cases up here with you?"

"Certainly not," replied Senator Logwood. "Go back and tell my servant George to get the suit-cases and bags. You point them out to him and have him bring them up here. Tell him to be very careful with that bag of mine sitting next to the window, because I have a vacuum-bottle in that bag."

"Well, we will just fine you one vacuum-bottle for contempt of court," said Judge Woodward, "for not having sent for that bag long before this."

"That will be entirely agreeable to me," said Senator Logwood. "I am an old-fashioned man, and I never lay myself liable to a charge of improper conduct with the court; but in a case of emergency like this, I feel that the court has a right to confiscate any goods which a member of the bar may possess, and which might be necessary to the health of the court's kidneys. The defendant pleads guilty and thanks the Court for the Court's mercy."

"Hurry up with that bag," roared Judge Woodward as Scott disappeared.

A few minutes later George came in with the precious bag and opened it in front of the Judge. "I always take my drink at eleven o'clock," said Senator Logwood, "and I do not take another until five-thirty in the afternoon. If you gentlemen will excuse me a moment, I will send a telegram."

Senator Logwood hurried back to the rear coach, where he found Scott. "Please take a telegram for me," he said.

Scott drew a notebook from his pocket. "This is to Mack Mason at San Jacinto," said Senator Logwood. "Tell him to start instantly by auto toward Carrizo and to drive without interruption for food or sleep until nine-thirty o'clock to-morrow morning. Tell him to call me by long-distance then. Send this at the next stop without fail. Leave the train and remain with the operator until the message is sent. This is important. I had not the remotest idea that I could do anything for you, but we are going to continue all these cases."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Scott. "You haven't bribed the Judge have you, or got him drunk?"

Senator Logwood recoiled as though from a blow. "Young man," he said, "I will attribute your remarks to the stress of emotion and to your surprise, but you have wounded me to the heart. I never bribed a man in all my life, nor have I ever used any improper means or influence with any public official or any other citizen. I am shocked and grieved that you should think for one moment that I would be guilty of such an outrage against the honor of the State I love. We will drop this subject now, and I will try to forgive you at some later date. At present I cannot."

"Senator—" began Scott, but his voice choked and there were tears in his eyes. He tried to control himself and beg the Senator's pardon, but he could not speak. Senator Logwood stood looking at him with an expression of amazement and contempt. Finally Scott said: "I'll send the telegram."

"Very well," replied Senator Logwood.

Mack Mason had just returned to San Jacinto when he received the telegram. He had been on a scouting-trip for Senator Logwood, learning intimate details about members of the legislature in order to keep Senator Logwood advised of the complexion of that body so that he could take care of the interests of his clients at the coming session.

Senator Logwood was a professional lobbyist, but very few persons knew it, least of all, the members of the legislature, though all of them knew that Mack Mason was a lobbyist, and most of them attributed to him the uncanny success of Senator Logwood.

Mason read the telegram and laughed heartily. "Now, what kind of devilment do you reckon that white-haired old darling is up to away down there among the coyotes?" he asked himself. Ten minutes later his big car was roaring down the road with muffler wide open, breaking every speed-law of the State. He did not waste time to send a telegram to Senator Logwood. Between themselves, they never wasted words. Logwood had never given him an order he had not carried out.

THE little hotels of Carrizo were crowded shortly after the Mesquite, Gulf & Southern passenger train arrived that evening. Attorneys and their clients had come from far and near. The sleepy little town was humming with activity. Dingy

little restaurants were crowded. Every billiard- and pool-table was in use, and a dance was in progress on the wide veranda of the most pretentious hotel in the city. Gaping crowds of ten to twenty men pointed out Judge Woodward as he waddled along the sidewalk, greeting his constituents with a hearty guffaw, slapping them on the back and roaring with laughter at every jest.

Senator Logwood left the crowd early and opened negotiations for the digging of a barbecue-pit and purchase of a yearling and the delivery of four-foot lengths of firewood. It would be necessary to begin that night in order to have the barbecue ready for the following evening.

During the course of the evening, rumors floated in about the bandits and the route they were taking across the county. There was almost a thrill at eleven o'clock that night when word came that the bandits had torn two rails from the track of the Mesquite, Gulf & Southern Railway not long after the passenger train had gone by. If the train had been as late as it usually was, there might have been an encounter after all, but for some unexplainable reason the train had been on time that evening. The word also came that several deputy sheriffs and some citizens were hot on the trail of the bandits and might meet them by dawn. A deputy sheriff was holding a telephone-wire open to the border guard. Two hundred soldiers were on the *qui vive*, and it was even reported that a company of three State rangers had been sent for, though many doubted that the situation was that serious.

AT nine-thirty o'clock Senator Logwood went to the office of the telephone-company and informed the manager that he was expecting a call. One minute later he was talking to Mack Mason.

"Where do we go from here, Senator?" asked Mason.

"Where are you?" asked Senator Logwood.

"I am in the same county you are in," replied Mason. "I sure burned a lot of gasoline; I don't know where I am at, but it is some little prairie-dog hole in this county, I mean the same county you are in. I could have made it into Carrizo, but I thought maybe you didn't want me to come in."

"You are getting more sense all the time," said Senator Logwood. "I didn't want you to come in. Have you heard anything about the bandits?"

"I haven't heard anything else," replied Mason. "I seem to be right behind those bandits or just ahead of them, I don't know which. We must have been playing tag with each other all night."

"What have you heard as to an encounter with a posse?"

"Well, they had the encounter, all right," said Mason, laughing. "There were about six men in the posse, and they attacked the bandits at dawn this morning. They don't know how many there were, but it was too many; they exchanged a few shots, and then they had to run. A deputy sheriff named Simms was shot through the calf of the leg and dropped behind, and the bandits got him. When last seen he was toting a bundle of cartridges on his back with his hands tied behind him, and a bandit was whipping him along with his riding-quirt. The posse is gathering help to attack again, and the Mexicans are making toward the border."

"That's fine," said Senator Logwood. "Now, you drive up to within a mile of Carrizo and then get a horse. No news of this has come in yet. Those fellows are evidently excited, and they haven't telephoned. Ride your horse right up to the courthouse, rush into the courtroom and yell the news. Do you understand?"

"You must want a continuance," said Mack Mason. "What's the matter—didn't you have time to work up your evidence?"

"That will be enough out of you, young man," said Senator Logwood. "Hurry, because a telephone-message from that posse may spoil everything."

"I am on my way," said Mack Mason, and he hung up the receiver.

BEFORE ten o'clock the courtroom was crowded. Most of those inside were attorneys, litigants and witnesses. Spectators lounged about the doors and windows, or stood in groups in the courthouse yard, exchanging gossip.

The crowds respectfully parted to make a way for Judge Woodward as he strode pompously and this time solemnly toward his bench. The big chair, with its high, carved back, creaked painfully as he sat down.

Senator Logwood respectfully pinched the light off the end of his cigarette and

tossed it into the cuspidor as the Judge sat down.

"Mr. Sheriff," said Judge Woodward, "have order in the courtroom." The courtroom was already impressively quiet, but the deputy sheriff shouted with a tremendous voice: "Have order in the courtroom." Then he strode to the window and shouted the accustomed announcement that the court was in session, all of which ceremony was regarded with solemn awe by the crowd.

Judge Woodward nodded to the clerk of the court, and the clerk read: "No. 4682, Simon Greenwood vs. the Mesquite, Gulf & Southern Railway Company."

A wizened little man who crouched behind heavy spectacles said in a high, piping voice: "The plaintiff is ready, Your Honor.'" Then he looked toward Senator Logwood, as did the Judge.

Senator Logwood rose very slowly from his chair. "If the Court please," he began, "the defendant in this case will ask a continuance. It is with extreme reluctance that we again ask the indulgence of the Court, and we realize that this case has already—"

There was a commotion and some exclamations from the crowd outside the door. "Mr. Sheriff, have order!" commanded Judge Woodward impatiently.

The sheriff strutted to the window and shouted: "Have order out there!"

As he turned from the window, Mack Mason came stumbling through the doorway, his face caked with dust and perspiration, one leg of his trousers ripped to the knee and flopping about. He wore no hat, and his eyes were bloodshot. Mason was naturally clumsy, and he gave the impression at once of a man reeling with fatigue.

"Men," he shouted, "I have just come in with news from the posse. They met the bandits; Deputy Sheriff Simms was wounded and captured."

"Get out of here and report to the sheriff's office!" shouted Judge Woodward. "You are interrupting the Court."

"Do I understand this court to say," demanded Senator Logwood, "that this court is not interested in the fact that bandits are raiding this country and that a gallant peace officer who has bared his breast to the bullets of marauders threatening the peaceful homes of American citizens and their wives and children is not to be given protection? I have never in my life been guilty of contempt of a court, but by Gad, sir, I call upon this jury and your deputy sheriff and upon every good citizen of the State of Mesquite, within the hearing of my voice, to go to the rescue of that brave man. When we have done all that is humanly possible for him and those who are with him, it will be time enough to try these cases;—time enough for me to place my person and my property at the disposal of this court, offering no defense for the contempt I am now committing."

Senator Logwood turned to the crowd. "Why do you stand there like cowards?" he shouted, his face livid and his arms extended. "You, sir," he said to Mason, "whoever you are, lead the way!" To the crowd he shouted: "Bring me a horse!"

THERE was a roar of approval. Mack Mason went stumbling out of the door again, followed by Senator Logwood. The deputy sheriff pressed a pistol into Senator Logwood's hands as they were crowded together in the narrow doorway. Mason was the first one on his horse. Senator Logwood was second; but by the time they had crossed the courthouse yard, fifty men on horseback were following. When they turned a corner of the courthouse square, Senator Logwood looked back anxiously. Judge Woodward had just mounted a horse which was struggling to gallop. The Senator smiled, then pulled off his hat and gave his horse a resounding smack on the flank. He shrieked a "Rebel yell" that was echoed from every direction for a quarter of a mile and finally drowned by the clatter of horses' hoofs. A cloud of dust which was increasing in size, showed that the crowd was gathering very rapidly. Senator Logwood spurred his horse hard and managed to catch up with Mack Mason.

"Not so fast, you fool!" he yelled.

"All right, Senator," replied Mack Mason with a chuckle. "How did you like my little performance?"

"Very good, very good," replied Senator Logwood. "But that work on the trousers was a little crude."

"I thought so too," said Mason, "but I couldn't sew them up with the pocket-knife I cut them with; so I had to let it go."

"A good rider," said Senator Logwood, "wouldn't tear his trousers like that. It is never done in this country."

"On the whole, though, wasn't it a pretty classy performance?" asked Mason.

"It was fair," said Senator Logwood. "It was tolerably fair."

A CLOUD of dust swept between Mason and Senator Logwood, preceding a squad of twelve men who passed them with a yell. Senator Logwood rode closer to Mason: "Are you leading us toward the bandits?" he asked.

"Senator," replied Mason, "I haven't the remotest idea where them bandits are."

"I thought not," said the Senator. "I am going to drop behind; I am too old for this sort of foolishness. You ride on as hard as you can."

Senator Logwood slowed his horse, and presently the entire crowd had passed him. He slowed to a walk. Then he heard hoofbeats to the rear and looked back. Judge Woodward hailed him from a small cloud of dust.

"You have damn' near killed me, Senator," said the Judge. "Let's go on back and see how that barbecue is coming."

"I will do that with pleasure," said Senator Logwood. "But let me first apologize to you as a man, and I will apologize to you later in court. I was excited, Judge."

"Forget it, forget it, forget it!" said Woodward impatiently. "Let's first ride over to the little creek near here and wash our faces and get this mud out of our necks. I am nearly choked."

There were no fences along the roadside, and so they turned their horses into the brush.

The water of the creek was just in sight when a fusillade was fired from somewhere beyond the creek. Bullets whistled around them. Senator Logwood's horse stopped suddenly, trembling.

"My horse is shot, Judge," said the Senator.

"Now, aint that hell?" said Judge Woodward. "Right here is where the two best lawyers in this whole State get killed by a passel of bandits."

Senator Logwood dismounted and helped the Judge off his horse. Several more bullets whistled near. Senator Logwood's horse fell to the ground, while Judge Woodward's horse started off toward the road as fast as it could run.

Judge Woodward and Senator Logwood dropped behind the body of the quivering horse on the ground and held their pistols ready for action. Bullets began to hit the ground near them. "Let's just lie low, Judge," said Senator Logwood very calmly. "The boys will hear those shots and come back. Sound carries well on a day like this, and the wind is in our faces."

"I WISH we had that bottle, Senator," remarked Judge Woodward. "I never needed a drink worse in my life. If those fools keep up that shooting, they can't miss me many more times because I am a large part of the scenery wherever I am."

"I can't see them," said Senator Logwood, "but I believe they are within range of our pistols."

"I haven't looked," said Judge Woodward. "Hang me if I ever expected to die as thirsty as I am this minute."

Senator Logwood peered cautiously over the horse and strained his eyes in the glare of the morning sun. Suddenly there was a sound of firing far behind the little creek, followed by a burst of fire from a point near the creek.

"Our boys have wheeled and taken them in the rear, Judge," said Senator Logwood.

"Then they will be passing this way," remarked Judge Woodward. "We are in for it now."

"I think so," agreed Senator Logwood. "Are you a good shot?"

"The worst in the world," said the Judge.

"Then let me have your gun," suggested Senator Logwood. Judge Woodward immediately complied.

The firing grew hotter, and Senator Logwood with a pistol in each hand stood up. "I see them now, Judge," he said.

"Yes, and they are going to see you," thundered Judge Woodward.

"Not a chance, Judge," said the Senator. "You are a good enough poker-player to know that those fellows cannot see anything but what is behind them right now. They are scared."

Judge Woodward peered over the side of the horse. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "They are coming right this way."

"Yes," said Senator Logwood. "I could get one now, but I am afraid to draw their fire. Our boys are dropping them."

Bullets began to whistle overhead again. "Have they seen us?" asked the Judge.

"No," said Senator Logwood. "Some of our boys are shooting a little wild."

"You had better lie down, then," said Judge Woodward.

"I am going to open fire in about ten seconds," replied Senator Logwood.

"All right, go ahead," said Judge Woodward. "I have said my little 'lay-me-down-to-sleep' and kissed myself good night." He laughed.

"Simms is in sight," said Senator Logwood. "He is wounded, but he is getting away from them, Judge. A scared man is certainly a powerful animal when he sees a chance to get away. I am watching two Mexicans. They are going to see Simms in a minute. When they do, they will shoot at him, and I am going to shoot first."

A second later Senator Logwood fired. He aimed very carefully, waited for the smoke to clear, then fired again.

"I got both of them," he said. "Simms didn't know who fired, so he dropped. Judge, you stay here, and I'll make toward Simms. He is not armed."

"I would a sight rather you wouldn't," answered Judge Woodward. "But go ahead."

Senator Logwood walked boldly forward through the brush. He had gone only a short distance when he drew fire. One bullet scratched his arm and another burned his shoulder. "Lucky that wasn't the right arm," he muttered as he dropped to his knees and began crawling toward Simms.

The posse of citizens was gaining rapidly on the bandits, who did not know which way to go, when Senator Logwood's unexpected fire broke out in front of them. Finally, in confusion, they turned directly toward the town with the posse sweeping around them. One minute later the posse came upon Senator Logwood sitting on the ground beside Simms, his pistol in his hand, holding one remaining cartridge for emergency. The fight lasted only a few more minutes. The score at the close was eight bandits killed, three captured and six of the posse wounded. The remainder of the bandits escaped.

JUDGE WOODWARD acted as toastmaster at the barbecue that night, and recounted with embellishments the conversation between himself and Senator Logwood while they were intrenched behind the dead horse.

When the Judge concluded his recital, there were calls for a speech from Senator Logwood.

"Gentlemen," said the Senator, "I am the host for this occasion, and it would be very unseemly for me to appear to accept all the praise that has been heaped upon me by the Judge. I am a very tired man to-night; I am too old for such a strenuous day, and I wish merely to say, before I go to bed, that Mr. William J. Scott, who is my client, has assured me that he will make ample provision for Mr. Simms, who is the real hero of this somewhat turbulent day, and now I bid you all good night."

When court convened the following morning at ten o'clock, Judge Woodward again nodded to the clerk, and he again read: "No. 4682, Simon Greenwood vs. Mesquite, Gulf & Southern Railway Company."

The wizened little man behind the spectacles rose from his seat and said:

"If it pleases the Court, we will ask a continuance. The Court will understand that the very unusual occurrence of yesterday may have profoundly affected the minds of the jurors. The Court is cognizant of the fact that counsel for the defense in this case has achieved a popularity in this county since yesterday, which would make it extremely hazardous for the plaintiff to attempt to go to trial, especially before a jury of his comrades-in-arms."

Judge Woodward cleared his throat noisily and said: "It is the opinion of the Court that none of these cases in which Senator Logwood is counsel should be tried at this term of the court. This court will be willing to entertain motions for change of venue in any of these cases if the plaintiffs desire to present them."

Senator Logwood rose very slowly and said in a low tone: "The defendant will offer no objection either to continuance or change of venue, and we will assure the Court and counsel in these cases that we will make our most earnest endeavor to be ready for trial at the next term of court."

Senator Logwood turned to leave the courtroom. A ripple of applause was heard. "Have order in the courtroom!" shouted Judge Woodward ferociously, and the deputy sheriff echoed the cry even more ferociously.

Another exploit of Senator Logwood will be described in the next, the December, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

From a Frontiersman's Diary

The Serpent City

By Edison Marshall

It was curious that three such good woodsmen should wander into the hills and fade from the earth. But as they were men steeped in iniquity, no one mourned their loss. —From a Frontiersman's Diary.

THERE is one mystery in the Southern Oregon mountains that never grows old, and never is understood. Even ancient Abe Carver, who knew the strange ranges as never geologist can hope to know them, who had melted snow in his veins for blood, and strata in his frame for bones, found it a fresh marvel at every fall of darkness. It is the mystery of the mountain night.

It doesn't seem to be the same night that falls over cities and plains. Even the stars look different. There is no smoke to hide or blur them, and they seem to hang just at the top points of the tall, dark pines. Once really to see them, the people say, is to lose at once the worst of a man's fears of that time-honored bogy, death. They give a queer feeling of insignificance, too, that is remarkably good for men. But they are just a small part of the mystery.

There are the smells, never to be forgotten. One of them comes from the balsam, and is more wonderful than any chemical perfume could possibly be, and gives more light, far-flying dreams than is possible with opium. Some of them come from the lakes that make a silver chain from one end of the Back Country to the other—the smell of wet banks and Heaven alone knows what. Blending in the mixture are such good and healthy smells as sun-baked earth, and fern beds, and little, shy mountain-daisies that are almost as hard to see as the little rock-rabbits close to snow-line. These are the smells that a man can perceive, but of course a man has a ridiculously rudimentary sense of smell. You can tell, by watching the night-hunting of a wolf, that he experiences a whole scale of smells on either side of the little octave known to men.

THEN there are the sounds that make a mystery just by themselves. Of course, the human sense of hearing has very limited and definite frontiers, but even for human ears the mountains have enough unknown sounds to draw a man's thoughts, as a sponge draws water, far into the strange, little-used spaces of his mind, where he does not like to have them go. Students who have sat in a collegiate class of psychology and have watched the tuning-fork experiment are best able to understand these human limits. As the note sounds higher and higher, fewer and fewer students are able to hear it, until only one is left. At the next note the one remaining cannot hear, either. But it is perfectly evident that the forks are still making vibrations, if the human ears were only

tuned to hear them. It is the same below the lowest note that a human ear can perceive. And part of the mystery of the mountain night is the ever-present impression that if one's ears were just a little sharper, there would be a thousand sounds that people have never dreamed of. But after all, perhaps these limits are a good thing. As it is, men are having a hard enough time clinging to their long-harbored theories of life and death.

The limbs of the pines scratch and rub together with a very curious sound. It is always right over your head, and it dies away on each side of you. The wind tries to force its way through the brush-thicket, and its sound is like a whimper of disappointment. There are a thousand sounds, no two alike, that the wind can make. A few of the million noises of the insect world are pitched in the right key for human beings to hear, and always you are dimly aware that some creature is stalking some other creature in the shadows just beyond. The stalking wolf is one of the most silent creatures in the world, but now and then he cracks a twig, or crushes a leaf. And the darkness itself is a mystery, particularly when the moon is shining through it.

It doesn't seem merely an absence of light. It seems as if it were something in itself that drops down from the mountain-tops. It drops with startling speed, and it lifts the same way. And through it, now and then, you can see far-away forests that seem to have silver poured over them, and curiously dark valleys, and strange, deep glens. The whole region is strange beyond words—with its endless forests and its mysterious lakes and its stone-heaps piled without reason or sense, and its creeks that fade away when you need them most—but particularly it is strange at night. People call it the Back Country because they don't know any other name; it is quite the way of human beings, when they don't know much about a thing, to lop it off with generalities. It is back somewhere behind the hills, and since deer and mines and things can be procured at the very edge of it, there is no sense in entering it very far. As a result, the long-tailed jays still shriek with astonishment and amazement every time one of the curious forked creatures comes into their sight.

It isn't good to be lost in the Back Country. There are no landmarks to guide one out. Streams are often very hard to find, and the human body, not very good at best, soon becomes tired of climbing a thousand ridges that look exactly alike. The great timber-wolves are always waiting for the moment when a man grows helpless, and the long, wild shriek of the mountain lion is apt to frighten a man into that deadly mistake of running in a circle in the dark. Of course, the true-breed mountain lion, weighing one hundred and fifty pounds at the most, is the worst coward in the mountains, but his kill-scream is very disconcerting and terrible.

THE night had just dropped down about Abe Carver's cabin; and the wonder that is a remembered echo of the fear that men had in a younger world, brought a curious glow in his eyes. He was hardly conscious of it. He had other things to think about to-night, for just that day a very dear and ancient friend had wandered away into the ridges, and the hills are always full of death-traps for the unsuspecting. They have always one trick more to play, even when a mountaineer thinks he has learned them all.

People knew at the first glance at Abe Carver that in some one great factor he differed from the common run of mountain men. What the difference was, they usually couldn't say. He dressed just like the rest—mostly in buckskin, which wears like iron, and does not require constant cleaning. Then, his hair was strange and gray and long; his arms and legs were hard and knotted; and his face was scarred and deep-lined, like the faces of the mountains themselves. But here all likeness abruptly stopped.

The mountain men never looked squarely into Carver's eyes. They couldn't have told why they didn't. They weren't afraid of him—at least, they did not fear bodily injury at his hands. He was neither particularly fast with a pistol nor particularly strong. His eyes were rather large, and they had a peculiar fixation. The eyelids didn't seem to close down as often as is natural. They were blue in color, and they were always noticeably bright.

Children have bright eyes, but the brightness of his was not the kind that people love to see in the eyes of a child. Strong drink can brighten a man's eyes, and there are certain emotions, like fear and pleasure, that makes them sparkle. Carver's eyes had no such warm brightness as is caused by these things. The light in

be seen under his brows was just as cold as the glitter that mountaineers behold on the face of the snowbanks in the winter sun.

Carver had lived too long in the mountains, and had imbued too much of their spirit. He had stepped beyond the pale ordained for human beings, and the mark of a strange, outer world was beneath his lids. The gaunt wolves, howling from the hilltops at night, have something of the same glitter in their eyes. You can catch it sometimes in the eyes of the little cowardly lynx that will mew on your trail all day but never dares attack. And most of all it is the property of the gliding people that live on the lowest of the three planes that make up forest life.

If human beings had that look in a younger world, they have mostly got away from it long since. There is no need for it in farms and cities. It is an inheritance from a wilder, more savage time, and now it remains the mark of a wilder, more savage world that begins where the habitations of men leave off. It is the mark of remorselessness, inexorable as the cold in winter. It is the brand of the kind of mercy one may expect from a wolf-pack in the snow, or the rattlesnake on the rock. The other brands Carver had—a peculiar stealthy quality in his walk, and a queer repressed note in his voice—were far too obscure for any except the eyes of a naturalist. And no naturalist would believe them if he saw them.

ABE CARVFR walked up and down in front of his cabin; and now and then he searched with his eyes the distant hillsides. The dark was over them, but his eyes were trained to see in the darkness. Sometimes he put his fingers to his lips and gave a whistled call that seemed to reëcho endlessly among the pines.

"Funny thing," he breathed. "All the time I've had him, he hasn't been gone at feedin'-times before."

The old man seemed very haggard and broken as he began to prepare his simple meal. It had been years since he had supped alone. Always the same faithful, loving friend had been crouched at his feet. To-night he was gone; and Abe was very lonely and apprehensive indeed.

There is a kind of fatalism in the creed of the mountains; but it isn't the same kind that is to be found among such old peoples as the Chinese or the Arabs. With the latter, nothing seems to matter much one way or another; and things matter very much indeed in the mountains. The mountaineer is perfectly indifferent to the inevitability of death; but what are half-felt emotions among the plainsmen are passions with him. He cannot forget an injury. He may not know the meaning of pity; but he loves with the devotion of a dog for his master. The further one goes into the Outer World of the Wild, the more simple and intense emotions become. Abe Carver had only one love, and he gave him all the affection in his heart. That love was his shaggy hound, his companion in the hunt, his partner in his explorations, the sharer of his troubles, his defender and slave and friend.

Shag had trotted away on one of his endless hill-journeys at noon that day. He had taken the trail that went down toward the Trotter place. Abe would rather have had him go in any other direction. He did not like the Trotters, new from a mountain district in the East. Thev were grimy and vile-tongued and malignant; and he had once had a dispute in court with them over a trap-line. Always before, Shag had returned, bounding like a wolf down the slopes, when the sky first changed to green at sunset. It was nearly nine now; and he had not yet come.

"We'll get you yet," the Trott rs had told Carver at the door of the court that day. "We'll bust you open like a ripe papaw!" And then they had whispered oaths down on his head—such oaths as only men who know the savage mountains can possibly conceive.

"But they wouldn't have shot my Shag," the old man muttered into his coffee-cup. "They couldn't have done a thing like that."

But he was lying to himself, and he knew it. There was nothing too low and mean for the Trotters. In this way they differed from most of the mountain men, and even the mountain creatures that range the forest. The latter can be terrible and cruel, but they cannot be low. It is against the laws of the wild.

THE night drew on, hour after hour. Supper was done. Carver built his fire high; and like a form in some curious dark-colored stone, he stood waiting at the doorway. He did not seem to move a hand or lift a shoulder. Men who have waited on deer-trails know that the most

draining conduct in the world is to remain perfectly motionless, yet Abe had stood without motion for two long hours, evidently without fatigue.

It isn't exactly a human quality, and it would have been most disconcerting to watch. A lizard on a stone may have that same impassive immobility; and it is particularly a quality of the serpents. But even the larger forest-beasts seem to lack the muscle-control to do it easily. Carver stood with his arms loose-hung, his strange, fixed eyes gazing down the trail.

"It couldn't be that them Trotters have got him," he said again. "If they have—"

The words ended in a sort of throaty sob. For there are certain emotions, as all men know, that cannot find expression in words. The words for them have died from the language in these gentler days.

Then his gray head lifted, almost imperceptibly. Far away down the trail he could hear a sound that was not part of the natural noises of the night. Above the sound of the tree-limbs, above the stir of the wind in the brush-thickets, he heard a faint, low whimper, almost like the noise of the wind itself. And the next instant came an echo of the old, familiar bark of welcome. But it *was* just an echo—the cry of a brave heart that remembers even as it dies.

At once the motionless muscles of the man sprang to life. He leaped down the trail; and a spectator would have been curiously reminded of the lunge of a serpent. The motion was so unbelievably fast, so silent. And in another instant the dying dog was whimpering in his arms.

Its two hind legs were broken—the man could see where the brave animal had dragged them in the dust of the moonlit trail. The hairy coat was matted and wet; and the great, intelligent head was terribly battered and broken.

The dog did not shrink at the sight of the blue pistol pointing squarely in the moonlight. It could see the eyes that aimed along it, full of the same love it had always seen. When the man's eyes had that look, they were never to be feared. The pistol flame leaped in the dark. And then the only sound on the mountain trail was the faint rustle of leaves stirred by the quivering muscles of the dying animal, and the loving, whispered curses of a weeping man.

It was a long time after this that he left the stiffening body and walked on down the trail. He went toward the cabin on the lower level where the Trotters lived. He went very softly, very smoothly, as if with no muscular exertion. A snowshoe rabbit leaped and fled from his trail. The little squeak of terror that it uttered was the same that its breed had learned in long ages, at the sight of a serpent descending from its ledges on its night-hunting.

THERE are three planes of life in the mountains, and the laws are the same for each. The middle plane consists of all those creatures whose byways are the game-trails in the brush and on the hills—the wolves that never are full-fed, the larger bears, deer like streaks of brown light, and the stately elk. The upper plane is the tree-people and the winged creatures. Here are the tawny mountain-lion, that lies so close to the great branches of the trees that he is all but invisible, smaller cousin the lynx, the gray squirrels, and such grotesque creatures as the porcupine—always the last hope of a wanderer lost and starving in the mountains. And finally there is the under plane, knowledge of which is still mostly a mystery except to the greatest naturalists.

In this plane are the rodents, the marmots and rabbits and mice and chipmunk, whose forests are the ferns. And worse than any of these are the poison folk, the gray, speckled rattlesnakes on the rocks. The casual hunter in the hills does not see these poison people. In the first place, most of them are nocturnal in their habits. Besides, they are perfectly camouflaged by nature to match the rocks and dust in which they lie. Hunters very rarely go to the rock ledges that they love, the breeding-places where sometimes a hundred of them will sun themselves on the same cliff. And of all the creatures of the wild, theirs is the most remorseless creed.

The wolf turns aside at the sound of their warning rattle. The cattle forsake the slopes where they take their sun-baths. They have learned in long years to expect no mercy from the poison folk, for the reptiles have a cold malignancy toward all other living things—perhaps because far back in their evil minds they can remember when they were the rulers and owners of the whole world, and they are jealous of these intruders. They strike not only in self-defense or in hunting, like most of the forest people. Men who have been

struck by a head that leaped like a whip-lash from beneath a rock are well aware of this fact—if they survived to be aware of anything. The birds hate them because when the glittering eyes meet their own, all power to fly away passes from their wings. The little mice and smaller rodents squeak with terror at just the rustle of the leaves in the shadow. And even men, remembering from a remote time a greater breed of serpents that hunted in the darkness just without their caves, hate and fear them too.

They do not understand them. They never quite understood the miracle of their changing skins, their long fasts from food and drink, their motionless slumber on the rocks. Men know that the bite from a full-grown rattler is often a very quick and unhappy death; for the venom itself, a certain complex combina'ion of proteids, is almost as deadly a substance as the wisest chemist can evolve in a laboratory.

The poison-folk were Abe Carver's life and study. He had not inherited the usual fear of them. Even in his boyhood he would leave his play to follow the gliding forms through the grass. Their eyes, their habits, their strange, malignant lives, had been a fascination to him in all his long years. And he knew things about them that no living man ever knew before.

HIS first study was the blue-racers, and the garter- and gopher-snakes—such snakes as kill their food by constriction of their coiling bodies. They could exert a most remarkable pressure, as the little Abe learned after many experiments; but compared to the rattlers they were dull and stupid things. He had watched them do their strange dances in the moonlight; he had seen them attack a great toad that had been frozen in its tracks with horror; he had beheld them breed and lay their eggs, and had been first to see the little wormlike things that left the shells. Later he beheld the same mystery in the viviparous rattlers.

Then one day Abe had followed a great rattler from the river-bank far up precipitous trails to a wonderful serpent colony on the rocks. A man may live years in the hills and never find one of these places; but once he does, he remembers it to the day he dies. And he will go many paces out of his way to avoid the place again.

The serpent cities are great fragments of broken ledge where the rattlesnakes gather in countless hundreds. No man knows what their business is. No man can imagine what consultations the great gray king-rattlers have among themselves, what the females—no less deadly and twice as malignant—say to one another, and why they lie for such endless hours so still upon the rocks.

Sometimes they lie apart, and sometimes a number of them will make a ghastly mass like the twined locks of a Medusa. Sometimes they stretch two and two, and often the great males will battle to the death for a resting place on a rock too small for both. All these things Abe Carver had seen, and if any man in the world knew the why and wherefore of them all, Abe Carver was he.

ABE had been bitten many times, but he had always carried antidotes of the most scientific and effective kind. And long ago he had become immune to rattler's venom. He wore tall, tough boots,—for a rattler's bite is painful even when one is immune to its toxin,—and he wore long gloves over his wrists and hands. The gloves were just as important as the boots, because in climbing over the snake city a man could only make progress by using both hands and feet.

At twenty-one he had a knowledge of rattlesnakes past that of any naturalist of his period in the world. At forty the poison-folk that ever coil and glide and strike and dance on the rocks were his cult and his life and his eternal mystery. But at sixty he had passed all this. He had lived too long in the under plane. In a measure they had become his own people. They did not mystify him now. Except for a dog that whined and cowered at the extreme frontier of the snake-city, they were the one remaining interest in his life.

At sixty Abe Carver had broken one of the few great underlying laws of the universe. He had probed too deeply into a mystery that had not been meant for human beings to know. It has been the same since the beginning of the world. There have been men who have looked too far into the occult sciences of the East—and their story is a good one to forget. There is a more recent story of a man who purposely went to prison to study the ways of criminals and came out a criminal himself. Abe Carver had lain for too many long sunlit hours watching the ceaseless

coiling of the poison-folk. He had gazed too long into their glittering eyes. There had been a time when he wondered at himself—at the strange pleasure he took in the touch of their cold bodies; but that was past. He had once started with amazement at the sight of his own bright eyes in a looking-glass; but long ago he had become accustomed to their glitter. And once another mountaineer had shuddered and sworn that Carver moved through the hills like a snake itself; but Abe had forgotten that his reply had only been a laugh. These were just externals—simply unconscious imitation. But too many times he had watched the night-hunting of the snakes, had seen their cold rage in battles; their own remorselessness had grown into his blood and fiber.

They feared him no more. He had learned to imitate a little whispered call—more like a hiss than a word—by which they knew their friends; a sound that long ago he had learned was the snakes' peace-greeting. He could whisper it softly at the first stir of a gray ribbon beneath a rock, and it meant that he could pass back and forth unchallenged.

JUST once as Carver walked down the moonlit trail to the Trotter's house, he had to utter the call. Just as he had come down into the lower hills, a gray shadow had streaked across his path. And for the first time since he had left his dead companion on the trail, he paused tensely.

His eyes probed into the darkness where the snake had vanished. It had been but a gopher-snake, after all; but it had started a queer current of thought in his mind. What had he meant to do by this blind advance? The Trotters were three, all of them dead shots and in the prime of their strength; and he was only one. Does a wolf attack when he has odds of three against him?

He had come up blindly from the trail, his heart full of such cold hatred as most men have long ago lost the power to feel. Hatred must have exercise as well as any other emotion, or it dries up like the poison-duct of a snake of fifty winters—and too many years of peace have killed the power of most human beings to feel it. But Carver had had good teachers.

Even at first it had not been the kind of hatred that ignites the brain and heart and makes a man helpless before his foes. Thoughts must be allowed free play; brains must be kept clear; this is one of the first laws of the wilderness. Yet he had not stopped to plan. He was dimly cognizant of some wild and daring impulse to attack all three of the Trotters as they sat in their cottage—of slaying them as a wolf slays sheep. Yet in a single moment of clear thinking he knew that his one hope lay in strategy alone.

He might kill one of them; but surely the deadly aim of one of the other two would end his own life. One was not enough. Besides, the preservation of one's life is the first law of the forest, and no plan must be considered that entailed its loss.

Abe walked softly, stealthily down into the first clearings. Once a horse neighed wildly and fled in unlooked-for terror, and once a toad, usually so dull and stolid, hopped frantically into the darkness. In a little while he saw the windows of the Trotter cottage.

THE men had not yet gone to bed; but the fact did not surprise Carver. Of course they had been looking for Abe to attempt some stroke of vengeance; and they had no intention of being found asleep. Abe felt a little shiver of gladness, something like the first rapture of passion; for the more tired they were in the next day's business, the longer were the odds against them. He stole up to the window.

The three of them were sitting in their filthy room; and drowsiness had begun to dull the savagery of their faces. All evening through they had waited for Abe to come; and now that he was here, they did not know it. They were three great, dark men, foul of tongue and evil of face.

"We might as well go to bed," the oldest Trotter was saying. "The skunk ain't comin'."

The second brother stood up and stretched out his arms. "He aint got the nerve. Whatever made you think he had? He's crazy, anyway—you can see it in his eyes."

"I don't like them eyes," the youngest of the three objected. And he ought to have known, for they were fast upon him as he spoke.

The others laughed. "He's a bluff—and what could he do against the three of us? We'd shoot him like a rat before he got his guns out. But one of us had better keep watch. We'll take turns at it—two hours each."

"Maybe his dog died on the trail, and he hasn't seen him yet," the youngest of the three went on. "We'd hate to have to carry him up and throw him in old Abe's bed."

The three of them laughed—a grim, terrible sound that rocked out into the quiet night. The old man's lower teeth gnawed at his lip. He was shaking all over now—yet not enough to stir the dead leaves under his feet. It was not nervousness, except in the sense that all wild creatures are nervous at the beginning of a hunt. It was hatred that seemed to shiver his heart to pieces.

"I tried to leave enough life in him to get home," the older brother answered. And they chortled again. Then they lay down in their clothes to sleep.

They did not dream of the two remorseless eyes that glittered through the windowpane. And then, as a shadow goes, the old man glided away. He went into the deepest brush; and the lessons of silence he had learned on the rock-ledges laid his feet like cushions against the dry twigs. Then his lids slowly closed over his fixed eyes, and he went to sleep.

There was work to do on the morrow; and work to be done well needs fresh muscles and clear thought such as only sleep can give. Fifty feet to his right a wolf slept through the early night-hours, waiting for the hunting-time in the dawn. One hundred to his left a rattlesnake curled about a rock still warm from the previous day's sun; and it was deep in its slumber. And to one that looked down from the clouds, the three would have seemed of the same breed.

THE long, silent wait in the brush would have been a physical drain on some men, but Abe knew just how to lie relaxed and conserve his strength. The night drew to morning—a dawn that leaped up over the mountains wherein the trees sprang out of the shadow one by one and grew clear-lined—and the morning drew till noon. The vigilance of the Trotters had grown ever less as the morning hours went by. When they came in to dinner at noon, they had decided that Carver would attempt no vengeance at all.

They did not know that even a toothless wolf will fight to the death, and that a rattlesnake will strike after its poison-glands are dried up with age. If they had known these things, they might have been more watchful when they went out to their work in the afternoon.

They did not see Abe creep into the house. If he had glided in the dust like his poison-people, he could have scarcely been less visible. Even the buzzard that keeps grim watch over all the mountains did not see him.

The house was quite deserted. It was full of the odors of uncleanliness—a quality very hard to endure by one accustomed to the clean smells of the woods. And there were hardly enough articles of value in the house for his decoy. It didn't much matter, however. The sight of him leaving the cabin with a full sack would be enough to put them on his trail.

He emptied the potatoes from a burlap sack, then filled the bag with such things as he thought the Trotters valued most. Then he put in a light comforter to give the bag an appearance of weight and bulk.

But he was not through yet. The Trotters carried their pistols, but their rifles were hung on the deer-horns over the little fireplace. A well-aimed rifle-bullet might end the adventure before it had begun; and his next business was to spike the guns beyond repair. It was not hard to do, with a hammer and a brick from the fireplace.

He did not work in silence now. A little noise was better. If the Trotters heard and came, their dog would surely reach him before they did. And he did not wish too long a start on them. He merely wanted to remain just out of pistol-range. And now only one gun remained unbroken.

HE was still cold as steel; and the only change in him was an added brilliancy in his reptile eyes. But a madness was creeping through his blood like a poison. His face was curiously white; and his motions, ever quickened, became more lithe and sinuous. His age had fallen from his shoulders in a breath. With a clang and clash he struck the fireplace wall with the last of the three rifles and the lock shattered to pieces.

Far away, through the windows, he saw the three Trotters stop in their work. It was just as he had hoped. He shouted at them, a scream of fury, and crouched to wait the onslaught of the dog. It was bounding across the fields toward the cabin; and in a moment more it would spring into the open door.

The two met in the doorway; and a knife flashed down in a white light. Then,

laughing his scorn, and in plain sight of the three men that watched from their fields, he kicked the bleeding body from his path.

With his bag over his shoulder, he started running toward the hills. One of the Trotters' herd of long-horned cattle lifted its head from the grass as he passed, and he fired remorselessly at its shoulders. It rocked down with a bellow; and he halted to drive his blade into its neck.

The Trotters were firing now, impotently, wi.h their pistols. And Abe Carver cursed with mad rapture when he saw them spring in pursuit of him. He did not need the sack over his shoulder as a decoy. Once having seen the butchery of the steer and dog, they would follow him till they died.

Just as he had hoped, they soon swung into the long, easy trot that is one of the few accomplishments men have learned from the wild creatures. It is a pace that will run down a horse in time; and they did not question for a moment that overtaking Carver was but the work of an hour at most. They were young and strong, and he was old.

The youngest of the three had gone to the cabin after the rifles; now he had joined them with the story of a fresh atrocity. And the three of them trotted together up the long slope in pursuit of the gray figure just ahead.

THEY did not waste their pistol-cartridges by firing at Carver. A pistol is not particularly accurate at long distances, and Carver hovered just out of range. They would catch him soon, anyway. Besides, a murder at arm's-length would better satiate their fury.

He led them over hills and down into still glens and around the shoulders of mountains and along narrow trails. He was trotting slowly now, and their pace had decreased too. As danger from pistol-fire grew less, he had permitted the distance to narrow between them. Ever he moved toward the great waste of crag and rock-heap that men called the Dead Indian Mountains. And ever he drew his three pursuers after him. . . . .

Now he was traversing the great range itself. The August sun blasted down in fury, and the rocks swam and shimmered in the heat-waves. It was the most torrid hour of the day, just as he had hoped.

The three came hot on the trail, for surely he was almost exhausted now. The great rock-heaps, piled as if in the play of a mad god, looked down at this strange chase, and had never seen the like before.

Now Carver was ready to descend. He knew the country well. A thousand times he had crept down this same precipice of shale—a steep slope that ended on a white rock-ledge below. There was no retreat, once one started the descent. Hands and knees and feet were needed to prevent a fatal fall, and only by the most tortuous climbing could one ever leave the white ledge below.

HE dipped down and down; and now he began to utter a little whispered call that was more nearly like the hiss of a snake than a human cry—the friendship articulation of the poison people.

Literally hundreds of the lithe, spotted ribbons of gray were sunning themselves on the rocks—as always in the heat of the day. Some of them were in ghastly masses, and some were stretched at full length. It was the great colony of rattlesnakes that Abe Carver had known of old, the great assembly of poison folk whose bite is death.

They could not see him now, but they heard his call. The rattlers shed their skins in dog-days; and during the period they become temporarily blind. And that is the time that all creatures most carefully avoid the snake-trails in the dust. At such times their malignancy is at its height, and they strike without warning at the slightest movement on the stone.

But they gave no heed to old Abe Carver. They were used to him, and to their own whispered friendship-call that marked him as a brother rather than a foe. He climbed slowly down, his face and hands and body almost brushing hundreds of the terrible flat heads. Then he dropped his bag and sped into the brush beneath.

And just as he had known, his three pursuers plunged down after him.

THE wild is very old and most imperturbable; and all except its own soft voices are always quickly stilled. A gray old man who had chattered and danced in rapture stretched out in the sun to sleep. And almost as quickly as the ripples die when three stones are cast into the sea the silence fell again over the serpent city.

There will be another story "From a Frontiersman's Diary" in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The Lady-Killer

By C. S. Montanye

A JOYOUS tale wherein the two exciting games of love and baseball are most attractively commingled.

SHOW me the bird what believes every gal in the world is crazy and mad about him, and I'll show you a guy worth his weight in ivory. Or better still I will introduce you to no less than Oscar Morton. Oscar, or Ox as the bunch calls him, is a Columbus of beauty. Which is to say he discovers more good-looking dames in one day than Columbus ever did in the way of real estate, in all of his life. With Oscar it is just one gal after another, and it's about as hopeless to keep his mind off of the sex feminine as it is to eat vegetable soup with a fork. Oscar was a born lady-killer and will continue so as long as he is able to totter around.

Here is the way I got acquainted with the male vampire:

I and Larry Higgins has took his baseball team down to White Springs, Texas, for a period of training. The reason I is brung along is due to the fact I'm the manager of the team and Larry hisself says that when it comes to whipping a nine into shape and bringin' them back North, fit and ready to cop out the pennant, I is second to nobody at all.

We get down to Texas on the second day of March. Down there the climate can't be told from July in Coney Island. White Springs has everythin' that goes with hot weather. They is dust, perspiration to be had by all, to say nothin' of ice-water and hot sunshine and silk shirts. The boys, however, after leavin' the big town in a howlin' blizzard, is gladder to see the sun and feel the heat than they is to grab their salary checks.

We all repair, as the guy says what wrote it, to the Hotel Springs—called so no doubt on account of the leaks in the roof and what we sleep on. We're given a welcome better'n what the President got off of the Frenchmen. The whole town is out to meet us, the hotel clerks out to do us, and altogether they is more excitement over our comin' than they is in Russia at any hour. We're led up to the hotel by a cheerin' mob, Larry, bein' the owner of the team, smilin' like a conquerin' hero.

"Some welcome!" Larry keeps sayin'.

"Yeah," I answers. "Some welcome is right! I guess they hasn't been a nickel spent in this here town since we was here last winter!"

We reach the hotel what is to be our headquarters durin' our trainin' period, and they is as much yellin' and noise in the lobby as they was at Shadow-Thierry when the Marines gave the Huns

the worst of it. Everybody is shakin' hands and stumblin' over somebody's else's suit-case, and they is a big banner hangin' all the way across the lobby which reads, "Welcome Brown Sox."

AFTER the boys finally beats it away upstairs to their rooms, and Larry starts gettin' familiar with the ice-water tank, I grabs a cigar and goes outside on the porch, which is two degrees warmer than it is in the lobby. Outside they is nothin' but bum scenery, heat waves, sky and dust.

I is just about the duck inside again and horn in on Larry's acquaintance with the chilly drink, when up the road what leads to the hotel I perceives the figure of a young man approachin', staggerin' under the weight of a suit-case what is really a young trunk with handles on it. I watches him, smilin' at the way he is creepin' along, until he reaches the hotel, chucks down his grip and falls on top of it sheddin' both moisture and gloom.

"Oh, boy!" he says. "I learned in Sunday-school that Hades is away down under the ground, but whosoever made that one up has a guess more. It is right *here!*"

I grins at him sympathetically, noticin' he is not a bad-lookin' guy. He is one of these here individuals known as "neat dressers" and has got curly hair full of waves and dust. For the rest they is gray eyes what match his suit, a good jaw and a nice smile. They is only one thing against him. On his upper lip they is somethin' what masquerades as a mustache but what looks to me like a sick caterpillar has crept up there for a sleep. Outside of this he seems to be a normal human bein'.

"Yeah," I says, "the weather is slightly warm here. But, however, if you wants to enjoy *hot* weather, wait until the end of next month when all the thermometers in town busts outa the top of their glass cages! This is cold compared to what will be!"

At this he moans and shakes his head from one side to the other.

"Well, thank goodness," he answers, "I wont be here then."

"Is that so?" I says, to be polite.

"Yeah," he replies, moppin' off his face. "By that time I hope to be up to the North, pitchin' the Brown Sox to victory!"

I looks him over carefully to see if I is bein' kidded, but his face is as straight as a yard of string.

"You don't tell me!" I says. "Has you signed with them?"

He shakes his head some more.

"Not yet, but I expect to, once the manager of the Sox, a bird called Joe Miller, sees me work."

I has to laugh.

"What did you say your name was?"

He looks surprised.

"I didn't say. But—but do *you* know Joe Miller?"

"Yeah," I says. "I have known him since the day I was born. Joe Miller is my name, and I happens to be the manager of the fastest baseball club in the world and White Springs—the Brown Sox what is the property of Larry Higgins!"

NO sooner do I get the words from out my mouth than he jumps off of his suit-case and begins grabbin' my hand and shakin' it. This over, he takes a breath and busts out in autobiography. In a coupla minutes I knows the history of his young life by heart. He tells me his name is Oscar Morton, that he is twenty-seven years old, that he comes from Houston but that I shouldn't hold that against him, that he is a Baptist and has pitched semi-professional ball for the Houston Giants. Also, so he says, he is the inventor of the famous down-hop ball and has newspaper clippin's in his grip to prove the same. Accordin' to him, what he don't know about speed, control and strikin' 'em out is less than nothin'.

He goes on to confide that he is sick and tired of both small-time baseball and waitin' for scouts, what never showed up to discover him. Realizin' that what Shakespeare says, "Everythin' comes to him who waits—if he waits on hisself," is true, he has quit Houston cold, packed his grip, and has come to White Springs to let me know they is such a person as hisself alive, and that I will make the mistake of my life by not immediately takin' him on.

When he gets all through with his spiel, he wipes his face off again and mutters somethin' to the effect that while Houston is hot, he will have to wear a fur overcoat when he gets back there again.

"Well," I says, thinkin' over his story, "seein' you has come all the way here, the best I can do is to give you a workout. Good pitchers is as scarce as money, and

if you is one half as good as you say you is, they will be a berth for you with the team." I stops and then adds: "I give you fair warnin', however, if you has not got the stuff, you is wastin' your time and mine. I can pick up all the twirlers what is 'almost there but not quite' without goin' five minutes away from our home-town diamond."

This don't take the smile off of his face, and together we goes into the hotel where Oscar gives over his suit-case to a coon bell-hop. The dinge weighs it with both hands and then whistles for six or seven of his playmates to help him.

Then Oscar wipes over his face some more and suddenly begins starin' across the lobby like he has seen either a old friend or a bill-collector. I turns around to see what has caught his eye, but they is nothin' at all in sight outside a little blonde telephone girl, chewin' on a bit of gum and toyin' with both a novel and a powder-puff.

"Pardon me," Oscar murmurs in a funny voice, leavin' my side and steerin' for the switchboard.

WHEN I leaves the lobby ten minutes later, and goes in search of Larry, Oscar has pushed a chair almost up on the top of the switchboard and has curled up on the blonde gal's ear, chewin' the rag somethin' awful.

Even then I didn't get wise to the fact he was one of these here musicians what finds grand opera in the music of a skirt. I should have taken a tumble but didn't. After the dinner I has to use the telephone in the lobby, to call up the caretaker of the grounds on which we conducts our practice, and whilst Goldilocks is gettin' the number for me, I gets curious about her and Oscar.

"Old friend of yours, hey?" I chirps, mentionin' the name of the newcomer in our midst. "I suppose him and you was childhood friends in that Houston place. I'll bet you was glad to see him again, hey?"

She looks at me with one of these here dreamy gazes and sighs.

"You is a bum fortune-teller," she says. "If you is referrin' to Oscar the pitcher, I can't tell a lie. I only seen him first this afternoon. But" —she sighs again— "he is awfully nice. And he is gonna give me a photo of hisself when he gets the uneyform of the Brown Sox on him."

I has to laugh.

"Is that so? Well, blondie, maybe you will never have the pleasure of gettin' that photograph. Who knows?"

She gives me both my number and a cold look at the one and the same time.

I tells Larry about Oscar's comin' to the Springs, and the boss gets excited. He says maybe the boy is another Marquard, and who knows? Anyway, so Larry says, I should give him a stiff tryout and also plenty of chances to see what he has got.

THE next day it is rainin' with drops as big as fifty-cent half-dollars, so the boys stick around the hotel, performin' with dice and cards. Oscar, who has got introduced to them all, excuses hisself from the family circle and hangs around the switchboard like he was expectin' a long-distance call from Mary Pickford. The followin' day the rain stops as quick as it begun, and ten minutes of White Springs sun makes the ground drier than prohibition has made the country at large.

In festive array, as the guy says what composed it, we start for the ball-grounds escorted by the male population of the town. The grounds is nothin' to go crazy about, they consistin' only of a diamond that is flat as the top of a billiard-table; a grandstand what looks like Noah give the contractors that built it the lumber from outa his ark; bleachers what is bleached to splinters and a coupla benches that still can be sat on by them what carry accident insurance.

"Slip Oscar into the box," Larry says to me, "and let us get a look at what he can do besides talk about hisself."

I picks Oscar from outa the bunch and sends him out to the box, gettin' in back of him so I can see if he knows where the plate is and what it's meant for. Larry gets up and moves behind Eddie Bush, same bein' our star catcher, whilst I signals to Terry Flynn to grab ahold of a bat. Terry is the heaviest hitter in the Tri-City League. He has a .292 percentage, and I knows a ball has to have somethin' on it to get past him without his cloutin' the cover off of it.

"All right, kid," I says carelessly to Oscar, who is toyin' with a brand-new ball. "Let's go!"

He nods, leans down to get some dirt on his fingers, makes a short wind-up and burns the plate with a ball what sounds like the shot outa a gun.

"Strike!" hollers Larry. "What is the matter?" he says to Terry. "Do you want 'em brought to you on a silver dish?"

Flynn grins.

"No, but I'd like to have them keep goin' and not do no tricks when they gets to me, like that there ball did!"

FOR twenty minutes straight runnin' Oscar shows us everythin' he has got and the further he goes, the better he gets. His work stands out like a chorus girl in a room full of washwomen and he has the team gaspin' for breath and hollerin' for help. He uses a fancy ball what he calls the down-hop and which same leaves his hand with the speed of an Erie train and travels up to the plate like it was sick and tired. Just when the batter gets ready to knock it so far that nobody but Peary can ever find it, the down-hop suddenly gets full of pep. It spins around, and as the bird at bat makes a swing, it turns a somersault, hops over the willow and flops into the mitt of the catcher. Some ball!

Oscar has also got another one what has more curves to it than a scenic railway, a fast inshoot what leaves the air hotter than it really is, and a slow drop what is a bear. Altogether, they is more tricks to him than they is to a Chink magician, and when a half-hour is over, he has my heaviest hitters runnin' about in circles and Larry doin' everythin' but kissin' him.

"Great stuff!" the boss keeps on sayin'. "Great stuff! C'mon up to the hotel, kid, and we shall frame up a nice contract!"

I draws Larry to one side and proceeds to furnish him with some information and advice.

"Listen," I says. "This bird might be the child wonder of the western hemisphere, and he might know more about the art of pitchin' than Charley Schwab does about makin' steel, but thirty minutes of his work don't prove to me he is another Plank or Mathewson. The boys is not anyways near to their form yet, and no doubt this Oscar guy has been pitchin' all winter in that Houston place. Don't go nutty Larry, just because he shows a flash. Let him string along with us and if at four weeks from to-day he still can deliver the same stuff he pulled just now, and get away with it, all well and good. Then I'll say go ahead and sign him. If he is as good then as he is now he can have anythin' I has got, includin' the shirt off of my back!"

Larry cools down at this and thinks it over. After a while he decides it's better to look before leapin' and tells Oscar that while he was a little hasty about the contract thing, still he is gonna make some kind of a arrangement whereby he will get paid while with us, whether he works or whether he don't. This suits the pitcher, and they is nothin' more said on the subject.

TWO weeks pass us by, durin' the time of which Oscar is still holdin' to his form and makin' suckers outa the boys. In addition to his pitchin' he is as fast as lightnin' on the bags, no rummy at the bat, and isn't too proud to run in for bunts or to grab a fly when the same is anyway within six or eight feet of him. Takin' all in all, he still looks as good to me and Larry as a new million-dollar bill.

But I keeps my fingers crossed.

They is one thing about the boy what has got my goat. This is the fact he don't seem to want to mingle with his team mates but sticks around the blondie telephone operator like he was a reporter tryin' to make her speak up. Not only does he hang around her, but he is on flirtin' terms with the dame in the White Springs post office, the gal who handles the soda-water counter in the village drug-store and the lady cashier in the quick-lunch room what is next door to the station. Oscar don't play no favorites, but I sees the cutie at the hotel is aces high with him. The others is just merely there to fill up his spare time and keep him from gettin' bored.

Kiddin' and jokin' about the three gals don't have no effect on him whatsoever. The gang, once they tumble to the fact Oscar is a lady-killer, starts in to ride him somethin' terrible, but for all the fun they gets outa it, they might just as well have laid off the stuff. Wise cracks and joshin' don't get under Oscar's skin which, no doubt, is tough as that of an elephant. He takes all they has and begs for more. On accounta his indifference and the way he takes punishment, Terry Flynn christens him with a new name. Terry calls him Ox and in practically no time at all everyone is callin' him the same.

"Listen," I says to Oscar one night, trippin' over him at the bar in the drug store, where he is watchin' his lady friend shake up sodas behind the fountain.

"Listen," I says, "the poets has told us they is nothin' worse than a woman's scorn. If such be true, take a free tip off of me. Keep this under the covers or the little peroxide telephone gal up at the hotel will be after you with her hat-pin, ready to put more holes in you than they is in any golf links!"

Oscar laughs and tears away his gaze from the gal he is watchin' like he is a detective or somethin'.

"The sex attracts me," he confesses without a blush. "I can no sooner resist a pretty face than I can strikin' them out."

WALKIN' back to the hotel with him, accompanied by a lot of friendly mosquitoes, he tells me that he must be a relation of a guy known as *Romeo*, because every feminine person what sees him, immediately falls in love with him. He tells me handin' out pictures of himself to all what are crazy about him keeps him always broke. Then he goes on to say that gals is an inspiration to him, and without a couple around to cheer him up he feels as blue as a June mornin' sky. Females, accordin' to him, is divided into two classes—them with brains and them with beauty. To show he has a kind heart, Oscar says he don't pass up the first-mentioned because they are minus what the second has, or the second because they is not a bunch of Lillian Russels. No, he loves them all, it seems, tall, short, beautiful and ugly, stupid or smart.

By the time we gets back to the hotel, I has a pretty fair angle on Oscar. I has decided that as a pitcher he is there, but that in other things he isn't. I has also made my mind up that if he weighs a hundred and sixty pounds, one hundred and fifty-nine of the same is weight above the ears!

When four weeks is up, Oscar gets his contract, a new uneyform and the glad hand from Larry and the bunch. The boss is tickled to death with the boy and as happy as a child with a new toy. He talks Oscar, and dreams Oscar, believin' he is gonna set the world on fire and that they is a lotta credit comin' to him for holdin' the kerosene can. Also, in addition to this, Larry has got an idea in his bean that once he uncovers his marvel, all the big leagues doin' business will be breakin' their necks tryin' to buy him up.

By this time I has hammered the Brown Sox into some kind of shape, and like we has done in former years, we begins fixin' up games with local teams. After givin' the worst of it to the best White Springs can offer, we proceeds to a little town called Spartan where they is spent a very pleasant Saturday afternoon givin' the Spartan fielders a lotta exercise, and teachin' the native people of the burg how baseball is played.

LARRY is happy as a show-girl with a string of pearls at our showin', and because Oscar has pitched great ball, and has kept the Spartans away from first base, like they was a band of burglars and the sack a bank. Ox is still there with his down-hop ball and all his other tricks, and he has our opponents gnashin' their teeth and sayin' things under their breath, whilst we lose more balls on them than a guy just learnin' this golf thing.

"Some pitcher!" Larry says to me after the game. "I just wish John McGraw or Connie Mack or Frazee could stick an eye on this lad of mine! I guess maybe they wouldn't hock their whole team to get him, hey?"

I has to admit Oscar has kept to top form, but still I can't help but figure out a couple of games with some Texas Bolsheviki bears no relation to goin' into the box and pitchin' Tri-City stuff.

"Yeah, he looks good," I says to Larry. "But one swallow don't make a summer!"

The boss grins.

"No, but one off of Oscar makes a sucker outa anyone! Joe, you was always a knocker. Wait until the series is over and the big money split up. Then you will be singin' another song."

"Maybe," I retorts, "the name of the song will be 'Break the News to Mother!'"

Directly after the Spartan game Larry looks over the ground, and the first thing I know, we're to journey to Dallas and mix up with the Dallas Giants. This is the last game we're to play before goin' to the North to open the season, and once the gang is let in on the secret, they bust into cheers. One game and then home! Oh, lady!

The only one what doesn't show great joy is little Oscar. He draws me to one side and informs me his heart is broke on accounta leavin' White Springs, the post office, the drugstore, the lunch-room and the switchboard at the hotel. It is

only when I tell him what swell-lookin' babies they is up North that he cheers up again, and says he hopes Myrtle, she bein' the blondie who handles the calls, can bear the separation from him.

The night before we leaves the Springs for good, he takes three hours off, and goes around biddin' his friends farewell and tellin' each one she is the only gal he cares for and so forth. Then, when we finally piles onto the train what is to take us to Dallas, I has to hold him by the arms to keep him from jumpin' off, and rushin' back to the little phone operator who is standin' on the station wavin' a handkerchief to him and usin' the same frequently.

"Love is a awful thing," he moans, dashin' tears from his eyes. "I hope Myrtle doesn't do anythin' desperate. I would never forgive myself if she did."

AS White Springs fades outa sight, I drags him into the train and throws him into a seat.

"Tear your mind away from the ladies," I begs, "and tell me how that wing of yours is feelin'."

He sighs.

"My arm is O. K.," he replies. "It's my heart that troubles me!"

He looks so sad I busts out laughin', winkin' at the same time at Terry Flynn who is busy oilin' up his glove.

"Oscar," I says, "that little guy what shoots arrows from out a bow and arrow, what don't wear no clothes worth speakin' about, and what has got wings on his back, must be kept terrible busy where you is concerned. I is speakin' now of none other than the well-known kewpie—"

His answer is nothin' but a groan.

Three quarters of the trip is made by him in silence. The bunch is skylarkin' around, playin' pranks on each other and occasionally stoppin' to kid Oscar. Then they start playin' polka, and Oscar, to relieve his mind, goes off into another car. Lookin' to see what he is doin' a half-hour later, I sees he has recovered. He is settin' in a seat next to a pretty gal, chewin' the rag and laughin' more than if he was at a vaudeville show.

We gets into Dallas as the shades of night is fallin' fast, and Larry, wantin' to do the thing in style, hires a fleet of Texas cabs to roll us all up from the station to the hotel. We is all climbin' into the cabs when I suddenly gets wise to the fact that Oscar is not one of us. I remembers the dame on the train, and knowin' the habits of my pitcher better'n I knows my own name, I ducks back into the station. The train is still standin' there, takin' on mail and freight and givin' Ox a chance to gaze up at the gal he has got acquainted with, she bein' in the open window of the train, smilin' sadly down at him.

"Listen," I says, gettin' sore at the sight. "Lay off of this stuff and string along with the gang, or you'll be alone in a foreign city with no helpin' hand to guide you. Can the chatter—you is holdin' up the railroad!"

He don't pay no attention to me but keeps on talkin' to the gal in the window.

"Good-by!" he says. "Good-by, Gladys! Don't forget to write every day and take good care of that photo I has gave you. It is the last I owns except one more!"

I pries him away from the train, throwin' kisses off of his hand to the gal who is beginnin' to cry, and manages to get him into a cab.

"What you need," I says, "is a nurse to take care of you!"

He nods his head.

"I think so, too," he agrees. "Do you know of any blonde ones?"

THE hotel to which we arrives at is nothin' but class and tone. It is as different from the one at the Springs as a loan shark is from a human bein'. In the first place they is electric lights, hot water which is really hot, a telephone in each and every room, to say nothin' of paper on the walls, carpets on the floors and beds what look like they was made to be slept in.

After I and Larry has grabbed something to eat, we start out to look up the manager of the Dallas Giants, leavin' the boys to their own devices, which same consists of pool, billiards and bull. We hire a guide and in no time at all we ... the man we're out to see. They is not so much to it, and after a hour has passed we has doped out a percentage arrangement as to the nine innin's to be played and so forth. Then, when we gets that all fixed up without comin' to blows, Larry, for good measure, and with his ... still full of Oscar, lays a thousand bucks at even money we will win with five runs to spare.

"It is just like pickin' up money ...

the gutter!" the boss chirps, as we wend our way back to the hotel. "The manager of these here Dallas Giants is a good sport, and I hates to see him lose a thousand berries in one settin', but still I aint runnin' a ball team for my health. Easy dough, hey, Joe?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"They must think they is pretty good," I answers. "No man is plunkin' down that much money unless he thinks he has got somethin' behind him."

Larry chuckles.

"Sure—but I has Oscar behind *me!*"

"I hope he stays behind you," I retorts.

WE get back to the hotel, and Larry breezes away to see what the bunch is up to, while I runs into Oscar, who is settin' in the shadows in one corner of the lounge room, holdin' hands with a pretty black-haired gal I has never before laid an eye on.

"Excuse me for buttin' in," I says, "but it is now eleven o'clock, more or less, and you is a ball-player, Oscar, and not no night watchman. For this reason it is up to me to ask you to seek the feathers!"

His little friend giggles whilst he gets up to his feet and makes a bow.

"Ruth," he says to the gal, "let me introduce you to Joe Miller, who is manager of the Brown Sox. Joe," he says to me, "shake hands with Ruth Cooper, a dear friend of mine!"

After the introduction is over and finished with, Oscar coughs a coupla times.

"Joe," he says, "how are the chances of gettin' a box seat at the game to-morrow for this here little lady?"

"If you gets to bed now," I barks, "the chances are pretty good. If you don't, the chances are nothin'!"

The gal giggles again.

"You'd better retire, Sir Pitcher," she murmurs to him. "And don't forget that picture of yourself to-morrow!"

Oscar, lookin' as happy as a bird when the doctor tells him he must lay off smokin', bids us good night and crawls into a elevator, leavin' me and the dame alone.

"Old friend of yours, no doubt?" I says in order to say somethin'.

She colors up and finds a view of the ceilin' is interestin'.

"Well—well," she stammers, "not exactly. You see Mr. Morton mistook me for a girl he knew in Buffalo."

I has all I can do to keep from bustin' out laughin'. A gal he knew in Buffalo! Oh, boy!

She smiles.

"But do I get that ticket?" she wants to know.

I slips her my card with some handwriting on the top of it. She thanks me like it was a check made out to bearer, and smilin' all over her face, says good night and beats it.

THE next day is as bright as a Tiffany diamond and hot as a red stove. We finds the Dallas ball park to be some peach of a place, with a fast diamond, large stands made outa cement, a clubhouse what can't be told from a swell private house, lawns, flowers and plenty of cold water handy.

Half of the mornin' is spent tunin' up, and by the time the game is called, the Sox is as smooth as velvet and works like machinery or a orchestra ready to tear off one of these symphony things.

The city is evidently baseball-hungry, for it declares a half-holiday, and they is an angry mob at the gates almost tearin' them down, tryin' to get in. Soon they is more people in the grandstand than they is in a Bronx subway train any evenin', and the bleachers is so full, it is almost bendin' in half. As we is to drag down a piece of the gate, Larry, after givin' the stands the double-O can hardly be kept from shoutin' out loud with joy.

"Oh, lady!" he yells. "The money I is gonna take from out this burg is a crime!"

He keeps on ravin' whilst I suddenly lamps Oscar leanin' against the grandstand and smilin' into the eyes of Ruth Cooper, who is reposin' in a front-room box seat. Just as I sees him, so does Terry Flynn, and the catcher sends a howl over to him.

"Hey, Ox," he bawls, "leave go of that lady's hand and come over here and run over the signals with me!"

The stands lets out a roar and Ruth Cooper ducks down behind a newspaper to hide herself, whilst Oscar, no more disturbed than if he is a deaf and dumb mute, grins and hurries away.

Oscar goes in, and for three innin's the Giants don't get a smell of the ball. Meanwhile Terry Flynn knocks out a three-bagger and is sent home by little

Jerry Deacon, our shortstop. By this time the whole city of Dallas is wise to the fact they is seein' a great pitcher in action, and they leaves off kiddin' Oscar and begins cheerin' him when he is in the box.

"Can you beat *that!*" says Larry. "A strange guy in a strange town, and look at how they yell their heads off for him!"

"Yeah!" I snaps. "But this single, solitary run we got don't suit me at all! Outside of Terry and Deacon, none of the boys seems to be able to get to this Giant pitcher. He is not good, but he is not bad, and he is holdin' us. If they ever solve Oscar, it will be roses for us and make no mistake!"

The boss takes a puff on his cigar.

"Don't worry none about that," he says. "Them five runs I need to win on is comin' along soon, and when they get on the down-hop, silk shirts'll be sellin' at twenty cents apiece!"

UP to the endin' of the seventh Oscar keeps sendin' them over, and each Giant takes three chances at 'em and retires in a hurry. For our part the team has got wise to the Dallas twirler and has fallen on him for exactly four more runs, which, with the one Terry presents us with, makes five in all. The game is drawin' rapidly to the end of it and I begins once more to breathe natural.

But, as the guy says what tells us, every rose has its thorn and every fur coat its moth.

Just as things is lookin' like Larry will soon have his little thousand back, with another to play around with it, Oscar comes over to me, whilst we is at bat, white as a quart of milk.

"Joe," he yelps, lickin' his lips, "I—I don't think I can finish out this here game!"

I almost falls but manages to keep my balance, lookin' him over from head to feet.

"Where do you get that stuff?" I snarls. "This here game is sewed up, and all you has got to do is to serve them with a few more of the same brand you has been sendin' over!"

This don't get me nothin', and Ox lets out a groan, his manly brow wet with perspiration what wasn't due to the heat.

"I—I can't pitch another ball!" he croaks.

Just as I is about to snap at him, Larry comes bustin' over to see what is the matter. Oscar turns to the boss and begs he shouldn't be sent in no more but should be let go to the showers immediately if not sooner.

Instead of doin' the same, Larry gets red in the face.

"You big tramp!" he hisses. "What has got into you that you is tryin' to quit cold at a time like this?"

Ox licks his lips some more.

"I'm sick," he moans. "I think I has got a fever!"

"Sure!" Larry sneers. "A *yellow* fever! You big stiff, my thousand berries depends on *you!* Stay in and I'm plus! Quit and I'm minus! I don't wanna hear no more excuses outa you! Take your cold feet to the box and warm them up!"

Oscar pulls on his glove whilst the rest of the team, seein' they is somethin' wrong, is starin' over.

"All—all right," Ox says in a voice what can be hardly heard. "I'll—I'll go in, but if I toss this game away, don't blame me—"

"I wont blame you," Larry hollers. "I'll bust you in the eye!"

I sees it is a time for some of this diplomacy stuff, and I follows Oscar, who is creepin' away, shakin' in every limb, and lays a hand on his arm.

"Grab hold of yourself!" I pleads. "You is scared about somethin',—I know the signs,—and that is all the matter with you. But remember, Ruth Cooper is settin' up there wtih her eyes on you. If you cracks now, *she* is sure to think you is a false alarm!"

He shakes his head, groanin', whilst the stands begins howlin' for a little action.

THE two innin's what follows is cruel. Oscar is as wild as a coupla uncaught lions, and for all he knew, the home plate might be located in Egypt. He keeps the whole team on the jump and wears out the bases lettin' the Dallas Giants frolic around them. In the eighth they piles up fifteen runs and only quit then because they needs a rest.

By this time Larry has tore out the most of his hair, and it takes the combined efforts of the team to keep him from rushin' out and committin' murder.

The first half of the last innin' ends with him hollerin' his head off at Oscar and shriekin' like he was crazy with the heat. I has sent Terry Flynn in to bat

for Ox and they is already two out. Terry pops up a little fly and the game ends with the city of Dallas screamin' so loud the noise must have been heard in Scotland.

As the game ends, with the Dallas Giants doin' a war-dance, Oscar, who is tryin' to make a dash for the clubhouse, is prevented from doin' the same by Larry, who tells him all over again just what he thinks of him.

Oscar puts an end to it by suddenly duckin' behind me. As he does so, they horns into the family circle a blonde gal who carries a green umbrella.

Zing!!

I dodges, and poor Ox catches the shot on top of his nut, the umbrella bustin' into sticks.

Then, the next thing I knows, the blonde has got ahold of Oscar by the collar and is shakin' him so hard his teeth rattles.

"Good for you, Lady!" Larry hollers. "Give him one for me!"

For the next three minutes they is nothin' but confusion made more so by the sudden appearance of Ruth Cooper, who jumps into the fray and tries to pull Oscar away. They is scraps enough to feed all Russia, believe me!

Finally the one what has started all the trouble leaves off beatin' Oscar and turns to Larry.

"Who runs this here ball-team?" she wants to know. When the boss, backin' away, admits he is guilty, she almost lets Ox go, to get at him. "Don't you know no better than to give a job to this good-for-nothin'!" she screams. "And why do you pay him good money what he throws away on havin' his picture took so he can give them to poor unsuspectin' gals!"

At each and every word she speaks, Oscar shivers from head to foot, and throws up his hands like she was still tryin' to knock him.

"Aw, Mae!" he pleads. "Have a heart—"

BY this time they is quite a crowd around us, which is to say the whole city of Dallas has got an ear open and reporters is workin' overtime, gettin' the stuff down whilst it is still hot.

"Hey, lady!" chirps Eddie Bush, gettin' fresh. "What has Ox ever done to you that you should beat him up?"

"That's what I'd like to know," says Ruth Cooper, glarin'.

The blonde gal laughs in a way that makes cold chills run up and down my spine and turns to Oscar.

"It's a good thing," she says in a voice full of icicles, "that you told my brother, before you sneaked outa Houston, you was gonna join the Brown Sox! And it is a good thing I found out the team was playin' here in Dallas to-day! Oh, you has been cute and foxy, all right, but not enough! You'd have to be better'n *Shylock Holmes* and smarter than Marshal Foch to put anythin' across when I is on the job!"

"Just a minute," I butts in. "This aint gettin' us nowhere, and all it is doin' is givin' this here crowd enough gossip for the next fifty years! Come through. Is you Oscar's sister or what?"

"His *sister!*" she screams. "Is *that* what he told you! The liar! I'm his *wife*—the first one he ever gave a picture of hisself to!"

No sooner she gets the words said than it is Ruth Cooper's turn to be heard.

"Oh, you big hound!" she hollers, kickin' at Oscar's shins. "You told me no longer ago than last night I was the only one you ever loved!"

She busts into tears and is led off.

Then Oscar's wife gives him a yank by the collar, and the last any of us ever sees of the pair of them, is her leadin' him away, whilst the entire population of Dallas is hootin' and jeerin' at poor Ox.

"There goes the best pitcher what I ever seen," says Larry in a sad voice.

"And the *worst* husband!" chimes in Terry Flynn.

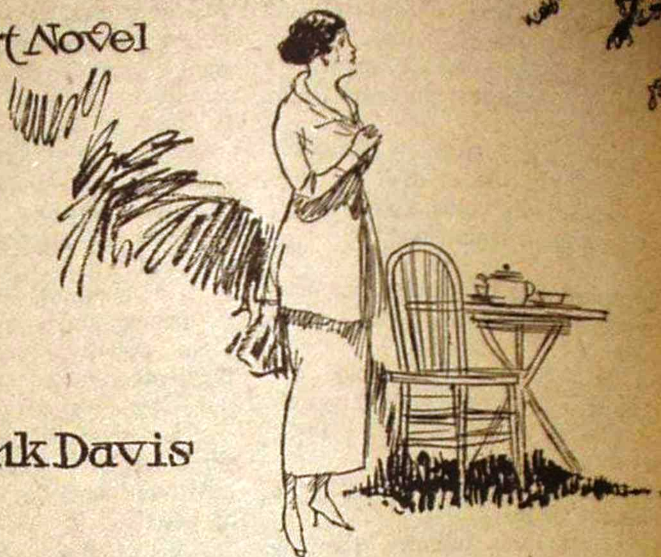
THEY is a silence. Then I hears some one callin' my name, and turnin' around, I almost collapses. Comin' through what is left of the crowd I sees no less than Myrtle, the little blondie telephone gal of White Springs.

She too has got the habit and is weepin'.

"Oh, Mr. Miller!" she sobs. "My train was late and now it is too late. My heart is broke—" Whilst we all stares at her like we is seein' things, she mops her eyes. "Some vampire has stole Oscar away from me! I seen her with him just now and—and—she had her arm around his neck—and—and he made believe he didn't see *me*—"

The Chinese Label

A Three-Part Novel



By J. Frank Davis

(Events of the Preceding Installments:)

JULIAN NAPIER, representative of the American Treasury Department, was attending the Fiesta of San Jacinto in San Antonio, Texas, in his usual guise of a leisure-enjoying tourist. The real purpose of his visit, however, was the search for two great diamonds which had been smuggled through the Customs, and for Kalat Pasha, prominent in Young Turk circles, suspected as the smuggler.

Napier's unusual knowledge of the Orient and Oriental nature led him to begin his search in the Chinese colony of San Antonio. Collector of Customs Lamb told him that the best-known of the local Chinese was a restaurant-keeper named Charles Toy.

Mingling with the holiday crowds in the hope of seeing Kalat, Napier saw two women whom he had met abroad. One was Madame Frezzi, an Italian (?) "with a conveniently absent husband;" the other an American, Ruth Glenn. Both smiled and bowed; and both, he suspected, might have some knowledge of the whereabouts of Kalat. That evening a Mexican brought a message to his hotel: the lady who had smiled at him wished him to follow this guide to her.

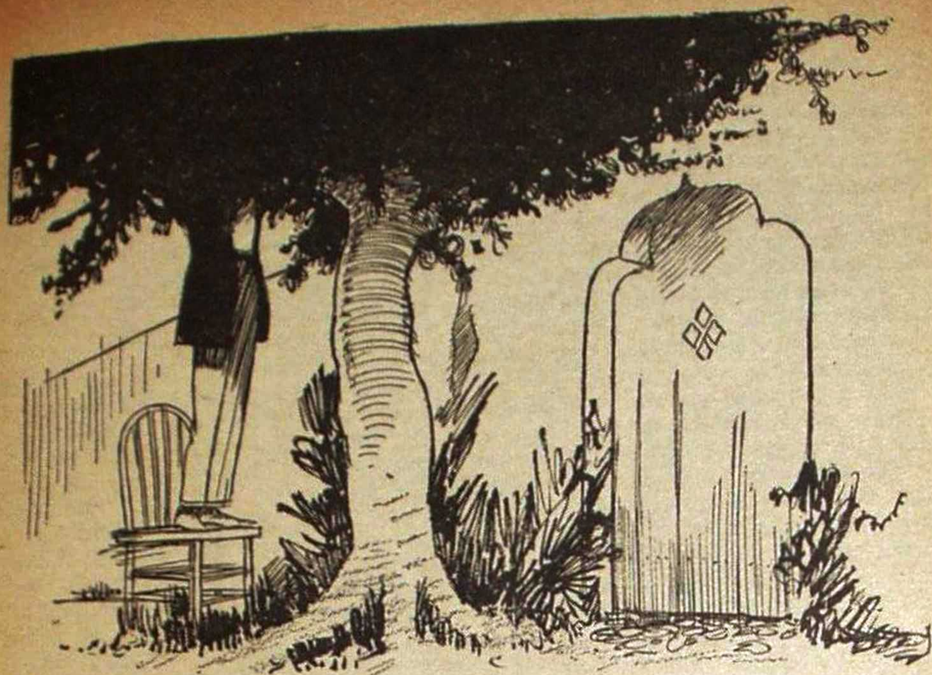
A slip of yellow paper covered with Chinese characters had fallen from the Mexican's pocket as they stood in conversation, which the man had grasped and replaced with every indication of terror. In a dark alleyway, on the way to the rendezvous, the messenger was stabbed. Napier, following at some distance and almost falling over the fellow's body, found a torn fragment of the yellow paper in his hand.

SEÑOR VILLABOSA, who had been in the hotel lobby during the meeting between Napier and Angel Puenta, the messenger, slipped out to a telephone-booth as the two men left the hotel, returning immediately to the lobby when he had sent his message, and loitering there with careful obviousness until midnight.

Napier called upon Miss Glenn, who was staying with her father, a retired army officer, at the Hotel Edgemont. When he led the conversation in the direction of the events of the preceding night, she showed no knowledge of his hidden meaning; but later, when he had followed a chance clue to the dark yard of Charles Toy's home, he saw her descend from an automobile and enter that mysterious mansion alone! Then something struck him unconscious.

(The story follows in detail:)

Copyrighted, 1919, by The Story-Press Corporation. All rights reserved.



CHAPTER VIII

NAPIER struggled back to consciousness and raised his head dizzily. "Steady," a voice whispered. "You're all right. Take it easy."

"What—"

"Softly. Better not talk. Sound carries on a night like this, and we are pretty close to the house. Better not try to sit up for a minute, till your head clears a bit."

His head ached and throbbed, and he tried to recall exactly how he came to be unconscious. He remembered, in a minute, and opened his eyes to demand, with cautiously lowered voice:

"Who are you?"

"Gordon," the man on his knees beside him said. "I was following your old friend Villabosa, you know."

Napier's mind cleared rapidly, and he sat up. An outstretched hand, on the side away from the wiry young Treasury agent, encountered a still object that was plainly part of the prostrate figure of a man. "What—who is that?" he asked.

"The said Villabosa," Gordon chuckled. "I don't know exactly what shape he is in —I went to work on you first. We'll take a look-see as soon as you are sure you are quite all right. I would expect him to take a little longer sleep than you, anyway, because all he hit you with was a blackjack, and I had to wallop him over the side of the head with a pistol."

Napier rested his hand on the Mexican's breast; it was rising and falling regularly. His fingers came in contact with metal.

"Handcuffed!"

"Thought I wouldn't take any chances while I was fussing with you. I guess maybe we'd better gag him when he comes to. There's no sense letting him holler."

"I'D like to know what happened, if there's time to tell it. I'm getting clear-headed enough now." Napier delicately patted a bump of increasing size an inch and a half above his right ear. "It doesn't seem to have broken the skin, but it surely hurts."

"There's mighty little to tell. He tried to follow you, late this afternoon, when you left the hotel—and lost you inside of ten minutes. He went back to the Bonham and stayed there until after dinner. A little while ago he started for here. You crossed the street ahead of him about two blocks back, and he slowed up and took his time trailing you. Perhaps I ought to have tried to warn you, but—"

"But you thought I probably was able to take care of myself," Napier supplied, when Gordon hesitated.

"I would have warned you when he sneaked up in back of you if I had known he was so close. But I was a long way off when you disappeared in these trees, and when he came up behind you, with me behind him, I didn't know that you hadn't gone beyond the trees and up to the back of the house, or somewhere. I didn't know you were right here until he rose up and lammed you. He turned you over in a hurry and started to go through your pockets."

"And you rose up and lammed him. Thanks. I'll do the same for you sometime. What had we better do with him?"

"That's up to you. I don't know all the details of the case, but I shouldn't suppose we ought to let him loose after this."

"No, it wouldn't do. If he was headed for this house, and it looks pretty certain that he was, he would tell them the first chance he got that I was watching it."

"We can take him down to headquarters, temporarily, and then consider what to do with him afterward. My idea is that when he begins to take notice we had better see he is fixed so he can't do any shouting, and then one of us can stay here with him, nice and quiet and out of sight, while the other goes and gets an automobile. Perhaps I'd better be the one to go; I know the town better than you do."

Villabosa sighed and moved.

"Que diable!" he muttered, and Napier's hands went to his throat, while he commanded: "Keep quiet!"

GORDON wadded a handkerchief, forced it between Villabosa's teeth and fastened it with another handkerchief before the dazed prisoner was fairly aware of what was happening.

"I'll slip away and come back with a closed car," he whispered to Napier. "If the police happen to see us taking him to it, or happen to discover you here, which is unlikely, I don't suppose there is anything to do but identify ourselves and ask them to run away and play, but I hope we wont have to do that."

"If any policemen pass while you are gone, I sha'n't do anything to attract their attention—and neither will he."

Gordon rose to his feet. It suddenly occurred to Napier that he had not looked toward the big house since he drifted back to consciousness. He turned quickly. The automobile that had brought Ruth Glenn was gone.

"How many people left the house while I was down and out?" he asked. "And who?"

"Nobody I ever saw before. To tell the truth I was so busy that I didn't notice very particularly. A woman and a man went away in the auto. Perhaps it was a woman and two men."

"Can you describe them?"

"No. I didn't hear them come out of the house. I happened to hear voices, and looked up, and they were all right at the car, getting in. I saw a woman and two men, but one of the men may have been the chauffeur for all I know. He might have got out of the car for something. I think one of the men was sort of stout and Spanish-looking, but I'm not sure. I'm mighty sorry I didn't notice more, but just at that minute I was trying to find out whether you had been badly hurt—"

"A man can't, do everything at once. You could hear their voices, you say?"

"But not a word they said. I don't even know whether they were speaking English."

Villabosa moved uneasily, discovered the handcuffs and sought to give voice to some emotion.

"You lie still, old sport," Gordon told him, "and when I come back I'll take you where we can get that little cut in your head fixed up."

"In the meantime," Napier growled, with his hand on his own throbbing bruise, "if you get to threshing around and trying to attract attention, I'll be obliged to give you another cut to go with that one—on the other side."

Villabosa relapsed into watchful waiting, and Gordon silently departed.

NAPIER, crouching beside the Mexican, fixed his eyes on the house. No one entered or left. No sound came from it. Its contrast of exterior light and interior darkness was unchanged.

Two Chinamen crossed the street at the corner above, chattering in shrill singsong, and passed on about their business. The muffled click of a walking horse's hoofs was followed by the appearance of a mounted policeman, who rode by casually, his body slouched, his hands on the pommel of his saddle. The officer had been

gone five minutes when Gordon stepped out of a covered automobile and hurried to Napier's side.

"All right? Anything happen? I had good luck—called a garage and found this driver in. I've had him before. Perfectly reliable and closemouthed. He came a-runnin'."

"I can't very well go back with you," Napier told him. "I want to see who comes out of the house; nobody has since you've been gone. Suppose you take him down to the Federal Building and let me join you there a little later. Or you could have him locked up, if I don't get there for some time, and we can question him in the morning."

"I haven't anything to do but stick to him, and he hasn't a thing in the world on hand but to hang around with me. I'll do a little first-aid on his head, or get in a doctor if he seems to need a stitch or two, and then we'll make ourselves comfortable and wait. It isn't late—hardly ten o'clock."

They turned to Villabosa and bade him get up and go with Gordon. Resistance was useless, protest impossible. He went with docility.

THE purr of their motor had hardly faded when another automobile came through the street on which the big house faced and drew up in front of it. Its chauffeur sounded his horn with that impatient emphasis that is almost the trademark of taxi-drivers who prefer to avoid the steps necessary to walk to a door and announce that the carriage waits. Immediately Charles Toy and Tung Sheng, his manager, came out of the house, climbed into the car, and were driven away—back to the restaurant, no doubt, in time for the evening's greatest rush.

The cluster of electric lights under the veranda roof went dark. Whatever meeting had been held at the "great house" that evening was obviously adjourned.

Napier waited a little, to see if any other activities developed. For all he could see or hear, the place might have been unoccupied. He slipped out of the shadow of the mulberry trees, finally, and set out in the direction of town.

Somewhere ahead of him, a player was torturing a Chinese fiddle. He had noticed it about the time of his arrival; it occurred to him, now, but unthinkingly.

For two blocks his mind had been filled with the complications that the evening's adventures had added to his problem, but now, when he was within perhaps a block of the player, something about the weird scrapings and squealings made an insistent demand upon his powers of recollection. Where, among all the Chinese fiddling he had heard, had something happened that this one was recalling?

Three shrill, ascending notes—discordant and barbaric to Western ears—a shrieking run, and then three shrill, sharp, descending notes. It came to Napier what it was that hammered at his memory. He knew this tune; it was one of the two or three Chinese airs he had ever been able to distinguish definitely from the others. Old Kwong Li played it, over and over, when he and Kwong were friends in San Francisco, three years ago. Kwong had solemnly assured him that there were only a few musicians who could play it exactly as it should be played. Its name was "The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree." For all his headache he grinned a little as he remembered how he had always wanted to ask Kwong whether the three sharp, descending notes were supposed to represent the running brook hitting a waterfall or the little bird falling out of the tree. Of course he never had, for that would have hurt Kwong's feelings. Kwong took it for granted he knew.

The player was back at the beginning of the tune now, starting all over again. He must be as fond of it as old Kwong.

NAPIER saw, a half-block before him, a one-storied grocery. It had not yet closed for the night; there was a light inside and at least one customer. The narrow front gallery was in darkness except for such rays as straggled through the front windows, and the fiddler was seated out there. Napier thought amusedly that the man was having an enthusiastic evening all by himself. Neighboring Chinese had probably not even noticed him, but in a Caucasian section such harrowing sounds as he was producing would have long since busied every telephone in the vicinity with frantic calls for the police.

The customer came out through the door, chanting a Cantonese farewell to the grocer inside. He stepped down from the gallery and then turned and bowed deferentially in the direction of the hidden musician.

"Good night, Kwong Li," he called, respectfully. "May no demons disturb your dreams."

The fiddler stopped. "Good night, honorable friend," he replied. "May you awaken refreshed, to the best of rice."

All requirements of etiquette now being perfectly fulfilled, the one-string fiddle resumed the tune on the next note to that on which it had been interrupted.

The customer had vanished and the grocer had gone to the rear of the store when Napier paused in the shadows close to the gallery and called softly, in his best Mandarin:

"Kwong Li! Is it not the honorable and venerable Kwong Li?"

The bow bit off the sound in the middle of a dispirited wail, and the old Chinaman shuffled quickly forward. Napier stepped a little into the light, and the other bowed with sedate dignity, while from his lips fell a sentence out of the Analects of Confucius:

"'Is it not a charming thing when a friend comes from afar?'"

CHAPTER IX

"AT a distance I heard the music," Napier said gravely, "and I thought, 'Can it be possible that in this city there is one who can play "The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree" like Kwong Li, who is in San Francisco?'"

Kwong inclined his head to the compliment. "Will you not honor me by entering the humble abode of my nephew?" he asked ceremoniously. And after Napier, with regard for the conventions, had murmured, "It would be presumptuous for me to precede you," and then, on the old man's insistence, had passed first through the door, he added: "It is a poor place—a very poor place."

It was, but Napier, who knew Kwong would have spoken the same words if he had been receiving him in a palace, replied with the proper sentiment: "It is a most excellent place—a very delightful place."

A young Chinaman appeared in the door to a living-room behind the store, surveying this most unusual guest as impassively as though tall Americans who spoke Chinese were quite within his common daily experience.

"Kwong Yet, we are honored by the visit of my great friend Nah Poo," old Kwong told him, "Nah Poo" being the nearest he had ever been able to come to the pronunciation of Napier. "I have told you the story of how I was accused of being concerned in smuggling with which I had nothing to do, and that I should surely have been punished, being entangled in evidence that I could not prove false, but for an official who sought to protect the innocent as well as punish the guilty. Nah Poo is he who saved your father's brother."

"The nephew of Kwong Li is your servant for your kindness to the elder one of his clan," murmured Kwong Yet. "This is your home, and all the poor things in it are your property."

Kwong Li, since coming into his nephew's hearing, had dropped the Mandarin dialect and spoken in Cantonese, from which Napier judged the younger man, perhaps American-born, did not possess the education of his uncle. He also dropped into Cantonese in his courteous reply.

Old Kwong urged him to be seated and accept a pipe. "A tobacco pipe," he smiled. "I know you do not use opium, and you know already, my friend, that neither do I. Nor does Kwong Yet."

"A plain pipe, and a mere pinch of tobacco," Napier deprecated. Clearly Kwong Li proposed to make this a ceremonial visit, and he could not let his impatience to rejoin Gordon and his prisoner show in any slighting of the customary forms unless he wished Kwong to take offense. Kwong Yet got pipes, filled them and brought matches. Then, perhaps in obedience to some sign from his uncle, he mentioned apologetically that he had a small errand which would take him out of the store for a while. He would close it for the night, and his honorable elders would not be disturbed. He bowed deeply and went away.

IN silence Napier and his wrinkled host smoked slowly. Not until half a pipeful had been burned did Napier speak.

"It is strange to find you a thousand miles from San Francisco."

"But four days have I been here," Kwong replied. "I came to visit the son of my brother. Some day I shall return, I think, but it is not important. I have sold my business."

"So good a merchant as you has surely been successful."

"I have saved enough. I need not call on friends for alms if illness comes, or fear that there is not enough to send my bones to rest beside those of the honorable ancestors," the old man replied complacently. "Not for many years had I seen my nephew. His business here is not a great one, but better men have done worse than he is doing."

Another interval of smoking, and Napier thought the time had arrived when he might properly introduce the subject that was foremost in his thoughts.

"I think, Kwong Li," he said, "that I am going to ask of you a very great favor."

The Chinaman inhaled a deep puff of smoke before he replied. He knew Napier's occupation.

"No favor for you would be great," he said then. "I am old, but my mind is still as clear as when I was young. I do not forget. There was a day when I said to you that if ever you should come to me and demand payment for the debt I owed you, that day the payment should be made. My memory tells me that I struck palms of hands with you when I said it. What do you require of me, Nah Poo?"

"No," Napier said. "It is not a demand. It is what I said—a favor. If it is a very dangerous thing for you to accede to it, I do not hold you to the promise. I am not asking payment; the slight thing I was able to do for you was not in hope of reward. You will remember I did not even know you and your excellent qualities when I did it. Our friendship came afterward."

"That is true," Kwong said, and waited.

"No Chinese in this city know my business," Napier remarked.

"None shall, from me or my nephew," the old man assured him.

"Yet my business has to do with Chinese. There are those here who deal with 'cargoes of bitter ballast.' "

"As everywhere."

"Perhaps they are friends of yours. They might even be connections of your clan."

"Not that I know. I have not heard, since I came here, who are those who trade in—I suppose it is opium."

"Yes."

"Kwong Yet may know. Undoubtedly he does know. He has been here some time."

"The favor that I mention with hesitation has to do with the doings of certain men. Hear me, Kwong Li. If, when I name them to you, or after you have talked with your nephew, it appears that they are of your tong, or of any clan which it would be dishonorable for you to injure, my request is withdrawn, and this talk becomes a thing to be forgotten. If not—"

HIS smoking host did not hesitate to show relief. " 'The consideration of a friend for the honor of a friend is a shining thing, like moonbeams upon a placid river,' " he quoted. "You make it very easy."

"One of these men," Napier told him, without more hesitation, "is called Charles Toy. He has a big restaurant."

"What is his real name?"

"I do not know."

Kwong shook his head. "So far as I am aware, I never heard of him."

"His manager—who lives with him in a large house three streets away from here—is Tung Sheng."

"I have not heard that name, either."

"And there is another, but I hear he is a menial, called Wang Ting."

Still no recognition.

"The fourth—and these are all the names I know as yet—is one Joe Fong. He is half Chinese, half Mexican."

The old man's heavy-lidded eyes showed interest. "There are not so many who are of that mixture," he said. "Can you describe him?"

Napier did so. The result was quite surprising.

Kwong Li made fluent remarks, made them coldly, dispassionately, without raising his voice, but positively. They had to do with Joe Fong, with the characteristics and present abode of his ancestors to the fiftieth generation, with the morals of his mother and the occupation of his sisters and the appropriate fate of his male children, if he should ever have any. Kwong was very thorough. When he had finished for lack of further expletive—and it was some time, because there are many things a Chinaman can say in derogation of a person, and several ways of saying each one, and the old man went with detail into most of them—Napier merely remarked: "I see he is known to you."

"Since noon to-day. He came past this place when I was sitting outside in the shade, making music with the fiddle. He does not know how to talk to his elders;

his ears are the ears of a fool; and his sense is as the sense in the flat head of a snake."

Napier waited in silence.

"I am making music and he passes by, and calls to me, 'What is the good of all this disturbance when there is no Chinese theater in town where you can get work?' And then, as naturally I did not deign even to notice him, he cried: 'But if there was, you would hardly play in it. As big a town as this would have a theater with a *good* orchestra.' I was playing, Nah Poo, the beautiful song of 'The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree' as not more than five other musicians can play it (I say this modestly; as a matter of fact, I have not heard but two of them); and I am an old man, entitled to the respect of the young, even though he might be an idiot who does not know music."

"Did you reply to him?"

"Does the man on horseback pay attention to the mangy dog that yaps? But I remember him, Nah Poo. Well I determined to remember him. Tell me what you want to know about him and his friends."

KWONG YET unlocked the outer door, some minutes later, and came through the store into the room where they sat.

"I have a task to do for Nah Poo that I shall tell you of, Kwong Yet," the old man said at once. "And when you have heard it, you may help me do it or you may not, as you wish. What obligation your father's brother owes to Nah Poo you already understand, yet he has not demanded payment. You know, because you remember my story, that he is an official, and you have guessed that his being here has to do with those who avoid duties. He needs assistance that perhaps we can give, but although I was ready to promise in advance—indeed, I had already promised, that time when it looked as though I would spend the remaining days of my life in jail—he made it clear that he does not ask us to do anything that would make us lose face with anyone. He does not ask us to tell anything that would affect our tong or our clan."

The young Chinaman inclined his head in Napier's direction. "What my father's brother wishes me to do, I will do," he said. "His honor is the honor of our family. His promises are my promises."

"He has told me names," Kwong Li went on. "Charles Toy, and Tung Sheng, and Wang Ting, and Joe Fong. Joe Fong is the half-caste pig—may the bones of his fathers be dug up and scattered—who called to me this noon with insulting words, as I told you, Kwong Yet. Do you know any of these names?"

"All of them," Yet replied, "although I do not know any of the men themselves. They are undoubtedly smugglers, as our friend here thinks. At least I can tell you that they have opium to sell. But I have never asked many questions about them. There are people about whom it is not wise to be curious. And yet," he hastened to add, "I will ask questions, if it is the wish of my uncle."

"They have no connections with our family?" old Kwong queried.

"None."

"Their tong is not ours?"

"No. It is—" He went to the window to look out before he finished the sentence, and when he came back he lowered his voice:

"Their organization is the Society of the Fragrant Lily. Charles Toy, whose name is Ng Choy, is its chief in these parts."

Napier needed no explanation of the young man's tiptoed excursion to the window or his uneasily hushed voice, for the Society of the Fragrant Lily is not to be spoken of lightly by a man with a yellow skin, or to be considered with contempt by any man, whatever his complexion. Its arm is long, and its judgment ruthless. The Boxers, most of the worst of them, were members of the Society of the Fragrant Lily.

CHAPTER X

VILLABOSA sat in a comfortable chair in a corner of the customs office, physically more or less at ease, although he rested his cheek in his hand and from time to time extended his fingers upward to caress tenderly a contusion ornamented by a shaved area in which was centered a strip of sticking-plaster; but seemingly he was low in his mind. He scowled at Napier's entrance, but tried to amend his expression in line with a plan of conduct he had worked out while waiting.

Erect and alert, Gordon sat at the flat desk several feet from the Mexican, watch-

ing him. On the desk-top were spread various articles, quite plainly the salvage from the prisoner's pockets.

"I gathered them in before I took the cuffs off," Gordon cheerfully informed Napier. "Here's the little persuader he swiped you with. Pleasant little instrument, isn't it?"

"Are you the man I struck?" Villabosa demanded. "I couldn't see you after I came to myself. Are you the man?"

Napier eyed him without answering.

"I felt sure it was a mistake, the minute I had done it," the Mexican went on earnestly. "I was turning you over to see if it wasn't a mistake, when—" He shrugged and made a significant gesture toward Gordon and then toward his own damaged scalp. "I am certainly very sorry. I took you for another man."

"Who?" Napier asked, and Gordon put in: "We haven't had any conversation at all. I thought I would wait till you came. Except that he has asked me two or three times why I didn't take him to the police station."

"I decline to say who I thought it was," Villabosa declared, with only the slightest Spanish accent. "That would make me convict myself. This is what happened: I was walking through the street and I saw a man ahead of me who, I thought, was my enemy. I came up behind him and hit him. If it was you, why, I made a mistake." He tried to smile, but his effort was not particularly pleasant. "It is pretty clear I am telling the truth, isn't it? I didn't have any reason to hit you, a fellow that I never saw before in my life."

"Don't know me from Adam, eh?"

Villabosa spread his hands. "If I ever saw you, I don't know where," he said. "You know as well as I do that you and I had no quarrel."

"We've got one now," Napier told him.

"I am ready to pay my fine. There is nothing to do but plead guilty and pay the fine. And I am willing, if you would not consider it wrong, to ask you to accept some—some damages, that is the word—for my mistake. I want to be fair. Am I not fair?"

"What were you looking for in my pockets?"

THE Mexican's face indicated shocked surprise. "Pockets! No sir. You are mistaken. I am not a robber. Look, there on the desk where this officer took it out of my clothes, is more than a hundred dollars, and I have money in the bank. No, señor. You are mistaken."

"You turned him over on his back and started to go through his pockets," Gordon remarked dispassionately. "He didn't ask you did you do it, but why you did it."

"You are mistaken. But why do I have to stay here, to talk only to you? I take it, from this office, that you are a Government officer. Hitting a man—assault—isn't a crime against the United States even if I got the right man, is it? I ask you to take me to the police. I will pay the fine, or get bail, if that is what is required."

"After you tell me what you were trying to steal out of my pockets," Napier said.

VILLABOSA'S denials were profuse and vehement. His tactics were obvious enough. He was not aware that Napier knew him at all; certainly not that he suspected him of any connection with the tragedy of the night before. He was hoping to bluff out the story of mistaken identity.

"What is your name, and where do you live?" Napier demanded.

"Salvador Villabosa, and I live at the Bonham. They will tell you there about me. Believe me, mister, I am not the sort that goes about assaulting and robbing."

"Where were you last evening?"

"Last evening?" He hesitated a barely perceptible second. "Early in the evening, I was out on the street, seeing the parade. I was on the sidewalk not far from the Bonham when it went by. Afterward I was in the hotel, all the rest of the evening."

"You may have to prove that."

"I can." His assurance was too positive, too eager. It confirmed all the things Napier had believed.

"And you say you never saw me before in your life. Don't you know that I am stopping at the Bonham?"

"You are?" His surprise was well simulated. "I have not seen everybody who stops there. There are many guests at the Bonham."

"You haven't seen me at any time during the three or four days?"

"No sir. Not that I remember."

"Who did your little dope-fiend friend come to see at the Bonham, last night?"

VILLABOSA was not adept at concealing emotion. The expression that came into his eyes, and the flush and succeeding pallor that mounted to his face told how heavily the question had scored.

"Little dope-fiend friend!" he repeated stammering. "I do not know who you mean. I have no such friend."

"Named Puenta," Napier supplied. "Weren't you standing there by the desk when he came into the lobby? He said you were."

"He said— How could he, when he didn't look— I mean, how could he, when I don't know any such person?"

"You followed him when he left, and went up Houston Street and through Main and Military plazas. What happened after that?"

"But I didn't follow him. I was at the hotel every minute after he left. I can prove it—prove it by many people. Huh! You are guessing wrong there, señor. I was there in the lobby of the Bonham every minute from eleven o'clock until one. I can prove it."

"You say he didn't leave the Bonham until after eleven."

"I say— No, I don't say that. I don't know what time he left, because I don't know him. I don't know anything about him. Who is this Angel Puenta?"

"Never heard of him, eh?"

"Never. On my word of honor."

"Then how did you know his first name?"

Villabosa saw his slip; his face showed it. But he tried to extricate himself. "It is the name you said. A dope-fiend named Angel Puenta, you told me. Say, mister! I don't want to be questioned like this. I haven't done anything wrong, except hit a man that I thought was my enemy, and get the wrong fellow. Take me to the police station. If you wont, send word to my friends. I want a lawyer."

"It's hard to get a lawyer this hour of the night," Gordon remarked amiably. "Probably the man you wanted wouldn't be in. There wont be anything doing in lawyers for the present."

"But I demand it. I demand to have word sent. Either take me to a judge, or I shall get habeas corpus, and then we'll see."

Napier considered him silently for more than a minute, during which time Villabosa again repeated his demand for friends and legal assistance. Then:

"Who killed Puenta?" he suddenly asked.

"I don't know. How should I know. I was at the hotel, I tell you. And I can prove it, too." He made a wriggling amendment, to square his previous admissions. "I know now who you are talking about. I saw about that killing in the newspaper. But I wasn't there. It was at twelve o'clock, the paper said, and at twelve o'clock—"

"Yes, I know. You were at the Bonham, and you can prove it. And I can prove a few things, too. What interest did you have in that Chinese label?"

This time Villabosa, realizing at last that already he had talked too much, waited a moment before he answered, and then merely said: "I don't know what you are talking about. I want a lawyer."

And to many other questions which Napier and Gordon threw at him during the next fifteen minutes his replies, over and over again, were the same: "I don't know;" "I wont answer;" "I want a lawyer."

They finally gave it up.

"Very well," Napier said. "We'll let you take the night to think it over. When you get ready to tell us what we want to know, you send word." He rose and picked up the handcuffs that Gordon had tossed on the desk after relieving the prisoner of them. "We haven't any cells here in the Federal Building, have we?" he said to Gordon. "I suppose he has to go over to police headquarters."

"That's where we keep 'em," Gordon agreed. "As long as that is where he has been demanding to be taken, he ought to be tickled to death."

Villabosa glared, but held out his hands.

"How about my money and other things?" he growled, indicating the small array of possessions on the desk.

"We'll put them in a nice sealed envelope and keep them all safe," Gordon assured him. "You'll get them back by and by—all except the blackjack. I don't believe you will ever crack another man over the head with that particular one. Do you know, I don't believe you are ever going to crack anybody over the head with *any* blackjack."

GORDON counted the money and made a memorandum of its amount before putting it into the envelope. He picked up and weighed in his hand a knife that could

be called a pocketknife if one were merely trying to keep within legal definitions, but which was large enough to be dangerous in a scrimmage in which its wielder was one familiar with the use of edged steel, opened it and commented on the keenness of its blade. "Not quite big enough to constitute 'concealed weapons,' but a handy little tool at that; they almost always have a practical knife about 'em somewhere, these Mexicans," he remarked to Napier. "This man is more cautious than most of them. I rather expected to find it in a sheath hanging down from the back of his neck." He put the knife, some papers which seemed to be of no consequence, and a watch and chain, into the envelope.

There remained of the prisoner's belongings on the desk only a small bunch of keys and a separate key, long, rectangular, flat and apparently quite new. As Gordon moved to sweep these in with the rest, Villabosa, whose eyes had been fixed on the agent's hands and whose chest was heaving with the emotion of his protests and demands, made an effort to calm himself and said, in what he tried to make a natural voice:

"I can't hurt anybody else or myself with my keys, can I? What's the use of keeping those?"

"We especially want to keep those," Napier replied quickly—a mere shot in the air suggested by the man's anxiety.

"Car-r-ramba!" Villabosa cried, losing all control of himself and leaping at Gordon, handcuffed arms upraised. "I wont stand for it! I wont! I—"

It is neither a difficult nor an especially creditable task for two powerful young men to subdue a middle-aged ruffian who is handcuffed. They did not even have to hurt him. When the excitement was over, Napier took up the flat key that seemingly had precipitated the outbreak and studied it carefully.

"A padlock, and a very up-to-date and rather high-priced padlock. Where is that padlock?" he asked.

Villabosa's reply was in muttered Spanish, and clearly both profane and insulting.

"He mustn't get a chance to communicate with his friends," Napier whispered to Gordon, whom he had drawn into a corner after the envelope with Villabosa's belongings was safely locked in the desk. "Can it be arranged at the station? What sort of people are the police here?"

"They work with us very nicely; we have never had any trouble getting whatever assistance from them we asked. I don't think there will be any difficulty keeping him *incomunicado* there. You'll go over with us, wont you? Then I'll have the car take me home and drop you at the Bonham."

THEY came up to police headquarters through a narrow, dark street at the rear, and Gordon left Napier with the prisoner while he disappeared into the building. When he came out, he said, as much for Villabosa's information as for Napier's: "I wanted to be sure there weren't any visitors sitting around the guard-room who might know him. There aren't."

Villabosa got the implication of this. "You can't lock me up secretly, and not let anyone know I am here," he protested.

"Think so?"

"You have to put my name on the police book,—the blotter,—and anybody has a right to see that blotter. You have to. The law says so. A man can't be locked up without his name on the blotter. The police have to write it."

"So they do," Gordon replied. "Your knowledge of Texas law is excellent. All right. We'll go in."

At the desk Gordon addressed the sergeant, with whom it was plain he had already discussed the matter:

"We want this man held for us, please. His name is John Doe."

"The name is Salvador Villabosa," the prisoner declared loudly.

"John Doe, alias Salvador Villabosa," Gordon amended, and busied himself removing the handcuffs.

The sergeant wrote. Villabosa, craning his neck to watch, cried out excitedly. "Here, Mister Sergeant, I told you my name is Villabosa. Salvador Villabosa. You haven't written it."

"'John Doe, alias. For Federal,'" the sergeant read complacently from what he had written. "That's fair enough, isn't it Do you expect an officer to clutter up the blotter with all a man's aliases?"

"When he wants to talk to us, get us word, will you?" Gordon said. "It isn't necessary for him to send messages to anyone else."

"Sure," agreed the sergeant. "If he talks with anybody, it's you."

"But I demand a lawyer," Villabosa shouted. "I demand to have word sent to my friends. You can't hold me like this!"

"Number 257," remarked the sergeant perfunctorily, to the officer who stood at the prisoner's shoulder waiting to take him to his lodging-place, and entered the cell number against the name on the blotter. "Come on, *hombre*," the officer said.

"But hold on! Wait! I demand—"

"On our way," the turnkey interrupted, and took Villabosa by the arm. The prisoner took one step, held back and turned.

"I know what my rights are, Mister Sergeant," he threatened. "And I propose to have them."

"Sure," the sergeant agreed, with perfect good temper. "Sure you'll have 'em. Su-u-re!" He waited until the prisoner had passed out of hearing. "If anybody should find out he was here and come around beefin' about it and demandin' to see him, I refer 'em to you people, as usual."

"Pass the buck to us," Gordon replied. "We take the responsibility."

NAPIER walked into the nearly deserted Bonham lobby, ten minutes later, and called for his room-key. There was a slip of paper in the box with it. It read:

> Mr. Napier please call Alamo 1266 as soon as he comes in. Important.

As soon as he had reached his room, Napier called the number.

"Hotel Edgemont," a sleepy voice replied.

"Some one there left a call for Mr. Napier, at the Bonham. Asked me to call your number as soon as I came in."

"Wait a minute," the operator languidly advised, and a moment later he heard her say: "There's your party at the Bonham."

"Hello," came in Miss Glenn's voice.

"This is Julian Napier. Did you call me?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Napier, but— It was a long time ago. It must be after one o'clock, isn't it?"

"Yes. Quite a little after. I know it is terribly late, but the note I found said to get you as soon as I came in."

"Thank you for calling, but— I couldn't possibly see you to-night—not at this hour. You see, I phoned you about eleven."

"I'm sorry I woke you up," Napier apologized. "There wasn't anything on the memorandum to show what time the call came."

"I—I haven't been asleep." She hesitated, and then went on: "I wanted to see you. There was a matter—there is a matter I want to talk to you about. It is an imposition to ask you, but I want—I need a little advice."

"I am at your service whenever you wish. At what time to-morrow shall I call?"

"Really, Mr. Napier, I feel embarrassed, asking you to take any interest in my affairs, but if it isn't too much trouble—"

"It is no trouble whatever. It will be a real pleasure." The words sounded sincere, because they were.

"Then at ten o'clock, if that is convenient."

"I'll send up my name as near ten o'clock as I can get there."

"No," the girl objected. "Don't send up your name. I will be in the lobby or the little lounge that opens just off of it. If I am not there, would you mind waiting until I come? I would rather, if you don't mind, that you didn't send word up to our rooms."

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH it still lacked three minutes of ten o'clock when Napier turned into the entrance of the Hotel Edgemont, Miss Glenn was waiting for him in the lounge. Except for her, the little room was unoccupied, and she met him at the door and led him to chairs in the further corner.

If she had slept less than usual the night before, he thought she did not show it. Nor did her manner show signs of the mental disturbance that her summons of the evening before had seemed to evidence. Some explanation of this came in almost her first sentence.

"It was so good of you to come," she told him. "I have been thinking how hysterical I must have seemed, calling you at all hours of the night. I got to thinking, and it seemed as if I simply had to talk to some one. Isn't it strange how different things look in the sunshine of the morning after?"

"If that means the things that were troubling you have disappeared, let us be thankful there are no clouds in the sky."

he said. "But it was no trouble to come, of course. Exactly the opposite. I am sorry I did not receive your message in time to get here last night."

She was a bit embarrassed, and he thought she regretted having sent for him. It would be ungrateful as well as discourteous, however, not to give him any inkling of what she had wanted, even though, as she intimated, her morning worries were not as great as they had seemed in the dark hours. She set out to explain:

"Do you know, it sounds rather absurd, Mr. Napier, but I haven't any friends—I mean, here in San Antonio. Oh, acquaintances, of course,"—as he murmured deprecatingly,—"but no friends that I could go to in an emergency and ask them to help me. And something came up—"

She rather groped for words with which to tell it, while he waited, willing but unable to make it easier for her.

"I was a little frightened, last night—a little frightened and nervous. I thought I needed help. Advice, anyway. And the only person in the world I could think of was you. That must sound strange, considering how very slight our acquaintance is, but I had the feeling that— Well, I have traveled a great deal, you know. I have met a good many people. I thought, if I were to ask you to help me, you would be the sort who would do what you could, and not misunderstand."

THERE was nothing of coquetry in her manner; she was looking him squarely in the face and talking seriously. "Man to man" was the phrase that came into his mind to describe her attitude. And he did not think she was trying to flatter him.

"If there is anything that I can do—" he assured her, but she shook her head thoughtfully.

"I don't think there is—this morning. I can't even say there was anything in particular I thought you could do last night. It was just that I was nervous and excited, and I had to talk to somebody."

"Your father wasn't here?"

Instantly came into her face the expression that he had seen before when Captain Glenn was mentioned. "My father," she said, "was— He is not well. There were reasons— It happened to be a matter that I cannot talk over with him." As though she had said a little more than she intended, she made an amendment: "I wouldn't want him to know I was worried. His health—"

Napier, as she left the sentence unfinished, suggested sympathetically:

"If you feel like telling me anything about what is troubling you—"

She shook her head. "The foolish troubles of night," she said. "They do not sound real in the daytime. One can get terribly worked up over small things after going to bed in the dark and giving way to nerves. Giving way to nerves always has been and always will be a woman's privilege."

Napier did not believe Miss Glenn was subject to nerves, and he felt positive she had not been in bed before she called him at eleven o'clock.

She did not seem quite satisfied with the explanation she had made; perhaps she felt she owed him a little more confidence under the circumstances.

"I actually felt, last night," she said, slowly and seriously, "that I was in danger, in a sense. It was quite silly, of course, but I had the feeling. And it seemed to me I *must* have some one I could call on if the thing that I thought was threatening ever really came to pass."

"Would it be too much to ask what sort of danger?"

"I'm afraid it would. If I were to tell you, you would think I had been reading thrillers. I might have told you if you had come last night—although I think more likely my nerves would have calmed down once you had arrived and I would have reneged, apologized and sent you home again. But in this broad daylight—it would sound perfectly outrageous." She laughed lightly. "This is San Antonio, United States of America, in the twentieth century."

"THERE can be dangers, even in the United States and the twentieth century," he said quietly. "Not as many as there can be in the East, or as there could be in other centuries, perhaps, but this place and time isn't free from them."

"If I didn't know something of the East, I shouldn't have been as frightened as I was last night," she said impulsively. "It is because I have seen there what people who propose to have their own way, and are in the habit of getting it—" Seemingly this sentence was bound farther than she wanted to go, for she halted abruptly. "I'm still a little upset, I guess. It is

awfully good of you to be willing to let me make an exhibition of temperament so patiently."

"If it shouldn't be temperament," Napier said, "if it should turn out that there really was something to worry about, I expect to be in San Antonio some little time, and I shall be at the Bonham—unless I am able, later, to get rooms here at the Edgemont. They didn't have any when I was here yesterday."

"That's awfully good of you," she began perfunctorily, but he interrupted her:

"I think you really have a bit of trouble. And I am sincere when I say I would like to have you call on me if there is anything I can do. It isn't merely a polite promise."

"What makes you think so?" she demanded, ignoring the latter part of his speech.

"I too have lived in the East."

THE quick glance that she threw him told him she wondered if there was anything significant in his remark, if he could possibly know that her trouble might have an Oriental side. As his face showed only sympathy,—and, perhaps, admiration,—she apparently dismissed the thought as unreasonable. But from the seriousness with which she sat for a moment in silence, while he tactfully waited, he knew she was turning her problem over in her mind, perhaps readjusting some former decision. When she looked up, her eyes rested on his frankly.

"I am going to be quite honest," she said. "It wasn't all a matter of getting nervous in the dark. I made up my mind, after thinking it over this morning, not to say anything to you of the things I would have said if you had been able to get here last night—and I am not going to say all of them, even now. But I am going to tell you that I am terribly worried over something that may turn out very seriously. I really may need somebody to help me—badly. I can't tell you what the trouble is. There is a possibility—I think maybe a probability—that it wont come to a head at all. But if it should—I would be all alone here."

She seemed unconscious that her words implied the absence of her father, and he wondered if the danger that threatened her was indirect, by being aimed at him.

"If you should be in trouble and should call upon me, I want you to believe that I would do everything to help you that was in my power."

"If I am, I will." She smiled, trying to ease the tension. "I shall get word to you the first thing. I shall say, 'Dear Mr. Napier: It's happened.'"

"And I, to use the expressive language of Texas, shall 'come a-runnin',"" he assured her, "even if it is in the most depressing hours of the night."

"It probably will be in those dark hours, if you ever get it," she declared. "If I were to wait until daylight, I'd finally find there wasn't really any danger, and—" She broke off, and dropped the badinage. "That isn't so," she said, serious again. "If I send for you at all, I'm afraid I'll really need you. You will forgive me if I don't tell you any more about it, wont you? I can't really understand why I have told you as much as I have, or why I telephoned you. We are practically strangers."

"I have known you eight years."

She shook her head. "You do not know me at all. And I don't know you, except that you are an American man. One learns to appreciate American men—the right kind of American men—after meeting so many foreigners—as in the East."

HE wondered if she was thinking of Orientals in the East, or Orientals transplanted to the West. It came to him how little any foreigner—either Oriental or Continental—would or could have understood her frank appeal to him for help in an hour of need. He did not take too much credit to himself for her confidence; she was a shrewd, sophisticated young woman who had seen enough of life to gauge men more or less and pick out those who were probably ordinarily decent. Of course he felt pleased and complimented. Who would not? He looked at her earnestly and honestly and said: "If you should need me, I'll try to come up to specifications."

"I'm really very sorry I can't ask you to call on me formally," she said. "It seems so absurd, my telling you all this and asking you to run to my assistance if something should happen that probably wont—and yet not asking you to come and see me. But you will forgive me. As I told you yesterday, my father—"

He rose. "Let us hope he will be better," he said. "When he is—"

"You know I'd like to have you," she

assured him. He felt certain she spoke with perfect sincerity.

He went back to the Bonham, found no mail or telegrams, and went out to stroll about the streets, not yet crowded but beginning to be filled with sight-seers, mostly out-of-town people in their best city-visiting clothes, wandering rather aimlessly but with a determined holiday spirit. At noon he took lunch where he happened to be, in a little dairy restaurant. He was sauntering, afterward, through Alamo Plaza, his mind revolving theories which refused to work out at all satisfactorily when his attention focused sharply on the figure of Madame Lucia Frezzi, just disappearing into the entrance of the Plaza Hotel.

It was but a glimpse, but he knew he was not mistaken. He crossed the plaza and went into the hotel, stopping at the cigar counter and glancing at magazines on the news-stand. After a bit, not seeing her, he looked into the several public parlors, and finally decided, unless she was above the first floor, that she must be in one of the dining-rooms.

Several people were ahead of him as he came up to check his hat, and perhaps ten minutes had elapsed since he first saw her before he stood in the main dining-room, surveyed the tables, and informed a grand-mannered head waiter that he was looking for friends.

She was there, facing him at a side table, and there was a man across the cloth from her. Napier could see only his shoulders and the back of his head. Obviously they were just beginning lunch, and there would be ample time before they finished to telephone for an agent from the collector's office and have her followed. He was about to turn and leave the room, with a manner implying that the friends for whom he was searching were not present, when Madame Frezzi suddenly looked toward the door and saw him.

Her face lighted with pleased recognition and she smiled cordially. There was nothing to do but look equally delighted and step over to her table.

"Mr. Napier!" she exclaimed, as he came within hearing. "What a pleasure!"

As she half rose to welcome him, her companion came courteously to his feet, pushing his chair back, and stood, napkin in hand and an amiable smile on his face, waiting to be presented.

It was Kalat Pasha.

CHAPTER XII

"MR. SASTANADA, Mr. Napier," she introduced them. Kalat extended a friendly hand and bowed gracefully. "Mr. Napier and I met in Paris," she told him. "Four—five years ago."

"Have you lunched, Mr. Napier?" Kalat asked in English that was precise and a trifle too correct. "Wont you sit down with us?" Without waiting for a reply, he signaled to a hovering waiter, who brought a third chair.

"Thank you," Napier said, dropping into the seat. "I'm sorry I can't have lunch, but I already have an appointment. It was to have been here—at least that is the way the message was delivered—but I am pretty sure he said the St. Francis, and I shall have to go over there. Telephone message taken by a third party—" He smiled, and dismissed his annoyance. "It is a great pleasure to see you again," he told Madame Frezzi. "There are many miles between here and the Rue de Varenne."

"I have been in the United States some little time," she said. "But I have always put off visiting my relatives here until now. They told me I would enjoy the Fiesta, and I have. It is very interesting, isn't it?"

"As distinctive, in its way, as the Mardi Gras," he agreed.

"I have never seen the Mardi Gras."

"Its atmosphere is French, of course, while the Fiesta San Jacinto is essentially Spanish. I always enjoy these carnivals. I am specially impressed with the fact that they are only possible in cities where there is much Latin blood and a Latin tradition. Any attempt to accomplish a carnival spirit like this in a Northern city in the United States would be a dreary failure."

"We Latins know how to play," Kalat put in.

"Mr. Sastanada is a fellow-countryman of mine," Madame Frezzi explained.

"Ah?" Napier remarked politely. "From what part of Italy?"

"Oh, but you are not remembering me as well as I hoped you did," the lady cried, "or you were misinformed. I am Spanish."

"Perhaps I thought the name was Italian."

"It is. My husband was of Italian blood." From the tense of the verb, Napier took it the husband who once was

conveniently absent was now conveniently deceased. "My relatives here are Spanish, although they have lived for a number of years in Mexico. 'Had lived' would be a better way of saying it, because they have been in San Antonio since the revolutions began. They were so unfortunate as to be Cientificos."

"You are, like us, a tourist?" Kalat asked. "Or have you business interests here?"

"I am a visitor."

"Mr. Napier is in business in New York —or was," Madame Frezzi said. "I am sure I recall that it was mentioned by some one, the first time we met."

"Your memory is better than mine was as to your nationality," Napier laughed. "I was—and am."

"In what business?" Kalat asked. His interest was merely polite, the interest of one who knows that some Americans like to discuss their commercial concerns.

"Not a very active one during the past few years," Napier said. "Oriental importations." He took out a business card and laid it before Kalat.

HE looked at his watch, with an apology; he must have time, before they finished, to telephone the collector's office.

"I hope you can come and see me," Madame Frezzi said. "I haven't a card with the address, of course, but if you would make a note of it—I am at Number 311 Chiromoya Street. I am always at home Wednesdays, after three. This has been no meeting at all. Do come."

"I shall be delighted to," he told her, and noted the address.

"I hope we also shall meet again," Kalat said, as Napier rose to leave.

"I hope so." He said the proper things to Madame Frezzi and left them.

From a pay station across the plaza he got Collector Lamb's office and was so fortunate as to find Gordon back from lunch, and with no important work on hand. Guardedly he told him what he wanted. "I shall be inside the doorway of the drugstore just across from the main entrance," he said, "and when he comes out, I will shake out my handkerchief."

"O. K.," said Gordon. "And I'm to stick to him till further notice?"

"If you please. I will come over to the office as soon as you have got started, of course, and talk it over with Mr. Lamb. If he has something else he wants you to do, I will ask him to have you relieved. If things break so you can, you might telephone in later and ask him."

"That wont be necessary, I know," Gordon said. "There isn't anything in the works at this minute that he thinks half as important as your affair. All right. I'll be over just as soon as I can get there."

NAPIER saw the wiry young man arrive and take up a position that, without being conspicuous, commanded both entrances to the hotel and the drugstore in whose busy doorway he waited. He saw Kalat and Madame Frezzi, after a while, come leisurely out and move up the plaza, afoot, and he shook his handkerchief. Gordon disappeared, strolling aimlessly behind them.

He went over to the Federal Building at once and saw Collector Lamb.

"Please excuse me for seeming to give your men orders," he said, "but you were out and the matter couldn't wait. It was Kalat himself."

The collector nearly permitted himself to show excitement.

"Are you sure?"

"I sat for fifteen minutes nearer to him than I am to you." Napier recounted the circumstances of the meeting.

"He asked your business, you say. Do you suppose he knows?"

"I don't think so. It is possible Madame Frezzi might know,—she might have learned in Paris,—and of course she could have tipped him while I was crossing the room. But if he had known, I think he would have said more about his presence here in San Antonio. He would have explained. The fact that he had no reason to suppose I knew him wouldn't have altered that. As a matter of fact, he explained nothing. He didn't even refer to it, except to intimate that he was a tourist."

"What is the connection between those two?"

Napier shook his head. "That remains to be learned. If we could get a line on her, it might help us. When I telegraphed Washington Monday night, asking for information regarding Captain Glenn, I also asked them to see what they could dig up about Madame Frezzi. They have passed the request on to our people in Paris; it is almost time to get a reply. She and Kalat *could* have met for the first time right here in San Antonio, within the past week."

LAMB considered this and nodded to its possibility. "And she could really believe that his name is Sastanada," he added.

"She could—and yet I doubt it. It isn't likely she dropped her work—whatever it was—when the war began and secret agents began to be really valuable. No. Before I felt certain that her presence here is entirely due to a desire to visit Spanish relatives and witness the carnival, I would want some evidence beyond her simple say-so. Which, naturally, I shall try to get."

"It's good progress, anyway. Mighty good progress. If you should happen to be able to connect this alleged Spaniard Sastanada with any of the Mexicans who are mixed up with these Chinks—" He broke off. "I was so interested in what you had to tell me that I almost forgot I had something to tell you," he said. "The chief of police telephoned a few minutes before you came to say he wanted to talk to me about this fellow Villabosa that you and Gordon locked up over at headquarters, last night. That was a good job, too; Gordon told me about it. How is your head?"

"Sore, but not troublesome, if I take pains in adjusting my hat. I have been so busy to-day I've hardly had time to think about it. What has happened regarding Villabosa? Is he ready to talk?"

"I don't think so; the chief didn't intimate it, anyway. He was a little careful about what he said over the phone; he didn't mention Villabosa's name at all; I took it for granted somebody was in hearing, or perhaps he didn't feel sure of who might have been listening in somewhere. He said he was coming over this way and would drop in to see me. He ought to be here pretty soon."

"Police chiefs don't always take that much trouble for the Federal outfits."

"This one does. He sees things from our end as well as the police end; he used to be in the Federal service himself, in the D. J."

ANNOUNCED by a clerk, only a few moments later, the chief came in and was introduced to Napier.

"You must be the fellow who stumbled over that Angel Puenta over on the West Side, night before last," was his opening comment, when the ceremony of shaking hands and lighting the inevitable Southwestern cigarettes had been concluded.

"I was. How did you know?"

"Burlen described you. When you get through with this case you're on now, I wish you'd take a little vacation from your regular job and find out for my department who killed that Mex."

"Aren't the detectives making headway?" Lamb asked.

"If they are, they're in reverse gear," the chief declared. "They know less about it now than they did right after it happened." He grinned amiably. "Right after it happened they knew *all* about it."

"If I fall over any evidence like I fell over Puenta, I'll try to help you get the murderer," Napier smiled. "Did they ever find the knife?"

"Nary sign of it."

"If I had been the killer, I would have thrown it away," Napier said positively. "Once he started to escape through that alley, he took a chance of meeting some one at the farther end, with no opportunity to turn back. He wouldn't hide the knife in his clothes and get them blood-stained, and the chances he was taking if he carried a knife in his hand— If he didn't get rid of it, he was a fool."

"Well, nobody seems to have seen him coming out of the alley," the chief said dryly. "And whoever he met, after that, it wasn't a policeman."

He stopped to discard the end of his cigarette. "What I came over for," he said, "was to tell you that this pockmarked Mex that you've locked up over in our hotel is certainly anxious to get word to his friends. Ever hear of Pedro Flores of Eagle Pass?"

"Never," Napier replied. "Who is he?"

"Search me! He is this prisoner's one best bet, I gather. This Villabosa—That's his name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He said it was; I thought he was telling the truth. The blotter, you know, says just 'John Doe, alias.' Well, this Villabosa is making a good deal of a holler. He seems mighty set on having somebody find out where he is so they can start habeas corpus proceedings. Thus far he hasn't succeeded in getting any word out, so far as I know,—I'm pretty sure of it,—but I'm not sure he can't, sooner or later. We've got as good policemen as any town —but he is a good promiser. He *might* find one who needed the money, especially as we wouldn't ever be able, probably, to find out who did it."

"Trying to bribe the officers, eh?"

"Last I heard he was up to a hundred dollars, and likely to go higher."

"MAYBE I'd better tell you what happened, and you can make your own decision. When I came on, this morning, I saw the entry on the blotter and heard about the request that he be kept *incomunicado*, and I went down, naturally, to look him over. He went at me, hammer and tongs, the minute I showed up, demanding to be arraigned, to have a lawyer, to see his friends. Knows quite a lot of law, of one sort and another. Mentioned the constitution and statutes of the State of Texas pretty fluently, and when I went away I think he was beginning to quote the Constitution of the United States. He was sure anxious to get word somewhere, *pronto*. Well, that was all there was of that. About an hour ago one of the officers—man named Hathaway—happened to have an errand that took him into that part of the station."

"I know Hathaway," Lamb said. "Good man, isn't he?"

"One of the best I've got. Well, he sung out to Hathaway, and began to tell him his troubles. Hathaway, knowing his business, went over and listened. When this Villabosa thought he had him sympathetic, he came across with his big thought. Hathaway was to slip out and send a telegram for him, and the honorarium was to be fifty dollars. He raised it to seventy-five, and just before Hathaway left, it went to a hundred. The telegram was to go to Pedro Flores, Eagle Pass, and it was merely to say where Villabosa was, and that he was *incomunicado*."

"And Flores, naturally, would start the necessary machinery moving," Napier said. "I wonder why he didn't name some of his local friends. He has some."

"That's no riddle I know the answer of," the chief said. "But he didn't mention a single other person except Flores. Well, that's all there is to it. Far be it from me to intimate that there is any chance over in that establishment of mine for a leak, but a hundred dollars is a lot of money, and I can't draw a dead line and keep policemen from getting within hearing of him. I don't think any of them would fall for it, but you ought to know how the situation lies. If the important thing is that Villabosa sha'n't see anybody, there is nothing to worry about, because if any of his friends should call, we would refer them to you and let it go at that. But if it is vital that they sha'n't even know where he is—well, there's a little chance, and it don't get us anywhere to ignore it."

"It is important that nobody shall know where he is," Napier said. "What other place is there where he could be kept?"

"The county jail, I suppose, if they've got room and the sheriff is willing—and of course he would be. But that wouldn't be any improvement. Human nature is the same in a county jail as in a police station, and a hundred dollars is just as big."

"In all this we are overlooking the most vital thing. We not only need to keep his friends from getting at him, or even from learning where he is, but he has got to be made to talk—if possible. If I haven't doped our case wrong, he would be able to straighten us out on a number of things that we need to know—badly."

"Of course, not knowing anything about the case—" the chief began, when Napier interrupted.

"I'm going to tell you about it, and I hope you wont be offended when I tell you that I have held out some evidence on your department. If I had met you, or known that you used to be in the Federal service, I would have gone to you first thing with it, but having been in the service, you know yourself how it is."

NAPIER rapidly outlined the main points of his case, telling of his quest for Kalat Pasha and the diamonds from the sultan's sash. He spoke of a woman who smiled at him—speaking no names and not mentioning that there were two—and told of the messenger who came from her with a summons, of the orange label that fluttered from his pocket to the floor of the Bonham lobby, and of the walk in the Mexican section that came to an abrupt end with the killing of his guide. "I didn't tell the officers that he spoke before he died, or that he had this in his hand," Napier concluded, producing the torn fragment of the label. "Perhaps you wont agree with me, but from my viewpoint, if a bunch of detectives ever started asking Chinamen questions about a thing like that, the case would be gummed in five minutes. So I held out on you."

The chief, who had listened without in-

terrupting, nodded good-naturedly. "I don't blame you," he said. "I would have done the same, when I was in the D. J."

"Our cases really dovetail," Napier went on. "If we find the diamonds, we stand a fair-to-middling chance of finding out who killed Puenta, and whatever credit there may be for landing him will go to you people, naturally. Public credit, as you know from your own experience, is a thing we fellows don't seek."

"Fair enough," the chief agreed. "Thanks." He reached over to the collector's box, helped himself to a cigarette, and lighted it thoughtfully. "Do you know," he said, "I was pretty sure, if I came over here this afternoon, you would be on the level and tell me about Puenta."

"Did you think we—" Lamb began.

The chief nodded. "You see I couldn't help putting two and two together. Here was Puenta, a dope-fiend, with some connection with Chinks that are supposed to be tangled up in opium smuggling; all of them are. Here was a strange special agent of the Treasury Department in town. After what? Smugglers wouldn't be a bad guess, seeing as that is what you're always after. Puenta is over on the West Side, heading toward the Chinese quarter, and gets killed. You happen to be right there, and notify the police. Well—"

"It was good figuring, and correct," Napier said.

"And then, besides all that," the chief grinned, "when I went down to call on Villabosa, this morning, he happened to say that it was impossible he could have been mixed up in the murder of Puenta, like you accused him last night, because he was in the lobby of the Bonham all the time and could prove it. So I thought I'd come over and find out."

"And you did, very artistically," Napier remarked, and joined in the laugh. "And now that you know what we know, and we know what you know, what are we going to do to make Villabosa tell us something about that Chinese label that was on the box that had a diamond in it?"

THE chief became instantly serious. "Unless I'm a poor judge, he isn't ready to talk yet and he isn't going to be ready to talk for some time. If he can get word to his friends and start habeas corpus or something like that, he figures he wont ever have to talk. It's my strong opinion that you could keep him over in our place a week, and still he would keep his tongue between his teeth—unless there was more pressure put on him than either you or I have any way to put on. I don't know as you know much about these Mexicans, Mr. Napier, but Mr. Lamb does. It's darned hard to make them talk, especially when something bad, like a murder, is involved. The Rangers have the best luck with them, and *they* don't always succeed. But if I were you, and there was any good, old-time Ranger within reach, I'd get to him and holler for help."

"They are all mortally afraid of the Texas Rangers," Lamb explained to Napier. "And with good cause."

"It would have to be one of the best," the chief said. "None of these young fellows that have gone in lately. I don't know whether any of the old-timers are in town, but—"

"I saw Captain Dalton on the street only this forenoon," Lamb broke in. "Didn't speak to him, except to say 'Howdy.' If he isn't on some important work, and if you agree that he would be a good man, I could telephone Austin and ask them to lend him to the Government for a day or two."

"You do the telephoning, and I'll locate the Cap'n and ask him to come over and see us," the chief agreed with enthusiasm. "I didn't know he was in town. Why, he's our one best bet in the Ranger service. If there is one man more than another in the State of Texas that can put the fear of God into the heart of a Mexican, it's Bob Dalton."

CHAPTER XIII

THEY sat in the chief's office at four o'clock, the chief, Napier and Dalton, and the special Treasury agent again told his story for the Ranger's benefit.

Captain Dalton smoked quietly throughout the recital without displaying excessive interest, and did not once interrupt. He was a tall man, with broad shoulders and a tapering waist, calm gray eyes and a wind-burned, leathery skin. His age was forty-six, and one who saw only his face might have said he was ten years older than that, but one who saw only his body would have been more likely to guess ten years younger.

Off duty, clothed as any comfortably

well-to-do cattleman on a visit to town might have been clothed, his movements moderate and unhurried, it was not easy for Napier to fit the Ranger's appearance into the tales the chief had told him while they waited for him to come, tales that explained why Dalton was distinguished for initiative, resourcefulness and courage even in an organization which expects all those qualities from its members as a matter of course and in the day's work.

It was hard to visualize in this quiet, reserved person the unhesitating dead shot and lightning gunman that he was reputed to be. His low-pitched, drawling voice did not sound as though it could, in desperate emergency, bark harsh commands that would overawe a mob, as—so the chief said—Dalton had more than once done, single-handed. During the sinister Plan of San Diego in 1915, when the southern half of Texas was to be captured and restored to Mexico, "all white Americans being killed, but no negroes," as the manifesto naïvely proposed, Dalton had had charge of the Rangers in several border counties where Mexicans outnumbered Americans fifty to one, and the manner in which he and his men had handled the situation had established forever his reputation among the bandits who came across the river and their swarm of friends on the northern side as one who hurled swift-driving bullets first and discussed the matter afterward (if, indeed, he discussed it at all), yet was neither a bully nor a murderer.

"So there is the situation," Napier concluded. "Villabosa knows something about this label." He indicated the orange slip lying before them on the chief's desk. "He probably knows who killed Puenta. I want to find out about one and the chief, here, wants to know about the other."

"I told him if anybody could make a Mexican admit that he wasn't entirely without sin, it was you," the chief said.

"I don't know," the Ranger said. "I don't know. I cain't do any impossibilities. You haven't got anything—anything else, I mean—on this Villabosa? Don't know who his friends are, or his connections, or anything?"

"Yes. We know he used to be tied up with a crowd that was supposed to be friendly to Villa," Napier said. "And we got this new name—this Pedro Flores."

"I'll have somebody look Pedro up," Dalton said. "It may help us get a line on this other *hombre*. About this Villa outfit, didn't you say all that was several years ago?"

"Yes."

"There's no telling from who a Mexican's friends were some years ago what brand he's wearing now. Well, maybe we better have a look at him. He might be ready to say something by now, without any unusual pressure. If he isn't, I'll try to be thinking up something to suggest while you are talking to him. Suppose you have him in and don't mention me. We'll see whether he knows me. If he doesn't, at the right minute—after I have butted into the conversation, say—you might mention my name, and see what happens."

THE chief pressed a button and ordered that Villabosa be brought to them. Napier leaned forward to pick up the piece of orange label from in front of the chief, and hesitated. "I wonder if it wouldn't be just as well to let that lay there in plain sight while we are talking to him—and not refer to it, at first," he suggested.

"It will help keep him guessing," Dalton approved. "Pretty well over this side of the desk, where he cain't grab it and eat it, or something like that."

Villabosa was brought in, and the officer who escorted him, at the chief's order, went out and closed the door.

"You can sit down in that chair," the chief told the Mexican, indicating. He obeyed, and silence followed. The eyes of the three men were upon him, but they did not speak. Villabosa scowled at each in turn. "Why don't I have a lawyer?" he finally cried. "Ever since last night I have been here, demanding a lawyer, and you do not let me send for him. I know my rights, and I'll get them, too."

"You'll get them," the chief said significantly, and fell silent again.

"I haven't done anything except bit this man by mistake, and I am willing to plead guilty to that," the prisoner began, and then his eye fell on the bit of bright paper with its sprawling Chinese ideographs. He stopped, looked quickly about the hostile circle and swallowed. "Why don't you let me send for a lawyer?" he demanded, in a much less truculent voice.

"Who knifed Angel Puenta?" the chief snapped at him. "Come on. Don't tell us you don't know, because you do."

Again his eyes fluttered to the fragment of label. "I don't know anything about him," he replied. "On my word of ho[illegible]

I don't. I told this man I didn't, and I told the truth." He nodded toward Napier. "You can find out at the Bonham—"

"Who did you get word to? Who did you tell that Puenta had it in his pocket?" It was a shot in the dark, but it had its effect. Villabosa did not immediately answer in words, but his eyes went sharply to the blotch of color on the desk. "Yes, that's it," the chief followed up. "You get what I mean. Who did you tell?"

"I don't know what you mean at all. See here, chief, and you too,"—to the others. "I'm not going to say another word until I get a lawyer. I haven't done anything, and I don't propose to let you put up any job on me. I want to notify my friends where I am."

DALTON, while Villabosa was saying this, had taken a paper from his pocket and was studying it, looking up, every line or so, to stare at Villabosa's face. It was a printed paper and looked like a police description of some wanted fugitive, as, in fact, it was—the description of an American youth aged eighteen who was greatly desired in El Paso for the embezzlement of funds belonging to his employer.

"He certainly answers the description," he suddenly said, to the chief.

The chief smiled with satisfaction. "I thought he would."

Villabosa said nothing, shifting his gaze from one to the other warily. The chief, still smiling, gave him a bit of casual information. "This is Captain Dalton, of the Rangers."

The Mexican's eyes narrowed, and Napier knew that he was well aware of Dalton's reputation. The chief had said there wasn't a bad Mexican in Texas who didn't fear him mortally, but he hardly looked for such speedy confirmation of it, on the mere mention of his name.

"Yes," Dalton told the chief again, folding the paper and replacing it in his pocket. "It shore looks like he is the man." Napier noticed that he hadn't said he *was* the man, either time. He felt certain the qualification had been for the prisoner's benefit, although he couldn't see the point of it. He was not familiar with the one piece of Ranger tactics that may be depended upon beyond all others to terrify a Mexican with a guilty conscience.

"Are you demanding that we turn him over to you?" the chief asked.

"Not necessarily," Dalton said. "When we hear his story about this killing here in San Antonio, we'll see. Maybe, if he tells it straight, I'll let you hold on to him. It's going to be a lot of trouble to take him way down there by the river to get him identified. Me, I'd just as lives not have to do it. And Ranger Hard, who would have to go along with me, he's just got in town here after three months border duty, and he'll shore feel mean if he has to quit when he's hardly got started to amusing himself—he's got a girl here, too—to go gallyhootin' down into that country guarding this feller. No. Let's hear what he's got to say about this case here, and maybe it'll be all right for you to hold him. We'll see after he comes through."

AT Dalton's opening words in reply to the chief's query Villabosa's eyes fixed themselves on the Ranger's face. When Dalton spoke of taking him "way down there by the river," to get him identified, muscles in his cheeks twitched nervously. As it appeared that two Rangers would make the journey, and that at least one of them would feel disgruntled at having to leave San Antonio, he sat back in his chair, breathing hard. When Dalton finished, he began to sputter with fluent desperation.

"You can't do it!" he cried. "You can't do it! No, chief, don't turn me over to him. I wont stand for it!"

"You'll stand for it if he demands it," the chief told him coldly. "However, if you've got anything you want to say about this Angel Puenta killing, and this piece of paper that you saw fall out of his pocket in the Bonham, we'll hear it."

"I don't know anything about it," Villabosa protested. "And I don't know anything about this other thing this Ranger talks about, either. I haven't done anything down in any of the river counties. They don't want me for anything, honest, chief. He don't say I'm the man; didn't you notice that? He only says I look like the man. He wants to get me down in one of those counties, and—" He stopped, panting.

"We're waiting for that story about Puenta.

"I tell you I don't know anything about Puenta. Listen, chief! They take a man down to the river, these Rangers, and maybe somebody identifies him as a murderer

or something, but maybe nobody does. What does the Ranger report say? What did it say when Liborio Tamez started for the Rio Grande and never got there? You know what it said: 'Killed while attempting to escape.' The *ley fuega*. I wont go, chief. Don't let him take me."

"Was Liborio Tamez a friend of yours?" The significance of this was lost on Napier until afterward, when he learned that Tamez was a leader in the insane (and to many of the plotters fatal) plot of 1916 to seize, burn and loot a score of small South Texas towns—as desperate a bandit as ever met a violent and just reward.

"No. But everybody knows what happened to him. Chief!" His voice lifted a bit hysterically. "Don't turn me over to the Rangers."

"All right. We'll see. What about Puenta?"

BUT if Villabosa feared the Rangers, it might be judged there were other things he feared as much, for he persisted in denying all knowledge of the little Mexican's death or of the Chinese label that was in his pocket. Frightened he obviously was, but not enough to confess.

"I—don't—know—anything — about — Puenta," he declared, with emphasis on every word. "And I'm through. I am not going to say another thing until I get a lawyer, and if you wont send for one, I'll get one somehow. This is an outrage, and I wont stand for it. When I get out, I'll make you pay for it, the whole of you. I am not wanted by the police down on the border for anything, and you know it. I warn you not to send me down there. If there is anybody there who thinks he can identify me, let him come up here. I'll pay all his expenses, and this man"—jerking his head toward Napier—"has money enough of mine to foot the bills, and I give him authority to spend it for that, now." He sat back, pale but determined. "Now you can lock me up again or you can let me go, just as you please, but you wont get any story out of me, because I haven't got anything to tell—or you can go to the devil."

The chief raised his eyebrows and looked at Dalton, who had listened quite unmoved at the Mexican's peroration.

"All right," the Ranger captain said. "If you don't mind, I'll get hold of Ranger Hard, and Señor Villabosa can get ready to start on a little journey."

"Do it!" Villabosa defied him. "Do it, and my friends will know where I am—and once I get before a judge on a habeas corpus you'll let me go quick, and you know it. Do it! Start me for the border. Somebody will see me that knows me."

"Not in an automobile, after dark," Captain Dalton told him equably. "And they wont hear you, either, because you'll be gagged."

"Take him back," the chief commanded the officer who responded to his signal.

The prisoner was hardly out of the room before his voice rang loudly through the corridor. "Villabosa!" he shouted. "My name is Villabosa. Salvador Villabosa. Are there any reporters here? Print it. Salv—" An abrupt cessation of the bellow indicated that a hard and heavy hand had come into action as an extinguisher.

The chief stepped to the door and spoke to a passing officer. "Are there?" he asked.

"Are there what, chief?"

"Any reporters in the building. Look quick. If there are, ask them to come here right away. And see if anybody else seemed to take any notice of that man's yelling."

THE officer was back in a moment. "Nobody here at all just now except officers. Not an outsider on the floor."

"All right." The chief dismissed him, and turned to Dalton, who was rolling a fresh cigarette, seemingly very much at peace with the world. "What was the matter?" he asked. "We almost had him going for a minute. What changed him?"

"Well," the Ranger drawled, still busy with the adequate manufacture of his smoke, "for one thing, he got to thinking that maybe it was all a bluff, and that if it wasn't, he would have plenty of time to squeal after he was sure it wasn't. For another, maybe he's as 'fraid of somebody that would get him if he told what he knows as he is of the Rangers. And, another thing, he kept sizing me up and wondering if I was the kind of a feller that would take a Mexican out and kill him in cold blood—and guessed right on the answer."

He scratched a match and inhaled deeply. "But there is a lot of time to change his mind as to that," he said. "Maybe, by to-morrow, he'll feel different. If not, he will sooner or later—or he's got more nerve than most of 'em. When Hard and

I get him out in the sticks and he realizes there aint any chances of dodging one kind of a hereafter or another—we'll see."

"Where are you going to take him?" Napier asked.

"Down here about a hundred miles to a little farm that I happen to own, down in San Miguel County. There's nobody there but one man, who can be depended on, and Villabosa will suppose that it is the county where somebody needs to be identified for something. If necessary, I prob'ly will have a few folks I can trust come see him from time to time and look him over speculative. In the meantime we'll see what we can find out about him. That name at Eagle Pass was Pedro Flores, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"It's some common name, and I suppose there are ten of 'em there, but I'm betting there aint more'n one that would be the kind of feller this Villabosa would be trying to get word to. He isn't telegraphing any common *pelado*. This feller is prob'ly some prominent among the Mex population. If we kin get a line on Pedro, it may give us something on Villabosa. All I need to know is who his friends are, on the other side of the river, and I'll take my chances on being able to make the information useful." He puffed meditatively a moment, and added: "When you know who a greaser's friends are, these days, you quite frequently don't have to ask who are his enemies."

"I'll be here to see you make your start," the chief said. "What time?"

"About nine, I guess. It will be dark then. And in the meantime I'm going to write a little letter to Cap'n Williams—he's in charge of the Rangers down in that Eagle Pass country just now—and ask him to get busy looking Flores and Villabosa up. And I'd suggest that you"—he addressed Napier—"write your customs officers down there, or ask Lamb to, and see what they can gather along the same line."

"We could telegraph, or telephone."

"I wouldn't," Dalton advised. "It's quicker, but only one person knows what's in a letter—unless he tells it. It has to be done sometimes, but mentioning names over a wire isn't the most secret of indoor sports."

"I'll go over to the Federal Building and see that a letter is sent right away, and be here at eight."

He pocketed the slip of paper with its Chinese lettering, and hurried to carry out his errand. Lamb, who was still at his desk, signed the letter that he dictated, and he went downstairs and mailed it, after which, with nothing more to do and no desire to bother the collector, who was extremely busy, he wandered out onto the street. Gordon had not telephoned.

Napier looked at his watch; it was not yet five o'clock. It was hardly likely Madame Frezzi would be at home, but he had a sudden impulse to see at least what sort of house she lived in, and where. He got a car and told the driver to take him to 311 Chiromoya Street.

CHAPTER XIV

THE automobile set him down, ten minutes later, before a good-sized residence in the edge of the Mexican quarter, and he went up the short walk to the door and rang the bell.

A dark-skinned maid responded. "Madame Frezzi?" he asked, and the girl looked puzzled and replied in Spanish, spoken too rapidly and with too much of a Mexican accent for him to make anything of it. He had an inspiration, amended his inquiry to "Señora Frezzi," and gave the name the Spanish pronunciation instead of the Italian.

"Sí, señor," the girl replied, and opened the door wider for his entrance. *"Espere usted un poco."* She left him and disappeared up a flight of stairs. He gathered that she had indicated she would go to summon the Señora, and took a seat.

It was a very old house, but in fairly good repair and seemingly well furnished, so far as he could make out from his view of a broad parlor that opened out of the hall. He could see comfortable chairs, a piano, and too much bric-a-brac. The hall where he sat was wide and led completely through the house to the back, and a door that was partly open at the rear framed a glimpse of what looked to be a good-sized yard, its foliage glistening green in the afternoon sun.

Madame Frezzi came down almost immediately, her hand cordially extended.

"I couldn't have dared hope you would come so soon," she said.

"And I was afraid you wouldn't be here, but you said 'always on Wednesdays' and this is Wednesday. The parade this afternoon didn't interest me, and I suddenly

determined to look you up, although I realized you might be out seeing it."

"There is nothing picturesque in a trades' parade," she said. "I wouldn't be uncomfortable in a crowd for it. But Mrs. Bonillas—she is my relative here—is one who likes not to miss any detail of the Fiesta. I am sorry she is not at home; I would like you to meet her."

DURING this brief interchange they had remained standing in the hall. Madame Frezzi now took a step toward the parlor at the side, and then changed her mind. "Wouldn't it be nicer to sit out in the patio?" she asked. "It is such a lovely afternoon, and we can have tea out there." She led the way down the hall. "It isn't really a patio at all," she told him, over her shoulder. "It is only a yard. But it is quite pleasant. We spend a great deal of our time out here."

They passed through the door and into an inclosure, high-walled at sides and back, that was surprisingly spacious. Land in that section of the city had not been especially valuable when the house was built, and the lot was deep and wide, with many shade-trees, vines and creepers to contrast their color with the gray stone—or perhaps adobe—of the wall, and flowers and blooming shrubs, profusely scattered, with pomegranates, poppies and roses in bloom.

There were two or three little tables under the trees, and she led the way to one of them, after having called a command in melodious Spanish to some one in the house, who replied, *"Sí, señora."*

"Delightful!" he exclaimed, as they took seats. "One could never imagine that you had so pleasant a retreat back here."

"The Mexicans are like the Spaniards—and unlike you Americans, if you wont take offense, which you wont, because you are too well-traveled. They do not like to live their lives in public."

The dark servant came out with tea and little cakes, and Madame Frezzi poured while they chatted of inconsequential things: of some of the people who had been present when they met in Paris; of how Paris must have changed, in some respects; naturally, of how Madame Frezzi liked America. "You didn't tell me where you make your home," he said.

"A little way outside New York, on Long Island," she told him. "I have a little house there, near enough to town to get in and out easily, and far enough away to be quiet—and not demand every cent of my income for rent. When you are back in New York, I hope you will be able to come down and see me sometime."

He expressed the pleasure it would give him.

"And you? I suppose you live close to the city, so as to be near your business."

"In the city," he said. "At a club."

"But your business doesn't hold you in an office like most men's, I imagine. You travel a great deal, naturally. What are you poor importers doing these days, when there are neither ships to bring the goods nor passports for the agents who go up and down the earth buying them?"

HE answered that business had indeed been bad for lo! these several years, but, as he talked, lightly describing the depleted condition of most importers' warerooms, he reflected on the fact that twice he had met Madame Frezzi that day, and each time his business had been one of the earliest things to be discussed, although, at noon, she had not introduced the subject. And neither Italians nor Spaniards nor European ladies of any other blood, concerned principally with affairs of state and politics, are prone to discuss commercial matters at all. That message, Monday night, had said his business would be benefited if he would respond to it.

"Shall you remain in San Antonio after the Fiesta," he asked, "or are you here only for the week?"

"Oh, I haven't just arrived," she said. "I have been here more than a fortnight. I timed my visit to include Fiesta week, of course, but I wouldn't have felt like making my cousin a little, fly-by-night visit like that. It would have looked as though I only wanted to see the carnival and had made her my excuse. As to going, I haven't made up my mind. It may be next week. I may stay two or three weeks longer. How long are you planning to be here?"

He implied in his answer that he was on a vacation and had some thought of extending it to the Pacific coast, although he might decide to spend the whole outing in Texas.

"I was mighty sorry not to accept Mr. Sastanada's invitation to take lunch with you," he said, after a little. "Seems like a mighty nice chap, Sastanada."

This lead might have induced her to tell him something about her amiable luncheon

companion, but it didn't. "It was too bad you had to run away," was her reply. "Did you find your friend at the St. Francis, as you hoped?"

"It was a good guess. Can you understand how a hotel clerk can get a message over the telephone, making an appointment for the St. Francis, and deliver it as being the Plaza?"

He took some more tea and spoke highly of the little cakes. Then he said idly: "I had a notion, when I saw you in the crowd, Monday night, to come back and try to find you. As a matter of fact, I did start back, but the jam was too great. I had been in town three days, and yours was the first face I had seen that I knew. There is no place quite so lonely as a crowd."

SHE smiled at the bromide as flatteringly as though it were new. "You would have met some very pleasant people if you had found us," she said, "and we had a good place to see the king's ceremonies. It is an interesting thing, the way Americans, who insist they don't like kings and queens at all, like to play at bowing down to royalty."

"Some pretty conservative monarchies are only playing at it, these days," he laughed. "There is more than one *bona fide* king, I fancy, who would be glad to have his throne guaranteed for as long as this San Antonio king's reign. That fellow with the crown, the ermine-trimmed mantle and the look of pained embarrassment, Monday night, is sure of his job for a whole week."

She spoke kindly of George, Victor Emmanuel and Alfonso. "What I enjoy about these carnivals," she said, "is not the processions and coronations; they aren't very thrilling to one who has seen the real thing. It is the spirit of the crowds. You were speaking about it at lunch to-day. Were you in New York on armistice night?"

"No."

"If you had been, you would never cease to note the difference in these Latin crowds—or, rather, crowds in places that have a deep strain of Latin blood and tradition. New York had the crowd, the noise, and far more cause to be merry than these people have here, this week. It had everything—except the carnival spirit. And it was as different from this as though the people came from two worlds."

Adroitly, she had succeeded in leading the conversation a long way, he thought, from Monday evening and his desire to see her again.

He brought it back: "I tried to find you later, that night, but was unable to."

There was no emphasis to give his words significance, but he looked into her face as he said it, alert for some expression that would show she understood. "The woman who smiled," Puenta had said, and Madame Frezzi could not know that this, to Napier, had been cryptic. She could not possibly be aware that two women had smiled at him that evening.

"It was all we could do to get home, the crowds were so thick," she said, and went on with an account of how the automobile in which she rode stalled for an incredible period at one of the corners. He was disappointed. Not by the slightest flicker of an eyelash had she indicated that his words had any more meaning for her than they purported to have.

The Mexican girl came out and spoke a few words in Spanish.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" Madame Frezzi asked. "I am called to the telephone."

WHILE she was gone, he moved about the yard. The high walls were of adobe, as he had guessed. There was a shrub whose name he did not know, and a tree that was quite unfamiliar; he thought he would ask her their names when she came out.

But when she came, he ceased to be interested in shrubs and trees. Something had occurred to agitate his hostess violently, and her emotion was not sorrow, but anger. She was making a strong effort to hold herself in hand, but her bosom was heaving, her voice quivered perceptibly, and there was a flash in her eye that boded no comfort for the person or thing which had enraged her, if that object happened to be near at hand while she was still in her present mood. Not enough time had elapsed for her to have participated in any quarrel, either over a telephone or directly. There was but one other probable answer. Some one had telephoned disturbing news.

Ordinarily, as she had recently demonstrated,—or so he believed,—Madame Frezzi was able to dissemble cleverly. But perhaps, when she was under the stress of such passion as now swayed her, with her

emotions near to the surface, her real thoughts would not be so easily hidden. As she resumed their interrupted conversation, trying to speak as lightly as before and plainly striving both to gain mastery over herself and keep him from observing her excitement, he suddenly determined upon an action that until that moment he had not planned at all.

"It is certainly a beautiful near-patio," he said, "with all the atmosphere of a home in Spain or Mexico. Even the romantic-looking door in the gray wall, where the hero can slip out—or the villain in—without being seen from the front."

He opened the narrow door, took one step through it—and stood on the spot where Angel Puenta died.

Instantly he turned, stepped back, closed the door, and looked down unsmiling into Madame Frezzi's eyes.

"Your messenger did his best to bring me here, but he met with a serious accident, as you know," he said. "You had better tell me about it."

CHAPTER XV

"WHAT messenger?" she repeated. "I do not understand." But her hand was at her throat and in her eyes was startled apprehension.

"We had better sit down," Napier told her. She sank into her chair, and he took the seat opposite. His eyes, since his question, had not left her face. "He was killed at your gate. Why?"

"How should I know?" she replied. "And why do you call him my messenger?" Very desperately she was trying to regain her usual poise, but without success, and her eyes fell under his grave gaze. "You mean that Mexican, of course."

"You did not know him?"

"No," she declared, and then caught her breath and bit her lip. Perhaps it would be an easy thing to discover that she did. "That is—I mean I did not know much about him. I had seen him working around here."

"He worked here?"

"Not—not exactly. He came here on work—doing errands, or something like that."

"For whom?"

Clearly she felt she must, if possible, counter this cross-examination. "How should I know?" she asked. "And why should you ask me these things? A man was murdered in the alley beyond our wall. What should I know about it?"

"That is what I am asking."

"Nothing, except what I saw in the newspaper. Somebody found him dead. It said he had been stabbed."

"And you, I suppose, were in the house?"

"Yes."

"Then who was going to unlock the gate for him?"

Again she tried to shift the questioning. "Do you mean to say he was coming here?"

"He hadn't said. But he gave me your message. If you were here—" He left the sentence significantly suspended.

"My message?" She hesitated, and Napier sensed in her voice a note of indecision. There was no way by which she could know whether or not Puenta had given him the name of the one who sent him. "You say he brought you a message?"

Napier refused to let her become the examiner. "You haven't told me who was going to open the gate," he insisted.

"How do I know anyone was?"

"Did anyone else want to see me besides you?"

HER hands, on the table before her, were clasped, and the ends of her nails were white with their tension. She tried to smile naturally: "But you still seem to be taking it for granted your message came from me, when I have told you it did not. That is not very complimentary, Mr. Napier."

"Where were you when I discovered his body?" Napier demanded. He was surprised at the real astonishment with which she cried: "You! Did you find him?"

He nodded. "Where were you?" he repeated.

"If it was around twelve o'clock, I must have been—"

He interrupted her impatiently. "There is no use our going on this way, Madame Frezzi. I propose to know. I don't want to have to go to the police with this, but if you do not tell me—"

She broke in sharply: "Do you mean you would not go to the police if you knew?"

"It would depend on what I knew, perhaps."

She leaned forward, speaking rapidly, eagerly. "If you were certain I had no

responsibility in regard to it at all—if you were convinced I knew nothing whatever about who did it or why it was done—neither I nor anybody in the house—would you promise not to tell the police?" She seemed to feel this outburst called for explanation. "They are blockheads. They do not use reason. American police and European police, they are all alike. They believe everybody to be guilty."

"If you were to tell me," Napier said quietly, but without withdrawing his eyes from her face, "if you were to tell me all you know about this Puenta and how he was killed, and if I were absolutely convinced that neither you nor anybody in this house were really concerned in it at all, and that the ends of justice did not require that you should be brought into it, I do not see why it would be necessary to go to the police. If you are satisfied with those qualifications, I promise."

"I am," she said promptly. She laughed, a little shakily to be sure, but with a certain air of triumph. "Isn't it unusual," she asked, "for a citizen who has become so interested in a crime as you have in this one to think perhaps he can work it out all by himself without the help of the police—while he is on a holiday?" Mockery was in her eyes and her voice. "You are allowing yourself to get out of character, Mr. Napier, and I had about made up my mind you never did. I am a little surprised at you."

IT was his turn to parrot words: "Out of character?"

"We might as well speak frankly, because I don't want you to think I would be such a fool as to trust every well-mannered Oriental importer that I might meet for the fourth time in my life not to run straight to police headquarters, promise or no promise. I am trusting you because I am quite aware of your reputation for not confusing the innocent with the guilty—and your very wide experience."

He wisely remained silent.

"In Paris, the first time we met," she told him, "I was given quite elaborate details as to your profession and some of your major successes, by an American who knew."

He hoped he was concealing his inner feelings. So she had been amusing herself by her questions about his business.

"You prefer not to admit any connection with the Government, eh?" she said, as he did not answer. "Well, I will not hold that against you. It isn't done, I suppose."

She became serious again, but with her temporary shift from defense to attack (able tactics, Napier admiringly admitted to himself), she had gained self-control, and when she went on, her poise was almost normal. "I am going to tell you, now, exactly what happened Monday night, so far as I know. I shall show you that I really know almost nothing about the murder, and then I shall leave myself in your hands. You will not, I am sure, forget your promise."

Napier bowed gravely, and she continued:

"It was waiting for him to come, sitting very quietly, right here where I am sitting now. I had told him to be here at twelve o'clock, whether he found you or not; I did not want to be out here later than that. As he came through the alley, he was to whistle, very softly, four notes, and then he was to knock four times on the door, and I would open it. I heard his steps, and then the whistle—there were only the footsteps of one, and I supposed he was alone." She looked inquiringly at Napier and he said: "I was some distance behind; he asked me not to walk with him."

"Yes," she nodded. "Naturally; but I supposed you would have joined him outside the alley. I did not think there was any danger of his being observed after you got this far; I supposed he would wait out here in the street for you to come up. When only one came, I was sure he hadn't found you." She smiled a little as she added: "If I had known you were the one who found his body, what an idiot I would have been to give you my address, this noon, and ask you to call!"

"I wondered about that," he admitted. "The paper said, 'The body was discovered by a passing pedestrian.' I didn't know how long afterward it was; the paper didn't say."

HE nodded understanding, and waited for her to go on.

"He whistled," she said. "Four notes. And I got up and went quietly to the gate, waiting for the four knocks. He never gave them."

Her face reflected some of the emotions of the night.

"His footsteps had not quite reached the door, although they were very near,—

he was already stopping,—when I heard a different sound. It was the movement of some one else, not loud, and at the same instant a blow. Then there was a groan and a fall. I shrank back by the door, holding my breath. For a second or two there was no sound at all, and then came a rustling, dragging noise. I think he was moving the body. And then something fell in the yard, right there by the pomegranate bush behind you. There was another groan and more rustling—but only a little. Then the murderer set out toward the other end of the alley. He ran at first, but as he got toward the end, I think he walked. Before that I had slipped over to the pomegranate bush and was groping around for what he had thrown over the wall." She had difficulty in repressing a shudder. "It was a knife—wet."

She paused a moment. "Wet," she repeated. "On my hands, and a little on my dress, and I had sent him on the errand. How would it look to the police? And there was another matter. No one in the house knew I was out here, and I could not explain to them why I was not in bed, as they thought. So—I hid the knife, as quickly as ever I could, and hurried into the house and up to my room, and nobody saw or heard me. Then I went to the bathroom and washed my hands—and the stain on my dress. Nobody suspected I had been out here." She stopped. "And that is all I know about it. On my word of honor."

Napier, his eyes fixed on her face throughout the recital, believed she had spoken the exact truth.

"And the knife?" he asked.

"There was no use trying to bury it," she said. "This ground is too hard, and, anyway, there wasn't time. So I—" She moved her head, indicating a point above him. "I hid it in this tree that we are sitting under. If you were to stand on a chair, as I did, you could reach it."

THE tree was a chinaberry, its foliage quite impenetrable to the eye. "I stood on a chair, and drove the point into a crotch of the tree, between two branches," she said. "I have not seen it since."

"Then it is still there?" he queried, without looking toward it.

"I suppose so. If it had been found, I would surely have heard of it. People in the house said the police were in the yard, later that night, with flashlights, but they searched on the ground. I did not hear or see them. Either I was in the bathroom, getting rid of the stains, or I had gone to bed. Do you wonder, with that knife to explain, and the fact that he was coming here, that I did not want my story to be juggled and blundered over by the police?"

"How many people are in the house at this moment?" Napier asked.

"Unless some one has just come in, no one but the servant you saw. The other one was given an afternoon off to see the parade, and everybody who lives here is out—or was, a few moments ago."

"I am going to put this chair on the other side of the tree-trunk and get the knife," he told her. "I think they cannot see from the house, even if some one has come home and happens to be looking, but I suggest you walk about a bit with me and describe some of the vegetation. That tree over there, for instance. What is it?"

While she played the part he had outlined, he moved about with her. They came, after a while, to the chinaberry tree again. "I never saw thicker foliage," he remarked, looking up into it openly. "Are the branches extraordinarily thick and close together, or is it entirely the leaves that cause the effect?" He shifted the chair, stood upon it and parted the foliage to see for himself, the upper third of his body hidden in the leaves. "Perfectly explainable, if anyone is watching, on the ground of my deep interest in unfamiliar trees and shrubs," he said evenly, as he stepped down and replaced the chair by the table. "Now tell me about that bush over by this side wall." He led the way in that direction.

"The knife?" she whispered.

"In my breast pocket. There was a rather heavy thunderstorm very early yesterday morning."

"You mean—"

"It seems to be washed clean. That undoubtedly means there are no fingerprints left on it—including yours."

SHE sighed with relief. "You don't know how glad I am it is gone from the tree. They might have decided to trim the branches. Well, do you believe I have told you the truth? Is it necessary for you to tell—anybody? You see I really could not help the police at all. The only aid I could have been

to them at any time was to give them the knife, and now you have it. But they would never have believed that I did not know more than I do. Police never believe anything that doesn't prove somebody guilty."

"You haven't told me what you know about Puenta. How did you come to select him for a messenger?"

"He came here on an errand, and I spoke to him as he was leaving, and offered to pay him for finding you. I know very little about him; I had seen him here once or twice, that is all."

"Who had he come to see? That night, I mean."

"I don't know. I saw him as he was coming out. This is a sort of hotel, you know, and I do not know everybody in it very well. I did not ask him who he had come to see. I merely knew he was a sort of errand boy in the neighborhood here. If he could bring a message to others, perhaps he would take one for me. I have no doubt the police know more about him than I do; they wouldn't need to ask me about him at all." He felt sure she had not told him all she knew about Puenta, and surmised that she would not if she could avoid it. She quite obviously wanted to get away from the subject of the little Mexican's personality and played a card (again he admired her cleverness) which she had been saving for a moment like this.

"When we made our little bargain," she said, "you didn't make it a condition that I shouldn't tell anyone who you really are, because, at that minute, you didn't know I knew. Now that I have told you all about it, I am going to give you good measure, to prove—how is it you Americans say it?—to prove that my heart is in the right place. I am going to promise not to say who you are to a soul."

"How many people know it already?" he asked.

"None, so far as I know."

"You didn't happen to mention it to the friends you were on the plaza with when I drove by, the other night, or to Sastanada, this noon?"

"I have spoken of it to no one. Oh, I suppose it would have been the most natural thing in the world, if I was a talkative, gossipy person, for me to have leaned over to whoever was nearest to me and said: 'Do you see that nice-looking man who bowed to me? That is Napier, of the United States Treasury Department. He is a great smuggler-catcher.' But I didn't. I have found out it is just as well not to tell all one knows. A few secrets, just for oneself, are good to keep."

"AND that matter of not telling all one knows," Napier remarked pleasantly, "brings us to the subject of what it was you wanted to se me about Monday night."

She hesitated. "It wasn't at all an important thing," she said. "Just a thing that came into my mind that I thought I would tell you. I am very impulsive sometimes. It wasn't important at all. If you don't mind, I would like to leave that out."

"But I am afraid I do mind. Our bargain was that you were to tell me the whole story."

"It had no bearing whatever on his death," she said. She stood in thought, weighing, it seemed to him, arguments for and against frankness. He believed, at one moment, that she had about decided either to decline flatly or to invent a plausible substitute for the truth. Then, as she meditated, her eyes narrowed slightly and there came into her face an expression faintly reminiscent of the passion that had marred it when she returned from the telephone.

"It was a sudden impulse," she said. "I don't often act on impulse, but that night— I saw you, and remembered your work, and wondered what you were doing here in San Antonio. And I happened, quite by accident, to have heard a whisper as to a violation of your customs laws. I cannot tell you how I heard it. I mean I will not tell, because that would bring friends into it, who mentioned it merely in the way of gossip and oughtn't to be dragged in. It was about some people who are interested in smuggling opium. So, just because you would like to know, and —and you looked friendly and reminded me of old times when I saw you—I thought I would get you word."

Napier felt positive of two things as he watched her face. One was that she was speaking the truth when she said she had sent for him to give him the information she outlined; the other was that the lame explanation she was giving of why she was going to give it to him was absolutely false.

"You can tell me now," he said.

"I will," she decided. "But I cannot tell you more than the bare fact without

letting you know how I came to hear it, and that would involve others. So I shall not say a word further than to tell you who the people are, and you will be able to get the evidence easily enough, yourself. If I am not mistaken, a search—"

"Yes?" he encouraged her, thinking of Kalat and the Chinaman at "the great house."

"The man is a retired officer of the United States army. He lives at a little hotel called the Edgemont, and his name is Captain Glenn."

Napier masked his surprise. "You said 'people,'" he reminded her. "Who else?"

"He has a daughter," she told him.

With this he had to be content. She would not answer another question.

CHAPTER XVI

BACK in his hotel room, Napier took the knife out of his pocket and examined it carefully. It was a nasty-looking weapon, with a thin, keen blade, but there was nothing especially distinctive about it. A Mexican might have owned it, or a Chinaman, or a Sicilian, or any other national, for that matter, whose preference in weapons was edged ones. He put it away carefully and went down to dinner, after which he was at police headquarters in time to see Villabosa start on his unwilling journey.

Captain Dalton was accompanied by Ranger Hard, a young man who, twenty years hence, if he survived the wear and tear of his profession so long, would be of a similar type to Dalton. Hard bore out, in the presence of Villabosa, the mention that Dalton had made of his probable dissatisfaction at being called upon to leave San Antonio and a girl—a condition of mind that would not make him friendly toward the prisoner who had forced him to make the trip, but he grumbled as to the errand only once, and then apparently not at all for Villabosa's benefit. Before the Mexican had been brought into the office, however, Napier had not observed that Hard was suffering from any lowness of spirits; if he had a girl in San Antonio he did not seem to be in despair at leaving her; in fact, it did not seem farfetched from his manner and comment to judge that he rather fancied the work the captain and he were about to undertake.

"Don't you worry," he said, in a brief burst of confidence to the Treasury agent, his head jerking in Dalton's direction with his emphasized words. "He'll have him eating out of our hands before he gets finished. Leave 'em to Cap'n Bob!"

Villabosa entered the back seat of the automobile, unostentatiously, at a rear entrance to the station, and Hard sat beside him. Dalton climbed in behind the wheel, spoke a cheery good night to the chief and Napier, standing at the curb, and let in his clutch. Napier did not see the car after it turned the near-by corner, but he knew that if Villabosa were to see any of his friends as they passed toward the outskirts of town, he would not wave or shout to them—for most excellent and binding reasons.

NAPIER had time on his hands before keeping an appointment, made the evening previous, at the little grocery of Kwong Yet, and he went back to the Bonham and up to his room. There, well satisfied with a day's work well completed, Gordon came to him at ten o'clock, just as he was thinking of starting for the Chinese quarter.

"Another man has relieved me—Carver," he said, "although I doubt if he will have anything to do. However, if our friend moves out of his house for any late calls, he'll be there to trail along and see what's doing. I had a satisfactory afternoon and evening. Not exciting; merely satisfactory."

"No trouble keeping track of him, eh?"

"I had an uneasy time for a while, following him in an automobile; that's always risky, at the distance you have to keep in broad daylight. But I got along all right, and he didn't get wise to being followed."

"What did he do?"

"Had a mighty pleasant afternoon, if my judgment is any good. I'll tell it in detail:

"First, when he came out of the Plaza, he and the fine-looking woman he was with went down the street a block to the entrance of a department store, and she went in. He walked off as if he didn't have any place in particular to go; just sauntered up the street, smoking. When he came to Main Plaza, he drifted into the crowd and listened to the ballyhoos. Watched the crowd around the cane boards and the other games. Went into two of the shows. In other words, gave a mighty correct imi-

tation of a man with nothing on his mind but a willingness to be entertained by the carnival. He kept this up for two hours. Once in a while he looked at his watch. Plain to see he had an appointment later.

"At about half-past three he hired an automobile—one of those public so-much-an-hour cars on the plaza. I was lucky; I knew the driver of another car that stood along there, and knew he could be depended on to use a reasonable degree of horse sense in following, so I hired him. Our friend went to a little hotel over here on the north side of town called the Edgemont. It's a little family place."

"I know where it is," Napier said.

"HE was gone in there twenty minutes. When he came out he had a girl with him—a mighty pretty girl, a good deal younger than the other. Her name is Glenn; I found that out later. They got into the car and took a ride. Went around the North Loop and when they got to Brackenridge Park, on the way back, they turned in there. Drove around slowly in the park, looking at the scenery. Stopped, finally, at the Japanese tea garden. Went in and had tea. So did I.

"Mr. Kalat is a very fascinating gentleman with the ladies, I should say, and he was doing his best to please. Everything was fine and dandy until a couple came in and passed his table. Mexican couple, a man and a woman. They bowed to Kalat and passed on, but he was disturbed about it. It didn't appear why. Perhaps because they saw him with the young lady; at least that looked plausible. Is this Kalat married?"

"If he is, it isn't likely his wife is where she could hear about it."

"The Mexican couple—nice, high-class-looking people, they were—went over to a table in the further corner from Kalat, and the woman left the man after they had given their orders and came over to the telephone. The phone happened to be right near where I was sitting. I don't know whether what she said has any bearing on the case or not, but as long as she mentioned his name—that phony name that you told me this noon he was going under—it is worth repeating, perhaps.

"She called a number, and asked—in Spanish, you understand; I speak it pretty well—if Señora Bonillas could come to the phone. Then she asked who was there. Then she said: 'All right. Will you ask her to come, please?' After a bit she began to explain to somebody that she and her husband had decided not to come home to dinner, and would whoever it was on the other end of the line tell Señora Bonillas, so she wouldn't expect them. She said she didn't dare trust any message to that fool of a servant. And she said—there was something malicious about this, although she said it sweetly enough, or I don't know one single thing about women— She said, 'Who do you suppose I ran into in the tea-room? Señor Sastanada. And the prettiest girl! Ramon'—I suppose Ramon was this woman's husband—'was so envious he would hardly look at me all the time we were having our tea. She was— Why, how stupid I am! It never occurred to me until this minute. It was the same girl he was riding with Monday night, when he left her to join us just before the parade came along. . . . . You'll tell Señora Bonillas, wont you? *Gracias.*'

"WELL, about that time Mr. Kalat and Miss Glenn left, and I beat it out and followed. They rode around in the park a little more, and then came into town and went to the Edgemont. After a while Kalat came out, paid off the chauffeur, and went back. He had dinner there, at seven, with Miss Glenn and her father. I got the names from a friend of mine behind the desk while they were eating. After dinner he went upstairs with them, to their rooms, I suppose. He came down at nine-fifteen, ordered a car by phone, and went home. By now, for all I know, he is tucked up nice and comfy for the night, and I turned the job over to Carver. I'll relieve him again in the morning."

"Where is this house where he is all tucked up for the night?" Napier asked.

"It's a sort of cross between a hotel and a high-grade boarding-house run by this Señora Bonillas I heard the conversation about. In the better part of the Mexican quarter. Respectable enough, in a way, but the Mexicans who stop there do not expect their fellow-guests to pry too much into their business. Just the place to suit a man who did not want to answer many questions. It's at 311 Chiromoya Street."

The third and concluding installment of "The Chinese Label" will appear in the next, the December, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

It Can't Be Done

By Harold Titus

THERE'S just one thing in this peculiar world that can't be done—as this soldier-boy, newly returned from France with his "pooch," discovered.

BUSINESS was bad for the Kettle Real Estate and Investment Company, but it was no worse than Kettle's temper. The whole office had listened while he vented some of his irritability on Jimmy Lawrence, late corporal of artillery, A. E. F., who had been out of uniform and back on his job just one month.

Jimmy had taken the first of the monologue blandly, but when Kettle, on the point of turning away, glanced at the floor and saw protruding from the shelter of the boy's desk the tawny tail of Blix, the wounded war-dog which Jimmy had brought back from France as his single trophy of the big show, he said:

"Another thing: You leave that dog at home hereafter! You've had four weeks to settle down to business, and you haven't made a beginning. The war's over; you aint a hero any more. You get into the harness and do as the rest do. If you're goin' to stay here, you're goin' to settle down. Get that?"

Reference to the dog had sent a flush into Jimmy's freckled cheeks, and when Kettle started back toward his private office, Jimmy rose.

"Just a minute—Kettle," he said with a significant pause where the "Mister" customarily had been.

His employer stopped and faced about, glowering.

"I want you to look out there at that steam-pipe," Lawrence went on, indicating an escape-pipe on the roof of the adjoining building. "I've been looking at it these four weeks you've mentioned. I've been sitting at this desk and making an honest try to pick up the routine where I left it in July, 1917; but the notion that something under my nose is going free has—well, it's grabbed a big part of my goat. That steam is supposed to serve a purpose, as I am, but it's sneaked off, slipped past a valve, and it's wandering up toward God's own blue sky, not giving two whoops in—in your private office—whether school keeps or not.

"That's the way I feel, Kettle."

"What are you driving at?"

"Just this: You expect me to push this job along. The world expects me to push some similar job along. But I don't want to do it. I want to slip out and go my own sweet way." His voice had risen; so had his color. "I stood for a lot of growls in the army—had to, because you can't have an army without 'em. I got my share.

"But I got something else out of the army. I got a notion that jobs like mine, under men like you, are all rotten nonsense. I've a fat hunch that life holds

something else for young fellows besides sitting at a desk and plugging along toward, among other things, old age, where you can't enjoy living. I want change and friends. That's all I want—for a while.

"I've got just one pal—Blix, here." At his name, the great police-dog limped on his slightly misshapen leg from beneath the desk and stood beside Jimmy, looking up unnoticed. "I'm going to keep this pooch with me; and when you ordered him away, it was the last pound that started the old pack-mule bucking.

"I've done a lot of fighting and a little bleeding for other folks recently. Before I did that, I had a notion that the only way to live was to keep fussing with the affairs of other folks, but I found that I was mistaken—among other things I found in France. I want a little more air, a little more elbow-room, a lot more freedom. I don't want to be pestered with other people's troubles.

"You can peddle your job elsewhere. I'm through!"

He moved toward the hat-rack.

"But where are you going?" Kettle asked—a hint of conciliation in his tone, for Jimmy had possibilities.

The boy motioned to the window.

"Look at that steam," he said, smiling again. "It doesn't know. It's sneaked out; it's free. So am I. So long, gang. —Come on, Blix—we're on our way."

And there ended Kettle's first lesson in New Men of America. He learned as Jimmy Lawrence and a few hundred thousand like him have learned, that to shake a young man from the rut into which he has slipped is a dangerous thing—that is, if you value his return to that rut.

THREE days later, on a wonderful July morning, Jimmy Lawrence with Blix beside him tramped along a white Michigan road, headed north and in a hurry. His haste was not that of desperation, not even that of a man under the cross of worry. It was a glad haste, and the light in his blue eyes, the smile on his freckled, unshaven face, were of eager anticipation.

He walked because it was not costly. Alone he could have beaten trains, but Blix complicated matters, and although time was a factor of value, his affection for the big dog was so great that it overrode any annoyance at the delay.

Once, several summers before, Jimmy had spent a brief vacation in that great belt of country which spans Michigan's lower peninsula where once white pine grew, where now the Jack and Norway pines have the solitudes to themselves. There are lakes and rivers, with fish a-plenty; there are swamps with birds and beasts; there are people—very few and very far between; and their lives, though not far from others when measured by miles, are vastly different from the lives lived by usual men. They are isolated.

THIS last held the strongest appeal for Jimmy. When he left Kettle's office, put on his good old army shoes, tucked his slender packet of bills into his shirt pocket and started south from Chicago to circle Lake Michigan and strike up into the Wolverine State, he knew that the big thing which impelled him was to seek refuge from people. For years he had lived among people; for months he had been crowded in barracks and billets; throughout his life he had been more concerned with the troubles of others than with any affair of his own. His job with Kettle had been to handle the tangled transactions of other people; his job in the army had been to offer his life to help solve the difficulties of nations. All of that had been very natural, because Jimmy Lawrence was simply a human being; but now he believed he had earned respite. He wanted to taste life lived in the sole interest of Jimmy Lawrence; and he was in a hurry!

He caught a ride on a motortruck the first day, and that night slept on the seat of another which he found conveniently stalled just outside an Indiana town. The next night he spent in a straw-stack with Blix curled close to his body, and now he was already in a different country, with villages farther apart, the open spaces more expansive. He felt that a new life was before him.

"There wont be any towns after a while, Blix!" he cried, and the dog shoved his cold nose into a hand. "There'll be just woods and waters; there wont even be a railroad within sound. There'll be nobody around to interfere, and life'll be just what we make it—not a human complication!"

He whistled as he walked.

A farmer accosted him, asking if he wanted to pick strawberries.

"Not a berry!"

"Good money in it."

"No use for jack! No use for anything but time, and it's too valuable to waste making money," grinned Jimmy; and the farmer, though a practical man, grinned too.

AT noon Jimmy rapped on a back door, declared need of food and his willingness to work. A woman, broad of hip and shoulder, eyed him skeptically. Reluctantly satisfied, she said that she needed some spading done in the back yard, and in a jiffy the boy was at it.

"Diggin' in for chow!" he chuckled to the dog as the sod rolled back.

While he was so engaged, the woman held discourse across the fence with her neighbor. Their talk was concerned with church politics; it ran into argument, and the temperature of the argument soared until, when the woman set a plate of food out for Jimmy, she was in such humor that she spent time trying to find fault with his faultless work.

"That's what living too close to folks does, Blix," he observed as he shared the meal with his pal. "Other folks' troubles sure make life uncomfortable for this man's army!"

That afternoon he fell in with a boy who was hitting it up for the next town, which was an aspiring place with many factory-stacks belching smoke, and ornamental lights along the main street.

"There's work there," the other explained, "and I just got to get a job."

"Somebody going to go hungry if you don't?" Jimmy asked.

"No, but I been in the army. Been foolin' round long enough, and I just got to settle down and get somewhere."

"I'm going to get somewhere," said Lawrence with a laugh.

"Where's that?"—eagerly.

"Don't know, just. It's a place where there aren't folks around who're so darned concerned about getting somewhere that they don't get any fun out of going."

His companion said no more about the matter, but looked at Jimmy from time to time as though puzzled.

"Worrying about getting ahead?" laughed Jimmy when the other turned off the main street. "Well, so are we, Blix; the longer we're in a place that's thick with people, the longer we're going to delay the fun!"

He came upon a place that appeared to be getting ahead. It was the building, so its ornamental sign indicated, of the W. Hill Gilt-Edge Realty House; and Jimmy remarked to himself that it looked just like that! A man in his shirt-sleeves stood in the florid doorway, cigar uptilted until it almost met the down-tipped brim of his derby, and his black eyes were set greedily on the slim figure of a girl who turned from him and walked down the steps stiffly, carrying a sample-case in either hand and a high flush in her cheeks. She was more than pretty, and the impression created by one glance at her was in great contrast to the coarseness of the man. Jimmy saw the latter turn into the doorway again, and for an unnamed reason experienced a hot resentment. He eyed the details of the overly decorated, flimsy building and the showy gardening about it. The whole place was made for show. He raised his eyes to the sign again and grumbled:

"Gilt-edge—huh! Gold *brick!*"

He looked about to see the girl hastening down the street. Troubled, probably! He shrugged.

AFTERNOON, and the country; but afternoon brought clouds, and as evening approached, they thickened to an ominous mist in the southwest.

"Rain wont stop us, Blix," Jimmy grumbled, "but it'll slow us up. Maybe only hours, but we haven't many hours to squander, fussing in a country filled with folks and difficulty."

The rain started before dusk, gently at first, but with that growing vigor which forecasts a night's downpour. The country in which the two tramped was well settled. On either side of the road were prosperous farms, and some that approached the distinction of estates.

"Too prosperous for a couple of soaked bums!" chuckled the vagrant. "Not a haystack in sight. Not a building that hasn't locks and keys!"

But shortly they rounded a bend, dipped across a concrete bridge that spanned a gentle stream, its surface freckled with raindrops, and came out on a less pretentious place. Next it was a country-club with green bunkers rising from the fairway swards, and across the way was an imposing bungalow. But this was quite different.

The house was tiny, unpainted, the shingles warped and moss-grown. Over the doorway was a woodbine which crept along

the face of the structure, prying loose the clapboards. Behind, in the gloom, he could see a tumble-down stable and berry-bushes in rows, and from the very appearance of this detail it was evident that the acres belonging with the house were not many. His eye lingered on the barn. It was shelter enough, and he walked through the gate to ask permission to avail himself of its roof for the night.

The door was open, and as he stepped to the low porch, an old man who sat at a red-covered table looked up; an old woman, across from him, put her teapot down sharply.

"Who is it, Pa?" she asked querulously.

The man rose and approached. He was thin and bent and wasted, and his sight was not good, for he came close to Jimmy before he said:

"Good evenin', boy. —No, Ma, it aint Harry."

"We were just coming up the road when the rain hit us," Jimmy explained, a hand on the dog's head. "I wondered if we could sleep in your barn to-night."

The old lady had arisen and approached also.

"The barn!" she cried. "Bless you, sonny, you're wet through! Come right in here and dry off, and get somethin' in your stummick!"

Jimmy protested—not that he disliked the idea, but because her welcome was so genuine and the supper-table told of such poverty that he shrank from sharing their few possessions.

"Come right along!" the old man insisted. "Lordy, we've got a boy of our own somewhere!"

Jimmy entered, and the old lady, opening the stove door with her clean checkered apron, thrust more wood into the fire. She drew up an ancient armchair and made him sit close to the oven's hot breath.

"While I get a warm bite," she explained.

The boy protested that he had interrupted their meal, but that had no effect, and while she fried eggs, the old man stood by, talking.

THEIR son, it developed, was in France. Jimmy said he had been there too, and they pounced on him to know if he had known their Harry. He had not. Harry, it seemed, was still in Europe, seeing that the Germans behaved.

"Land, an' you can bet we're as impatient as he is!" the old lady declared, closing the damper. "Aint we, Pa?"

Pa sighed. Indeed they were, he agreed, and Jimmy noticed that in the old eyes was a worry, and about the mouth a worn patience.

"Did you have any troubles about sendin' money to your folks?" Pa asked.

"Not a bit. I haven't any folks."

"Poor boy!" whispered the woman. "But maybe if you had, they'd been fixed like we are. . . . . It was all right, and then Harry got sick and was put in another regiment and some of his papers got lost, an' the money stopped."

"That's hard luck," Jimmy said.

"Yes!" breathed Pa. "Right now, especial, when there's so much trouble about!"

Jimmy glanced at Blix, asleep on the door-mat. Trouble! He shifted in his chair and scratched his chin. He had come out of the rain into trouble!

His clothing dried; the eggs were done, and he sat with the old people to eat fine white bread and jam and real milk, and while he ate, they chattered on in thin, aged voices about their Harry and their hopes of his early return.

In their talk were pauses, and in the pauses both seemed abstracted, worried, with something very definite weighing on their minds. Jimmy glanced at the contented Blix from time to time and wondered how far he could get the next day, and thought about a stream where he had caught trout to his heart's content, and occasionally he did not give close heed when they addressed him.

Nice old people, dear old people! But he did not envy their Harry anything except their devotion; and Jimmy was young and thought himself free, and even that devotion did not impress him deeply. He thought of the boy, returning from France to settle down and run this little farm, staggering under debt, worrying over crops and taxes, walking in a treadmill.

"An' Harry's smart," Pa was saying. "If he was here now, he'd know what to do. For old folks, courts an' lawyers an' the like are a mite confusin'."

"Courts?" Jimmy asked the question more to be polite than because his interest was real.

"Yes, you see it's about our mortgage," Pa explained. "It was in court yesterday. So we heard."

Another silence in which the old couple kept their eyes on their plates.

"We've never had a mortgage—before," the woman said.

"An' this wouldn't be botherin' us, Ma, if Harry's papers hadn't got lost, or if he was here—either one."

JIMMY looked from one to the other. Yes, trouble was real enough for them!

"You see, we was dependin' on that money," the man explained. "Harry took care of us when he was here, an' he was helpin' us with money from the army. Then it stopped, an' when he was in York State, just ready to go on a boat, he asked us to come see him an' say good-by. We just *had* to, but it cost a lot. Then Ma was sick, and the horse died, and we had to get this new stove, and what with the berries failin' last summer, we had to borrow money."

"And get a mortgage," added Ma.

"I see," was Jimmy's comment. He looked at Blix again and saw one amber eye on him. To-morrow, he thought, they could make twenty-five miles without trouble.

"Mr. Hill aint a hard man," Pa went on, and Jimmy was suddenly aware that these two were actually bursting with trouble, so filled with it that they must talk to him, a stranger. "He was real kind when he give me the money. Even wanted to buy the place before that. I don't think he'd turn us out!

"I don't think Mr. Hill would be hard, even if he did go to court. He warned me he'd have to, that he'd be obleeged to."

"He's a banker?" Jimmy asked.

"No. Sometimes I wished we'd went to a bank, but I don't know much about banks. Harry would. Mr. Hill's a real-estate man. He has lots of mortgages. He knows honest folks always pay their debts, an' I don't think—"

The boy's mind went back to that sign, "W. Hill Gilt-Edge Realty House," and the man with greedy eyes—and the girl.

"Just as soon as Harry's money comes, we can pay it all," Ma said seriously—then sighed sharply. "It'll come sometime, Pa. It might be in the morning mail, even!" She rose to gather the dishes. Jimmy insisted on wiping while she washed, and as he helped, he complimented the old lady on her housewifery. He said he envied Harry, having such a mother.

"Just like our boy!" she cried. "Always payin' his ma compliments!"

She looked away quickly, then. Harry liked his old father and mother, she went on after a moment. He liked the place. That was one reason they hadn't sold when Mr. Hill wanted to buy: Harry would miss his old home when he came back. Of course, they couldn't buy another place that would make a home for them with what he had offered, because everything, even land, was so high. It was mortgaged now, but they must keep it for Harry. And they must have a roof over their own heads. No, Mr. Hill couldn't be a hard man. He was real interested when they told him they couldn't sell because of Harry. That was why, when they had to have money, they had gone to him.

WHEN the work was finished, Jimmy told them some stories of the army, and kept on talking until they laughed heartily; and when they showed him to his bed—Harry's bed—up close under the roof, he felt that he had done something to make them forget their troubles.

It was with a sigh of relief that he dropped into the clean sheets. He felt sorry for those old people; but, he told himself, that was life. He was going away from such things as fast as he could. And while the patter of rain on the shingles lulled him to sleep, he smiled, picturing the delightful country, the delightful possibilities that awaited him.

It was a low sound that roused him, but he sat up, startled. The rain still fell, and light filtered through the circle of round holes in the guard about the stovepipe which passed through his room. Through them, too, came the sound. It was a sob, a low, breath-catching sob.

Jimmy got out of bed. The sob came again, and then he heard the old man's voice. He tiptoed to the stovepipe and peered down.

They stood together, the woman with her face in the clean apron, the man, helpless, with his arms about her and his wet face lifted, as if in appeal.

"It'll come out all right," he said in an unsteady voice. "Mr. Hill aint a bad man."

"But he told you we'd have to pay, Pa. I'm afraid—I'm afraid."

"Yes, he said we'd have to pay. An'—"

"But it's due—was due last week, an' we can't pay. I've kept up best I could, but it seemed to me to-night my heart would break. If Harry would only come!

"It's all we've got in the world, Pa!

It's all we've ever had. Harry was born in that room. He grew up under these trees. We've been sick an' happy under this roof. We had our silver-weddin' here—the three of us. We've never had anything but this, but it was enough—to make us content—

"Why, what'll Harry think when there's nothin' left for him to come to? Where'll we go, Pa? We can't go to the poor—the poorhouse!"

"Oh, it wont be that bad!" he cried in a voice which was more of fright than assurance. "You rest on that, Ma. It wont be that bad!"

"But I don't know, Pa. I'm afraid."

Tears drowned her voice.

Jimmy watched until the old man coaxed her off to bed, then crawled back to Harry's pillow, a lump in his throat.

"Damn the world!" he said.

WHEN Corporal Lawrence awoke the following morning, it was with a grin. The little hole in the roof which had allowed a few drops to come through last night now let in a beam of early sunshine. He stretched luxuriously. No dust, good walking, feeling fit! One thought only: big places, and things as his own hands might shape them!

He was buckling his belt when he remembered what he had seen and heard the night before. The smile vanished from his face.

"It can't be helped," he muttered. "If I had the money, I'd give it to 'em without a whisper. By George, I'll leave 'em all I *have* got! I'll have to work a day or two somewhere, but that's nothing!"

That part of him which had wanted to dwell on the difficulties of these people was partly satisfied, at least quieted, by that idea; and breakfast was a delight—that is, the food was a delight. Though the old man tried to be kindly and interested in his guest, his efforts were forced and badly counterfeit. Jimmy, having dismissed their simple tragedy from his thoughts, was planning on the day's hike, impatient to be gone, for those hours that he must work for money would delay his plans.

An automobile stopped before the gate.

"Who is it, Ma?" the man asked.

"I declare, it's Mr. Hill!" the old lady whispered. "Here he comes, with another man. Pa, I wonder— He seemed like a good man, Pa!"

The caller was the man Jimmy had characterized as a gold-bricker yesterday. He thumped on the door, and both old people went trembling to answer.

"Well, Thomas, I guess it's all over," Hill said brusquely. "I have my obligations to meet as well as you have yours. I'm sorry for you, but there's no other way round it. The court issued an order to foreclose yesterday, and I guess we'll have to ask you to get out."

For a moment no one moved. Jimmy thought the old people even ceased breathing, they were so still in the face of this calamity.

Slowly Pa raised a hand in feeble gesture.

"You're—you mean, Mr. Hill, we've got to move out?"

"Sorry. That's what it amounts to. Too bad, but there's others that are in worse fix."

"But our Harry—"

The old lady could go no further. She choked and turned away.

"When?"

The old man framed the question as though he dreaded to know, yet dreaded to delay knowing.

"Well, this's dated yesterday. Here, read it if you don't believe me." He thrust the document into Pa's hands, who stood looking down at it dumbly, thumbing the paper.

"I don't know much about such things, Mr. Hill. I've trusted you. I've—I never went to a lawyer or to a court. I aint an educated man. I thought you would do—what's right. Some folks said to get a lawyer, but I didn't. You was so kind, when you lent us the money—"

"Too bad—too bad!" Hill said, without sympathy in tone or manner. "You can't pay, and I can't wait. There's only one thing to do: you'll have to get out this week. I'll give you that long. That means by to-morrow."

JIMMY had listened without comment or movement, but now he rose and walked across to the old man; without a word he took the paper.

"Who are you?" demanded Hill, suddenly belligerent.

"Nobody, much. I'm only a guy that wants to find out your game."

"Give me that fore—"

Hill snatched at the document, but Jimmy turned away.

"Not so fast, old-timer. Don't get hard with me so soon! You may have to later. . . . . 'Three hundred dollars.'" Read-ing, he retreated along the porch, Hill fol-lowing.

"Give it to me. You've no business with that. It's a legal matter!"

"So I understand. That's why I want to see it. Three hundred dollars, you thug!"

"Yes, three—"

"And with that, and that!"—indicat-ing the country-club adjoining, the luxu-rious country-home across the way. "Why, you make *Shylock* seem like a piker."

"None of your—"

But Jimmy had shaken out the folds, and his practiced eye sought the paragraph he wanted.

"'Ninety days from date,'" he read, and with a laugh he tossed the paper to the in-furiated Hill. "—Ninety days, you have!" he said to Pa, turning and clapping him on the shoulder. "Ninety days to raise the money in!"

"That's a lie!" raged Hill. "You'll get out to-day or—"

"*You'll* get out now, or we'll tangle in the flower-beds!" cried Jimmy, stepping forward. Hill did not move, and the other man who had come with him advanced menacingly.

"We'll beat the life out of you, kid!" he muttered. "You clear out of this and leave us alone, or we'll—"

"Do what?"

"This!" snarled the other, and he and Hill rushed at Jimmy, fists clenched.

The boy squared himself for the unfair shock. Ma lifted her voice in a crackling cry, and then—

Blix had thrown himself before his pal and stood stiff and ready, ears back and teeth bared.

The men checked themselves; Hill even drew back a frightened step.

Jimmy permitted himself a broad grin as he lowered his hands.

"If I say the word, this pooch'll make you two think you're the boche at Château-Thierry. You'd like this place, Hill; you want it so bad you wont take honest means to get it, but you're not goin' to get it. You're goin' to get out, both of you!"

HE did not even watch them withdraw, but turned back to the old people. Ma was crying on her husband's thin shoulder, and there were tears in the man's eyes.

"I don't understand it," he said, pathet-ically bewildered.

"Just this:" Jimmy explained. "Hill wants your property, because anything in this neighborhood is a good thing. He wanted to buy, but when you wouldn't sell but needed money, he saw another way. He knows you'll be able to take care of the mortgage soon, and he wanted to get you out in a hurry.

"Don't you worry. We've got ninety days, and that's a long time. Harry may be home before then; you may get his money any time. Lots of things may happen, but I'm goin' to stay right here to see that the *right* thing happens."

"Stay here?" quavered the woman.

"Right here—Blix and I."

"But—but you can't. You had other plans. You said last night you was goin' some place and in a hurry. Where were you going, boy?"

Jimmy sat down on the step slowly and took Blix's muzzle between his palms.

"This dog and I—why, we started out to walk away from other folks' troubles just as fast as we could," he said to her; then to Blix: "But it can't be done, buddy—it can't be done!"

"AFTER THE MANNER OF ASIA," a thrilling novelette by H. Bedford-Jones,—the man who wrote "The Cruise of the Pelican," "Official Business," "Never Run from a Sikh" and many other brilliant stories,—will appear in the next, the December, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. It will afford you a treat of the most worth-while sort.

The White Moll

The Door Across the Hall

By

Frank L. Packard

RHODA GRAY, a charity-worker known to the underworld as the White Moll, had impersonated a strange woman known as Gypsy Nan in order to prevent a robbery. The real Gypsy Nan had died, unknown; and through a peculiar chain of circumstances Rhoda found herself accused in her own person of the robbery and compelled to assume her impersonation of the dead Gypsy Nan to avoid arrest and certain conviction. . . . This fourth of Frank Packard's brilliant stories describes her further adventures.

IT had been a night of horror—a night without sleep, a night, after the guttering candle had gone out, when the blackness of the garret possessed added terrors created by an imagination which ran riot, and which Rhoda Gray could not control. She could have fled from it, screaming in panic-stricken hysteria—but there had been no other place as safe as that was. *Safe!* The word seemed to plumb the uttermost depths of irony. Safe! Well, it was true, wasn't it?

She had not wanted to return there; her soul itself had revolted against it—but she had dared do nothing else. And all through that night, huddled on the edge of the cot bed, her fingers clinging tenaciously to her revolver as though afraid for even an instant to relinquish it from her grasp, listening, always listening for a footstep that might come up from that dark hall below, the footstep that would climax all the terrors that surged upon her, her mind kept on reiterating, always reiterating those words of the Adventurer—*"Gypsy Nan is Danglar's wife."*

And they were still with her, those words. Daylight had come again, and passed again, and it was evening once more; but those words remained, insensible to change, immutable in their foreboding. And Rhoda Gray, living disguised as Gypsy Nan, shuddered now as she scuffled along a shabby street deep in the heart of the East Side. *She* was Danglar's wife—by proxy. At dawn that morning, when the gray had come creeping into the miserable attic through the small and dirty windowpanes, she had fallen on her knees and thanked God she had been spared that footstep. It was strange! She had poured out her soul in passionate thankfulness, then, that Danglar had not come—and now she was deliberately on her way to seek Danglar himself! But the daylight had done more than disperse the actual, physical darkness of the past night; it had brought, if not a measure of relief, at least a sense of guidance, and the final decision, perilous though it was, which she meant now to put into execution.

THERE was no other way—unless she were willing to admit defeat, to give up everything, her own good name, her father's name, to run from it all and live henceforth in hiding in some obscure place far away, branded in the life she would

have left behind her as a despicable criminal and thief. And she could not, would not, do this while her intuition, at least, inspired her with the faith to believe that there was still a chance of clearing herself. It was the throw of the dice, perhaps—but there was no other way. Danglar, and those with him, were at the bottom of the crime of which she was held guilty. She could not go on as she had been doing, merely in the hope of *stumbling* upon some clue that would serve to exonerate her. There was not time enough for that. Danglar's trap set for herself and the Adventurer last night in old Nicky Viner's room proved that. And the fact that the woman who had originally masqueraded as Gypsy Nan—as she, Rhoda Gray, was masquerading now—was Danglar's wife, proved it a thousandfold more. Rhoda could no longer remain passive, arguing with herself that it took all her wits and all her efforts to maintain herself in the rôle of Gypsy Nan, which temporarily was all that stood between her and prison bars. To do so meant the certainty of disaster sooner or later, and if it meant that, the need for immediate action of an offensive sort was imperative.

And so her mind was made up: Her only chance was to find her way into the full intimacy of the unhallowed band of which Danglar was apparently the head, to search out its lair and its personnel, to reach to the heart of it, to know Danglar's private movements, and to discover where he lived, so that she might watch him. It surely was not such a hopeless task! True, she knew by name and sight scarcely more than three of this crime-clique, but at least she had a starting point from which to work. There was Shluker's junk-shop, where she had turned the tables on Danglar and Skeeny on the night they had planned to make the Sparrow their pawn. It was obvious, therefore, that Shluker himself, the proprietor of the junk-shop, was one of the organization. She was going to Shluker's now.

RHODA GRAY halted suddenly and stared a little way up the block ahead of her. As though by magic a crowd was collecting around the doorway of a poverty-stricken, tumble-down frame house that made the corner of an alleyway. And where but an instant before the street's jostling humanity had been immersed in its wrangling with the push-cart men who lined the curb, the carts were now deserted by everyone save their owners, whose caution exceeded their curiosity—and the crowd grew momentarily larger in front of the house.

Rhoda drew Gypsy Nan's black, greasy shawl a little more closely around her shoulders, and moved forward again. And now, on the outskirts of the crowd, she could see quite plainly. There were two or three low steps that led up to the doorway, and a man and woman were standing there. The woman was wretchedly dressed, but with most strange incongruity she held in her hand, obviously subconsciously, obviously quite oblivious of it, a huge basket full to overflowing with, as nearly as Rhoda Gray could judge, all sorts of purchases, as though out of the midst of abject poverty a golden shower had suddenly descended upon her. The woman was gray, well beyond middle age, and crying bitterly; and her free hand, whether to support herself or with the instinctive idea of supporting her companion, was clutched tightly around the man's shoulders. The man rocked unsteadily upon his feet; he was tall and angular, older than the woman, cadaverous of feature, and miserably thin of shoulder; blood trickled over his forehead and down one ashen, hollow cheek—and above the excited exclamations of the crowd Rhoda Gray heard him cough.

Rhoda glanced around her. Where scarcely a second before she had been on the outer fringe of the crowd, she now appeared to be in the very center of it. Women were pushing up behind her, women who wore shawls as she did, only the shawls were mostly of gaudy colors; and men pushed up behind her, mostly men of swarthy countenance, who wore circlets of gold in their ears.

And then a young man, one whom Rhoda from her years in the Bad Lands as the White Moll recognized as a hanger-on at a gambling-hell in the Chatham Square district, came toward her, plowing his way, contemptuous of obstructions, out of the crowd.

Rhoda Gray, as Gypsy Nan, hailed him out of the corner of her mouth.

"Say, wot's de row?" she demanded.

The young man grinned.

"Somebody pinched a million from de old guy!" He shifted his cigarette with a deft movement of his tongue from one side of his mouth to the other, and grinned again. "Can youse beat it! Accordin' to

him, he had enough coin to annex de whole of Noo Yoik! De moll's his wife. He went out to bell-an'-gone somewhere for a few years huntin' gold while de old girl starved. Den back he comes an' blows in to-day wid his pockets full, an' de old girl grabs a handful, an' goes out to buy up all de grub in sight 'cause she aint had none for so long. An' w'en she comes back, she finds de old geezer gagged an' tied in a chair, an' some guy's hit him a crack on de bean an' flown de coop wid de mazuma. But youse had better get out of here before youse gets run over! Dis aint no place for a skirt like youse. De bulls'll be down here on de hop in a minute, an' w'en dis mob starts sprinklin' de street wid deir fleetin' footsteps, youse are likely to get hurt. See?" The young man started to force his way through the crowd again. "Youse had better cut loose, Mother!" he warned over his shoulder.

IT was good advice. Rhoda Gray took it. She had scarcely reached the next block when the crowd behind her was being scattered pellmell and without ceremony in all directions by the police, as the young man had predicted. She went on. There was nothing that she could do.

Her forehead gathered in little furrows as she walked along. She had weighed the pros and cons of this visit to Shluker a hundred times already; but even so, instinctively to reassure herself lest some apparently minor but nevertheless fatally vital point might have been overlooked, her mind reverted to it again. From Shluker's viewpoint, whether Gypsy Nan was in the habit of mingling with or visiting the other members of the gang or not,—a question to which she could not even hazard a guess,—her visit to-night must appear entirely logical. There was last night—and as a natural corollary, her equally natural anxiety on her supposed husband's account—providing, of course, that Shluker was aware that Gypsy Nan was Danglar's wife.

But even if Shluker did not know her true relation to Danglar, he knew that Gypsy Nan was one of the gang, and as such, he must equally accept it as natural that she should be anxious and disturbed over what had happened. She would be on safe ground either way. She would pretend to know only what had appeared in the papers—in other words, that the police, attracted to the spot by the sound of revolver-shots, had found Danglar handcuffed to the fire-escape of a well-known thieves' resort in an all too well-known and questionable locality.

A smile came spontaneously. It was quite true. That was where the Adventurer had left Danglar—handcuffed to the fire-escape! The smile vanished. The humor of the situation was not long-lived; it ended there. Danglar was as cunning as the proverbial fox; and Danglar, at that moment, in desperate need of explaining his predicament in some plausible way to the police, had, as the expression went, run true to form. Danglar's story, as reported by the papers, even rose above his own high-water mark of vicious cunning, because it played upon a chord that appealed instantly to the police. And it rang true, not only because what the police could find out about him made it likely, but also because it contained a modicum of truth in itself.

IT was ingeniously simple, Danglar's smooth and oily lie! He had been walking along the street, he had stated, when he saw a woman, as she passed under a street-lamp, who he thought resembled the White Moll. To make sure, he followed her—at a safe distance, as he believed. She entered the tenement. He hesitated; he knew the reputation of the place, which bore out his first impression that the woman was the one he thought she was; but he did not want to make a fool of himself by calling in the police until he was positive of her identity, and so he finally followed her inside, and heard her go upstairs, and crept up after her in the dark. And then, suddenly, he was set upon and hustled into a room. It was the White Moll, all right; and the shots came from her companion, a man whom he described minutely—the description being that of the Adventurer, of course. They seemed to think that he, Danglar, was a plain-clothes man, and tried to sicken him of his job by frightening him. And then they forced him through the window and down the fire-escape, and fastened him there with handcuffs to mock the police, and the White Moll's companion had deliberately fired some more shots to make sure of bringing the police to the scene, and then the two of them had run for it.

Rhoda Gray's eyes darkened angrily. The newspapers said that Danglar had been temporarily held by the police, though

his story was believed to be true, for his life, what the police could find out about it, coincided with his own statements. The newspapers had devoted the rest of their space to the villification of the White Moll. They had demanded in no uncertain tones a more conclusive effort on the part of the authorities to bring her, and with her now the man in the case, as they called the Adventurer, to justice, and—

The thought of the Adventurer caused her mind to swerve sharply off at a tangent. Where he had piqued and aroused her curiosity before, he now, since last night, seemed a more complex character than ever. It was strange, most strange, the way their lives, his and hers, had become interwoven. She had owed him much; but last night she had repaid him and squared accounts. She had told him so. She owed him nothing more. If a sense of gratitude had once caused her to look upon him with—with— She bit her lips. What was the use of that! Had it become so much a part of her life, so much a habit, this throwing of dust in the eyes of others, this constant passing of herself off for some one else, this constant deception, warranted though it might be, that she must now seek to deceive herself! Why not frankly admit to her own soul, already in the secret, that she cared in spite of herself—for a thief!

A thief! She loved a thief. She had fought a bitter, stubborn battle with her common sense to convince herself that he was not a thief. She had snatched hungrily at the incident that centered around those handcuffs, so opportunely produced from the Adventurer's pocket. She had tried to argue that those handcuffs not only suggested, but proved, he was a police officer in disguise, working on some case in which Danglar and the gang had been mixed up; and as she tried to argue in this wise, she tried to shut her eyes to the fact that the same pocket out of which the handcuffs came was at exactly the same moment the repository of as many stolen bank-notes as it would hold. She had tried to argue that the fact that he was so insistently at work to defeat Danglar's plans was in his favor; but that argument, like all others, came quickly and miserably to grief. Where the "leak" was, as Danglar called it, that supplied the Adventurer with foreknowledge of the gang's movements, she had no idea, save that perhaps the Adventurer and some traitor in the gang were in collusion for their own ends—and that certainly did not lift the Adventurer to any higher plane.

She clenched her hands. It was all an attempt at argument without the basis of a single logical premise. It was silly and childish! Why, hadn't the man been an ordinary, plain, common thief and criminal—and looked like one? She would never have been attracted to him then even through gratitude!

HER mental soliloquy ended abruptly. She had reached the narrow driveway that led in between the two blocks of down-at-the-heels tenements, to the courtyard at the rear that harbored Shluker's junk-shop. And now, unlike that other night when she had first paid a visit to the place, she made no effort at concealment as she entered the driveway. She walked quickly, and as she emerged into the courtyard itself, she saw a light in the window of the junk-shop.

Rhoda Gray nodded her head. It was still quite early, still almost twilight—not more than eight o'clock. Back there, on that squalid doorstep where the old woman and the old man had stood, it had still been quite light. The long summer evening had served at least to sear, somehow, those two faces upon her mind. It was singular that they should intrude themselves at this moment! She had been thinking, hadn't she, that at this hour she might naturally expect to find Shluker still in his shop? That was why she had come so early—since she had not cared to come in full daylight. Well, if that light meant anything, he was there.

She felt her pulse quicken perceptibly as she crossed the courtyard, and reached the shop. The door was open, and she stepped inside. It was a dingy place, filthy and littered, without the slightest attempt at order, with a heterogeneous collection of every article one could think of, from scraps of old iron and bundles of rags to cast-off furniture in an appalling state of dissolution. The light, that of a single dim incandescent, came from the interior of what was apparently the "office" of the establishment, a small glassed-in partition affair at the far end of the shop.

Her first impression had been that there was no one in the shop, but now, from the other side of the glass partition, she caught sight of a bald head and became aware that a pair of black eyes was fixed steadily upon her.

She scuffled slowly, but without hesitation, up the shop. She intended to employ the vernacular that was part of the disguise of Gypsy Nan. If Shluker, for that was certainly Shluker there, gave the slightest indication that he took it amiss, her explanation would come glibly and logically enough—she had to be careful; how was she supposed to know whether there was anyone else about or not!

"'Ello!" she said curtly as she reached the doorway of the little office and paused on the threshold.

Shifty little black eyes met hers as the bald head, fringed with untrimmed gray hair, was lifted from a battered desk, and the wizened face of an old man was disclosed under the rays of the tin-shaded lamp. He grinned suddenly, showing discolored teeth—and instinctively she drew back a little. He was an uninviting and exceedingly disreputable old creature.

"You, eh, Nan!" he grunted. "So you've come to see old Jake Shluker, have you? 'Taint often you come! And what's brought you, eh?"

"I can read, can't I?" Rhoda Gray glanced furtively around her, then leaned toward the other. "Say, wot's de lay? I been scared stiff all day. Is dat straight wot de papers said about youse-know-who gettin' pinched?"

A scowl settled over Shluker's features.

"Yes; it's straight enough," he answered. "Damn 'em, one and all! But they let him out again."

"Dat's de stuff!" applauded Rhoda Gray earnestly. "Where is he, den?"

Shluker shook his head.

"He didn't say," said Shluker.

"He didn't say?" echoed Rhoda Gray a little tartly. "Wot d'youse mean, he didn't say? Have youse seen him?"

Shluker jerked his head toward the telephone-instrument on the desk.

"He was talkin' to me a little while ago."

"Well, den,"—Rhoda Gray risked a more peremptory tone,—"where is he?"

Shluker shook his head again.

"I dunno," he said. "I'm tellin' you, he didn't say."

RHODA GRAY studied the wizened and repulsive old creature that, huddled in his chair in the dirty, boxed-in little office, made her think of some crafty old spider lurking in its web for unwary prey. Was the man lying to her? Was he in any degree suspicious? Why should he be? He had given not the slightest sign that her uncouth language was either unexpected or unnecessary. Perhaps by Shluker, and perhaps by all the rest of the gang,—except Danglar!—Gypsy Nan was accepted at face value as just Gypsy Nan; and if that were so, the idea of playing up a natural wifely anxiety on Danglar's behalf could not be used unless Shluker gave her a lead in that direction. But all that apart, she was getting nowhere. She bit her lips in disappointment. She had counted a great deal on this Shluker here, and Shluker was not proving the fount of information that she had hoped he would.

She tried again—even more peremptorily than before.

"Aw, open up!" she snapped. "Wot's de use of bein' a clam! Youse heard me, didn't youse? Where is he?"

Shluker leaned abruptly forward and looked at her in a suddenly perturbed way.

"Is there anything wrong?" he asked in a tense, lowered voice. "What makes you so anxious to know?"

Rhoda Gray laughed shortly.

"Nothin'!" she answered coolly. "I told youse once, didn't I? I got a scare readin' dem papers—an' I aint over it yet. Dat's wot I want to know for, an' youse seem afraid to open up!"

Shluker sank back again in his chair with an air of relief.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "Well, that's all right, then. You were beginning to give me a scare too. I aint playin' the clam, and I dunno where he is; but I can tell you there's nothing to worry you any more about the rest of it. He was after the White Moll last night, and it didn't come off. They pulled one on him instead, and fastened him to the fire-escape the way the papers said. Skeeny and the Cricket, who were in on the play with him, didn't have time to get him loose before the bulls got there. So Danglar told them to beat it, and he handed the cops the story that was in the papers. He got away with it, all right, and they let him go to-day; but he phoned a little while ago that they were still stickin' around kind of close to him, and that I was to pass the word that the lid was to go down tight for the next few days, and—"

SHLUKER stopped abruptly as the telephone rang, and reached for the instrument.

Rhoda Gray fumbled unnecessarily with her shawl, as the other answered the call. Failure! A curious bitterness came to her. Her plan, then, for to-night at least, was a failure. Shluker did *not* know where Danglar was. She was quite convinced of that. Shluker was— She glanced suddenly at the wizened little old man. From an ordinary tone, Shluker's voice had risen sharply in protest about something. She listened now:

"No, no; it does not matter what it is. . . . . What? . . . . No! I tell you, no! Nothing! Not to-night! Those are the orders. . . . . No, I don't know! Nan is here now. . . . . Eh? . . . . You'll pay for it, if you do!" Shluker was snarling threateningly now. "What? . . . . Well, then, wait! I'll come over. . . . . No, you can bet I wont be long! You wait! Understand?"

He banged the receiver on the hook, and got up from his chair hurriedly.

"Fools!" he muttered savagely. "No, I wont be long gettin' there!" He grabbed Rhoda Gray's arm. "Yes, and you come too! You will help me put a little sense into their heads, if it is possible—eh? The fools!"

The man was violently excited. He half pulled Rhoda Gray down the length of the shop to the front door. Puzzled, bewildered, a little uneasy, she watched him lock the door, and then followed him across the courtyard, while he continued to mutter constantly to himself.

"Wot's de matter?" she asked him twice.

But it was not until they had reached the street, and Shluker was hurrying along as fast as he could walk, that he answered her.

"It's the Pug and Pinky Bonn!" he jerked out angrily. "They're in the Pug's room. Pinky went back there after telephonin'. They've nosed out something they want to put through. The fools! And after last night nearly havin' finished everything! I told 'em—you heard me—that everybody's to keep under cover now. But they think they've got a soft thing, and they say they're goin' to it. I've got to put a crimp in it, and you've got to help me. Y'understand, Nan?"

"Yes," she said mechanically.

HER mind was working swiftly. The night, after all, perhaps, was not to be so much of a failure! To get into intimate touch with all the members of the clique was equally one of her objects, and failing Danglar himself to-night, here was an open sesame to the retreat of two of the others. She would never have a better chance, or one in which risk and danger, under the chaperonage, as it were, of Shluker here, was, if not entirely eliminated, at least reduced to an apparently negligible minimum. Yes, she would go. To refuse was to turn her back on her own proposed line of action, and on the decision which she herself had made.

It was not far. Shluker, hastening along, still muttering to himself, turned into a cross-street some two blocks away, and from there again into a lane; and a moment later he led the way through a small door in the fence that hung, battered and half open, on sagging and broken hinges. Rhoda Gray's eyes traveled sharply around her in all directions. It was still light enough to see fairly well, and she might at some future time find the bearings she took now to be of inestimable worth. Not that there was much to remark! They crossed a diminutive and disgustingly dirty back yard, whose sole reason for existence seemed to be that of a receptacle for old tin cans, and were confronted by the rear of what appeared to be a four-story tenement. There was a back door here, and on the right of the door, fronting the yard, a single window that was some four or five feet from the level of the ground.

Shluker without hesitation opened the back door, shut it behind them, led the way along a black, unlighted hall, and halting before a door well toward the front of the building, knocked softly upon it—giving two raps, a single rap, and then two more in quick succession. There was no answer. He knocked again in precisely the same manner, and then a footstep sounded from within, and the door was flung open.

"Fools!" growled Shluker in greeting as they stepped inside and the door was closed again. "A pair of brainless fools!"

There were two men there. They paid Shluker scant attention. They both grinned at Rhoda Gray through the murky light supplied by a wheezy and wholly inadequate gas-jet.

"Hello, Nan!" gibed the smaller of the two. "Who let you out?"

"Aw, forget it!" croaked Rhoda Gray.

Shluker took up the cudgels.

"You close your face, Pinky!" he snapped. "Get down to cases! Do you

think I got nothing else to do but chase you two around like a couple of puppy-dogs that haven't got sense enough to take care of themselves? Wasn't what I told you over the phone enough without me havin' to come here?"

"Nix on that stuff!" imperturbably returned the one designated as Pinky. "Say, you'll be glad you come when we lets you in on a little piece of easy money. We aint askin' your advice; all we're askin' you to do is frame up the alibi, same as usual, for me an' the Pug here in case we wants it."

Shluker shook his fist.

"Frame nothing!" he spluttered angrily. "Aint I tellin' you that the orders are not to make a move, that everything is off for a few days? That's the word I got a little while ago, and the 'Seven-Three-Nine' is goin' out now. Nan'll tell you the same thing."

"Sure!" corroborated Rhoda Gray, picking up the obvious cue. "Dat's de straight goods."

THE two men were lounging beside a table that stood at the extreme end of the room, and now for a moment they whispered together. And as they whispered, Rhoda Gray found her first opportunity to take critical stock both of her surroundings and of the two men themselves. Pinky, a short, slight little man, she dismissed with hardly a glance; he was the common type, with low, vicious cunning stamped all over his face—an ordinary rat of the underworld. But her glance rested longer on his companion. The Pug was indeed entitled to his moniker! His face made her think of one. It seemed to be all screwed up out of shape. Perhaps the eye-patch over the right eye helped a little to put the finishing touch of repulsiveness upon a countenance already most unpleasant. The celluloid eye-patch, once flesh-colored, was now so dirty and smeared that its original color was discernible only in spots, and the once white elastic cord that circled his head and kept the patch in place was in equal disrepute. A battered slouch hat came to the level of the eye-patch in a forbidding sort of tilt. His left eyelid drooped until it was scarcely open at all, and fluttered continually. One nostril of his nose was entirely closed; and his mouth seemed to be twisted out of shape, so that even when in repose, the lips never entirely met at one corner. And his ears, what she could see of them in the poor light, and on account of the slouch hat, seemed to bear out the low-type criminal impression the man gave her, in that they lay flat back against his head.

She turned her eyes away with a little shudder of repulsion and gave her attention to an inspection of the room. There was no window, except a small one high up in the right-hand partition wall. She quite understood what that meant. It was common enough, and all too unsanitary enough, in these old and cheap tenements; the window gave not on the out-of-doors, but on a light-well. For the rest, it was a room she had seen a thousand times before—carpetless, unfurnished save for the barest necessities, dirt everywhere, unkempt.

Pinky Bonn broke in abruptly upon her inspection.

"That's all right!" he announced airily. "We'll let Nan in on it too. The Pug an' me figures she can give us a hand."

Shluker's wizened little face seemed suddenly to go purple.

"Are you tryin' to make a fool of me?" he half screamed. "Or can't you understand English? D'ye want me to keep on tellin' you till I'm hoarse that there aint nobody goin' in with you, because you aint goin' in yourself! See? Understand that? There's nothing doin' to-night for *anybody*—and that means you!"

"Aw, shut up, Shluker!" It was the Pug now, a curious whispering sibilancy in his voice, due no doubt to the disfigurement of his lips. "Give Pinky a chance to shoot his spiel before youse injure yerself throwin' a fit! Go on, Pinkie, spill it."

"Sure!" said Pinky eagerly. "Listen, Shluk! It aint any crib we're wantin' to crack, or nothin' like that. It's just a couple of crooks that wont dare open their yaps to the bulls, 'cause what we're after will be what they'll have pinched themselves. See?"

Shluker's face lost some of its belligerency, and in its place a dawning interest came.

"What's that?" he demanded cautiously. "What crooks?"

"French Pete an' Marny Day," said Pinky—and grinned.

"Oh!" Shluker's eyebrows went up. He looked at the Pug, and the Pug winked knowingly with his half-closed left eyelid.

Shluker reached out for a chair, and finding it suspiciously wabbly, straddled it warily. "Mebbe I've been in wrong," he admitted. "What's the lay?"

"Me," said Pinky, "I was down to Charley's this afternoon havin' a little lay-off, an'—"

"One of these days," interrupted Shluker sharply, "you'll go out like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Can't you leave the stuff alone?"

"I got to have me bit of coke," Pinky answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "An', anyway, I'm no pipe-hitter."

"It's all the same, whatever way you take it!" retorted Shluker. "Well, go on with your story. You went down to Charley's dope parlors, and jabbed a needle into yourself, or took it some other old way. I get you! What happened then?"

"It was about an hour ago," resumed Pinky Bonn with undisturbed complacency. "Just as I was beatin' it out of there by the cellar, I hears some whispering as I was passin' one of the end doors. Savvy? I hadn't made no noise, an' they hadn't heard me. I gets a peek in, 'cause the door's cracked. It was French Pete an' Marny Day. I listens. An' after about two seconds I was goin' shaky for fear some one would come along an' I wouldn't get the whole of it. Take it from me, Shluk, it was some goods!"

Shluker grunted. "Well, go on!" he prompted.

"I didn't get all the fine points," grinned Pinky; "but I got enough. There was a guy by the name of Dainey who used to live somewhere on the East Side here, an' he used to work in some sweat-shop, an' he worked till he got pretty old, an' then his lungs, or something, went bad on him, an' he went broke. An' the doctor said he had to beat it out of here to a more salubrious climate. Some nut filled his ear full 'bout gold-huntin' up in Alaska, an' he fell for it. He chewed it over with his wife, an' she was for it too, 'cause the doctor'd told her her old man would bump off if he stuck around here, an' they hadn't any money to get away together. She figured she could get along workin' out by the day till he came back a millionaire; an' old Dainey started off.

"I dunno how he got there. I'm just fillin' in what I hears French Pete an' Marny talkin' about. I guess mostly he beat his way there ridin' the rods; but anyway, he got there. See? An' then he goes down sick there again; an' a hospital, or some outfit, has to take care of him for a couple of years; an' back here the old woman got kind of feeble an' on her uppers, an' there was hell to pay, an'—"

"WOT'S bitin' youse, Nan?" The Pug's lisping whisper broke sharply in upon Pinky Bonn's story.

Rhoda Gray started. She was conscious now that she had been leaning forward, staring in a startled way at Pinky as he talked; conscious now that for a moment she had forgotten—that she was Gypsy Nan. But she was mistress of herself on the instant, and she scowled blackly.

"Mabbe it's me soft heart dat's touched!" she flung out acidly. "Youse close yer trap, an' let Pinky talk!"

"Yes, shut up!" said Pinky. "What was I sayin'? Oh, yes! An' then the old guy makes a strike. Can you beat it! I dunno nothing about the way they pull them things, but he's off by his lonesome out somewhere, an' he finds gold, an' stakes out his claim, but he takes sick again an' can't work it, an' it's all he can do to get back alive to civilization. He keeps his mouth shut for a while, figurin' he'll get strong again, but it aint no good, an' he gets a letter from the old woman tellin' how bad she is, an' then he shows some of the stuff he'd found. After that there's nothing to it! Everybody's beatin' it for the place; but at that, old Dainey comes out of it all right, an' goes crazy with joy 'cause some guy offers him twenty-five thousand bucks for his claim, an' throws in the expenses home for good luck. He gets the money in cash, twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills, an' the chicken-feed for the expenses, an' starts for back here an' the old woman. But this time he don't keep his mouth shut about it when he'd have been better off if he had. See? He was tellin' about it on the train. I guess he was tellin' about it all the way across. But anyway, he tells about it comin' from Philly this afternoon, an' French Pete an' Marny Day happens to be on the train, an' they hears it, an' frames it up to. annex the coin before morning, 'cause he's got in too late to get the money into any bank to-day."

Pinky Bonn paused, and stuck his tongue significantly in his cheek.

Shluker was rubbing his hands together now in a sort of unctuous way.

"It sounds pretty good," he murmured; "only there's Danglar—"

"Youse leave Danglar to me!" broke in the Pug. "As soon as we hands one to dem two boobs an' gets de cash, Pinky can beat it back here wid de coin an' wait fer me while I finds Danglar an' squares it wid him. He aint goin' to put up no holler at dat. We aint runnin' de gang into nothing. Dis is private business—see? So youse just take a sneak wid yerself, an' fix a nice little alibi fer us so's we wont be takin' any chances."

Shluker frowned.

"But what's the good of that?" he demurred. "French Pete and Marny Day will see you anyway."

"Will dey!" scoffed the Pug. "Guess once more! A coupla handkerchiefs over our mugs is good enough fer dem, if *youse* holds yer end up. An' dey wouldn't talk fer publication, anyway, would dey?"

Shluker smiled now—almost ingratiatingly.

"And how much is my end worth?" he inquired softly.

"One of dem thousand-dollar engravin's," stated the Pug promptly. "Pinky'll run around an' slip it to youse before mornin'."

"All right," said Shluker after a moment. "It's half-past eight now. From nine o'clock on, you can beat any jury in New York to it that you were both at the same old place—as long as you keep decently under cover. That'll do, wont it? I'll fix it. But I don't see—"

RHODA GRAY, as Gypsy Nan, for the first time projected herself into the discussion. She cackled suddenly in jeering mirth.

"I t'ought something was wrong wid her!" whispered the Pug with mock anxiety. "Mabbe she aint well! Tell us about it, Nan!"

"When I do," she said complacently, "mabbe *youse'll* smile out of de *other* corner of dat mouth of yers!" She turned to Shluker. "Youse needn't lay awake waitin' fer dat thousand, Shluker, 'cause youse'll never see it. De little game's all off—'cause it's already been pulled. See? Dere was near a riot as I passes along a street goin' to yer place, an' I gets piped off to wot's up, an' it's de same story dat Pinky's told, an' de crib's cracked, an' de money's gone—dat's all."

Shluker's face fell.

"I said you were fools when I first came in here!" he burst out suddenly, wheeling on Pinky Bonn and the Pug. "I'm sure of it now. I was wonderin' a minute ago how you were goin' to keep your lamps on Pete and Marny from here, or know when they were goin to pull their stunt, or where to find 'em."

Pinky Bonn, ignoring Shluker, leaned toward Rhoda Gray.

"Say, Nan, is that straight?" he inquired anxiously. "You sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure!" Rhoda Gray asserted tersely. The one thought in her head now was that her information would naturally deprive these men here of any further interest in the matter, and that she would get away as quickly as possible, and in some way or other, see that the police were tipped off to the fact that it was French Pete and Marny Day who had taken the old couple's money. Those two old faces rose before her again now—blotting out most curiously the face of Pinky Bonn just in front of her. She felt strangely glad—glad that she had heard all of old Dainey's story, because she could see now another ending to it than the miserable, hopeless one of despair that she had read in the Daineys' faces just a little while ago. "Sure, I'm sure!" she repeated with finality.

"How long ago was it?" prodded Pinky.

"I dunno," she answered. "I just went to Shluker's, an' den we comes over here. Youse can figure it fer herself."

And then Rhoda Gray stared at the other—with sudden misgiving. Pinky Bonn's face was suddenly wreathed in smiles.

"I'll answer you now, Shluk," he grinned. "What do you think? That we're nuts, me an' Pug! Well, forget it! We didn't have to stick around watchin' Pete an' Marny; we just had to wait until they had collected the dough. That was the most trouble we had—wonderin' when that would be. Well, we don't have to wonder any more. We know now that the cherries are ripe. See? An' now we'll go an' pick em! Where? Where d'ye suppose? Down to Charley's, of course! I hears 'em talkin' about that too. They aint so foolish! They're out for an alibi themselves. Get the idea? They was to sneak out of Charley's without anybody seein' 'em, an' if everything broke right for 'em, they was to sneak back again an' spend the night there. No, they aint so foolish—I guess

they aint! There aint no place in New York you can get in an' out of without nobody knowin' it like Charley's, if you know the way, an'—"

"Aw, write de rest of it down in yer memoirs!" interposed the Pug impatiently—and moved toward the door. "It's all right, Shluker—all de way. Now, everybody beat it, an' get on de job. Nan, youse sticks wid Pinky an' me."

Rhoda Gray, her mind in confusion, found herself being crowded hurriedly through the doorway by the three men. Still in a mentally confused condition, she found herself, a few minutes later,—Shluker having parted company with them,—walking along the street between Pinky Bonn and the Pug. She was fighting desperately to obtain a grip upon herself. The information she had volunteered had had an effect diametrically opposite to that which she had intended. She seemed terribly impotent—as though she were being swept from her feet and borne onward by some swift and horrible current, whether she would or no.

THE Pug, in his curious whisper, was talking to her:

"Pinky knows de way in. We don't want any row in dere, on account of Charley. We aint for puttin' his place on de rough, an' gettin' him raided by de bulls. Charley's all to de good. See? Well, dat's wot 'd likely happen if me an' Pinky busts in on Pete an' Marny widout sendin' in our visitin'-cards first, polite-like. Dey would pull dere guns, an' though we'd get de coin just de same, dere'd be hell to pay fer Charley, an' de place'd go up in fireworks right off de bat. Well, dis is where youse come in. Youse are de visitin'-card. Youse gets into deir bunk-room, pretendin' youse have made a mistake, an' youse leaves de door open behind youse. Dey don't know youse, an' bein' a woman, dey wont pull no gun on youse. An' den youse breaks it gently to dem dat dere's a coupla gents outside, an' just about den dey looks up an' sees me an' Pinky an' our guns—an' I guess dat's all. Get it?"

"Sure!" mumbled Rhoda Gray.

The Pug talked on. She did not hear him. It seemed as though her brain ached literally with an acute physical pain. What was she to do? What could she do? She must do something! There *must* be some way to save herself from being drawn into the very center of this vortex toward which she was being swept closer with every second that passed. Those two old faces, haggard in their despair and misery, rose before her. She felt her heart sink. She had counted, only a few moments before, on getting their money back for them—through the police. The police! How could she get any word to the police now, without first getting away from these two men here? And suppose she did get away, and found some means of communicating with the authorities; it would be Pinky Bonn here, and the Pug, who would fall into the meshes of the law quite as much as would French Pete and Marny Day; and to have Pinky and the Pug apprehended now, just as they seemed to be opening the gateway for her into the inner secrets of the gang, meant ruin to her own hopes and plans. And to refuse to go on with them now, as one of them, would certainly excite their suspicions—and suspicion of Gypsy Nan was the end of everything for her.

Her hands, under her shawl, clenched until the nails bit into her palms. *Couldn't* she do anything? And there was the money, too, for those two old people. Wasn't there any— She caught her breath. Yes, yes! Perhaps there *was* a way to save the money—yes, and at the same time to place herself on a firmer footing of intimacy with these two men here—if she went on with this. She would play Gypsy Nan now without reservation. These two men here, like Shluker, were obviously ignorant that Gypsy Nan was Danglar's wife; so she was—

Pinky Bonn's hand was on her arm. She had stumbled.

"Look out for yourself!" he cautioned under his breath. "Don't make a sound!"

They had drawn into a very dark and narrow area-way between two buildings, and now Pinky kept his touch upon her as he led the way along. What was this "Charley's"? She did not know, except that, from what had been said, it was a drug-dive of some kind, patronized extensively by the denizens of the underworld. She did not know where she was now, save that she had suddenly left one of the out-of-the-way East Side streets.

Pinky halted suddenly, and bending down, lifted up what was evidently a half-section of the folding trapdoor to a cellar entrance.

"There's only a few of us regulars wise to this," whispered Pinky. "Watch your-

self! There's five steps. Count 'em, so's you wont trip. Keep hold of me all the way. An' nix on the noise, or we wont get away with it inside. Leave the trap open, Pug, for our get-away. We aint goin' to be long. Come on!"

It was horribly dark. Rhoda Gray, with her hand on Pinky Bonn's shoulder, descended the five steps. She felt the Pug keeping touch behind by holding the corner of her shawl. They went forward softly, slowly, stealthily. She felt her knees shake a little, and suddenly panic seized her, and she wanted to scream out. What was she doing? Where was she going? Was she mad, that she had ventured into this trap of blackness? Blackness! It was hideously black. She looked behind her. She could not see the Pug, who was there; but dark as she had thought it outside there at the cellar-entrance, by contrast now it had been light; she could even distinguish the opening through which they had come.

They were in a cellar that was damp underfoot; the soft earth deadened all sound as they walked upon it—and they seemed to be walking on interminably. It was too far—much too far! She felt her nerve failing her. She looked behind her again. That opening, still discernible to her straining eyes, beckoned her, lured her. Better to—

Pinky had halted again. She bumped into him. And then she felt his lips press against her ear.

"Here we are!" he breathed. "They got the end room on the right, so's they could get in an' out without bein' seen, an' so's even Charley'd swear they was here all the time. You're too old a bird to fall down, Nan. If the door's locked, knock—an' give 'em any old kind of a song an' dance till you gets 'em off their guard. The Pug an' me'll see you through. Go to it!"

Before Rhoda Gray could reply, Pinky had stepped suddenly to one side. A door in front of her, a sliding door it seemed to be, opened noiselessly, and she could see a faintly lighted, narrow and very short passage ahead of her. It appeared to make a right-angled turn just a few yards in, and what light there was seemed to filter in from around the corner. On each side of the passage, before it made the turn, there was a door, and from the one on the right, through a cracked panel, a tiny thread of light seeped out.

Her lips moved silently. After all it was not so perilous. Nobody would be hurt. Pinky and the Pug would cover those two men in there—and take the money—and run for it—and—

The Pug gave her an encouraging push from behind.

She moved forward mechanically. There were many sounds now, but they came muffled and indeterminate from around that corner ahead—all save a low murmuring of voices from the door with the cracked panel on the right.

It was only a few feet. She found herself crouched before the door—but she did not knock upon it. Instead, her blood seemed suddenly to run cold in her veins, and she beckoned frantically to her two companions. She could see through the crack in the panel. There were two men in there, French Pete and Marny Day undoubtedly, and they sat on opposite sides of a table, on which a lamp burned; one of the men was counting out a sheaf of crisp yellow-back bank-notes—but the other, while apparently engrossed in the first man's occupation, and while he leaned forward in apparent eagerness, was edging one hand stealthily toward the lamp, and his other hand, hidden from his companion's view by the table, was just drawing a revolver from his pocket. There was no mistaking the man's murderous intentions. A dull horror seized upon Rhoda Gray; the brutal faces under the rays of the lamp seemed to assume the aspect of two hideous gargoyles, and to spin around and around before her vision; and then—it could have been but the fraction of a second since she had begun to beckon to Pinky and the Pug—she felt herself pulled unceremoniously away from the door, and the Pug leaned forward in her place, his eyes to the crack in the panel.

She heard a low, quick-muttered exclamation from the Pug; and then suddenly that crack of light in the panel had vanished. But in an instant, curiously like a jagged lightning-flash, it showed through the darkness again—and vanished again. It was the flash of a revolver-shot from within, and the roar of the report came now like the roll of thunder on its heels.

Rhoda Gray was back against the opposite wall. She saw the Pug fling himself against the door. It was a flimsy affair, and crashed inward. She heard him call to Pinky:

"Put yer flash on de table, an' grab de coin! I'll fix de other guy!"

Were eternities passing? Her eyes were fascinated by the interior beyond that broken door. A ray of light played now on the table, and a hand reached out and snatched up a scattered sheaf of bank-notes; and on the outer edge of the ray two shadowy forms struggled—and one went down. The light was out again. Again she heard the Pug speak:

"Beat it!"

COMMOTION came now; cries and footsteps from around that corner in the passage. The Pug grasped her by the shoulders and rushed her back into the cellar. She was conscious, it seemed, only in a dazed and mechanical way. There were men in the passage running toward them—and then the passage was utterly black. Pinky Bonn had shut the connecting door.

"Hop it like blazes!" whispered the Pug as they ran for the faint glimmer of light that located the cellar exit. "Separate de minute we're outside!" he ordered. "Dere's murder in dere. Pete shot Marny. I put Pete to sleep wid a punch on de jaw; but de bunch knows now some one else was dere, an' Pete'll swear it was us, though he don't know who we was, dat did de shootin'. I gotta make dis straight right off de bat wid Danglar." His whispering voice was labored, panting; they were climbing up the steps now. "Youse take de money to my room, Pinky, an' wait fer me. I wont be much more'n half an hour. Nan, beat fer yer garret, an' stay dere!"

They were outside. The Pug had disappeared in the darkness. Pinky was closing, and evidently fastening, the trap-door.

"The other way, Nan!" he flung out as she started to run. "That takes you to the other street, an' they can't get around that way without goin' around the whole block. Me for a fence I knows about, an' we gives 'em the merry laugh! Go on!"

She ran—ran breathlessly, stumbling, half falling, her hands stretched out before her to serve almost in lieu of eyes, for she could make out scarcely anything in front of her. She emerged upon a street. It seemed abnormal, the quiet, the lack of commotion, the laughter, the unconcern in the voices of the passers-by among whom she suddenly found herself. She hurried from the neighborhood.

But she had gone many blocks away before calmness came again, and before it seemed, even, that her brain would resume its normal functions; with the numbed horror once gone, however, there came in its place, like some surging tide, a fierce thought that would not be denied. The money! The old couple on that doorstep, stripped of their all! Wasn't that one reason why she had gone on with Pinky Bonn and the Pug? Hadn't she seen a way, or at least an opportunity, to ge that money back?

Rhoda Gray looked quickly about her. On the corner ahead she saw a drugstore, and started briskly in that direction. Yes, there was a way! The idea had first come to her from the Pug's remark to Shluker that, after they had secured the money, Pinky would return with it to the Pug's room, while the Pug would go and square things with Danglar. And also, at the same time, that same remark of the Pug's had given rise to a hope that she might yet trace Danglar to-night through the Pug—but the circumstances and happenings of the last few minutes had shattered that hope utterly. And so there remained the money. And as she had walked with Pinky and the Pug a little while ago, knowing that Pinky would, if they were successful, carry the money back to the Pug's room, just as was being done now precisely in accordance with the Pug's original intentions, she had thought of the Adventurer. It had seemed the only way then; it seemed the only way now—despite the fact that she would be hard put to it to answer the Adventurer if he thought to ask her how, or by what means, she was in possession of the information that enabled her to communicate with him. But she must risk that—put him off, if necessary, through the plea of haste, and on the ground that there was not time to-night for an unnecessary word. He had given her, believing her to be Gypsy Nan, his telephone-number, which she, in turn, was to transmit to the White Moll—in other words herself! But the White Moll, so he believed, had never received that message—and it must of necessity be as the White Moll that she must communicate with him to-night! It would be hard to explain—she meant to evade it. The one vital point was that she remembered the telephone-number he had given her that night when he and Danglar had met in the garret. She was not likely to have forgotten it!

RHODA GRAY, alias Gypsy Nan, scuffled along. Was she inconsistent? The Adventurer would be in his element in going to the Pug's room and in relieving Pinky Bonn of that money; but the Adventurer was a thief too—wasn't he? Why, then, did she propose to trust a thief to recover that money for her?

She smiled a little wearily as she reached the drugstore, stepped into the telephone-booth and gave Central her call. Trust a thief! No, it wasn't because her heart prompted her to believe in him; it was because her head assured her she was safe in doing so. She could trust him in an instance such as this because—well, because once before, for her sake, he had forgone the opportunity of appropriating a certain diamond necklace worth a hundred times the sum that she would ask him to recover to-night. There was no—

She was listening in a startled way now at the instrument. Central had given her Information; and Information was informing her that the number she had asked for had been disconnected.

She hung up the receiver and went out again to the street, a little dazed, a little bewildered, a little helpless. And then suddenly a smile of bitter self-derision crossed her lips. She had been a fool! There was no softer word—a fool! Why had she not stopped to think? She understood now! On the night the Adventurer had confided that telephone-number to her as Gypsy Nan, he had had every reason to believe that Gypsy Nan would, as she had already apparently done, befriend the White Moll even to the extent of accepting no little personal risk in so doing. But since then things had taken a very different turn. The White Moll was now held by the gang, of which Gypsy Nan was supposed to be a member, to be the one who had of late profited by the gang's plans to the gang's discomfiture; and the Adventurer was ranked but little lower in the scale of hatred, as they counted him to be the White Moll's accomplice. Knowing this, therefore, the first thing the Adventurer would naturally do would be to destroy the clue, in the shape of that telephone-number, that would lead to his whereabouts, and which he of course believed he had put into the gang's hands when he had confided in Gypsy Nan. Had he not told her, no later than last night, that Gypsy Nan was her worst enemy? He did not know, did he, that Gypsy Nan and the White Moll were one! And so that telephone had been disconnected—and to-night, now, just when she needed help at a crucial moment, when she had counted upon the Adventurer to supply it, there was no Adventurer, no means of reaching him, and no means any more of knowing where he was!

Rhoda Gray walked on along the street, her lips tight, her face drawn and hard. Failing the Adventurer, there remained—the police. If she telephoned the police and sent them to the Pug's room, they would of a certainty recover the money, and with equal certainty restore it to its rightful owners. She had already thought of that when she had been with Pinky and the Pug, and had been loath even then to take such a step because it seemed to spell ruin to her own personal plans; but now there was another reason, and one far more cogent, why she should not do so. There had been murder committed back there in that underground dive; of that murder Pinky Bonn was innocent; but if Pinky were found in possession of that money, and French Pete, to save his own skin from the consequences of a greater crime, admitted to its original theft, Pinky would be convicted out of hand, for there were the others in that dive, who had come running along the passage, to testify that an attack had been made on the door of French Pete and Marny Day's room, and that the thieves and murderers had fled through the cellar and escaped.

Her lips pressed harder together. And so there was no Adventurer upon whom she could call, and no police, and no one in all the millions in this great pulsing city to whom she could appeal; and so there remained only—herself.

Well, she *could* do it, couldn't she? Not as Gypsy Nan, of course—but as the White Moll. It would be worth it, wouldn't it? If she were sincere, and not a moral hypocrite in her sympathy for those two outraged old people in the twilight of their lives, and if she were not a moral coward, there remained no question as to what her decision should be.

HER mind began to mull over the details. Subconsciously, since the moment she had made her escape from that cellar, she found now that she had been walking in the direction of the garret that sheltered her as Gypsy Nan. In another five minutes she could reach that deserted shed in

the lane behind Gypsy Nan's house where her own clothes were hidden, and it would take her but a very few minutes more to effect the transformation from Gypsy Nan to the White Moll. And then, in another ten minutes, she should be back again at the Pug's room. The Pug had said he would not be much more than half an hour, but as nearly as she could calculate it, that would still give her from five to ten minutes alone with Pinky Bonn. It was enough—more than enough. The prestige of the White Moll would do the rest. A revolver in the hands of the White Moll would insure instant and obedient respect from Pinky Bonn or any other member of the gang under similar conditions. And so—and so—it—would not be difficult. Only there was a queer fluttering at her heart now, and her breath came in hard, short little inhalations. And she spoke suddenly to herself. "I'm glad," she whispered, "I'm glad I saw those two old faces on that doorstep, because—because, if I hadn't, I—I would be afraid."

The minutes passed. The dissolute figure of an old hag disappeared, like a deeper shadow in the blackness of the lane, through the broken door of a deserted shed; presently a slim, neat little figure, heavily veiled, emerged. Again the minutes passed. And now the veiled figure let itself in through the back door of the Pug's lodging-house and stole softly down the dark hall, and halted before the Pug's door.

It was the White Moll now.

FROM under the door, at the ill-fitting threshold, there showed a thin line of light. Rhoda Gray, with her ear against the door-panel, listened. There was no sound of voices from within. Pinky Bonn, then, was still alone, and still waiting for the Pug. She glanced sharply around her. There was only darkness. Her gloved right hand was hidden in the folds of her skirt; she raised her left hand and knocked softly upon the door—two raps, one rap, two raps. She repeated it. And as it had been with Shluker, so it was now with her. A footstep crossed the floor within; the key turned in the lock; and the door was flung open.

"All right, Pug," said Pinky Bonn, "I—"

The man's words ended in a gasp of surprised amazement. With a quick step forward, Rhoda Gray was in the room. Her revolver, suddenly outflung, covered the other; and her free hand, reaching behind her, closed and locked the door again.

There was an almost stupid look of bewilderment on Pinky Bonn's face.

Rhoda Gray threw back her veil.

"My Gawd!" mumbled Pinky Bonn—and licked his lips. "The White Moll!"

"Yes!" said Rhoda Gray tersely. "Put your hands up over your head, and go over there and stand against the wall—with your face to it!"

Pinky Bonn, like an automaton moved purely by mechanical means, obeyed.

Rhoda Gray followed him, and with the muzzle of her revolver pressed into the small of the man's back, felt rapidly over his clothes with her left hand for the bulge of his revolver. She found and possessed herself of the weapon, and stepping back, ordered him to turn around again.

"I haven't much time," she said icily. "I'll trouble you now for the cash you took from Marny Day and French Pete."

"My Gawd!" he mumbled again. "You know about that!"

"*Quick!*" she said imperatively. "Put it on the table there, and then go back again to the wall!"

Pinky Bonn fumbled in his pocket. His face was white, almost chalky white, and it held fear; but its dominant expression was one of helpless stupefaction. He placed the sheaf of bank-notes on the table, and shuffled back again to the wall.

Rhoda Gray picked up the money and retreated to the door. Still facing the man, working with her left hand behind her back, she unlocked the door again, and this time removed the key from the lock.

"You are quite safe here," she observed evenly, "since there appears to be no window through which you could get out; but you might make it a little unpleasant for me if you gave the alarm and aroused the other occupants of the house before I had got well away. I dare say that was in your mind, but"—she opened the door slightly, and inserted the key on the outer side—"I am quite sure you will reconsider any such intentions, Pinky. It would be a very disastrous thing for you if I were caught. Somebody is wanted for the murder of Marny Day at Charley's a little while ago, and a jury would undoubtedly decide that the guilty man was the one who broke in the door there and stole the money. And if I were caught and were obliged to confess that I got it from you

and French Pete swore that it was whoever broke into that room that shot his pal, it might go hard with you, Pinky—don't you think so?" She smiled coldly at the man's staring eyes and dropped jaw. "Good night, Pinky; I know you wont make any noise," she said softly—and suddenly opened the door, and in a flash stepped back into the hall, and closed and locked the floor, and whipped out the key from the lock.

And inside Pinky Bonn made no sound.

IT was done now. Rhoda Gray drew in her breath in a choking gasp of relief. She found herself trembling violently. She found her limbs were bearing her none too steadily as she began to grope her way along the black hall toward the back door. But it was done now, and— No, she was not safe away, even yet! Some one was coming in through that back door just ahead of her—or at least, she heard voices out there.

She was just at the end of the hall now. There was no time to go back and risk the front entrance. She darted across the hall to the opposite side from that of the Pug's room, because on that side the opening of the door would not necessarily expose her, and crouched down in the corner. It was black here, perhaps black enough to escape observation. She listened, her heart beating wildly. The voices outside continued. Why were they lingering there? Why didn't they do one thing or the other—either go away or come in? There wasn't any too much time! The Pug might be back at any minute now. Perhaps one of those people out there *was* the Pug! Perhaps it would be better after all to run back and go out by the front door, risky as that would be. No, her escape in that direction now was cut off too!

She shrank as far back in the corner as she could. The door of the end room on this side of the hall had opened, and now a man stepped out and closed the door behind him. Would he see her? She held her breath. No! It—it was all right. He was walking away from her toward the front of the hall.

And now for a moment, it seemed as though she had lost her senses, as though her brain were playing some mad, wild trick upon her. Wasn't that the Pug's door before which the man had stopped? Yes, yes! And he seemed to have a key to it, for he did not knock, and the door was opening, and now for an instant, just an instant, the light fell upon the man as he stepped with a quick, lightninglike movement inside, and she saw his face. It was the Adventurer!

SHE stifled a little cry. Her brain was in turmoil. And now the back door was opening. They—they *might* see her here! And—yes—it was safer—safer to act on the sudden inspiration that had come to her. The door of the room from which the Adventurer had emerged was almost within reach; and he had not locked it as he had gone out—she had subconsciously noted that fact. She understood now why he had not—that he had safeguarded himself against the loss of even the second or two it would have taken him to unlock it when he ran back for cover again from the Pug's room. Yes—that room! It was the safest thing she could do. She could even get out that way, for it must be the room with the low window, which she remembered gave on the back yard, and— She darted silently forward, and as the back door opened, slipped into the room the Adventurer had just vacated.

It was pitch-black. She must not make a sound—nor must she lose a second. What was taking place in the Pug's room between Pinky Bonn and the Adventurer, she did not know. But the Adventurer was obviously on one of his marauding expeditions, and he might stay there no more than a minute or two once he found out that he had been forestalled. She must hurry—hurry!

She felt her way forward in what she believed to be the direction of the window. She ran against the bed. But this afforded her something by which to guide herself. She kept her touch upon it, her hand trailing along its side. And then, halfway down its length, what seemed to be a piece of string caught in her extended, groping fingers. It seemed to cling, but also to yield most curiously, as she tried to shake it off; and then something, evidently from under the mattress, came away with a little jerk, and remained, suspended, in her hand.

It didn't matter, did it? Nothing mattered except to reach the window. Yes, here it was now! And the roller shade was drawn down; that was why the room was so dark. She raised the shade quickly—and suddenly stood there as though trans-

fixed, her face paling, as in the faint light by the window, she gazed fascinated at the object that still dangled by a cord from her hand.

It seemed as if an inner darkness were suddenly riven as by a bolt of lightning—a hundred things, once obscure and incomprehensible, were clear now, terribly clear. She understood now how the Adventurer was privy to all the inner workings of the organization; she understood now how it was, and why, that the Adventurer had a room so close to that other room across the hall. That dangling thing on an elastic cord was a smeared and dirty celluloid eye-patch that had once been flesh-colored! *The Adventurer and the Pug were one!*

Her wits! Quick! He must not know! In a frenzy of haste she ran for the bed and slipped the eye-patch in under the mattress again; and then, still with frenzied speed, she climbed to the window-sill, drew the roller shade down again and dropped to the ground.

THROUGH the back yard and lane she gained the street, and sped on along it—but her thoughts outpaced her hurrying footsteps. How minutely every detail of the night now seemed to explain itself and dovetail with every other one! At the time, when Shluker had been present, it had struck her as a little forced and unnecessary that the Pug should have volunteered to seek out Danglar with explanations after the money had been secured. But she understood now the craft and guile that lay behind his apparently innocent plan. The Adventurer needed both time and an alibi, and also he required an excuse for making Pinky Bonn the custodian of the stolen money, and of getting Pinky alone with that money in the Pug's room. Going to Danglar supplied all this. He had hurried back, changed in that room from the Pug to the Adventurer, and proposed in the latter character to relieve Pinky of the money, to return then across the hall, become the Pug again, and then go back, as though he had just come from Danglar, to find his friend and ally, Pinky Bonn, robbed by their mutual arch-enemy—the Adventurer!

The Pug—the Adventurer! She did not quite seem to grasp its significance as applied to her in a personal way. It seemed to branch out into endless ramifications. She could not somehow think logically enough now to decide what this meant in a concrete way to her, and her to-morrow, and the days after to-morrow.

She hurried on. To-night, as she would lie awake through the hours that were to come, perhaps a clearer vision would be given her. For the moment, there—there was something else—wasn't there? The money that belonged to the old couple.

She hurried on. She came again to the street where the old couple lived. It was a dirty street, and from the curb she stooped and picked up a dirty piece of old newspaper. She wrapped the bank-notes in the paper.

There were not many people on the street as she neared the mean little frame house, but she loitered until for the moment the immediate vicinity was deserted; then she slipped into the alleyway, and stole close to the side window, through which, she had noted from the street, there shone a light. Yes, they were there, the two of them—she could see them quite distinctly even through the shutters.

She went back to the front door then, and knocked. And presently the old woman came and opened the door.

"This is yours," Rhoda said, and thrust the package into the woman's hand. And as the woman looked from her to the package uncomprehendingly, Rhoda Gray flung a quick "Good night" over her shoulder and ran down the steps again.

But a few moments later she stole back and stood for an instant once more by the shuttered window in the alleyway. And suddenly her eyes grew dim. She saw an old man white and haggard, with bandaged head, sitting in a chair, the tears streaming down his face; and on the floor, her face hidden on the other's knees, a woman knelt—and the man's hand stroked and stroked the thin gray hair on the woman's head.

Rhoda Gray turned away. Out in the street her face was lifted, and she looked upward, and there were myriad stars. And there seemed a beauty in them that she had never seen before, and a great, comforting serenity. They seemed to promise something—that through the window of that stark and evil garret to which she was going now, they would keep her dreaded vigil with her until morning came again.

Another of the "White Moll's" breathless adventures in crookdom will be related in the next, the December, issue.

short gun on heem w'erever he goes." A "short gun" is our down-the-coast name for the long-barreled revolvers which horsemen used to wear in those days back in the Rocky Mountain country, but which one rarely carries in this part of California.

That was the beginning of the story which my father would have told me in his letters if he had been one to call for help from those who owed him aid. Being the man he was, he contented himself with fighting his battles against the larger rancher—for Sugden was a huge landholder within a year after his advent—alone. There had been bad blood over broken fences and similar acts of vandalism on the part of Sugden's riders; and more than once the black-bearded man had tried to get my father to sell out, but without result. And then—

Manuel rode up the hill to find what he had told me. It seemed, he said, as if my father must have been writing a letter at the time, for he was sitting in his chair at the table when discovered, and the pen lay as he had dropped it on the cloth. But there was no sign of written paper there. It was plain enough that the murderer had come upon him from behind.

"And then I jost wait because mebbe—I theenk—yo' weel come back," said Manuel, "or mebbe yo' weel answer my letter telling yo' all thees." At what risk he had abided I could well judge from the weapon in his hands.

"I never got the letter, Manuel," said I. It must have missed me in my wanderings, if indeed it ever went back across the trail to the stage road—for there is a good chance that it did not, as things turned out.

HE bowed his head and was about to make some answer when a clatter of hoofs came from the trail. Several horsemen were riding from the direction in which I had come, and I thought of those who had followed me through the fog.

They burst into sight from the mists, three of them, big fellows, riding recklessly. But the foremost of them was the greatest in stature and the most devilishly splendid in his horsemanship. I got a glimpse of him, as he came on a dead run down the sled road; and then he did a thing which came near to costing him his life—and probably me mine.

Our old bull-terrier had run out into the roadway at the first wild halloo and was standing there close beside the horse-track when the big man passed him. I noted that the fellow's hand was busy at his saddle-horn, and now, in the passing, I saw it move—one lithe dexterous gesture, and the coils of the rawhide riata unwrapped themselves until the rope was like a striking snake. Its loop widened and fell, and falling, tightened about the old dog's body. The horse leaped on.

I saw that much, and then Manuel's rifle was in my hands. I never did remember taking it from the old man. I had it leveled at my shoulder and called my warning, with my finger eager on the trigger as I raised my voice.

The horse came to a stop inside of two jumps.

"Unloose that rope!" I shouted. And as the order was obeyed, I watched the other two. Their hands were moving toward their sides, but I let the muzzle of the rifle swerve toward them and the movement ceased. There was an uncomfortable moment which passed in dead silence; and then they rode on while old Boxer came limping back to lick the hand which I extended to him.

"Thees one ees Karmany," Manuel said quietly, and pointed to the big leader who had roped the dog. And although he said nothing more, I was certain from what I saw in his eyes that I had leveled that rifle at the man whom he believed to be my father's murderer.

And then he bade me kindly to come within the house while he got me a bite to eat. While I ate the meal which he had prepared for me, I thought the matter over, until—

"Manuel," I said, "will you go with me and show me this man Sugden's house?"

I saw his eyes light fiercely as he nodded. Before we went, he took down the gun which he had placed in its rack on the wall, and I was sufficiently impressed by what I had seen and heard to get a single-action pistol from my saddle-bags; I had picked it up in Tombstone, Arizona, and used it down on the border more than once; and I was in a frame of mind where I really hoped that occasion might arise to use it again.

As he was saddling his own horse and one of ours, which he had caught up for me in the corral, "I am glad for you to come jost now," said Manuel, "because thees Sugden send me word last week that I have got to clear out from the country

of their first scrap, or something like that; but to have a lot of old heads like Mike Randall and Bert Bruce and fellows like that bumped off after they'd fought real men all over the world—"

THE weary voice of a hard-boiled non-com cut in: "Aw-w, pipe down! I thought we was tryin' to forget that stuff. What were you sayin', Marty?"

"Who? Me? Wh,, I was talkin' about that time when we ran into that school of whales just off Puget Sound; they'd been chasin' fish or somethin', and got to runnin'—"

"Swimmin', ya mean."

"O' course. Well, they got to swimmin' too fast an' swum clean up on the beach, and us fellows went out there with rifles an' bumped 'em off. Of all the flappin' around you ever see in your life—"

"Huh! Stood him up again!" The interrupting voice was that of the Captain's orderly as he nodded toward two figures just getting out of a motorboat at the beach. One was in the uniform of a captain of Marines. The other wore the white of the tropics. Ed Delaney turned a curious head.

"What d'you mean—stood him up?"

The orderly chuckled.

"Seems the Cap went sweet on a little Spanish dame about the day after we landed. Mercales introduced him. Oh, she isn't a spick—I saw her; full-blooded Castilian, and if I say it myself, I wouldn't mind having her around the house for a missus, I wouldn't."

"You mean you'd like to dream o' something of that kind. Say, if a woman ever took a look at you, she'd drop dead. And if she ever took another, she'd come to life again, just so she could bump off a second time. Mercales introduced him, huh? That's Mercales' boat he was just out in. What's the racket?"

"Just what I told you. The Cap saw this dame and went nutty over her, but it seems she lived across the bay, and that she'd got a hard-boiled uncle or something. Well, from what I can get from Mercales and the Cap talking together, Mercales has sneaked her over here two or three times to see the Cap, and once or twice when the old man was away, Mercales has sneaked the Cap over there. When the old man's home, she fixes a light so's you can see it across the bay, to tip the Cap off. They just went out about fifteen minutes ago to see if it was burning. Must be; they're back again. What's worse, this is the third night in succession."

"And who's Mercales?"

"Search me, except that he's got a lot of money and owns a bunch of plantations on the other side of the hills, and that he seems to be tickled stiff that the Marines lit down here in Nicaragua, to stop this revolution. Fine chance this gang has of stopping a revolution until the battle-wagons get over here from Cuba. Then—"

"Oh, then!" It was a deep-throated chorus. "Then there's goin' to be some spick graves to make up for that bunch of—"

"Aw, le's cut it!" Three of them said it at once. "Ed, what was that lie you were gettin' off your chest about swimming clean across the China Sea?"

"'Twasn't no lie, and it wasn't clear across the China Sea," answered Ed Delaney heatedly. "It was when I was on the *Dakota*, and there was a swimming-match, and—"

"You swam two days without stopping to eat," broke in Marty. "All you lyin' ol' guys make me sick. Why, one time when I was doin' guard-duty at Pearl Harbor—"

"I suppose you lived in the water for a month, an' the fishes brought you your meals!"

"Well, anyway, I—"

BUT the recital ended. From the tent that served as headquarters came the call of a bugle, the soft, sweet call of taps. The men rose. One by one they sought their pup-tents. And as usual Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan were side by side beneath the little stretch of canvas.

"Listen," the bald little corporal whispered as they doubled up on the ground, "what was that wild yarn you were going to spin about the China Sea?"

"Nothin'." Ed Delaney yawned. "Only I just won the fleet championship, that's all."

"You? Say, quit your kiddin'."

"I guess I didn't, then."

"I say you didn't. You old liar, you couldn't swim a mile in ten years."

"I couldn't, huh?" Ed Delaney had straightened in the darkness. "Well, I know one thing: I can outswim you the best day you ever lived, with one hand tied behind my back."

"Well, you've got it to do, then."

Mickey Brogan was sitting up beside him now. "I'll take you on any place, any time; to-morrow, next week or right now!"

"Right now goes!" Ed Delaney turned and peered out the flap of his tent. "If you're as game as you say you are, right now we sneak, and I'll swim you across the bay and back again for a month's pay! Well, what are you stallin' about?"

"Thinking about the brig."

"For makin' the sneak?" The old comradeship had returned. "We can get past the sentry, all right. Anyway, you've got me all warmed up. I want to go swimming."

"So do I. Who's on duty to-night on the bay side?"

"Who's got the post, you mean? Either Pete Larkin, or that new boot. If it's Pete, he'll let us past. If it's the boot, we ought to be able to get around him. Come on."

"Better wait awhile. Look out and see if you can locate that sentry." Ed looked.

"Nothing doing. Must be around the bend. We can make it all right. Come on."

And like two kids sneaking to the swimming-hole, Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan glided forth from their pup-tents.

QUIETLY they made their way along the fringe of high grass which extended almost to their tent. Slowly they crawled, listening for the slightest noise, the slightest evidence of the presence of the guard. After a long time, far away, they heard the challenge and the clattering of rifles as two sentries met, and Ed Delaney touched his partner.

"Think we're safe," he whispered. "That must be the sentry on this post. He's clear at the other end. Come on, let's make a break for it."

In the dim light two figures slid forth toward the palms and tropical foliage beyond, hastily yet cautiously. Fifty yards, and they increased their speed—seventy-five and they were moving as fast as their doubled positions would allow them. One hundred—

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Ed Delaney had made a wrong guess. To their stomachs they dropped, and wriggled into the grass. The Sergeant pitched his voice into a nasal Spanish:

"Amigo, señor!"

"Well, come here and let me take a look at you!"

"Move fast!" Ed Delaney whispered it to his partner. But to the sentry, they said nothing. Already they were past him and in a position to make a break for it. Again the sentry called:

"Hey, you spick! Come out of that!"

"It's the boot!" Mickey Brogan whispered excitedly. "He's liable to take a shot at us!"

"Shut up and keep moving!" came Ed Delaney's answer. "We're in for it now, and we might as well play the game. It's us to stay out until they change sentries, or get back to the camp some other way. What say, we beat it clear around the bend—down just opposite to where the Captain's girl lives?"

"Yeh, and swim over and take a peek and see what she looks like. I'm interested in this love stuff."

"We'll be interested in a couple o' bullets if we don't shut up."

For again the sentry was shouting:

"There's two of you, huh? I can hear you whispering. Coming out of there? Corporal of the guard! Corporal of the guard!"

High-pitched and loud was his voice. Ed Delaney leaped to his feet.

"Run!" he commanded softly.

And together they ran, bumping into a tree now and then, but speeding on in spite of it, in spite of the darkness and the close-matted vegetation. The shouts of the sentry grew fainter and fainter, then faded altogether. The recreant pair slowed their pace to a walk.

"Probably thought it was some spick trying to get into camp," mused Mickey Brogan.

"Just why I used that bum Spanish," said Ed Delaney. "We'd better be moving toward the beach. We'll be lost, the first thing we know."

HURRIEDLY they changed their course, cutting diagonally through the dense foliage and heavily matted vegetation toward the faint sound of a slow-rolling surf. Ten minutes later they reached the bay, and walked along the shore for an hour. Mickey Brogan started across the water.

"She's sure the faithful one, aint she? There's that light beaming like a couple o' beacons. Gee, love's funny junk, aint it?"

"You said something," agreed Sergeant Ed. "You did, you know. You spoke on both sides of the page."

For a long moment they lay watching the light and pondering upon the difficulties of the path of true love. Then suddenly Ed Delaney scrambled to his feet.

"You see the same thing I do?"

"What's that?"

"Still see the light?"

"I'm a sonovagun! It's gone out!"

"Gone out, nothing! Something's come between us and it—that's what! Is there any kind of a dock over there?"

"Must be. Mercales runs his motorboat over. I've seen him and the Captain come back, and there never was any mud on 'em, so they must have tied up at a dock."

"Guess so. Probably a loading-dock for sugar-cane. Peel those clothes, quick, Mickey. The race is off!"

"A better one's on, though! Got a gun or a knife or anything on you?"

"No, have you?"

"Not a thing. We'll have to trust to luck." Then Ed Delaney chuckled. "We'll probably get over there and find that it's some old sugar-barge just tying up for the night. But why hasn't it got lights on it?"

"Search me! Ready?"

"As soon as I get out of this shirt!"

A quick movement, and two naked men started into the surf. Out into the water they waded; then a slight splash, and side by side they began the long pull across the bay.

Minute after minute they made their way along, slowly closing the gap between themselves and the object of their curiosity. An hour dragged away; then, five hundred yards from their goal, they stopped to tread water and reconnoiter.

It was a boat that lay before them at the small dock, hardly a sloop, hardly anything that could be dignified by the term *ship*—the type of boat that one will see along the southern coast and watch with speculative interest until it fades from view, wondering whether the slight wave it is breasting or the one just ahead will swallow it. Dirty, nefarious, dark in color and in purpose, its kind has run more than one gantlet, smuggled more than one cargo. Ed Delaney, spouting water, turned to his comrade, just beside him.

"Gun-runners!"

"You said it."

FORWARD they went again, this time more cautiously, more quietly than ever. They glided through the water toward the small dark hull at the dock—the object whence voices were issuing, and the sound of men treading a hollow platform. Nearer, nearer—

Then they sank until only their nostrils remained above water. From across the bay had come the tightly muffled *put-put* of a motor-launch as it skimmed over the bay, headed, it seemed, straight for them. It was running without lights, and swiftly. A hundred yards away, it swerved, that it might head more directly for the dock, then shot past not fifty feet away. Instantly the two Marines dived and came up in its wake.

They were safe from observation now; the swirling waters would conceal their swift-moving bodies; the flash of an arm would be mistaken for the glint on a ruffled wave. There was no need for talking, no need for consultation. Both had seen that same launch many times before; it belonged to Mercales—Mercales the friendly, Mercales the *amigo* of the Captain—Mercales, hurrying to a dock where a low-lying, dark, slatternly craft had sneaked in without lights, and where men were working in the night.

Yard after yard they cut down the distance between them and the ship, hurrying along in the swell of the motorboat. Before them they saw the white, sleek craft glide to the dock and stop, while shadowy figures made it fast. Evidently its occupant had been expected. A hundred yards, two, three, four—then came caution again. They circled. Closer and closer they crept to the faint shadow of the old ship, then dived.

When they came to the surface again, they were under the dock, grasping at one of the several frayed strands of rope which hung in the water. Three feet away was the side of the ship, barnacled and rough and dirty—indicative of many a trip on the dark seas, with never a legitimate stop in port, never a visit to a drydock. But right now they were not interested in the ship itself, but in the voice that came to them from above, a clear Spanish voice, speaking in tones of command:

"Where's Espienzo?"

"Here, señor."

"How are things getting along?"

"Excellently, señor. We have the cargo nearly unloaded."

"Did they send anything?"

"Yes. Two hundred machine-guns and one thousand rifles."

"How about ammunition?"

"Four thousand cases."

"Good! That's enough to wipe out all the Marines they can send, the dogs!"

QUICKLY the water-soaked hand of Ed Delaney jabbed Mickey Brogan. And Mickey kicked out a foot to indicate that he understood perfectly. From above, the conversation had continued:

"What precautions have you taken on the ship?"

"Very good, señor. We have placed a machine-gun on the bow, and an experienced man to handle it if necessary. All the others are working."

"How many?"

"Forty."

"All trusted men?"

"Yes, señor. I did not take any of the peons. These men are all leaders—every one of them has a command and is faithful and loyal. That is why I chose them."

"Good. Where's that sweet niece of yours?"

"In the hold of the vessel, señor. She does not know what is going on. I put up the light, as usual, to-night."

"It worked fine. He doesn't suspect. I left him very love-sick and lonely. Sad, is it not?"

They chuckled. Under cover of that laughter Ed Delaney leaned toward his comrade.

"That's Mercales, the dirty bum! Know his voice. Probably got the girl shut up in the boat. No wonder they've been putting up that signal-light for the Captain. It's to keep him from finding out about this gun-running."

"No wonder," answered Mickey Brogan angrily, "they knew where we were going that day they ambushed us. Mercales tipped 'em off. . . . Sh-h-h-h-h!"

For they were talking again above, Mercales and the man who evidently was the irascible uncle of the girl the Captain loved.

"And how many Marines are coming, señor?"

"Five hundred, according to the best information I can get. They should be here in two days. As soon as they arrive, I want you to be on my plantations with every man you can call to the cause. Then send me a message that the revolutionists—"

"Ourselves," laughed the other.

"Correct. Send a message that the main body has arrived there and that the plantations are being looted and that a number of people—women and children—have been killed. Then see that the Lewis guns are placed along the Lecore road, just below the mountain. I will attend to the rest—for I shall see that the gringos take the right path. Not one will be left to bring back the story!"

"Bueno!"

AGAIN Mickey Brogan kicked Ed Delaney under water, and Ed Delaney kicked back. From above came the sound of steps as the two men moved nearer the gangway of the ship. Beneath the dock, Ed Delaney and Mickey Brogan swam quietly in pursuit. Once again came the voice of the leader, Mercales:

"Take that man from the machine-gun. There is no need to keep him on guard any more. I will watch that. We need every man to work on the unloading. This ship must be out of the bay before daylight."

"Sí, señor."

There came an order, and fading steps. For just a moment Ed Delaney and his bald corporal remained stationary. Then the veteran sergeant moved closer to his buddy.

"I've got the whole thing figured out," he whispered. "This Mercales is the guy who's running the whole revolution. The old uncle, whoever he is, is only his general. Mercales has been sticking around the camp over there, getting all the dope and staying in the dark. Nobody ever has been wise to him—but he's been wise to everything the minute it happened. We've got to play cards fast!"

"We do, you know!"

Cautiously they worked their way along the side of the ship, Delaney in the lead. Listening, straining for the slightest sound, they heard Mercales come aboard, give a few orders and begin pacing the deck. Quietly the two men began making their way along in the water—suddenly to halt.

Mercales had gone to the other end of the deck and was turning back again. Evidently he was thinking and planning—and pacing the full length of the ship as he did so. Delaney turned again to his corporal.

"Us on board—if we can make it!" he ordered.

Again they slunk along, at last to reach

the stern of the vessel. Cautiously Delaney pawed the air as he circled the old hull, stopping now and then to tread water and to investigate every foot of his progress. Then quietly he signaled.

"A rope!"

Mercales was at the far end of the deck. Hand over hand, slipping, then twisting themselves about the rope, they made their way up over the stern and slid into the shadow of the aft cabin. Mercales was approaching. Quickly Delaney looked about him—and then stooped. A second later he had risen, a winch-bar grasped tightly in his hand. Mercales had come closer.

Once he turned and started back down the deck toward where the men were unloading the endless boxes from the forward hatch; then, changing his mind again, he came on. Ten steps more and—

A quick blow, a thudding sound, and the white-clad body of the man swayed and fell—into Mickey Brogan's arms.

"Quick with his clothes," Delaney ordered, "—before they miss him!"

But Brogan was already at work. Hardly a moment later a white-clad figure once more resumed its pacing; nor did the revolutionists notice that in the shelter of his form another figure was creeping along the deck—the naked body of Mickey Brogan.

Down and back again, down and back. Then a signal. Mickey had reached his station; Mickey Brogan was ready. The figure in white leaped quickly to one side, kicked full in the face the form of the spick that was emerging from the hatchway, knocked down the cursing Spaniard who had just started to the dock with his heavy load, and then, like lightning, dragged the hatchway into place and battened it.

A scream of warning came from the dock, shouted orders. The loud voice of the conspiring uncle rose anxiously.

"Mercales! Señor Marcales! What's wrong—"

"The United States Marines—that's what's wrong!" came the hoarse answer of Sergeant Ed Delaney as he tugged and pulled at the box the revolutionist had dropped. "Watch yourself, Mickey—they're beginning to mill on the dock there—watch 'em there—how many drums of ammunition you got?"

"Three!" came the short answer of Brogan. "Got any more?"

"Can't tell yet—watch 'em—keep that gun trained on the gangplank—"

A crackling sound as a board was ripped from the already weakened box. A shot came from close range on the dock, cutting just above Ed Delaney's head. Hurriedly he pawed in the semidarkness, then whirled.

"All right, Mickey!" he shouted. "They're drums, all right—watch 'em there—all right—turn loose!"

A half-hundred men had suddenly rushed toward the gangplank—and with the rush had come a stream of spurting fire from the Lewis gun in the hands of Mickey Brogan. Snapping and clattering, it telegraphed forth its death, to crumple the figures as they sought to make the gangplank, then to send them scurrying for cover again. The dark stretches of the dock began to spurt fire; the *whing-g-g-g-g* of bullets began to sing above the heads of the men as they crouched at the machine-gun. Ed Delaney changed a drum and swore softly.

"Dinged thing's hot—now start sweeping that dock. That's it—swing 'er around a bit more—a bit more now—that's it—look out!"

A bullet had clipped against the standard of the gun and gone whining away. From the far end of the dock came a steady blaze of rifle-fire, and then Mickey turned his gun, to send a withering sheet of fire against it, while Ed Delaney, changing drums, ducked and watched and groaned.

"If I only had a rifle!" he mourned. "Fourteen million rifles laying all around me here in boxes, and I can't get at one of 'em. Change that gun a little, Mickey, and take in that burst of fire over to the left—it's getting pretty hot from there. Gosh, if I only had a rifle—wouldn't it be the pickin's, though—shootin' at those flashes!"

"Gimme another drum!" said Mickey, squatted at his stuttering machine. "This thing's beginning to get hot—hey, look!"

HE nodded his head quickly toward the hatchway of the old ship. It was beginning to rise and jerk with the efforts of the men beneath to loosen it. Once it cracked, and an arm stuck forth. Ed Delaney leaped forward and smashed the heel of what once had been Mercales' shoes hard upon it. A scream came from below, but the pounding did not cease.

"Things are getting tight!" the sergeant growled, and looked about for a club. "I've got to knock 'em cold as they come up."

"'Nother drum!" yelled Mickey. "Quick. My hand's gettin' numb."

"What's the matter? Winged?" Ed Delaney ran quickly to the side of his partner in many an adventure. Mickey's lip curled.

"Been winged since the first shot," came his quiet answer. "How's the ammunition?"

"Getting short."

"And they're getting long. Look! They've gotten help!"

From high on a hill opposite the dock came the spitting of rifle-fire. Bullets began to cut into the deck from an angle that meant trouble. No longer was their shield of use to them; no longer were they safe at a higher point of vantage than their enemies. Hurriedly Mickey Brogan sought to turn the machine-gun in that direction, and failed. It would not reach the elevation. Ed Delaney, daring the steel hail which had begun to come steadily from the hill, leaped forward and knocked into the hatch the first of the forms of the imprisoned men who were seeking escape. A bullet cut through the white clothing he wore and burned his flesh. Hastily he dropped to his stomach on the deck behind a pile of canvas, and waited for his next victim. His arm rose and dropped—and a form dropped into the hold as a result of it. Again—again—then Delaney, raising for a fourth blow, suddenly recoiled dizzily. From below had come a hurtling missile which struck him full in the forehead. Blood began to flow into his eyes, but he dragged himself forward again, just in time to crash in the skull of a man already half out of the hatch.

Over at his gun, Mickey Brogan took one look, then leaped forward.

"You've got two hands," he ordered. "You can handle that thing. I can knock 'em out with one. Take the gun—oh, golly! Look!"

He pointed out into the bay. There, streaking across the water, were three motorboats loaded with men. A flash came from one of them, and a bullet whined overhead. Ed Delaney jumped to his feet, while Mickey Brogan swung his one good arm to send another enemy to the bottom of the boat. Again the flash came from the hurrying craft, then a burst of them. Ed Delaney waved his arms wildly—in spite of the fire from the hills.

"It's gyrenes!" he shouted happily. "It's the bunch from camp, coming over to see what the row is! No spick ever shot that way. Gyrenes—hey, aim toward the dock and the hills. This is Delaney—we're on the boat!"

A shout came in answer—then a clattering of fire that drew the attention of the enemies on the hill. Swiftly the boats circled. A moment more, and then came the thudding of heavy shoes on the deck of the old ship. Then—

The clattering of a half-dozen machine-guns, the swift rise of rifles to the shoulder, the beautiful pause that tells of a steady aim, then the crackle of death. Ten minutes—then silence. The fight was over, and a revolution as well.

THE next morning, under the palms just outside San Marco de Lanores, a deck court-martial was in progress. Before it stood two men, one with a bandaged arm. The Captain leaned forward—and there was a twinkle in his eye that belied the severity of the charge of Absent Without Official Leave against the tall and short Marines before him.

"Sergeant Delaney," he said quite severely, "I want you to answer me truthfully. You two were absent from camp last night because you suspected this Mercales—now, weren't you? Don't lie to me!"

The twinkle was in Ed Delaney's eyes also.

"Oh, yes sir."

"And you knew that you and Corporal Brogan couldn't come to me about it, because you knew that he and I were friendly, and you feared I wouldn't listen to you. Now, isn't that the truth? Don't you lie to me now!"

"Oh, yes sir."

"So the only way you could prove him to be a traitor was to leave the camp without permission? No lies, now."

"Oh, yes sir."

"Very good."

And five minutes later went upon the records the names of Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan, freed from the charge of A. W. O. L., and credited with:

"Absent in line of duty."

There will be another of the lively "Leatherneck Tales" in an early issue.

The Misfortunes *of* Mose

A JOYOUS story of Darkyland, told with a humor you will find most pleasantly infectious.

By **William Goode**

THE misfortunes of Mose Goober, respected citizen of the little negro settlement of Gilead, were induced by certain circumstances, one of which was the thrusting upon him of an unexpected honor, and another a very serious falling out with his wife.

Mose was a big, hulking Ethiopian of pure stock, black as ink, and possessed of a fund of good humor that found him favor in a wide circle of his own kind—boon companions who eschewed work and cultivated the easy side of life to the limit. It was his wife Randy's objection to such associations, as well as her insistence that he should locate a job and thereby contribute to his share of the domestic expenses, that started the trouble; and his failure to comply had resulted in an enforced exile from his home. Mose was big and powerful, but Randy was a West Coast negress, a perfect female giant, and Mose found that she could hold the door against any effort he could make to open it. So he remained outside.

This wouldn't have jarred the big negro's sensibilities in the least had it not been for the fact that Randy was a marvelous fine cook, and Mose had become so accustomed to high living that it was a shock to his digestive system so rudely to be deprived of it. At first a double sense of insult and injury had decided him that he would never go back, but when his stomach began to flatten against his backbone, he felt his resolution begin to melt. He did go back cautiously, one day, being careful to be on the opposite side of the fence when he made his appeal. He put all the pathos of his being into that appeal. He never had any very distinct recollection of just what happened in the next few moments, but when he pulled up after a good half-mile flight, it was for the purpose of nursing sundry bruises and bumps which a perfect cloud of flying missiles in the shape of saucepans, brickbats, cordwood sticks, and other things had given him. It was then that Mose became fully convinced that the domestic breach was no camouflage but the real tangible truth.

"Fo' de good Lor'!" he moaned dismally. "Dat nigger woman am suffin' mo' dan ordin'ry. Howeber is Ah gwine to mek dat up to her? Specs laikly Ah'll hab to go to wuk, anyway, jes' to sassify her, an' de Lor' knows Ah ain' able."

THE thought was depressing—in fact to Mose it was impossible. Indolence, and ease and freedom from care were as necessary to his temperament as water to a fish. He began slyly to consider the practicability of seeking pastures new. A divorce, in the spirit of the liberal conventions of the sphere in which he moved, did not by any means require a petition

to a law-court. Mutual consent was sufficient to dissolve the tie, and Mose had no qualms about that. Yet the problem was a difficult one and required careful consideration. He didn't want to make a misstep. He was particular that his next lifemate should be everything that Randy was, if not more, especially in the matter of culinary science, though he would be well satisfied if she lacked Randy's temper.

He was sick of sleeping around in sheds and barns and grubbing for meager fare in cheap restaurants, or at the free-lunch counter of the Black 'Possum Saloon. He couldn't recall a good square meal since Randy had turned him out. His mouth watered when he thought of her fried chicken and hoe cakes, corn pone and syrup and fixings. It made him yearn to get back. A sort of nostalgia swept over him. A great globule of a tear crept out of the corner of his eye and trickling gently down his ebony cheek, dropped with a splash onto the bosom of his cotton shirt.

THIS thing was bad enough as it stood, but he was just beginning to get hardened to it when along came the other thing to hasten his steps toward the great cataclysm of his life.

Mose had always been a faithful and consistent member of the Black Star Lodge of Colored Freemen, a secret organization peculiar to Gilead. It happened that the lodge treasurer died, and much to his astonishment Mose found himself elected to the office. No salary was attached, for the honor was supposed to furnish sufficient recompense. He suddenly found himself the custodian of the association's funds, to the extent of thirty-six dollars and seventy-six cents. It was the first time in his life that he had felt the heat of so much change in his pocket at one time, and in burned like a red-hot coal. Every time he put his hand in his pocket and encountered it, he felt a little distrust of himself. But for the delay in waiting for a few outstanding dues the money, probably, in obedience to a bylaw of the lodge would have found its way safely into the care of the Orlando Bank that very day—so that what happened to Mose wouldn't have happened at all, and this story would have been spoiled. But Fate laid its snare for Mose in the person of an old-time friend, Pink Smith, who had just hit the town, and at the same time ran into Mose on the street.

The collision was a mutual delight, and they dropped by common instinct into the Black 'Possum Saloon to cement old ties of friendship. They were quickly cemented, and so firmly that it would have required a sledgehammer to break them, so far at least as Pink was concerned. It took the wily little racetrack mulatto, who was wanted for misdemeanors in four States, not quite thirty minutes to possess himself of nearly every secret of the trusting Mose's life. He promptly decided that he had use for Mose.

Pink was a slender, rather delicately built yellow boy with a penchant for flashy clothes and cheap jewelry. In point of worldliness Mose was an innocent lamb in comparison. Pink declared that he had just strolled over from New Orleans, where he had been playing the ponies successfully. A hankering to see the old home town had brought him to Gilead.

Mose, with the corn whisky sizzling in his brain, proceeded at once to unbosom his domestic troubles to Pink, who listened with his little yellow eyes narrowed to slits.

"Ah ain' slep' in mah bed an' undah mah own roof fo' four weeks," he revealed. "Ah ain' got no ha'ht to go home no mo'."

"Huh! Wha' fo' am dat?" asked Pink casually.

"Mah wife Randy—she done turn me out," whimpered Mose.

"She done turn yo' out?" Pink selected a cigarette and lighted it contemptuously.

"Yeh, she sholy did," lamented Mose. "Ah ain' had a square meal since. Yo' know Ah is a well-kep' nigger, Pink. Fo' de Lor', Ah is losin' mah waist-line. Jes' laik enough Ah is gwine to die of starvation."

Pink's scorn was unconcealed.

"Yo' gwine let a nigger woman step on yo' laik dat, Mose?"

Mose rolled his eyes.

"Lan' ob Gideon! Wha' kin Ah do? Ah reckon yo' don' know mah wife Randy. She berry sérvigerous leddy."

PINK seemed to be busy a moment with mental calculation. He listened idly while Mose rehearsed his woes at great length. Finally he tapped the polished surface of the bar with his beringed fingers.

"See heah, yo' fool nigger!" he said forcefully. "Does yo' wan' me to tole yo' how to fix dat mattah up?"

" 'Pears laik Ah would consider it a speshial favor, Pink."

"Ah axes yo' a question: was yo' weddin' a chu'ch weddin' or jes a nigger mah'iage?"

Mose opened his eyes wide.

"Bress mah soul!" he gasped. "Yo' fink Randy would mah'y me anywhere but in chu'ch? She am one ob de pillows ob de Fus' Baptis' Chu'ch, and de Reveren' Skidder done mah'ied us in dat home ob de Gospel."

"A' right!" said the yellow boy with satisfaction. "Dat's all Ah wants to know. Tell me suffin' else: ain' dat house yo' lib in yo' own possession?"

Mose reflected.

"Ah ain' jest suah 'bout dat," he said dubiously. "When Ah got mah wife, Ah done fought Ah got de house wif her, but Ah ain' 'xactly suah."

"Don' de mah'iage vows say dat yo' wife endows yo' wif all her worldly goods and possessions?" Pink used emphasis.

" 'Pears laik Ah reckermember somefin' about it," confessed Mose uncertainly.

"Ob co'se yo' do," asserted Pink. "Yo' is de boss ob dat house, an' yo' is de boss ob yo' wife 'cording to de terms ob de mah'iage contract."

Mose whistled softly.

"Wha' dat yo' say? Ah is de boss ob de house an' mah wife, 'cordin' to de mah'iage contract?"

"Suttinly yo' is."

Mose chuckled and spread out his hands.

"Ah jes' laik to hab yo' argify dat wif her, son. Ah ain' got de stummick to do it mahse'f. She say de house was hers when she mah'ied me, an' she jes' lets me lib dere fo' 'commodation. Ain' neber been able to sassify her dat it ain' dat way."

"Wha' fo' she turn yo' out?"

"She ain' jes' sassified kase Ah don' wuk. Fo' Gawd, nigger, Ah done haid a crick in mah back fo' ten years, an Ah ain' fit to wuk."

"Huh! Ah don' blame yo' fo' dat, Mose. Yo' bet Ah don' wuk fo' no nigger wench mahse'f. I fin' a way right quick to show dat wench who am de boss if she was mah wife." Pink spoke sympathetically.

Mose was dubious.

"Yo' eber see mah wife Randy?"

Pink admitted that he hadn't.

"Lor' sakes, nigger, she jes' one bustiferous leddy. She am big enough to pick yo' up in one hand an' blow yo' out dat window laik a puff ob cotton."

Pink took a whiff of his cigarette and reflected.

"Huh! Am yo' wife a law-abiding leddy?"

"Wha' yo' mean?" asked Mose, mystified.

"Hab she any respect fo' de laws ob de country?"

"Ah reckon she hab."

"A' right!" Pink nodded sagely. "Yo' eber heah ob dat article ob de Constitushion ob de United States dat says dat possession am nine points ob de law?"

"Ah don' jes' grab yo' meanin', son," Mose mumbled vaguely.

Pink pulled some formidable-looking documents out of his pocket and proceeded to examine them. As a matter of fact, they were only advertising sheets of tips on the New Orleans races, but he knew that Mose couldn't read. After some time he appeared to be satisfied, and with a judicial air looked up.

"Well, it am dis-a-way: accordin' to de Constitushion ob dis country, if yo' kin git into dat house when she am out, an' close an' lock de door, yo' hab possession. Dat am nine points ob de law in yo' favor. She ain' got but one point in her favor lef', an' Ah hol's dat mahse'f."

"Sholy!" breathed Mose in sheer admiration of his friend's legal knowledge. "Wha' 'bout dat odder point? How be yo' hol' dat?"

Pink squared his shoulders and tapped his chest with his long fingers.

"Ah hol's dat odder point mahse'f. Ah am yo' lawyer," he said enigmatically.

Mose scratched his head.

"Mebbe yo' splanify a little," he suggested.

" 'Pears laik yo' ain' berry circumspicious in yo' undahstandin', Mose Goober. Ah splanify a little moh fo' yo' lusingdation. Mebbe yo' an Ah go down dere, an' we gets a pickaninny to tek a message in to her axin' her to step into a neighbor's house. Den yo' slips in and takes yo' nine points ob possession. Yo' locks de doors, an Ah sits down on de doorstep. Ah am de lawyer, an' hol's dat odder point ob de law right in mah hand. Ah right quick explains de law to her when she comes back, an' if she objec's, Ah threaten her dat de Gran' Jury tek up her case an' send her to jail. Dat's de point I hol'. Does yo' grab de idea?"

Mose rolled his eyes in wondering delight. "Am dat wha' de law says, son?"

"Dat am wha' it says, an' yo' hab de law on yo' side. She come roun' pretty quick when she fines out dat she hab got to stay outside an' hoe fo' herse'f. She jes' got mek any kin' ob a promise yo' ax fo' to get in. Ob co'se, dis ain' nuffin' to me, 'cept Ah laik to 'blige an old frien' fo' a decent commiseration."

"Wha' 'bout dat commiseration?" asked Mose cautiously.

"Jes' a li'le bit ob change—mebbe ten dollars."

MOSE'S pulse was running to the limit. The prospect of a tremendous coup was before him. He knew that there was but one thing in the world that Randy feared and reverenced and would obey, and that was the mandate of the law. Surely the trick would work.

"'Pears dat's a heap ob money fo' doin' a frien' a li'le favor laik dat," he quibbled.

"Huk!" sniffed Pink. "Since Ah has been in de lawyer's bizness, Ah meks a reg'lar cha'ge ob one hundred dollars fo' jes mah advice. Ah is considerin' mah friendship fo' yo', an' Ah is mekin' de terms low. Yo' mus' be a cheap man if it ain' wuth ten bones to git yo' wife an' home back. Howsumever, if yo' ain' so minded—"

"Jes' hol' onto yo'se'f till Ah does a li'le calculatin'," interposed Mose.

It was a matter that required consideration, as Mose was aware. He had the money, he well knew, but it was not his. It occurred to him suddenly that he would simply borrow it. Why not? Surely his lodge-brothers couldn't object to that when the cause was so worthy. His mind was made up. He would do it.

"Ah gib yo' dat ten dollars sho', son, if dat wuks out a' right."

There was a faint sneer in the corners of Pink's mouth.

"Kaint hep but wuk out. Ain' no lawyer dat waits fo' his pay, though. Yo' mus' come across wif dat ten dollars or dere ain' no game. Dat ain' distrustin' yo' honesty, but it am de way de law wuks."

Mose reflected some moments. He had quite a battle with his conscience, for be it said to the big negro's credit he really owned such a function. At last with a groan he extracted ten dollars from his lodge-fund and passed it over to Pink, who very carelessly thrust it into his pocket and threw away his cigarette.

"Ah hab some odder bizness on mah han's befo' Ah leabes dis town, an' Ah reckons dat we'd bettah carry out dis mattah wif expedition. Am dat agreeable to yo'?"

"Ain' no time laik de present," assented Mose.

SO they left the saloon. They attracted some attention as they walked down the grass-grown street. Buck negroes lounging at the corner leered at them; some pickaninnies ran behind them asking for pennies. A couple of Gilead belles hanging over a paling gave them a coquettish challenge. Pink adjusted the paste diamond in his tie so that the sun would flash on it and remarked casually:

"Some berry auspicious female leddies in dis town, Mose. Ah aims to mek a few 'quaintances afo' Ah goes away."

Just then, they arrived in view of the late domicile of the ostracized Mr. Goober. The house, or rather cabin, did not differ greatly from the others in the town. It was built of slabs and logs, with low-set windows and a front door that hung loosely on its hinges. The roof was roughly shingled, and along its ridge there extended a platform reached by a ladder on which always sat a bucket of water, for use in case of sparks' setting fire to the corncob chimney, a by no means uncommon happening.

Some jasmine trailing over the stoop, though, gave a bit of color to relieve the rudeness, and the walk was bordered with magnolia shrubs. There was a smattering of Bermuda grass to cover the white sand of the front yard, and a couple of lemon-trees bloomed at the gate.

Altogether, it was a quite comfortable home, quite too comfortable for a comfort-loving negro like Mose Goober to forsake of his own free will.

It was now, as they drew nearer, that Mose became conscious of a sudden slack feeling in his knees. He came to a halt.

"Wha' fo' yo' holdin' up?" demanded Pink.

Mose mopped a few beads of perspiration from the bridge of his nose with his coat-sleeve.

"Ah ain' so pertickler 'bout mekin' mahse'f familiar in dis yeah 'locumtion," he explained.

There was a little clump of live-oak near by, and the two negroes sought shelter there to consider matters. Everything

looked quiet about the Goober residence. The only sign of life was a razorback rooting in the back yard. Mose felt a little bit of yearning as he saw the outlines of his favorite easy chair in the front window. It recalled many a happy siesta after a hearty feed-up. And now it was lost to him.

"Well," grunted Pink, "wha' yo' got to sudjest?"

"'Pears laik yo' am de one to do de sudjestin'," retorted Mose. "Ain' yo' paid fo' dat?"

"Yo' waits heah till Ah comes back," Pink growled. "If Ah don' come back, an' yo' wife goes out, yo' jes' go in."

HE slipped away. Two minutes later he captured a pickaninny and slipped a penny in his hand, instructing him to tell Mrs. Goober that a gentleman who wasn't her husband was waiting at the street corner to see her. The pickaninny executed his orders so well that in a few minutes Randy, with a big sunbonnet to protect her complexion from the fierce rays of the sun, was making her way to ascertain the meaning of this mysterious tryst. She had drawn from the pickaninny that the unknown gentleman was a mulatto, and that he was fashionably dressed. Whether Randy was thrilled with the suspicion that her feminine charms had attracted some fashionable Lothario or not, it is not easy to say. Anyway, she readily answered the summons and it is worthy of note that as she spotted the nattily dressed Mr. Smith at the street corner, she instinctively assumed a little air of coquetry which in a younger and handsomer female might have been captivating.

Meanwhile, Mose had observed her departure, and summoning all his courage, slipped across the street and through the gate and reached the entrance. He stepped into his long-lost home and quickly closed and barred the door. It could not be said that Mose was conscious of a permanent sense of triumph. He was not altogether sanguine as to the outcome, nor had he over much confidence in Pink's ability to hold out against disaster. All he clung to was the knowledge of Randy's deep-seated veneration for the law. Anyway, he was in his home, and he was determined to assert himself as far as bluff and his half wavering courage would carry him.

Things familiar did certainly look good to him. It had been a cruel fate that had denied him his niche in this domestic ensemble. If he succeeded in regaining it, well, certainly the price paid would be cheap. He would regard Pink Smith forever as the greatest benefactor of his life.

He had hardly concluded this reflection when a certain familiar odor assailed his nostrils. With unerring instinct his footsteps took him to the kitchen. A great platter of fried chicken garnished with sweet potatoes was in the stove oven. No famished wolf ever descended upon his prey with half the avidity displayed by Mose Goober. Great hunks of the delicious white meat went down his capacious gullet at a gulp. He had reached a point where there was nothing left on the platter but pickings when he heard high-pitched voices and stole to the front window as the safest point of observation. And what Mose observed, he was destined long to remember.

PINK watched Randy's giant figure rolling up the street toward him with mixed emotions. Pink had sufficient self-assurance to carry him into the presence of kings, but when he appraised the supple proportions of the big negress something told him that this was one time in his life when his powers of circumspection would be taxed as never before. However, he was in for it, so his nerves grew taut as fiddlestrings, and his yellow face became a mirror of brass.

When Randy was a few yards away, he raised his hat with all the politeness of a chevalier and with his most honeyed tone inquired:

"Hab Ah de gre't honah to mek de extinguished 'quaintance ob Missus Randy Goober?"

Randy swept him with a quick appraising glance, and evidently favorably impressed, gave expression to a slight giggle. He appeared to her a very prepossessing and most pleasing young man.

"Yo' hab de right answer, mistah," she said coyly. "Wha' fo' may Ah ax does yo' wan' to see me about?"

Again Pink made a profound bow.

"Ah requests de pleasure ob walkin' wif yo' as far as de do' ob yo' home. Ah hab a berry important fing to tol' yo' about."

Randy did a little mental calculation, and decided shrewdly that this was just a polite way of gaining an invitation to call. She decided she would not refuse so courteous a gentleman the hospitality of her

home, and she remembered a choice bottle of orange wine on her pantry shelf. But she wondered who he was and what had brought him to see her.

So they strolled along, Pink revealing himself a most talented conversationalist. In fact, a very few yards had established quite a pleasant intimacy, and Randy was beginning to wish she wasn't married.

They went on as far as the doorstep and Randy determined that she could not permit so pleasant an experience to terminate there.

"Ah 'vites yo' to enter while yo' states yo' bizness wif me," she said winsomely.

The crucial moment had arrived.

"Ah is bound to spress mah regret dat Ah kaint accept dat most extinguished honah," said Pink, suddenly assuming an air of professional dignity, at the same time drawing a sheaf of formidable-looking papers out of his pocket. "Ah has to state dat Ah am heah in de intrusts ob mah client Mistah Mose Goober, yo' husban'. Ah am heah to repringsent his intrusts in de name ob de law."

The change in Randy's attitude was something beyond powers of description. From a rather stout, pleasant-faced negress she was instantly transformed into a black-browed, scowling Amazon.

"Wha' dat? Mah husban'? Debbil! Who am yo'? Wha' fo' yo' come heah?"

It took all Pink's nerve to hold his poise.

"Ah is a lawyer." But his voice quavered. His assertion didn't seem to have the subduing effect upon her that he and Mose had anticipated. He cast a sideglance toward the gate, measuring the distance carefully.

"Well, wha' yo' want ob me?" asked Randy coldly.

"Leddy," said Pink persuasively, "Ah is bound to beliebe dat yo' am a respecter ob de law."

"Wha' 'bout dat law?" demanded the big negress.

"M'am," stammered Pink, "didn' yo' mah'y Mose Goober in de chu'ch an' didn' you'—"

"No!" snapped Randy. "Ah didn' neber mah'y dat no-'count lazy nigger man. He done mah'y me. Woman don' neber mah'y a man. De man allus hab to do de mah'ying hisself."

Pink nearly dropped with the force of this unheard-of logic, and for a moment he was stumped.

"Yeh," he said finally, "but when he mah'ied yo', didn' yo' swear befo' de altar dat yo' would endow him wif all yo' worldly goods an' possession? Didn' yo'—"

"Wha' dat?" Randy stepped closer and Pink receded, for he didn't like the color of her eyes.

"Dat am de law," protested Pink desperately, "when nigger woman mah'ies she hab to gib herse'f an' all ob her possessions to her husban', an' if he hab possession he hab de nine points ob de law, an'—"

"Yeah, yo' li'le yaller-skin' swamp rat!" hissed Randy. "Yo' fink dis yeah home don' b'long to me? Yo' fink Ah hab to gib dat to mah husban'?"

"Da's de law," squeaked Pink, terror beginning to master him; "he hab got possession an' de law say dat am nine points in his favor."

"Wha' 'bout dat possession? How hab he got possession?" screamed Randy. "Jes' let him show his haid around yeah—Ah jes' laik to lay mah eyes on him."

"Jes' yo' try dat do'," suggested Pink. "He hab got possession an' de law say—"

But Randy's big hand was already on the door-latch. The door wouldn't yield. She turned like a lioness.

"Am mah husban' in dat house?"

"M'am, de law says—" But Pink's zeal was fatal. He never knew exactly how it all happened. There was just a vague recollection of being caught up as if in the grip of a cyclone, and whirled through the sand and scrub, and finally after a swift journey through the air, of landing with stunning force on the earth. When he regained his dazed senses he picked himself up out of the sand of the roadway just in time to view an astonishing and edifying spectacle. Mose was emerging from the top of the cob chimney covered with soot, from whence he took a flying leap to the ground, and shot past Pink into the palmetto scrub. Pink had a brief view of another figure right behind Mose but that was all he cared to wait for.

He picked himself up and limped away.

"Dis ain' no place fo' a 'telligent nigger laik me," he muttered. "Ain' no use tryin' to practice de law 'round yeah." Then he chuckled with afterthought, "I done earn dat ten dollars, anyway."

IT may seem curious that a fugitive from justice will in nine cases out of ten in making a get-away seek the publicity of

a railroad track. This is simply a case of misapplied logic. The railroad track offers a more direct line to a zone of safety than the highway, and the chance of securing quick transportation on the brake-beam of some passing freight is appealing.

This was not the reason, however, why Mose Goober plunged madly through the live oak and palmetto scrub and gained the roadbed of the Florida Midland. The direction of his flight was a mere matter of chance, and he had outdistanced his infuriated pursuer before he reached there.

The railroad itself was a joke. An enterprising promoter from New York had purchased a supply of second-hand sixty-pound rails and with cheap labor had laid them twelve miles through a part of the orange belt on the pretense of quick and easy connection with the South Florida main line. An old wood-burning locomotive of the earliest vintage, a flat- and a box-car comprised the rolling-stock. The most important and valuable part of the equipment consisted of the powerful jacks with which to restore the train after derailment, a very frequent occurrence. The Florida Midland's literature, however, was far more costly, consisting of elegantly printed prospectuses of exaggerated earnings and an endless supply of gold-embossed bonds and stock certificates disseminated mostly among gullible investors in the effete North.

When Mose struck the little grass-grown railroad track he was completely exhausted and thought only of a hiding-place. He crawled into a culvert, stretched himself out with a prodigious snort, and almost before he knew it was asleep.

When he awoke, it was the dawn of another day, and crawling out of his retreat, stiff and sore in all his joints, he cast a cautious glance about him and then sat down upon a log and gave himself up to reflections that were bitter.

His future prospects held but little that was cheering. His chance of reinstatement in his domestic haven had gone glimmering. He had not the slightest hope that Randy would take him back after what had happened. While he was too generous in spirit to heap all the blame on Pink who had endeavored at least to right matters for him, he couldn't help but think, with a sensation of misery at the pit of his stomach, of the ten dollars he had abstracted from the funds of the Freemen's Lodge.

A cold perspiration broke out upon him as he considered the consequences, should it be discovered by the lodge committee that he, the treasurer, was ten dollars shy in his accounts. Of course, he had only borrowed it, yet it was without permission. Mose knew that the most serious crime among his people was the abuse of a public trust.

What he had done no self-respecting negro would have done without first being dead sure he could get away with it. In the liberal philosophy of his ilk, sin ceases to be virtue only when it is found out, and that was the fate that would befall him. He would be found out.

He promptly discarded the idea that Pink might be induced to hand back the ten dollars. Yet, he must somehow replace that ten dollars, and save his character. He could think of only one way and that was to go to work, and that seemed to Mose a stupendous proposition.

Finally he decided he would take an excursion into the town, taking care not to encounter any of his lodge-brothers, with the fear of the guilty that by some means they had learned of his defection. While he had been sitting there deep in thought he had been unawares of the approach of a figure along the track.

A TALL, somber figure it was, attired in a frayed frock coat and dingy white waistcoat. A battered silk hat contributed to the clerical make-up of the dignified Reverend Skidder, beloved pastor of the Gilead Baptist Church. The Reverend Skidder spotted Mose long before Mose spotted him. The preacher had a long pole in his hand. He had been fishing in the Wekiva Creek.

The crunching of the preacher's footsteps caused Mose to whirl about apprehensively, and his guilty soul almost went down into the pit of his stomach with terror. The Reverend Skidder adjusted his spectacles and standing up on the railroad bank above, looked searchingly down at him.

"Howdy, Mistah Goober!"

"Howdy, pahson!" quavered Mose, longing to break away.

"'Pears laik yo' is discomposed 'bout suffin' dis mornin', son. Yo' is kin' ob rumpled up 'bout yo' pusson, an' looks laik de fear ob de Lor' am in yo' ha'bt. How 'bout it?"

Mose had a fit of buck ague.

"Ain' much de mattah, pahson, only yo' done gib me a li'le bit of a skeer."

But the Reverend wasn't to be put off.

"Dey is times when yo' needs to take yo' troubles to de Lor', son," he suggested. "De Gospel tells yo' to bring yo' troubles to de Lamb, an' hab yo' sins washed away or mebbe de fires ob hell gwine get yo'. 'Pears laik Ah hab heerd ob de trouble yo' done been habbin' wif yo' fambly. How 'bout it?"

A DAZZLING inspiration descended upon Mose and brought his spirits up with a bound. He knew that nothing on earth equaled Randy's reverence for the Baptist faith, and its personification in the saintly individual before him. If he could induce the Reverend Skidder to take up his cause, he would have the most powerful lever imaginable.

So he impulsively unbosomed himself to the spiritual adviser. He was careful though not to mention his and Pink's experience of the day before.

"Fo' de Lor', pahson," he whimpered, "Ah done lub dat woman laik it am wicked fo' me to lub her so much. Ah done be a good true husban' to her, but she ain' gwine show me no mercy no moh. Ah done be homesick fo' mah home, but she jus' kaint be puhswaded. Wha' Ah gwine do to puhswade her, pahson?"

The Reverend Skidder, peering at Mose through his spectacles, looked like nothing so much as a big owl.

"Hum!" he mused with a sort of little chuckle. "Hab yo' look de premises ober berry kerrfully, son? Hab yo' made suah dat de sheepfold am tight, an' no wolf ain' jes' been snoopin' round to sneak his way in and steal yo' lamb? Am yo' suah ob dat, son? Yo' know de Lor' made woman to try man's soul jes' as well as he made her to be his he'pmate."

"Ain' no odder nigger been snoopin' 'round, pahson. Ah is daid suah ob dat," protested Mose.

The Reverend stroked his chin whisker.

"Hum!" he mused again. "Yo' jes' wants mah serious advice?"

"Ah sholy do, pahson," said Mose eagerly.

"Wha' yo' do, son, wif a horse dat runs away? Yo' jes' puts a pow'ful bit in his mouf, and gibs him a taste ob de lash, and brings him to sudjection. Da's wha' yo' got to do, son. De Lor' say dat woman was made fo' man an' to obey him. Ain' yo' got de sperrit and de weight to hol' yo' wife down? If yo' don't hol' her down, son, she gwine trample on yo' and grind yo' into de dust. Yo' wants to take de rod ob Aaron, son, an' don' spare it one li'le bit. Dat's mah advice. Ah done fear dat yo' ain' got de sperrit to do it. Ah reckin yo' am jes' one ob dem chicken-liver niggers, dat am skeered ob a petticoat. De Gospel say dat a man am master in his own house. Jes' yo' go long home an' mek yo'se'f de master. Dat's mah advice. Ah jes' got to angle out a few jack fish fo' mah dinner an' Ah ain' got time to say moh. Ah wishes yo' success and prosperity, son. De blessin' ob de Lor' be on yo'."

And with that the Reverend Skidder made his way meditatively down the railroad track, leaving Mose a prey to varied emotions. He drew a deep breath.

"Lan' ob Goshen!" he whispered. "Ah jes' wish de Reveren' had mah job."

MOSE didn't take the advice so kindly given him. He slipped stealthily into town, and having a bit of a thirst slid into the Black 'Possum saloon. Pink was there as if by appointment. The little mulatto grabbed Mose by the arm eagerly with a light of awe in his little yellow eyes.

"Massy Lordy, Mose! Wha' yo' been? Ah jes' been finkin' ob yo'."

"Wha' fo'?" asked Mose wearily.

"Ah jes' been cogitatin' howeber yo' came 'bout to mah'y yo' wife?"

Mose leaned helplessly on the bar.

"Ah ain' jes' mek dat out mahse'f yet, Pink."

"She ain' no woman," asserted Pink, feeling of his bruises. "She somefin' moh dan a man, too. She de pussonation ob de debbil. Ah ain' got de squeak out ob mah back yet."

After imbibing a little more corn-juice, Mose's spirits and his courage revived. The conviction began to grow upon him that he had been guilty of many needless compunctions.

He knew that he had twenty-six dollars and seventy-five cents of the lodge funds in his pocket. He was a paltry ten dollars shy. Until the committee called upon him for an accounting he was safe. In the meantime, why worry?

Pink was interesting company, and Mose had need of that sort of thing just now. After fortifying his stomach a little at

the free-lunch counter, he and Pink presently found themselves involved in a hot game of craps with a bunch of negroes just in from the swamps, and with money to spend.

MOSE, it chanced, had luck for once in his life and quit a substantial winner. This added to his fund of good humor and he was almost resigned to the loss of his wife and home. Life began to take on a new and brighter hue. It was reaction, and he yielded to it with a sort of relief and something of recklessness. The worldly spirit of Pink began to have a powerful effect upon him. When the little yellow boy talked about the exciting affairs of the great world outside, a strong sense of discontent began to settle upon him. There was a sudden impulse to try his wings, and get away from the old nest. Pink's description of life in the racing world was most alluring.

"Dis yeah dump ain' nuffin' mo' dan a hole in de ground, Mose," affirmed the shrewd little vagabond. "Howeber do a libe coon laik yo' waste yo' days yeah? Yo' jes' gwine rust out laik an ol' grub hoe. Bimeby dey shovel a hole in de groun' an' dump yo' in laik yo' was a daid dog. Yo' ain' neber seen nuffin', yo' ain' neber had no fun, an' yo' is plumb daid. Ain' yo' got no sperrit?"

"Neber had no chaince," protested Mose.

"Yo' neber gwine get no chaince 'less yo' grabs it. Mebbe yo' ain' got no money," Pink sniffed contemptuously. It stung Mose's pride.

"Ah ain' so daid suah ob dat. Ah ain' so daid poor as Ah might be," he averred, stiffening a little.

"Hab yo' got a hundred in change on yo' pusson?" Pink's manner indicated that he considered a hundred dollars a paltry asset. To Mose it represented a fortune, but the big negro finally confessed, after skillful probing by the wily Pink, that he had exactly twenty-six dollars and seventy-five cents in his possession with seventy-four cents more that he had just won in the crap game. He didn't tell Pink that only the latter amount was his own. The little mulatto's eyes glittered.

"Dat ain' berry scrumptious fo' a niggar to trabbel on," he said indulgently. "Mebbe Ah gwine he'p yo' out a li'le bit. Mebbe Ah lend yo' some if yo' gets short."

TEMPTATION was strong upon Mose. Somehow he had come to believe that there was no future in Gilead for him. If he should bolt as Pink was urging him he would leave behind him a dark stain which he could hardly hope ever to obliterate. There was a fanciful idea growing in his brain that he might make the venture and after he had won a fortune playing the races, as Pink had assured him he could do, he could then restore the money to the lodge fund and square himself.

Mose almost fell for it, and the plan was practically made when he met up with a couple of his brother lodge-members on the street. They paid him their dues; and this exhibition of their faith in his honesty smote Mose so violently that his conscience triumphed, and he unbosomed the whole truth to Pink.

"Ah kaint do it, son," he declared. "When Ah qualified fo' de lodge Ah done gib mah swo'n oath; an' Ah jes' kaint."

When Pink learned that practically all the money in Mose's possession was held by him in trust as treasurer of the Lodge of Colored Freemen, he was deeply thoughtful. Secretly, Pink's profession had never at any time synchronized with his purpose. That twenty-six dollars and the odd pennies had looked to him like a foregone conclusion and he had very cleverly figured out a certain method for transferring it into his own pocket. Up to this moment his estimation of the great hulking good-natured negro had been merely that of a fat goose fit for the picking. The confession, however, altered matters. To mulct a soft-brained negro acquaintance was one thing, but to victimize the lodge treasurer was quite another and might entail serious consequences.

But if by any fortuitous circumstance the money should trickle out of Mose's possession through some channel with which he, Pink, could not be connected,—well, that was yet another thing.

So very astutely Pink fell in with Mose's mood.

"Sho'ly yo' kaint take money dat don' b'long to yo'," he said. "Yo' got to lib up to yo' swo'n word to de lodge. Ah is berry sorry, fo' Ah done got a real tip on a race dat is a suah fing. Ah gwine to pull down a bunch ob change on it fo' mahse'f, an' Ah jes' wanted to he'p an ol' frien' along. Da's all!"

Mose's eyes glittered with temptation

"Am yo' daid suah to win?" he asked eagerly.

"Am a chicken got pin-feathers?" jeered Pink. "Ain' nuffin' mo' suah dan dat de debbil gwine get yo' if yo' gib him a chaince."

"S'pose Ah borrows dis money?" queried Mose huskily.

Pink absolutely refused to accept the commission.

"Nuffin' doin', nigger! If dat money was yo' own Ah'd tek it right quick an' place it fo' yo'. But Ah ain' takin' no change dat don' b'long to nobody."

RIGHT there and then he clamped and double-riveted Mose's trust, which was the very thing he wanted to do. There was also another thing smouldering in his bosom. Pink's usual success with the fair sex was the chief vanity of his nature. His failure to cajole Randy had kindled a spark of resentment in his bosom and there was a smouldering purpose of revenge.

He proceeded about it with a craftiness and a finesse worthy of a greater mind.

"Ain' nuffin' bettah fo' yo' den to mek up wif yo' wife, Mose," he concluded with an air of finality.

Mose was dumfounded.

"Mek up wif mah wife?" he repeated. "Sho'ly!"

"Ain' Ah done tried?"

"Yo' sho'ly hab, nigger. Ah knows a way to mek her come an' feed out ob yo' hand jes' laik a li'le woolly lamb. She daid suah do it, too."

Mose's eyes rolled.

"How yo' do dat fing?" he asked.

"Jes' laik a snap ob yo' finger," assured Pink. "It am a suah fing wif ebery female woman. You done hab to mek her jealous."

"Jealous!" gulped Mose. He scratched his kinky head. Here was an idea that had never occurred to him.

"Das jes' de idee," assured Pink. "Yo' mek nigger wench jealous an' she jes' do anyfin' yo' say."

Mose's eyes kindled. It looked good—it was an inspiration. He knew of no better way to break the crust of Randy's temper. To accomplish it, though, it was necessary to have material. There was a time when Mose could have laid his hands on it easily enough, but since his marriage he hadn't bandied around with the gentler sex much.

"Dat sho' looks good to me, Pink," he admitted. "Mebbe yo' tole me how Ah gwine do it."

"Don' yo' know how yo'se'f?" sneered Pink. "Ain' yo' got knowledge ob any nice nigger wench in dis town yo' kin shine up to?"

"Used to know heap," meditated Mose. "Ah done been mah'ied fo' years, yo' know."

"Ah reckon Ah got to he'p yo' out den," said Pink patronizingly. "Ah is gwine to intringduce yo' to a nice li'le yaller gal ob mah 'quaintance down to mah bo'din'-house. She am some berry nice young leddy. She kin dance de fox-trot, an' sing, and play de pianny jes laik a dream. If Ah was a mah'yin' man mahse'f, Ah shore would lead her to de altar."

THAT evening Mose Goober underwent a wonderful process of rejuvenation, and he drank deep and heartily of the nectar of renewed youth. Pink's place of sojourn was just off the main street of the town, kept by the Widow Washburn. Among the boarders was Miss Junie Linkum, whose announced profession was that of book agent, though there was something of a mystery clinging about her fair personality. For, in the experience of the Gilead bucks, she was a trifle elusive, having a most captivating manner, but a most heartbreaking way of changing her affections. When Mose met her, however, he seemed to become a winner instantly.

The fact that he was a married man living apart from his wife did not seem to arouse scruples in Miss Junie. Perhaps it was the traditional penchant of her sex to rob another woman of her possession. Anyway, she and Mose began to figure visibly in the social life of Gilead. Every evening Mose was in attendance, and they strolled the streets, patronized the cheap shows, drifted about in a boat on the river; but there was one place that Mose diplomatically avoided, and that was the First Baptist Church. He had no very strong desire to disport his flagrant unfaithfulness anywhere within Randy's sphere.

Then the little town began to buzz with scandal. Naturally there was jealousy among the unmarried coons, but none of them cared to dispute the pass with Mose, whose giant proportions were awe-inspiring.

Of course, Mose found it necessary to

spend money on his affinity. Luckily Fortune seemed to smile upon him, for he was a steady winner at craps, and thus managed to pay up without disturbing the lodge fund. He eked out a scanty living at the free lunch and in cheap restaurants and found sleeping-quarters in an old boathouse by the river.

For a week it went on and then things began to buzz. There was a tremendous wave of sympathy for the betrayed wife, who, however, instead of accepting it with humility, fiercely resented it.

"Ah don' want no one snoopin' 'round me tryin' to mek out dat Ah needs any comfort," she stormed. "Ah jes' gwine brek de bones ob anyone dat done tole me dat."

Even the Reverend Skidder, who called to offer his spiritual solicitude, got a rebuff. Randy finally locked her door, and refused to admit callers. This might have been expected to cool the sympathy of the interested public, but it didn't seem to. It seemed as if each and all were disposed to take up Randy's case as a personal one, and public indignation grew hot. The whole town took issue against the faithless husband, and there was talk of tar and feathers and other things. How much of this was due to insidious propaganda skillfully circulated by the perfidious Pink may be well guessed.

MUCH of this could not help drifting in upon Mose and he grew alarmed. Things were not eventuating at all according to his expectations, and Pink's predictions. Randy didn't seem to be capable of jealousy. Far from succumbing to repentance and relenting in her attitude toward him, she was apparently callous and unconcerned. On the other hand, Pink was disappointed in Mose.

He had confidently expected the big black to fall for the blandishments and the charms of Miss Junie. It soon became apparent that, though Mose enjoyed that belle's society, he had not the slightest idea of conferring his heart or the honor of an elopement upon her. All for a very good reason, for Mose was a philosopher.

It did not escape him that Junie, though fair and slender and attractive as far as femininity went, was a clinging vine. He was wise enough to know that with her tendrils about his neck his job would be cut out for him, for he would have to go to work to support her. The truth was, he was not looking for anyone to support, but for some one to support him, even as Randy had done for four years gone.

As it became more and more evident to Mose that the coup was bound to be a failure he began to sicken of it. It was not pleasant to know that he was now not only ostracized from his wife but was a virtual pariah among his old friends and townspeople. From the eminent heights of the respectability he had once known he had tumbled like a falling leaf into space. Cold perspiration broke out upon him, and for two days he remained in moody seclusion in his quarters in the boat-house.

Then came the climax. Cowering in the boat-house one evening, Mose heard a rap on the door, sharp and insistent, and before he could get up it was opened and Pink and Miss Junie stood before him. The little Creole girl was sobbing bitterly. There was a vicious light in Pink's little yellow eyes and his manner was condemnatory.

"Mose Goober," said Pink sternly, "Ah jes' wants to ax yo' a question, and Ah axes yo' to answer it."

Confused and wondering, Mose got to his feet.

"Wha' dat question?" he asked.

"Wha' am yo' 'tentions in regard to dis beautiferous and innocent young leddy?"

Mose didn't grasp his meaning at once.

"Ah don' get yo', son," he said vaguely. "Mebbe yo' splanify?"

"Oh, yeh, Ah is gwine splanify," said Pink contemptuously. "Ah meks mahse'f 'sponsible fo' mekin' yo' 'quainted wif Miss Linkum. Yo' done pay co't to her, an' spend yo' time in her sassiety, an' den yo' turn cold on her. Am yo' triflin' wif her 'feckshuns?"

" 'Fo' Gawd!" gasped Mose, staring from one to the other of them. "Wha'eber yo' mean?"

"Ain' yo' gwine mah'y me?" sobbed the fair Junie.

Mose's knees grew weak and wabbly.

"Mah'y yo'?" he repeated. "However Ah gwine do dat? Ain' Ah mah'ied man mahse'f?"

Junie swayed and sobbed.

"Yo' done brek mah ha'ht," she wailed. "Ah done fo't yo' gwine mah'y me an' git a divo'ce." And she went off into a paroxysm of weeping. Pink stood like an accusing figure of Justice.

"Mose Goober, ain' yo' done scandal-

ized dis town? Ain' yo' made yo'se'f de talk ob eberybody heahabouts? Wha' yo' mean by brekkin' dis young leddy's ha'ht? Wha' yo' got to say fo' yo'se'f?"

MOSE staggered forward a little, staring at his late compatriot, trying to grasp the meaning of it all.

"'Fo' de good Lor', Pink, wa'n't it yo' own proposition? Wa'n't it jes' to mek mah wife jealous, an'—"

Like a little tigress Miss Junie fairly flew into his face, clawing at him like an enraged cat.

"Dat's wha' yo' was triflin' wif me fo'?" she screeched. "Yo' was tryin' to mek yo' wife jealous? Yo' was jes' foolin' wif me, was yo'? Ah gwine bite yo' ear off, nigger."

The only thing that saved Mose was Pink's timely intervention. He dragged the little spitfire off and again confronted Mose.

"Fo' de Lor's sakes, Pink," gulped Mose. "Hab yo' gone back on yo' ol' frien'?"

"Yo' gwine back on yo'se'f, yo' big brack fool!" snarled Pink. "Ah jes' axes yo' once mo', am yo' gwine git a divo'ce an' mah'y dis berry 'spectable leddy?"

"Fo' de name ob Gawd, Pink, de co't won' gib me no divo'ce," blubbered Mose.

"Wha' yo' gwine do fo' her feelin's den? Yo' gwine mek it up to her? All de nigger wimmen in Gilead done lookin' fo' her to scratch her eyes out, an' de niggers, dey lookin' fo' yo' to gib yo' a coat ob tar. Wha' yo' gwine do to mek it up to her?"

Mose was consumed with terror.

"Lan' ob goodness, wha' kin Ah do?" he wailed.

Pink's shrewd little eyes glittered.

"How much money yo' got on yo' pusson?"

"Ah ain' got no money dat b'longs to me."

"Don' mek no diff'runce whom it b'longs to. Yo' gib it to her fo' de damage to her feelin's or I gwine hab yo' in jail, an' de co't gib a mah'ied man twenty yeahs fo' triflin' wif a young gal's 'feckshuns."

Argument and plea was of no avail. Mose tried to prevail upon Pink's pretended friendship, but Pink was inexorable. With a groan, at last he counted out the money and passed it over, thereby as he believed sealing his fate forever so far as Gilead and his old-time friends were concerned.

TWENTY minutes thereafter Pink and Miss Junie, with their luggage, might have been seen boarding the north-bound train for Jacksonville. Their appearance was decidedly that of a bridal couple. With their surreptitious and doubtless premeditated leave-taking they passed like an ominous black cloud from Mose Goober's life forever, leaving him a shivering, dejected, woebegone black object of misery, without home, or friends, or money.

Mose had no very clear idea of what blackmail was, but he felt that in some way he had been swindled. He was so completely stunned by the unexpected turn in affairs, and the wholly evident treachery of Pink that it was a long time before he could regain anything like his old rational self. Then despair and humiliation blended with his anger. He began to see the truth.

Pink had been a traitor. He had led him designedly into the trap that had accomplished his ruin. He clenched his powerful hands in impotent rage.

"Wha' fo' didn't Ah jes' strangulate dat li'le measly yaller snake?" he groaned. "An' he clean got all mah lodge money, too. Ah gwine to git jailed if Ah stays 'round heah. Oh, Lordy, Lordy, wha' Ah gwine do?"

It was quite the most desperate moment the big negro had ever faced. He saw the structure of his life in crumbling ruins about him. There was no hope of reconstruction. Home and friends and money were all gone. Only the uncertainty of a cold, unfeeling, unknown world lay before him, for he knew that he could not remain in Gilead. In fact, it was quite imperative for his personal safety that he put as much distance as possible between him and his present location with the utmost despatch. There was no time to lose. This was his conclusion, but as a matter of fact it was already too late.

For, as he pushed open the door to slink out into the night, dark forms closed silently in upon him from the gloom. He was seized and his arms bound behind him. He was too much a victim of hopelessness to make resistance, for he knew as he gazed into the masked faces of his captors that he was in the hands of the Gilead Law and Order Committee, a secret organization known and feared far and near by undesirable citizens. Not a word was spoken, everything being conducted in grim silence. Poor Mose had visions of

a hangman's rope, or at least a bucket of hot tar, and he knew there was little to choose between the horror of the first form of punishment, and the humiliation of the latter.

ALL was done swiftly and silently. Mose could not recognize his captors. Doubtless among them were old friends and cronies.

He was wise enough not to beg for mercy. With slavering lips and eyes wildly rolling in terror and his huge frame quivering ecstatically, he was nevertheless silent. Through the darkness he was led, and as they passed numberless trees without a halt he concluded at last that he was not going to be lynched. Finally, the outlines of a structure loomed up in the dark. Mose recognized it as the town jail, or lock-up, a habitation of one room, made in stockade form by driving logs into the ground. There was an iron-barred door with a small wicket window, and there was no floor: only a pallet of old bagging.

Into this cramped place of horror Mose Goober was thrust, and his bonds were freed. Then the door was slammed and barred and the masked men vanished silently into the gloom, leaving him to his meditations.

During the night a jug of water and some crusts of bread had been placed in the wicket window. Mose ignored them, however, for he had no appetite. He only wanted to die.

He had a pretty clear idea as to what his fate was going to be, when, sometime after midday, a smell of boiling tar drifted into his nostrils. He was sufficiently interested to crawl to the wicket and look out. A couple of hundred yards away he saw a bright blaze above which was a kettle. A half-dozen negroes were gathered about it. Near the kettle was an old feather bed. Mose groaned in abject misery.

Then his gaze wandered a little further, to where the structure of the First Baptist Church loomed against a background of pines. He saw that the doors were open and people were thronging in. He wondered if he had miscalculated the day of the week. Surely it was not Sunday. Then he dropped back with a groan of despair. A little more than an hour later the door of his prison was forced open and powerful hands yanked him out into the light of day.

THE little Baptist Church was taxed to its capacity. The pews were jammed, the aisles were filled and even the window-ledges were occupied by negro boys, perched there like black crows on a rail fence, disregarding the fact that they were shutting out both light and air. Everyone sweltered and gasped for breath, for it was a hot June day. High and low, old and young were there, some with rancor in their hearts, some with the ego of offended virtue, and others with just plain undisguised curiosity.

The Reverend Skidder stood up solemnly in his pulpit and spoke slowly and portentously:

"Brudders, fellow-membahs ob dis chu'ch, we is called heah to-day fo' a berry painful an' necessary pu'pose. Yo' is heah to jine wif de Chu'ch Committee to consider de case ob Mose Goober, an' to act upon de question ob his expellation from de chu'ch fold. Now, Ah axes yo' to bend yo' haids in humility to de Lor' while Ah axes de Divine guidance in dis berry 'portant mattah."

For forty minutes the Reverend Skidder held forth eloquently and forcefully to his parishioners in what seemed to some of the less devout like an endless prayer. But his earnest appeal for Divine blessing upon each and every member of the church, the President of the United States, the rulers of all nations and even the heathen of unconverted lands in the remotest corners of the earth, beseeching that they might be all brought to the foot of the Heavenly Throne in humble repentance, had reached its seeming limit when there was a sudden pause. For a space of time in which one might have counted ten, the preacher hung far over his pulpit with closed eyes and heavy drooping lips. All would have been absolute, suspenseful silence but for a faint medley of snores in divers parts of the room, and a few devout *sotto voce* remarks:

"Amen! Glory to God, brudder!"

Then the Reverend Skidder dropped his lower jaw, revealing a cavernous mouth, pink and slavering, for all the world like that of a huge alligator angling for flies, and thrusting out his long arms, maundered emotionally on:

"All ob dese fings we axes yo' to grant us, oh good Lor', an' jes one fing mo', if it be in de goodness ob yo' ha'ht to grant it." He paused for an instant, for the wily purpose of enabling his audience to

prepare for what was to follow. He was apparently successful, for there was an audible stir and through his half-closed eyelids he saw the sea of black faces below him suddenly become animated and upturned.

"One ob de 'sociate membahs of mah precious flock by de name ob Mose Goober hab strayed from de fold, O Lor'. He hab wandered off into de dark places, and he hab fallen into de pit, an' he hab sco'ched hisself in de fires ob hell, an' consorted wif de debbil, an' fo'gotten his promises to de chu'ch an its holy pu'poses, an' gibben hisself ober to dishonest practices, an' desingcrated his home ties, an' fo'saken his faithful wife an' consort, an' his wuk, an' eberyfing dat is wicked an' sinful, O Lor'! We is mindful, O Lor', ob all de mercy an' de fo'gibbeness dat yo' is holdin' out to sinners, dat dey may be sabed an' dat dey may come back into de fold to hab deir wool washed white in de blood ob de Lamb. Amen!" A great chorus of amens came from the excited congregation. The Reverend Skidder knew the dramatic value of suspense and waited for the impression to sink in. "But befo' yo' done grant him dat fo'gibbeness which in de goodness ob yo' ha'ht yo' am pleased to gib to all sinners, Ah axes yo', O Lor', dat yo' consider dis case ob our absent brudder Mose Goober. Ah axes yo' dat he be weighed in de scales ob Justice, an' dat yo' may see fit to gib him punishment, O Lor'. Ah axes yo' to smite him wif de rod ob Aaron, O Lor', an' smite all de sin an' wickedness out ob him an' mek him an honest niggah. Ah prays yo', O Lor', dat he may be brung to see de error ob his ways, an' de wickedness ob cheatin' his fellow chu'ch-membahs—an' odder fings."

"Amen! Glory to God, brudder! Amen! Amen!"

"An', O Lor', Ah axes yo' to punish him fo' his neglect ob his wife, our deah sister Randy Goober, whom I sees sittin' down heah befo' me wif a ha'ht full ob sorrow, an'—"

THEN he stopped automatically. His gaze had been fixed with blazing concentration upon the gaunt, powerful figure of a negro woman sitting in a front pew. She owned the torso of a giantess and arms of such length as to be able to tap her knees with her finger tips. Her features were slightly dished, with a flat spreading nose, deep-set eyes and lips so thick and juicy as to look for all the world like great slit persimmons. It was the holding up of Randy's hand that had caused the negro preacher to pause.

"Ah don' laiks to interrupshun yo', pahson." The big, husky consort of Mose Goober got to her feet. There was a craning and straining of necks to get a view of her. Those who knew Randy distrusted the necessity of ministerial or even Divine intervention in her favor. She enjoyed the reputation of being quite able to maintain her rights without assistance and her looks did not belie it. "Ah ain' castin' no 'flections on yo' prayer, pahson," she continued apologetically. "It am jes' 'bout de mos' spirituous prayer Ah eber heerd. But Ah is jes' gwine offah yo' a sudjestion if yo' don' mind."

The Reverend Skidder leaned over his pulpit benignantly. "Yo' interruption am quite scusable, Sister Goober," he said indulgently. "Ah ain' so hidebound in mah creed dat Ah kaint lissen to de advice ob one ob mah flock."

"Ah is jes' minded to menshun," said Randy with a glitter in her eyes, "dat yo' don' need to put dat wuk ob punishin' Mose Goober mah husban' on de Lor'. 'Pears laik de Lor' hab got all ob dat kin' ob wuk he needs. Ah axes yo' to pray to him to jes' gib dat job to me. If de Lor' will jes' so circumvent fings as to let me get a armhold on Mose Goober Ah will see dat dere won' be no need ob de Lor' takin' a hand. Mebbe yo' undahstan's me."

Wisely the Reverend Skidder would have deferred to this simple request, but unwisely his ministerial mind caught at the chance for doctrinal argument which he felt he could creditably expound.

"Mah deah Sister Goober," he protested with his most patronizing air of solicitude, "don' yo' recall dat line ob de Scriptures dat de good Lor' say dat vengeance am his, an' dat he will repay? Does yo' fink yo' hab de right to take dat away from de Lor'?"

It was then that the transformation occurred. The big negress seemed to add a full foot to her enormous height and glared at her interlocutor with an insane light of fury in her dead-black eyes.

"Didn' de Lor' jine me to mah husban'?" she demanded hoarsely.

"He sho'ly did, sister," said the Reverend, adopting a pacificatory tone, "but ain' yo' husban' come undah de displeasure

ob de Lor' kase de don' support his wife an' meks her wuk to support him—"

"Am dat ag'in' de law ob de Lor'?" Randy's voice rose in a screech. "Didn' he gib mah husban' to me? Ain' Ah got a right to support mah husban' if Ah wants to?"

"Mah dear sister," said the Reverend Skidder impressively, "ain' yo' husban' done been faithless to yo'? Ain' all yore frien's heah to-day to show deir symphony fo' yo' an'—"

"Ah don' wan' no symphony! Ah brek de jaw ob anyone dat offers me no symphony!" Randy's raucous voice reverberated through the edifice like the booming of a cracked bell. "Ah ain' got no need fo' it, an' dere ain' no old monkey-face laik yo' gwine stan' up dere an' call mah husban' names to mah face. Ah gwine expel mahse'f from dis chu'ch if yo' expel mah husban', an' wifout yo' he'p. Mose Goober am mah husban', an' Ah done promise to stan' by him in sickness an' in sorrow, an' if Ah habs to, in sin. If mah husban' hab done wrong, it am bekase dere am a heap ob no-'count lazy niggers in dis town done lead him astray. Mebbe he hab fooled away his time wif a slippery yeller gal. Ah don' keer fo' dat, fo' dat's de weakness ob man—nigger man, anyway.

"Mebbe he done lose dat lodge-money, but he don' owe it no mo', fo' Ah done pay it back mahse'f dis mornin'. Ah jes' got to say a few fings right now to yo' an' to de membahs ob dis Baptis' Chu'ch, an' I neber did laik de Baptis' anyway,—Ah is gwine ober to de Meferdist fold,—Ah jes' wants to say dat Ah settle mah 'fairs wif mah husban' mahse'f, an' Ah don' need no he'p f'om nobody else. If mah husban' an' me wants to hab a rampification, da's our own affair an' we gwine hab it wifout de meddlin' ob nobody else. Ah jes' gwine tek mahse'f out ob dis chu'ch now, an' Ah neber steps mah foot in it no mo', fo' de grace ob de Lor' ain' heah.

"All yo' is heah fo' to-day is to pick on dis ol' nigger woman, try to mek out dat her husban' am de wust man on yearth, an' he ain' no wuss dan any odder nigger man!"

She finished with an eerie screech, and there was commotion in the startled throng which scattered right and left in consternation and terror as she went down the aisle to the door, flinging her powerful arms about like flails. No one had the temerity to offer protest or argument, and like an Amazon girded for battle, Randy burst into the street, the personification of unbridled fury.

FATE timed her exit from the place, for it was at the very moment that Mose and his captors carrying the bucket of tar approached the church. The abject, tottering, stricken figure of her terrified consort came in her range of vision and she stopped and took in the situation. She crouched like a tigress.

Mose saw the terrible light in her eyes, noted the savage in her demeanor, and a great wail of terror burst from his lips. Forward bounded Randy like a female cyclone, her great arms thrashing out to right and left, bowling the dumfounded coons over like tenpins.

Scattering them like chaff, she grabbed the bucket of tar and deluged all within reach. Mose himself essayed to beat a wild retreat, but her authoritative voice caught him, a voice he never dared disobey:

"Mose Goober, yo' gwine home! Yo' go in an' lock de do' an' stay dere. Ah aims to 'tend to dis fing mahse'f."

Mose couldn't believe his senses.

"Randy!" he gulped. "Yo' means dat?"

"Yo' gwine obey yo' wife?"

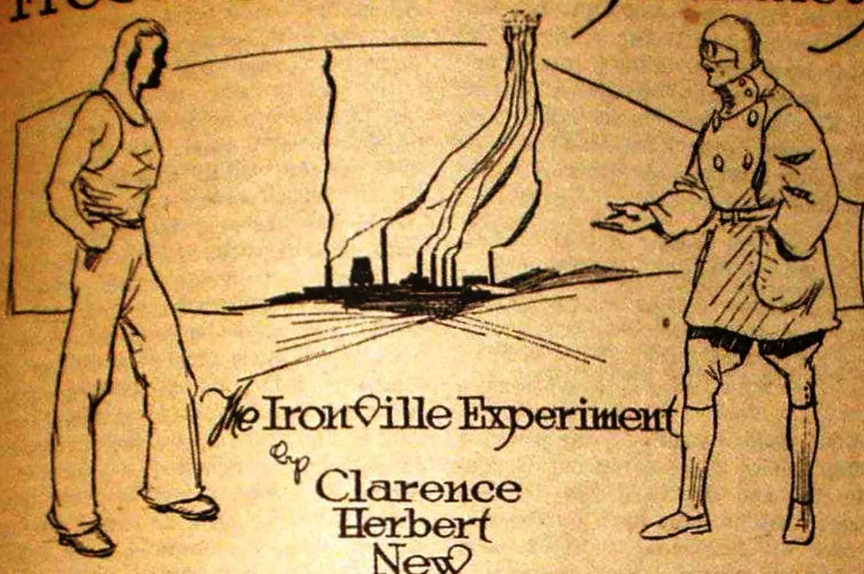
"Yo' done fo'gib me?" he gurgled ecstatically; but a look from her was enough, and he shot away like an arrow sped from a bow.

Randy didn't enter her domicile until some time later, but it was to find Mose luxuriating in his old armchair. He was trembling and half fearful as she came straight toward him, for the fear of retribution was in his heart, so he was unprepared for what happened. Powerful hands were laid on his shoulders, a black face hovered over him; and a pair of juicy red lips as thick as split persimmons descended upon his. Then Randy bolted into the kitchen, from which presently issued the delicious odor of fried chicken, mingled with the aroma of black coffee and the scent of corn-pone.

Mose sank back with the delightful sense of having wakened from a bad dream. Heaven had reopened its portals, the slate was wiped clean, and all he could say was:

"Praise de Lor'! Ah is gwine to be a good nigger aftah dis, an' Ah is gwine to fin' a job to-morrow."

Free Lances in Diplomacy



The Ironville Experiment

by Clarence Herbert New

TWO miles back of Scabbacombe Head in South Devon there is a little meandering country road, not suitable for motor traffic, which runs through the tiny hamlets of Coleton and Brownstone to Kingswear, and so across the river by ferry to Dartsmouth. Between this road and the Scabbacombe Cliffs, for some miles north and south, lies the residential estate of the Earl of Dyvnaint, which is known locally as Trevor Hall.

On the road, a short distance south of the only gateway or break of any sort in the twelve-foot wall surrounding the estate, stands a lovely old ivy-covered church which was originally a Norman chapel,—burned and rebuilt three times during succeeding dynasties—the living of which is within the Earl's gift, its congregation drawn from a limited radius in the immediate vicinity, including five or six county families and their tenantry. It has been stated before in these narratives that His Lordship made a point of knowing personally every tenant upon his land and every man or woman in his immediate employ and took a close interest in their welfare. Consequently he and his family are more popular with all classes than any other landowners in South Devon.

It has been impossible, of course, for either the Earl or Countess Nan to occupy the Trevor pew in St. Matilda's every Sunday even when they are at home, because of the many demands upon their time and their frequent absences abroad, but when they do appear, it is always an occasion for a pleasant chat with the tenantry after the service, when His Lordship saunters back along the country lanes with them, stopping for a look-in at various cottages by the way. His manner is always genial, lips smiling and eyes twinkling—but recently they have noticed a more somber expression when his face is in repose.

This thoughtful expression—like that of one who, unafraid, looks steadily upon a great and overwhelming danger approaching from the distance—was particularly noticeable as he walked home after the morning service one Sunday in early August. With the aid of a high-powered radio installation and his arrangements with the cable companies, he is generally in touch with every quarter of the globe where he has personal interests, and in some respects he is better informed as to political occurrences in various countries than even the British Foreign Office. The wire news that morning had been particularly disheartening. Bolshevistic poison spreading in every country, strikes increasing everywhere, the business of the world held up at a time when quantity-production, extension in every line, was the only sane and possible way out of the

chaos resulting from the German War. Lighting one of his favorite long cigars, the Earl was strolling along the brow of the cliffs by himself, trying to figure out some way by which a return to sanity and common sense might be forced in the United Kingdom, when his secretary came hurrying down from the Hall with a lengthy radio message, the pith of which read as follows:

> . . . . . Situation to-night is this: Every employee in plant will go out Tuesday morning unless granted 50% wage increase and share in profits of business. Similar strikes threatened in practically every other plant here. Demands preposterous, of course—but suggestions will be much appreciated.
>
> FRANKLYN B. DEVOE.

TREVOR nodded kindly to the pleasant young fellow, cadet of an old Derbyshire family, and dismissed him for the time being. As he went back up the terrace, two of England's most famous statesmen came out of a little postern in the rear façade with Countess Nan, and noticing the striking figure of His Lordship over on the cliff-brow sauntered down to join him.

"What's up, Trevor? More of these sickening cross-purposes and bolshevik results?"

"Oh—aye. All of a piece, don't you know. Nothin' much in the big total, an' yet the place is rather in the spotlight just now, d'ye see—Ironville, Pennsylvania—down near the Maryland border, in the Alleghenies. A few years ago nobody in Europe ever heard of the place—population very likely eighteen thousand by now, iron mines close by, half a dozen large manufacturing works. Place was rather free from labor troubles until last year; then an anarchistic band bought a parcel of ground two miles up the valley, an' started a settlem'nt there. Kept to themselves for a while; then they began havin' in every bolshevist, anarchist or I. W. W. of note they could get hold of, to lecture 'em on every rotten theory under the sun. We couldn't quite make out why they went to the expense of puttin' up a rough open-air auditorium that would seat a thousand or more when there were less than fifty of their own lot, until we found 'em offerin' inducem'nts to the hands in all the Ironville works to go out there evenin's or Sundays for free beer an' wild talk in their auditorium, from the rotters they had in from outside.

"Of course, one doesn't carry matches about in a lot of inflammable stuff without gettin' results, of a sort. Unions began sendin' delegates in. For ten months there have been strikes, arbitration, temp'r'ry settlem'nts, men breakin' their signed agreem'nts, strikin' again. Same thing over—an' round the circle! Worst of it is, the workin' folk in Ironville are better housed, better treated, better paid than any others in the world doin' the same class of work. An' their cost of livin' is lower than outside because of the co-operative shops we have to supply their wants. If any men and women in the world are gettin' more—a dev'lish sight more—than they can possibly earn to-day, it's that same lot in Ironville, Pennsylvania. An' that's why the Amalgamated Press sends it out in plate, all over the place, at every report of fresh trouble there, why Reuter's an' other syndicates reprint it over Europe—on the basis, y' know, that if men who are so much better situated than the average laborin'-class are still dissatisfied an' tryin' to get more, the whole economic world wants to know why!"

"Has Your Lordship any financial interest in the place?"

"Majority shareholder in one of the largest works. We were doing very well with it before the war, takin' out a clear twenty-five per cent in good years—lucky if we netted ten durin' the last three, in spite of Governm'nt orders. In any manufacturin' plant it's impossible to figure positively within five per cent, owin' to the constant margin of costs which can never be exactly forecast, but our books indicate between eight an' ten for the last year. Well—a glance at this message will show you where that is goin'!"

THE gray-haired statesmen and Countess Nan studied the message—their heads close together.

"My word! Seems to be no end to this sort of thing! It can't go on indefinitely, you know. There's a limit in every business—beyond that, nothin' save bankruptcy! Why the deuce is it the beggars can't see that! Can't understand that if they force their employers over the edge, the works close—they're out of a job!"

"Faith, they're considerin' that quite calmly, don't you know! Say when that comes about, they'll take over the works an' run 'em themselves!"

"But—but dammit, Trevor, that's confiscation! Just as much highway robbery as the chap who holds up a stage on the king's turnpike or the burglar who breaks into one's house an' takes whatever he happens to fancy!"

"Precisely! And yet, no more so than the bally rotters who hold up the railway systems of an entire country or city for a fifty-per-cent raise when they're already gettin' larger incomes than the average professional an' office men who are their neighbors! In each case they're takin' at the point of a gun money which in no way belongs to them,—more money than they can be worth, possibly, in open an' fair competition,—taking it merely because they have for the moment the power to grab it. Whether rightfully or wrongfully doesn't matter—whether by so doing they actually rob good neighbors poorer than themselves is of no consequence, either."

"But I say, Trevor! In this particular case, what will you do? Have they really the whip-hand? Have they come to that in the States? Is it actually facin' us here?"

"It's facing the whole world, Your Excellency! It mean. civil war an' red revolution in every country unless some means is found to drive home economic truths in unthinking heads which have been filled with anarchistic insanity until there's no room for even a grain of common sense! In this particular case I can beat them! Considering the prominence of Ironville in the public eye just now, it seems to me that it's well worth the time and trouble to do so. Fact is—if our structure of civilization isn't goin' entirely to smash—I fancy I could scarcely find activities of more real value and effect during the next few months!"

"But how can you handle a situation like that? I confess it looks to me like an *impasse*. Conceivably you might close down your works an' try to get another force together; but that means hostilities which may result in the destruction of your plant altogether."

"Which would hit the striking Johnnies rather harder than it would me, I fancy—they'd be a long time out of work, you know. At all events I'll not plan a campaign until I'm on the ground—an' you'll get the answer to your question in the newspapers. I'll jolly well see that you do! That's one way by which my poor efforts will possibly have a more far-reachin' effect on the general world-situation than the mere local result would imply. Watch the newspapers, gentlemen—an' distribute as many of 'em over here as you can! If one but had control of the entire world-press for a year, he could snuff out any trouble which came up in countries where newspapers are read. Unfortunately too many, of wide circulation, are in irresponsible hands!"

LEAVING their guests with the Countess on the terrace, His Lordship got into a small runabout and drove back through the wooded part of the estate until he came to a clearing in the heart of the forest where his laboratories and airplane construction works were located. On a level patch of turf in front of the hangars, a great triplane with four powerful motors was being tuned up, tested at every point. A slenderly built man in grease-soaked khaki, his eyes shielded by protecting goggles, walked thoughtfully around the big machine, examining a nut or a wire here and there—listening to the hum of the motors. Trevor smiled as he got out of the car and studied the 'plane in much the same absorbed way. A perfect tool for a master craftsman!

"Seems to be entirely fit—eh, Harry?"

Harry Archer has been for years not only the Earl's companion on many of his famous flights, and chief engineer, but friend as well—a friend whose knowledge of mechanics and various other things is abnormal.

"That bird, sir—that old baby of ours—is about as nearly right at this minute as human hands can make her—motors run as sweetly as the movement of a hundred-guinea watch."

"Think she'd make St. John's to-night—if we happened to be going that way?"

"She ought to make Quebec—without any trouble at all! I've had her up a dozen times with these motors, at more than eight thousand meters, and there's never been the slightest balk in them. Yesterday, as you know, we were up for twenty hours—and came down with a good ten-hours supply of petrol still in our tanks. Of course, Alcock and Brown had a westerly gale behind them, coming east to Ireland; we'd have to go above three thousand meters to get a current in the opposite direction, but at four thousand, one does get it. How far out that current

reaches on the western ocean, I don't know—nobody does! But I fancy it'll be merely a matter of going up or down to find our favoring wind, no matter where we are—and I'll guarantee those motors against freezing if we climb to seven miles—higher than anyone has been yet. We've insulated and protected them until they'll stand sixty below zero without much question—I got forty below, at thirty-three thousand feet."

"Very good. We'll try it. Be ready to start in three hours. Two of the men besides ourselves will be sufficient for any emergency—an' about all the extra weight we should carry. It happens that I must be in lower Pennsylvania to-morrow afternoon, if possible—so we'll just consider it done, an' see if this machine of ours is really as dependable as we fancy. Eh—what?"

Returning to the Hall, the Earl had tiffin with his guests—a week-end party of twelve, all more or less celebrated people; then, without the slightest reference to what he proposed doing, he dictated a radio message to his secretary:

> Plutoco—Ironville, Pa., U. S. A.
> Call meeting employees and company Tuesday morning ten-thirty. No outsiders. Further instructions later.
> DYVNAINT.

Next, calling the Countess into his private suite while he was getting into flying clothes, he gave her a few careful instructions:

"Nan, the value of what I hope to accomplish over there will depend largely upon the amount of publicity we can give it all over the world. With the twelve-hundred-odd news-sheets which are supplied by our International Press Syndicate—which we control through it—we can spread the daily events in Ironville before the public in such a way as to focus general interest and comment upon what is going on there. I'll see, of course, that our New York and London offices are supplied with full reports whenever there is anything to say. You'd best notify the New York office that anywhere from one to a dozen new dailies may be acquired at any moment—and that in case of possible complications, we must have press facilities, with full editorial staffs ready to get them out if necessary. I think I have enough on deposit with New York and Philadelphia banks to handle anything which may come up. Now kiss me, and get busy on the confidential wire into the London office! Harry and I had best be starting within the half-hour. *Au revoir*, dear!"

NEXT afternoon, at five o'clock, a smooth-shaven man of thirty-five sat in the president's office of the Pluto Manufacturing Company in Ironville, Pennsylvania—dictating letters to his admiring secretary as calmly as if the affairs of his company were running with perf ct smoothness. Devoe's face was rugged, but handsome from its very strength. Everyone with whom he came in contact respected him thoroughly. Women did more than that—but so far without perceptible results. Along toward six o'clock the door opened, and the Earl of Dyvnaint quietly walked in. Miss Humphrey, who had personally sent the radio message to England the previous morning, looked and felt as if she were seeing a ghost. Devoe had the sensation also, but managed to pass it off with a smiling remark:

"Your Lordship, then, was really on this side? Messages repeated to you?"

"Eh? Oh, no! Got your radio at Trevor Hall yesterday morning. Left there at two-thirty P. M. Made Philadelphia in a bit over twenty-two hours—straight course. Dev'lish cold, though, up there—what? Well—you called the meeting as I suggested?"

"Yes. The men have postponed their strike until after it. I'd no more idea than the man in the moon what you expect me to say at that meeting, but was confident that your instructions would arrive before the time set—so I wasn't worrying."

"Er—quite so. Miss Humphrey, you understand, of course, that this discussion is entirely confidential? Aye? Very good! Then we'll go into the matter at once."

The drafting-room of the concern occupied the entire top loft of a factory building in which various parts were assembled for putting together the finished heating-appliances. When the drawing-boards, tables and so forth were piled along the walls, there was just about space enough to seat the nine hundred employees and managing officials of the Company upon campstools which Devoe had hurriedly requisitioned from three Philadelphia undertakers—he had the feeling at the time that there was something of the funeral aspect in that meeting. When the assembled employees had answered a roll-call, he intro-

duced the commanding-looking gentleman at his side as the Right Honorable Rear Admiral, the Earl of Dyvnaint—majority stockholder of the Company—and was about to go on with a statement to them when the Earl touched his elbow.

"Just a moment, Mr. Devoe! Are you quite positive there are none but our own people in the room? This is supposed to be a private conference between the Company and its employees—but I rather fancy the large gentleman in the front row is not one of us. His face seems a bit familiar."

Phelan—red-faced and blustering—was on his feet in a second with a tirade against capital, including such worn-out expressions as "slave-drivers," "blood-suckers," "grinding the laborers down," and the like. The good-humored expression remained upon Trevor's face, but there was a glint of cold steel in his eye as he stopped the outburst with a carelessly upraised hand.

"One moment, sir! There are about nine hundred of our employees here, to represent their side, and scarcely a score of the Company management. Quite a large enough majority to protect their own interests without assistance from strangers who have no business here. This is a private conference, absolutely! At the proper time a committee made up equally of employees and managing officials will listen patiently to any representatives the unions care to send up, consider any union proposition—but not now. You will oblige us by leaving this room and getting entirely off the Company's property—at once!"

The tirade immediately burst into renewed activity—appeals to the men not to see their representative insulted.

"Put me out, will ye! An' l'ave these poor downtrodden slaves without nobody to purtect 'em against the blood-suckin' capitalists! Ye *will* not! 'Twould take a betther man!"

Trevor laid his hat and stick upon the table, stepped over in front of Phelan in as leisurely a manner as if he merely thought of continuing the discussion. Something in his eyes made the big fellow suddenly launch a terrific blow straight at the Earl's head—but it struck empty air, and he lost his balance a trifle. Something as hard as steel gripped his wrist in passing—he was jerked still farther forward, as a left arm slid under his chin and snapped his head back. As he stumbled to his knees, hard knuckles jabbed deep into a spot alongside his spine and found a nerve. Speechless, helpless, tottering, Phelan was pushed out of the room, down four flights of stairs, and handed over to a chauffeur who appeared to have been waiting to give just such a man a lengthy joy-ride out through the country.

WHEN the Earl stepped quietly back into the loft, brushing dust from his immaculate coat-sleeve, President Devoe had located one more interloper—a strikingly handsome young woman whose cheeks blazed as she stood up and defied them to remove her. But His Lordship merely smiled good-naturedly and motioned her back to her seat.

"You are Miss Hastings, I believe? Representing *The New Order*—a socialist weekly circulating through this part of the State? Aye? Quite so! We've no objection to your remaining—on condition that you print exactly what you hear. One single misstatement of the facts in your paper, and we'll start a libel-suit which will effectually put it out of business. We propose, Miss Hastings, that all dealings with our employees shall be open to the entire world, after we have reached an understanding with them—but we'll not permit any person or paper to lie about our management without as much unpleasantness as we can give them. In other words, the more honest publicity you give our actions, the better it will please this comp'ny. . . . . Now, if our President will permit me, I'd like to place before you a proposition which I consider a bit more than fair—eh?"

Devoe grinned happily. He had personal reasons for regretting any clash with Miss Hastings, who came from one of the most aristocratic families in Pennsylvania—and the Earl had smilingly handled that complication in a few seconds. With a sigh of relief he motioned His Lordship to go ahead and run the show his own way.

The officers of the Company were seated around a table against the side wall, midway down the length of the room, so that, as he turned from side to side, everything the speaker said in a conversational tone could be distinctly understood by everyone present. For one long moment the Earl glanced at the faces before him with such directness that each man and woman had the sense of meeting his eye. Then with a smile which drew response from most of them, he began to talk so clearly

and simply that they understood every word.

"Men—and women! To prevent any misleading report of what we saw, here, leaking out into the newspapers, Miss Seymour will take it all down in shorthand and then have copies run off so that each of you may have one to look over at your leisure. Now, let's get down to business. A good many of you believe that I—living in England—draw a lot of money out of this business without having any part in the earning of it. Radicals have told you that—made you think that it was outrageously unjust to you laboring people. So I shall first go over the real facts—which all of you may easily prove. At the time when this comp'ny took over the plant and business of the old Caldwell-Devoe Comp'ny, I was experimentin' in England with internal-combustion engines for airplanes. I discovered a principle which I saw would effect a large saving in every sort of heating-appliance—patented it in Europe an' the United States. I turned over the use of those patents, without royalty, to this comp'ny in return for a third int'rest. In Europe these same patents are payin' me, to-day, a twenty-five-per-cent royalty on the cost of every heating appliance in which they are installed."

SO far, they followed him understandingly. It was fairly clear to all of them that his patents had a definite cash value—would have to be paid for by any concern using them. They listened even more closely as he went on.

"In order to get our share of the trade and insure a fair return for the labor and investm'nt, we were obliged to erect five new buildings, four of the latest-model furnaces, and install a good deal of new machinery. You know as well as I how that runs into money. Well, the Comp'ny might possibly have borrowed the money on its own business showing, but that would have run up a heavy bill of interest. I had confidence in the business, put in that cash myself in exchange for more stock—which left me ownin' a majority of the shares, and with an actual investm'nt in this business of over four hundred thousand dollars in addition to my patents. Every penny of that money came out of my personal earnings and savin's. Now, before the war, this business earned a twenty-per-cent dividend on my stock, which paid me well. For the last two years the earnings have been so triflin' that it was impossible to declare any dividend at all. If I sold out my int'rest in this Comp'ny, I could easily get six per cent or more for the money—so that I'm actually losin', this year, an income of at least sixty thousand dollars, counting in the patents. If any of you were in my place, would you feel inclined to sell out—or not?"

This made them vaguely uneasy. Was the owner thinking of closing out the business? If so, how about them? But there was no getting around the cold logic of his statements—not a man of them but would have sold out for anything he could get, in sheer panic, and there were murmuring admissions of this.

"Well—you see my position. But I notice that it's makin' you a bit uneasy, and so I'll say at once that I've no idea of sellin' out—not just now, at all events! I've too much confidence in the earning possibilities of the business under normal conditions for that. But if we grant the fifty-per-cent raise you ask, it will put the Comp'ny just that much deeper in the hole, just that much nearer a receivership and closin' up the works altogether—because the business hasn't the money to buy me out, and couldn't borrow it now without bankruptcy. Without the money I have put in, it couldn't have lived through the last two years—you'd have had no work or wages at all from it. So you see that I have every bit as good a right to whatever int'rest or dividend this Comp'ny can pay me as you have to the wages you receive from it. Do I make the thing clear? Is there one of you who can't see that my earnings from this business are just as fair as yours?"

THERE was quite a little muttered discussion over this—in which the voice of Miss Hastings could be heard arguing along the line of the theory that he could not be considered a producer himself, and therefore was not entitled to any of the earnings from production. But she failed to convince her hearers; the plant certainly could not have been built or run without money—and nobody borrows money for nothing. No getting around that proposition! More than a third of them had little investments of their own—a few Liberty Bonds, a suburban cottage, a share or two of stock, the interest of which helped toward paying off their rent and furniture-installments. No, they couldn't

refute his statements, and some of them said so—rather ill-naturedly.

"Very good! Then we'll go on a bit further—to the Comp'ny's relations with you. We got along swimmingly until that long-haired crew camped down near us up the valley; then you men an' women began to hear a lot of theories which sounded very fine but which none of you understand even now, because they don't match up with the business experience you've all had. The Comp'ny had made a lot of contracts based on the wage-scale of 1918. You struck for a twenty-five-per-cent raise—and knocked every cent of profit out of those contracts when it was granted you, because we had to pay more for pig-iron an' tin at the same time. But we stalled along, hopin' to make new contracts at the present scale on which there might be a profit. Then you got all stirred up again by outsiders who knew nothing of our business—an' broke your signed agreem'nt with us for another year. Friends,—we're all really friends at the bottom, are we not?—I believe, an' the stockholders believe, that we'd have far less trouble in reachin' a basis of understanding an' fair play if you men an' women had more knowledge of the managing end of the business. So I've suggested a proposition to the directors, an' they've agreed that I may submit it to you."

"Let's have it!" "Bully for His Nobs!" "Spit it out, Mr. Earl—we'll listen to ye!" "You're all right, ol' sport!"

"Er—thanks! Well, first, all of the office force except the bookkeepers an' stenographers have given up their present positions for—say—four months. We've found jobs for them elsewhere at the same pay. This, and the resignation of the present officers, will leave vacancies—to be filled by some of you. There will be eight positions as salesmen on the road, one advertising manager with two assistants, one purchasing-agent, one shipping-manager and four shipping-clerks, two assistant bookkeepers who also act as collectors of the outstanding accounts, president, treasurer, vice president, general manager, secretary and cashier—twenty-three office positions to be filled from your own ranks by men or women whom you will elect by majority vote among yourselves.

"When you have elected this new management, we will call special meetings of stockholders and directors, passing resolutions confirming your appointments and turning over the entire management, receipts and liabilities of the Comp'ny to you, but transferring my patents back to me as security for my investm'nt. We have in mind several among you whom we think would be better fitted for the various positions than the others, but you probably wouldn't agree with us, so we shall make absolutely no suggestions. This arrangem'nt is to be tried out for four months at the present scale, but with a fifty-fifty division of all profits earned by the business each month—you to select your own expert accountant to go over the books, now and at the end of the four months—but he must be a duly certified and reputable one acceptable to us. Now—do you get it? Does it sound like a fair proposition?"

THE room was filled with a buzz of discussion, which increased as Lord Trevor sat down to let them thresh it out. Miss Hastings, the labor reporter, had been furiously scribbling in her notebook, and at first had been fairly seething with protest. As she finally grasped the full purport of the suggestion, however, it stupefied her; it was incredible that any set of capitalists should make such an offer in good faith! There was a trick somewhere! There simply had to be some treacherous catch in the proposition by which the employees would be sold out in the end! But she couldn't find it—and neither could they. One of the more cautious, levelheaded mechanics presently ventured a question:

"I say, sir! Ye've not told us what happens at the end of the four months? Where'll we be goin' from there?"

"The stockholders will then expect some sort of a proposition from you employees—either to continue the experiment another two months, so as to be quite sure, or to work together in future on some definite basis which will be fair to all of us."

"An'—an'—suppose we make a lot of mistakes?"

"That'll be entirely up to you; the business takes the consequences, either way. Each man who turns over his job to one of your men will tell him exactly what his duties were and how he carried them out. The salesmen will be given a list of the regular customers in each territory, and of other ones we hope to get—also what the averages of their sales an' commissions

have been. Advertisin' men will have the Comp'ny's books for reference as to what the previous expenditures have been, an' where placed—purchasing agents also."

"Will there be any strings on 'em, sir?"

"Not a string! The business, with all its liabilities an' possible earnings, will be entirely in your hands. Each of your men will be sole boss of his own job—except that some of them will be naturally responsible to some of your other men—collectors, of course, under the treasurer an' cashier, salesmen and ad men under the sales manager, an' he in turn somewhat under the secretary. I might suggest that your treasurer, secretary an' sales manager ought to be the three best men you have among you—men who've had at least two years in high school. But that's as far as I'll go."

"How soon would you want an answer on this?"

"Suit yourselves. Take a week if you like. Copies of this talk will be ready for you by ten o'clock this evening—take them home an' go over 'em at your leisure. . . . . Oh! There's one point I forgot to bring up." (Trevor rapped on the table for silence.) "One point I think it may be well for you to consider, if you accept our proposition—and that is whether you prefer to keep it just between yourselves an' the stockholders, or whether you'd rather have it explained to our customers an' the newspapers in advance? Of course, the moment your salesmen go out, there will have to be an explanation to the customers—the whole thing will get about, anyway. Seems to me the better course would be to send announcem'nts out as to just what the new arrangem'nt is—but suit yourselves about that. We've certainly nothin' to conceal."

IT was a foregone conclusion that the Earl's proposition would be accepted—with very little delay. Here was actually what they had demanded without any notion of actually getting—an equal share in the management and profits of the business. In fact, the more they read over the copies of what had been said at the conference, the more unmistakable was the fact that the business would be in their sole charge during the four months. Each man and woman among the employees saw golden additions to his or her savings account—and began spending the money in advance. The employees' committee had scarcely affixed their signatures to the agreement with the stockholders and counted votes to see who had been elected for the various office positions before the town was buzzing with plans for new interior-decorations and furniture—new clothes, tin Lizzies for the higher-salaried ones, player-pianos, movings to more expensive and presumably more respectable streets. It is an interesting sidelight on human nature to note that most of these plans were carried out before the second month was fairly under way—the scant five-per-cent profit holding over from the old régime (which was badly needed to replenish special stocks of raw material) being declared earnings and evenly divided.

It was supposed at first that the Earl of Dyvnaint had returned to England after signing the agreement, but he unexpectedly turned up in Ironville at irregular intervals—had pleasant chats with Devoe, Kate Seymour and the employee management—then disappeared again upon his own various and multitudinous affairs.

Devoe had formed the habit of dropping in every second or third evening at the boarding-house where Belle Hastings was staying, trying to keep their interviews upon a strictly social basis; but there was no side-tracking her. The "Ironville Experiment," as it was now being referred to by the daily press, was too absorbing, too mysterious and full of surprises in its working out to leave room for much of anything else in her mind. And the Earl himself was to her the biggest mystery of all; she couldn't decide whether he was a mere visionary fool or a force so powerful that he was playing with them all—laughing to himself at their childish attempt to handle something entirely beyond their average comprehension. She was trying to pull her own brain out of the fog, one evening, when Devoe had insisted upon her motoring up the valley with him. (If she would discuss the affairs of his Company, he preferred to listen when they were beyond the prying ears of town gossips rather than between the telephonic walls of a boarding-house parlor.) Presently she blazed out:

"Where *is* the trick in this arrangement of yours? Of course, you'll fool your laboring people and laugh at them in the end—it's inconceivable that you capitalists would do anything else. And there's something wrong with the arrangement right now! Your sales are falling off; there's far less money coming in! What's

wrong? Where's the joker in that agreement?"

"Well, if you want more plain talk, Belle—the whole proposition is a joke. An expensive one for us—but necessary as an object-lesson. If our employees had brains enough to run our business, they'd have been doing it long ago—or running some other business of their own! It's just as impossible for them to handle our end of the business as it would be for them to reach up and pull down the moon!"

"Oh! What utter capitalistic rot! Look at the Coöperative Stores in England!"

"Hmph! I'm glad you made just that comparison! That billion-dollar enterprise is in no way a business! It is merely a coöperative purchasing agency—with its customers guaranteed in advance! There isn't one shred of competition to induce them to buy elsewhere. By clubbing together they get the advantage of wholesale bulk-prices—that's all. Moreover, for the handling of even that, they hire better brains to work for them than they have themselves! But when it comes to manufacturing any line of goods and selling it in the open market, subject to deadly competition all along the line, you have a proposition as different as daylight from darkness. Your friends can't handle it. They have neither the brains, foresight, knowledge of human psychology nor experience—and that's why men who can handle it are worth from five to fifty times as much as the manual laborer!"

"Then you blood-sucking capitalists in that company mean to just sit back and let them fail—without trying to help at all, or educate them up to it! That's the sort of oppressors you are, is it! Oh! You ought to be hanged!"

"Look here, Belle! Are you plumb crazy—like all the radical theorists? Have you neither sense nor logic? We're not running a school or college! We're demonstrating in cold, incontestable facts that the management of any business in the world actually is worth to it fifty times what the laboring end is! Every man who gets the knowledge that we've acquired through long years of struggle and experience has got to get it himself. It can't be taught by anything but experience—and no man or woman acquires it until in the frame of mind where he or she wants to start out after it, instead of listening to a lot of theorists and spending valuable time trying to stir up more trouble than we already have! Considering your birth and education, Belle, you're the worst failure I've ever seen! Your family were in Philadelphia before the Revolution. You graduated from Bryn Mawr with high honors. If you'd studied stenography and earned your living in an office, you would have gotten some practical ideas in regard to everyday life—but! You've no more idea of business realities and economic conditions in this country than a baby! And lacking every shred of experience which might give you the right to talk and vote as an American citizen, instead of an insane bolshevist, you start in on a basis of impossible theory to make the already chaotic conditions here a thousand times worse! You know I've been fond of you! You belong to a class which has had enough advantages to acquire a lot of common sense—but the trouble with you is that you simply will not do your own thinking. Oh—what's the use! If young men and women of your breeding and position are going absolutely crazy, what chance has civilization got! Let's go back. You make me so damned discouraged that the game of life doesn't seem worth playing out any more!"

THE suggestion that notices be sent out to all regular customers advising them of the new arrangement had seemed to the employees so entirely in their favor that they feared the stockholders might reconsider it on second thought—and snapped it up at once. This was exactly what His Lordship had anticipated—and worked out according to his calculations. When the new salesmen went out among the trade, they were received courteously enough in nearly every instance, but with an amount of reserve never shown to the Company's former representatives. They had understood their business; the new men did not.

Before they started, the head bookkeeper, according to the agreement, showed them former sales-accounts in each territory, with the amounts of business done each month and the commissions paid. Further than this, acting upon a private hint from the Earl, he got all of them together and gave a two-hour lecture upon the Company's finances—the amount of cash it took to run it.

"In round numbers, gentlemen, this concern represents three-quarters of a million

dollars. Our trial-balance for last month showed an apparent net profit of four thousand—which is a scant six per cent, annually, on the investment. In any manufacturing business, when you get down so low that a six-per-cent showing is the best you can do, it is safe to figure that you are barely meeting expenses without a cent of profit, because it is impossible to figure down every possible item of expense as closely as that. A raise of a cent a hundred on freight-rates, for example, would not only wipe it out but put you actually in the hole.

"So you see the Company can't afford to go a bit lower than it did last month. It's your job to push it higher—to show a bit of real profit by selling more goods, or at better prices than Sayles, Fisher, Goodwin and the other boys did last month. If you don't do as well, there will be no profits to divide. If you do very much worse—the chances are, we'll not be able to meet the pay-rolls every Tuesday! Just get those facts thoroughly in your heads, because there isn't any joke about them at all! This concern can't keep going unless it sells heating appliances and systems at a profit—which is *your job!* You two gentlemen who are going to assist me in keeping the books and making collections, keep the fact in mind that the salesmen collect only about a third of the money for goods their customers buy. It's up to you to get the rest—diplomatically, if you can, some other way if you must. We can't run a day without money—the pay-roll, each Tuesday, is darned close to twenty-seven thousand dollars, and we have to spend a lot more for material, notes due, overhead and incidentals. That apparent profit last month at the rate of six per cent annually is merely a theoretic showing—the plant really lost money. This month we should do better, on account of the bully contracts Sayles and Goodwin signed up."

HE impressed upon them figures in the books showing just what each of the former salesmen had brought in during the previous quarter, month by month, and their minds, totally unaccustomed to dealing with such figures or cold facts, only grasped them vaguely. They left the office mopping the perspiration from their faces —whispering among themselves as to how they were going to keep up with, or beat, the old records. Two of them were ignorantly and irresponsibly optimistic.

"Aw, shucks! Them customers are all keepin' stores where they're sellin' stoves to people that come in an' buy 'em, aint they! Well—they go ta have the stoves to sell, aint they? An' that's where we come in—supplyin' 'em! Nothin' to it! We just goes in an' asks 'em how many they gotta have this month—tell 'em it'll cost 'em about so much, figger it out, wire the Comp'ny to ship—an' send 'em the bills! Aint it so?"

"Y-e-a-h—*sounds* all right. But, say—looka here! S'pose folks don't happen to buy so many stoves from them dealers this month—an' they got a lot on hand? Hey? Then ag'in, they's other fellers sellin' 'em stoves too! S'pose they's buyin' some from them—hey? Aint that where we kinda lose out?"

"Aw, f'r the love of Pete! You aint gittin' it a-tall, Eddy! These here guys we's talkin' about are our steadies—our reg'lar customers—see? Aint they gotta buy from us? Them other stove fellers, they gotta sell to their own reg'lars, aint they? *Sure!* We goes to ours, an' we say: Looky here, bo—you was takin' so many stoves from us last month—see? Well—'taint enough! You gotta take double that this month, or we can't make no profit—see? If ye don't, we'll call a strike on ye—wont let ye have a damned stove till ye promise to be good—see? Well, they gotta have the stoves to sell, aint they? Up against it, aint they?"

Now the writer of these current-history narratives does not ask his readers to believe that the entire eight salesmen—elected by the votes of their nine hundred fellow-employees—were all as lacking in common sense or general worldly experience as this. But those remarks were actually made in a plant just one hundred and sixty miles from New York City recently.

When the new men actually got out on the road with a selling-mark which they must reach or exceed, they were at first dazed. Then they started in with such excessive caution that they missed a few sales which were headed their way for the mere asking. Perhaps half the old customers, knowing the Company's goods to be thoroughly desirable and not wishing to take undue advantage of a situation which they saw might work out to the advantage of business in general, did not curtail their orders the first month. Some even increased them. But in many cases there was a disposition to ram the lesson home by hav-

dling the new salesmen in a strictly business manner. They showed lower quotations on goods fully as reliable or even apparently better from competing concerns. Said they were not in business for their health. The profitable contracts which Sayles and Goodwin had signed up were canceled—because the people said they weren't willing to depend for such large shipments of goods, or the installation of heating-systems costing fifty thousand dollars, upon a company which was admittedly being managed by its laborers.

THE first serious warning of what lay ahead came during the fifth week. Sales had fallen way below the book-showing of the former men—and collections with them. In some cases the employee collectors were so desperate in demanding payment, under threat of personal violence if it was not forthcoming, that they were forcibly ejected by special policemen. Two customers afterward sent their checks with the written assurance that they never would purchase another cent's worth of goods from the Company. And upon the afternoon before the next pay-roll was due, the new treasurer had less than fifteen thousand dollars in the two banks where his accounts were kept.

He had a conference with the salesmen and cashier. If three of the old customers could be induced to advance payments upon goods not even shipped yet, it seemed as if they might obtain a few hundreds over the twelve thousand they needed. Telegrams were sent asking for this accommodation—which was flatly refused in each case. In a drenching perspiration they called in the head bookkeeper and asked him where they were to get the money. He doubtfully suggested that the banks might possibly discount a note for the needed amount. The treasurer started down-street on a run. In both banks, the presidents seemed indifferent to their trouble. The next day the pay-roll was short just twelve thousand dollars — the shortage being deducted equally from the envelope of each employee. The cashier and collectors explained the facts in detail to their fellow-employees, but their statements were neither understood nor satisfactory. A three-quarter-million concern not able to find a matter of twelve thousand to pay its own men! To hell with such talk! Did the officers think the men were such fools as to swallow that? But the men were now the company themselves! Aw, 'tis some dirty trick of the owners! We might ha' known they'd be thryin' somethin' awn!"

There had been much dissatisfaction over the higher pay drawn by the elected office-force. Company politics was now in full swing—the office-jobs being political plums. A new election swept the old incumbents out of office just when they were beginning to learn how to go through the motions. The newly elected treasurer fancied himself as a Napoleon of finance. His cottage was plastered with mortgages. Mortgaging was a simple way of raising money. The very next week he mortgaged one of the factory buildings for half the pay-roll.

The new régime curtailed expenses by cutting out all the advertising and making the new purchasing agent contract for cheaper supplies in every department—which of course produced the inevitable result in a lower grade of goods, which had to be cleaned out at a loss, and killed more than half the demand for their stoves throughout the trade. They were entirely out of illustrated catalogues, but thought the printing of a new lot needless expense just at that time. Rumors got about that the concern was ruined.

The expedient of putting mortgages on the buildings, however, had worked too easily to be overlooked when the next pinch came. The following month's balance showed a net loss of forty thousand dollars—which meant nothing at all to most of the employees. They had demanded and split up among themselves their half of the first month's apparent profits, before the good contracts had been canceled—three thousand dollars. They had also increased the wage-scale. (Why not? All they had to do was vote it.) Consequently, one way or another, there must be more profits to divide at the end of the second month. "What! A big, rich comp'ny like that not makin' anything? To hell with such bookkeepin'! Put on another mortgage if ye like—but they's gotta be profits divided fif -fifty, 'cordin' to the agreement!" (Payments were due on the new cars, the player-pianos, the higher rents, the new clothes and decora i ns.)

DEVOE had fancied himself in love with the aristocrat-socialist reporter, Belle Hastings—thinking her radicalism but a

temporary phase which basic common sense must inevitably drive out of her mind. But all his arguments with her seemed merely a waste of breath. Logic meant nothing; incontrovertible facts she furiously refused to consider—as to rottenly materialistic. The world had reached a point where gross materialism must be sacrificed to ideals. Eventually, Devoe was forced to the conclusion that the woman he thought he knew so well—and loved—was not Belle Hastings, the radical. He shuddered a little at the thought of her as mistress of his home, mother of his children. No man in his senses would ever marry such a woman.

During all of the time he had been considering her as his possible wife, if anyone had told him that Kate Seymour, his super-efficient secretary, was leaving the Company's employ, he would have been completely upset. Capable, quiet, a reader of current events, articles and fiction, until her judgment was as sound as a new dollar—she was simply indispensable in his management of the business. Had he ever caught some of her glances at him while he was absorbed in work at his own desk (the private office had not been turned over with the other space), he might have guessed that he represented the ideal man to her. But she was mighty careful to see that he never did catch them.

If Frank Devoe was her ideal man, Lord Trevor was her conception of a superman, a being almost to be worshiped from afar for what she knew him to be, too far above her habitat to be anything more than the invariably courteous employer and genial friend who, she knew, appraised her accurately at her full value. When he had so amazingly appeared in Ironville, she searched the newspapers for comment upon his epoch-making westward flight across the Atlantic, but found not a word. She wrote to a friend in London—who positively confirmed the statement that His Lordship had been in that city twelve hours before her radio-message had been sent. A man who made a flight like that merely as a business journey, without permitting a hint of it to leak out, was certainly no ordinary individual. His appearance in the private office at unexpected moments always startled her—always gave her a thrill that came rather close to adoration. And just when affairs reached a point which left her more despondent than she ever remembered being, he quietly walked in and closed the door behind him. She was standing by the curtained window—crying. Crossing the room, he put an arm about her waist and drew her unresistingly against his shoulder.

"Bad as all that, is it?" The mass of fine dark hair nodded. "Well—can't be much worse than we expected, you know. Nothing for you to worry about, Kate!"

"Ah—but you haven't seen Mr. Devoe for several weeks! I—it hurts when I look at him! You know what pride he has taken in this business—in the reliability of our goods—his personal credit! And now—he's simply lost heart in everything! He—he's getting gray."

"H-m-m—sorry! But there are thousands of business men in a worse position to-day. Is he still running around with that fool woman?"

"N-not for some time, I think. Guess he—doesn't think he has anything left to offer her."

"Nons'nse, Kate! He never really cared for that crazy shrew! Fancy I know the chap better than he does himself—it was the utter absurdity of a woman of her birth and education lining herself up with anarchists and fool theorists that stuck in his crop! Tried to argue sense into her an' got int'rested—that's all. But he's by way of bein' the blindest young idiot I know! I say! Will you do something I suggest—an' see what happens? What?"

She looked up into his eyes and nodded—with a wondering smile.

"Very good! Before I explain, however, you're to promise me something—aye? You're to adopt me by way of a nonresident uncle, as it were—an' I'm always to have an uncle's privileges, no matter whether you marry or don't—eh?"

This time, the nods were clearly emphatic; the proposition was entirely pleasing, and if a future husband ever objected—well, it would be unpleasant for hubby.

"We'll be havin' that meeting with the men at two o'clock," Trevor went on. "Frank will be in here alone with you before that. You're to tell him that you're leavin' the Comp'ny to-night, an' prob'ly wont ever see him again—goin' to Philadelphia or some other place where he'll not be likely to run across you."

She glanced up at him with a shy smile—a spot of color in each cheek.

"What—what does Your Lordship think he'll say?"

"My dear, some things are so childishly

obvious that explanation is unnecess'ry—like the certainty that our employees couldn't run this business, for example. I don't think—I know!"

OUT in the big yard between the office-building and two of the factories, Phelan—the walking delegate—was haranguing the crowd of employees as they came pouring from the different buildings.

"Ye wouldn't listen to me at the start of this! Ye let that capitalist snob put me out of the meetin'! I told ye 'twas all a trick of the capitalists to do ye—an' now see what's happened! Half the time ye've not even had yer pay—ye're owin' money here an' there! If ye'd listened to me an' struck as I said, ye'd be drawin' double the pay ye're gittin' now! Them blood-suckers put ye in the hole, an' then niver lifted a finger to help ye out—niver left ye a cent of the money ye'd earned by yer sweat an' blood for the pay-roll each week! Will ye stand f'r it, men? Will ye?"

A hoarse roar went through the crowd. There was a babel of loud talk as they poured up the stairways to the drafting-room where the meeting had been called. When they were all in, Lord Trevor wasted no time in formalities or amenities. Raising his hand for silence, he said:

"Men, the four months are up. The property of this comp'ny is worth, to-day, less than a third of what it was when you took over the management, and the good will of the business is practically wiped out. The plant is mortgaged to more than three quarters of its cost value. We don't consider these facts necessarily insuperable obstacles to our reorganizing the business and carrying it on again if you have learned that you haven't the brains or ability necess'ry to manage a business from the top. We have the ability an' credit to float a bond-issue and raise new capital. But your proposition to us must be a fair one—based on the logic of your recent experience. What is it? We're waiting."

Above the murmured discussion rose the voice of Phelan—and they accepted his leadership with nods of satisfaction.

"Ye'll go awn an' run the business like ye did before—an' ye'll pay these poor downtrodden slaves just double the prisint scale!"

"And—if we refuse?"

"Iv'ry man an' woman'll walk out on ye to-night—that's all! Ye blood-suckin' capitalist!"

"Very good, Phelan—that'll be quite satisfactory to us. There's no money in the banks for the next pay-roll. There are not orders enough on hand to keep the plant running ten days. Nobody will lend you another cent on buildings or machinery—and the insurance runs out on the first of the month, unless the premiums are paid. You foolishly agreed to pay interest quarterly on the mortgages—so that when you default on the next quarter's payments, every one of them will be foreclosed—buildings and plant taken over, and dismantled. The stockholders withdraw from Ironville, permanently—still owning the comp'ny's patents an' the right to rebuild in some other locality if business conditions ever become settled again. You were offered the only possible way out—and you refused. You were given an object-lesson which any gang of school-boys would understand without argument—but you wont accept cold facts when they're rammed down your throats! It's up to you—squarely! That'll be about all, I fancy!"

AS His Lordship left Ironville on the evening train,—for the last time,—he smiled grimly to himself at the single bright spot in the somber outlook. Parlor-cars do not run to Ironville—but at the other end of the empty war-worn day-coach a woman's head rested on a man's shoulder. The light of love still burned. Here and there it will always burn—through it a spark will be preserved to light another civilization—in another day.

In a Pullman of the New York Express as it pulled out from North Philadelphia some twenty men of affairs were glancing with absorbed interest through the double-column headlines on the front page of the evening papers:

IRONVILLE EXPERIMENT FAILS!

MEN FORCE COMPANY INTO BANKRUPTCY UNDER THEIR OWN MANAGEMENT

Refuse Proposition of Stockholders to Reorganize and Go On! Demand 100% Raise with Return of Former Management. Stockholders Retire from Ironville. Mortgagees Foreclose on Plant. 900 People Out of Work Indefinitely as Result of Their Own Mismanagement. An Object-Lesson for the Whole World!

Another of the present-day adventures of the famous Diplomatic Free Lances will be told in the next issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Exploits of an Honest Grafter

One Every Minute

By William O. Grenolds

HONEST JOHN, the circus "fixer," gets involved in an oil speculation, and the consequences are both extraordinary and diverting.

SIX weeks ahead of the show was Honest John Barker, fixer extraordinary for the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus. In addition to this he was seated in the buffet-car of the Pacific Coast Limited, dividing his attention between the dry, baking heat of a Wyoming afternoon, the succession of cold lemonades that had answered his energetic pushes on the bell, and the conglomeration of scenery out there in the straight range of the beating sun.

At least, call it scenery for lack of a better name—lack of scenery might be a better simile. True, once upon a time the country had been a place of free flat plains, with soap-weed and prairie-dog villages and perhaps a lone cowpuncher riding the ridge against the horizon, but that time was gone now.

Instead, every road had its cloud of dust, and that cloud, breaking now and then, revealed the forms of chugging motors loaded to the limit with machinery, with steel pipes and great cumbersome tanks. Here and there a wagon would appear with its prairie-schooner covering —sometimes a train of them; motorcars scooted about where once the prairie-dog had cavorted, and in the place of the soap-weed were derricks, wooden, crossbeamed derricks, with engines snorting and puffing beside them, with men who did not even look up as the train rolled by, derricks with their pumps working at maximum speed, derricks of old lumber, new lumber, big, medium and small. Now and then, as the train rushed on, a great group of heavy steel tanks half sunk in the ground clustered beside a spur of the railroad, or a pool of brownish-black liquid formed itself about one of the clumsy-appearing structures, and men worked as though it were their last day on earth. Miles and miles and miles—then the immaculate Honest John pushed the button.

"Bring me another, Tom," he ordered as the porter slid to his side. "Put lots of ice in it; I've been sitting here thinking how hot it'd be if all that oil out there'd catch fire."

The porter chuckled.

"Hit shoah would make some smoke," he agreed. "Hit shoah would!"

But Honest John's mind had taken another tack.

"Guess it's making a lot of money for everybody right now."

But the porter qualified.

"Hit would if hit was all ile," came his rather solemn answer. "Yuh see, boss, all dese yere wells yuh-all's lookin' at aint got ile in 'em. All yuh got to do up in dis yere country is jes' to ac' laik yuh've got ile,—an' dassall, jes' ac' laik yuh've got ile,—an' befo' yuh knows it, dey's a million folkses

tryin' to git it befo' yuh does. Yassah, dassall—jes' ac' laik yuh've got ile, an' right away yuh've got comp'ny!"

"All of 'em aren't producers, then?" asked Honest John as he fingered the lion's claw on his watch-chain and stared out of the window. The porter chuckled again.

"Ah doan gits what yuh-all means by producers—but they shoah aint all got ile. Lot's o' 'em jes' got hopes—dassall, jes' got hopes. But dey's shoah diggin', aint they?"

"They sure are," agreed Honest John. "How much longer does this sort of thing last?"

"Dese yere derricks? Shucks, boss, we'll be runnin' pas' 'em fo' fifty miles yit."

"Don't go any farther?"

"Dassall, boss. Das as far as dey've explo'ed dis yere field yit. But Lawdy, cain't tell nuffin' about hit by to-morrow mawnin'. Dey's liable to be a new ile-rush bust out mos' any minute in mos' any direction up heah, dese yere days. Dis yere kentry's jes' plumb ile-crazy—dassall, jes' plumb ile-crazy!"

MUMBLING to himself, the porter shuffled away in search of more lemonade and more ice. Honest John Barker straightened slightly in the big leather chair and once more looked out the window.

"Only fifty miles more," he mused as he toyed with his lion's claw. "And Barstow's only a hundred miles away. That's near enough for working-purposes—if I have to do it!"

Following which, he dragged from a pocket the thing which had caused his journey, a report from the slangy, hard-working Al Butler, advance contracting-agent of the Mighty Maxwell, and turned to that portion headed *"Remarks."*

"This here bird that owns the lot is sure one tough baby," he read. "I went and saw him when I first lit in the burg, and offered him what I thought was a reasonable price for the grounds, but he wouldn't stand hitched. I offered him twenty-five bucks, but he said no—that there wasn't no other show-lot in town and he knew it, and if we wanted to show in Barstow we could slip him five hundred bucks for the lot and get business, or we could go out in the sticks and starve to death. Well, I would of liked to have told him where to go, but I didn't, and I said I would leave the lot for our special man to talk to about it, and then I went out and run my legs off trying to find some other place in town that was big enough to hold the show. But there wasn't any, so I guess we are stuck for this bird's hold-up game if we want to show Barstow.

"I didn't do nothing about it, though, and I didn't go back and see Mr. Williams, the bird that owns the lot, because I knew he would stand pat, and I figured that if you wanted to cut his price, you could send Mr. Barker on to give him the razz-ma-tazz some way and get the lot for a lower figure."

Honest John smiled thinly as he folded the letter and turned to raise the cold glass the porter had placed on the tray at his elbow.

"It's a nice little job!" he mused. "Porter—"

"Yassah?"

"What time do we get into Barstow?"

"Six o'clock, sah."

Too late to see the gold-seeking Mr. Williams at his office. Too late for anything, in fact, but dinner, a stroll about town and perhaps a theater. But four hours later Honest John had forgotten the last of the three possibilities. His after-dinner stroll about Barstow had led him to the circus grounds, and his sharp eyes had instinctively looked for the for-sale sign which accompanies every vacant lot. It was there. Carefully he read its wording, then very slowly squinted his eyes. A moment later he was in a taxicab bound for police-headquarters.

"Chief," he said confidentially after the cigars had been passed, "you've known me a good many years, and you know I don't usually hand a wallop to another guy until he's made a pass at me. Saying which, kindly tip me off to a crooked lawyer that isn't too tired to come down to his office to-night and talk a little business."

The chief grinned.

"How crooked?"

"Well, not too crooked," Honest John hedged hastily. "Fact is, I don't need a crook at all—only I'd feel more at home with one. Think you can fix me up?"

"Easiest thing I know. Give me five minutes, and I'll put you in touch with a fellow who never pulled a straight thing in his life and never got caught in a crooked one."

HONEST JOHN gave him the five minutes, and twenty minutes after that he was talking quietly and confidentially in a strictly private office to a shrewd-appearing, black-haired, black-eyed young man.

"Now, as I understand it," he said for the second or third time, "you can buy without tipping off the name of the man who's putting up the cash."

"Simplest thing in the world. You've given me power-of-attorney."

"And as I understand it, you know the price?"

"Absolutely. Eighteen thousand."

"Fine. Suppose I should have the money in your hands by noon to-morrow. When could you put over the deal?"

"By two."

"Good enough—and you'll take half the profits as your share?"

"Providing I can't persuade you to give me all of them."

"Wait a m-i-n-u-t-e!" Honest John Barker laughed, and pawed at his lion's claw. "Nix on that sort of thing! Us quick guys have got to stick together. Get me straight: I'm after a good day's business for the show and all that, but if there's any outside profit, you've got to mark me down as being present at the trimming of the sucker."

"And there's one born every minute!"

"You said it. Look for me by eleven-thirty o'clock in the morning—with the cash."

Then, smiling very blandly, Honest John glided out of the office and back to his room with apparently nothing more on his mind than a heart-to-heart talk with the hotel valet on the art of pressing clothing. And what was more, this same self-satisfied demeanor still was apparent when he ambled into the Williams Realty office at two o'clock the next afternoon and smiled beamingly into the face of the stenographer.

"I'm one of those horrid circus-men," he announced. "Come to see about the lot as usual. Mr. Williams in?"

"No, he's out just now." Her smile was a reproduction of Honest John's. "And I can't say just when he'll be in. He's been terribly busy to-day."

"So?" Honest John cocked his eyebrows with interest. "Pulling off a big deal or something?"

"Really, I couldn't say."

"Well, you wouldn't mind if I waited awhile? Don't guess there's any circus sawdust on my clothing." Honest John inspected himself carefully. "Guess I'm safe there—but I'm not so fortunate on passes. Always got a couple of them sticking around me somewhere."

He laid the passes on the stenographer's desk, and the stenographer in repayment showed the way to the private office of J. B. Williams. Honest John seated himself, twiddled his thumbs—and looked about the room. Evidently it was quite a busy day for Mr. Williams. The morning paper still lay in the center of his desk; at one side was the day's mail, not yet taken from the carefully slit envelopes. Honest John Barker, noting it all, began to sing softly, in keeping with the clicking of the keys of the stenographer's typewriter in the outer office:

> "Goin' down to de river
> By an' by,
> Goin' down to de river—
> There's a reason why,
> 'Cause de river's wet
> An' Beale Street's done gone dry!"

He tried the old "blue" chorus a second time, liked it better than before, nodded his head energetically to the voicing of it a third time, patted his hands and feet to a fourth rendition—then suddenly stiffened in silence. The outer door had banged, and steps were approaching the private office. A moment more, and Honest John Barker was smiling supergenially into the somewhat leathery features of Mr. J. B. Williams.

"Barker's my name," he was announcing with the extension of a chummy hand, "official adjuster of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus. Just thought I'd drop in and see if I couldn't fix up that little disagreement."

"With whom?" Mr. Williams had sidled to his chair and begun an aimless straightening of his desk. Honest John came closer.

"Our contracting-agent. Seems he objected to paying your price. Well, it was a little steep, but I realize that you've got the only lot in town, and—"

"Had the only lot, you mean."

"How's that?" Honest John's jaw dropped. "You haven't—"

"Sold it? Yep! This afternoon."

"Who to?" A handkerchief came forth and slid across Honest John's forehead. "Gosh, this may put me up against it good and proper. Who'd you sell it to?"

Mr. Williams pulled some legal papers from his pocket and read a name:

"The New York Promoting and Development Company; they handled everything through Mr. Rollins, their attorney. Eastern concern, you know."

"Yeh." Honest John was squinting with interest at the papers. "Oil-concern, probably."

"Oil?" The eyes of Mr. Williams took on a sudden glassy appearance. "Know anything about 'em?"

"Not much that I can say truthfully, except that the real man behind it is interested in oil right now."

"Sure of that?" The leathery face of the former lot-owner had grown several shades lighter.

"Never told a lie in my life."

"Know where I can get hold of him?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

"Down at the hotel." Happened to be looking in the big mirror in the lobby and saw him pass by. But,"—Honest John became suddenly serious,—"do me a favor wont you? Ask the attorney—what's his name, Mr. Rollins—about him. He may be under cover or something, and I wouldn't like to tip off a friend. Would you mind?"

"Well," rather gingerly Mr. Williams turned to his desk, "if I can't get it any other way, guess I'll have to. You'll have to see Rollins if you want that lot. I—"

"Mind if I call him up from here?" Barker was wiping away perspiration again. "I'd be in a swell fix if—"

"Go ahead!"—grumpily. "Main 2120."

"Thanks."

BARKER grasped the phone. Hurriedly and earnestly he talked to the man at the other end of the line, then turned anxiously. "What's the size of that lot?"

"Eight hundred by four hundred and fifty-two."

"Thanks." Then into the phone: "Sure, store all you want to on there. Plenty of room. I'll come right over and make the deposit."

"Store what?" The leathery-faced real-estate man looked up sharply as Barker started to leave the room.

"Lumber."

"What kind?"

"Didn't say just what kind—just said he had some lumber and machinery coming in about the time the circus got here and wanted to know if we could get on the lot all right in case it got here before we did."

"Lumber and machinery?" The glassy appearance had returned to the real-estate man's eyes. "Say anything about a rig or a derrick or anything like that?"

"Nope; don't guess he'd use those terms, anyway. Thanks for the use of the phone. Got to beat it to see Mr. Rollins. S'long."

But for some strange reason, Honest John Barker of the Mighty Maxwell did not reach his destination until late that night—just before hurrying to catch the midnight train back to the show. A smiling attorney greeted him.

"The yeast's working," he announced. "The sucker's called up here three times wanting to know the name of the man behind the New York Promotion and Development Company. Even went to the extent of offering me two hundred dollars if I'd loosen up."

"You stayed put?"

"Better than that. Told him that when he stopped talking cigarette-money and got into real figures he might be able to find me in my office."

"Fine and dandy!" Honest John looked at his big watch. "I'll have to beat it. You've got this thing all straight in your head now?"

"Straight as a die. When he offers me real money—"

"Six figures."

"You said it. When he's willing to come through, I'll discover for him—"

"After payment in cash."

"Of course, when everything's O. K. I'll discover for him that the deed was faulty and that there was no sale; whereupon he'll turn back to the poor deluded New York Promotion and Development Company the purchase-price and slip me the bonus. And I'll do my best to put over the deal by circus day, so that we can split the pot personally. Don't see any reason why it shouldn't go through. He's got the cash, and he's just stingy enough to be a sucker."

"On top of which," added Honest John as he shook hands with his comrade in complicity, "there's one born every minute!"

THIS remark Honest John repeated two days later as he sat in the private car of the Old Man, giving the reasons why

he had, without even a telegram of explanation, drawn on the Mighty Maxwell for twenty-two thousand dollars.

"Take it or leave it, boss," he said finally. "That country out there is just nutty enough over oil to make a rush on any place that shows indications of being a new field. I know what I'm talking about there, so I drew the purchase-price of the lot and four thousand for emergencies. Now, to go on with the argument; whether the scheme works or not, we can always sell the lot for a couple of thousand less than we paid for it; take five hundred dollars off of that for the rent we don't have to pay, and that leaves fifteen hundred plus the expense-money, against Old Leather-face's wad. If he falls, fine and dandy. If he don't, and if there's any kind of a rush in there, we'll do a turn-away business and get rid of the lot at a profit. And if neither one of those things turn up, we've lost a few thousand bucks, which is a good deal less than we slough off on a rainy day—so where's the holler?"

The Old Man chewed at his cigar.

"You win," he grumbled at last. "I aint saying a word—only be sure to get some cash back by circus-day. We're not overwealthy just now. Let me know if you get any news."

The answer to his request came a week later, in the person of Honest John and an edition of a Casper newspaper. Only a small item it was, but significant, for it noted the fact that rumors of a new field in the vicinity of Barstow had become current, and that the floating population of the Casper field was beginning to migrate. The Old Man grinned as he read it.

"There's a sucker born every minute," he chuckled. "Now, if the sucker-in-chief'll only bite, I'll say you're a regular fixer!"

"He'll bite," agreed Honest John, peering over his shoulder. "He's got to. Too many others will be nibbling at the bait."

In fact, as the days passed, it seemed that the sucker population was increasing mightily. A letter arrived from the hard-working Mr. Rollins to tell of the fact that he had begun to hold conferences with the leathery-faced person who formerly possessed the lot, and that these conferences were becoming highly interesting, especially since a carload of heavy timbers, such as are generally used in building an oil-rig had arrived in the railroad-yards. Honest John read that part of the letter to the Old Man, and the Old Man chewed at his cigar.

"Fine stuff!" the boss grunted. "What's he say about the chances for business?"

"Never better!" Honest John Barker was beaming. "Just what I thought has happened. Those oil-nuts have gotten the tip that something's going on around there, and they're beginning to flock in. Needn't worry any about the business—there'll be plenty."

"Yeh!" The Old Man champed at his cigar. "And plenty of suckers walking the ties back to a paying field when the thing's over."

Honest John Barker was silent a moment, watching the crowds in front of the kid show, the raucous-voiced ticket-sellers, the sweating "wild-man" as he danced up and down the lecture-platform to the adenoidal effusions of the ballyhoo man. "Yep, boss," he said at last, "I'm afraid that there'll be plenty of 'em walking back—and if you searched real hard for the guy that was the cause of 'em getting trimmed, I guess I'm it. Not that I tried to stick those poor simps, but to cop the coin from one bird who deserves trimming, I've got to cause trouble for a lot of other people. There are too many suckers in the world, boss—too darned many for the conscience of a guy who tries to be a straight crook. Every time you pull a trick that's clever and worth while, you've got to kick yourself for three weeks afterward because a lot of fool boobs who didn't have any business in the deal rushed in and got burnt. Believe me, the guy who said there was one born every minute didn't make any mistake.

"Look at that mob out around the ballyhoo-stand," went on Honest John. "All of 'em so darned anxious to give up their shekels that they can't see straight. And why? Because some bird they never saw before assures 'em confidentially that here is a real wild-man, straight from the Isle of Madagascar, captured after a terrific fight with fourteen sailors and a bottle o' rum—and in five minutes more they'll be walking over one another trying to get inside so they can have another peek at him. If they'd stop to think, they'd know that if a guy was really wild, he wouldn't be out there on that ballyhoo-stand dancing a fandango; and even if he was wild, haven't they had one look at him for nothing? Oh, you can't beat a sucker; he's a strange bird!"

"You said it!" The Old Man moved away into the menagerie, while Honest John Barker sidled through the main gate toward the treasury-wagon, where in peace and quiet he could write a letter of instructions to the fervent Mr. Rollins—a letter, by the way, which brought a quick answer, and many newspaper clippings, for oil-interests in Barstow were booming.

THE clippings told of rigs that were going up on every ranch, work being done on mysterious information that seemed traceable to nothing except the fact that a large development-company had bought the biggest section of ground in the heart of the municipality and was assembling oil-drilling machinery, evidently in the hope of extracting oil from beneath the very streets of the city. "Floaters" were coming in droves from other oil-fields; a few geologists had made their appearance, doing much work and saying very little, reserving their remarks, of course, for the men who had hired them. Barstow was beginning to boom.

All of this created a sense of benign happiness in the heart of Honest John Barker as he turned from the clippings to the letter. For a moment he whistled as he read; then gradually the pucker faded. The letter contained bad news:

> I have held two or three more meetings with Williams, but I am afraid that he is beginning to get cold on the proposition. The truth of the matter is that he has gone wilder over this oil-proposition than anyone and is trying to buy up all the land in sight outside the city. The result is, of course, that he has pulled on his money pretty hard and is getting strapped. However, I'll keep dangling the proposition before him—and keep my eyes open for any other sucker who comes along.

Honest John Barker hesitated only a moment. Then he made a rush for the typewriter in the treasury-wagon.

"Dear Rollins," he wrote. "If you have to cut your price on the deal, do so, as I must get rid of those lots by the day of our exhibition in Barstow. If you can't gyp him for a hundred thousand, try seventy-five, and if seventy-five wont work, let 'em go for fifty—only get rid of those lots. You know a good profit is better than no profit at all. Let me hear from you."

In four days came the answer:

> Don't worry. I'm doing my best. Town booming. Have pulled a stunt that is worth looking at. Natives all excited and people coming in droves on every train. You'll have the biggest day here you ever had in your life; the town is simply jammed to the guards. My stunt is getting great publicity, and I'll pull some kind of a deal for you by the end of your date here or bust a hamstring.

This restored the glint to Honest John's eyes and the pucker to his lips. Hastily the fixer sought out the Old Man and showed him the letter, on the strength of which the Old Man lighted a new cigar.

"Now that guy's talking!" he announced. "The finest words of tongue or pen are that I'll get that cash again. Say, listen, that's a wad of money!"

"You mean that twenty-two thousand I had to put up on this deal?" Honest John pawed his lion's claw. "I know it is—but it takes money to make suckers bite. I had to have eighteen thousand for the ground, and while I was getting it, I just drew that other four grand to let Rollins pull stunts with, and you can see from this letter that he's begun to pull them."

"All I hope is that they work," grunted the Old Man. "Not that I don't trust your judgment, John," he added hastily, "but in three weeks more we'll be on the death-trail getting down to Frisco, and hardly taking in a sad dime, and that twenty-two grand'll certainly be a life-saver."

"I'll have it for you or quit the show," the fixer answered confidently.

BUT at noon of circus day Honest John Barker had begun to doubt somewhat even his own word. For four hours he had searched for the busy Mr. Rollins, without success. He was not in his office—out in town, or down at the hotel, or at the circus grounds, the girl had said. He was not at the hotel, or the circus grounds, for Honest John had searched assiduously at both places. He was not at home—for Honest John had telephoned.

But at least he had been busy. Stretching high above a tall board fence at one corner of the lot rose the latticed rig of an oil-derrick, a cloud of steam and smoke ascending beside it. Honest John Barker knew without the telling that this was the publicity-stunt of which Rollins had written, the one that had gained columns in the local newspapers, and brought floaters in from the other fields by the hundreds. Resigned at last to a waiting game, Hon-

est John approached the taciturn-appearing person at the gateway of the high fence.

"Got an oil-well, eh?" he asked genially.

"Aint sayin'. Never say those things till you strike oil."

Honest John fondled his lion's claw. Rollins was working according to directions—never tell a lie. He began again.

"How far down are you?"

"Aint saying."

"Got any prospects?"

"Aint saying."

Honest John laughed.

"You don't need to—to me," he said. "Guess I'll go inside and take a look around."

"Guess you wont."

"But—"

"But all you want to. That aint going to let you in. Nobody allowed."

"Cut the comedy! I'm the owner of this land."

"Do you? Are you the Eastern Development Company?"

"Yes, I'm the Eastern Development Company. And—"

"Don't care if you are!" The taciturn one cocked his head. "Lawyer Rollins hired me and said to keep everybody out that didn't have a pass. Got one?"

"No, I haven't got a pass, and I don't intend to have a pass, and—"

"Stay out, then!" Saying which, the taciturn being quickly slid through the gate, shut it behind him and refused to answer the hammering of Honest John's fists thereon. Red-faced, the circus fixer whirled, once more to make his way to the lawyer's office. But this time even the stenographer was gone. A vague fear shot into the heart of Honest John Barker.

"Well, I asked for a crook," he said at last, "and maybe I got one. But what good's it going to do him to hide out? I've got the deeds to this land in my pocket."

Again fear crinkled its way up the spine of Honest John. The best trick that a confidence man knows is to give a sucker a faked deed to the Metropolitan Tower or the Chicago Elevated System. Honest John's eyes went wide.

"And I took it for granted that they were on the square!" he mourned as he turned back toward the circus lot. "He could gyp me with both hands tied behind him. Sweet cookie!"

To the lot he wandered, to search the crowds, then ineffectually to attempt to sidestep as he suddenly faced the Old Man. Impossible!

"Got that money yet?"

"Not yet, but soon." Honest John looked about him with a forced air of unconcern. "By the way, haven't happened to see Mr. Rollins around here, have you?"

"Wouldn't know him if I did see him," was the Old Man's rejoinder. "Looks like we're going to have a whale of a day." This was true, but it did not interest Honest John Barker in the slightest. He was looking for one person only, Mr. Rollins, the busy attorney—and looking in vain.

Matinée-time came, with the crowds jammed before the main gates, with shouting ticket-takers and busy attendants, with all three windows working on the treasury-wagon to supply the demand for tickets, with the reserved seats sold out before half the crowd had even reached the menagerie—but Honest John Barker failed to exhibit the interest that he would have shown under other circumstances. Mr. Rollins had not appeared. Concert-time arrived, and with the milling throng from the big show, Honest John left the circus lot, once more to make the rounds, from hotel to office, office to hotel, and back again, without success—and the stenographer was locking up for the day when he made his third trip.

The calliope screamed on the corner of the circus-lot with the falling of the evening shadows, issuing the call to the circus-grounds. Once more the crowds flocked to the great stretches of canvas, while under the flickering chandeliers Honest John Barker watched every face fruitlessly. His companion in complicity was not among them.

"Got the cash yet?" It was the Old Man, a new note in his voice. Honest John hurried away, pretending not to hear. The show began; it ended; the wagons began their journey to the trains; and then—

"Mr. Barker—Mr. Barker! Where's Mr. Barker?" From roughneck to razor-back the call radiated, at last to reach its goal. Honest John, doleful a moment before, whirled excitedly and ran forward. A dusty, road-grimed man awaited him. Honest John stuck forth an arm.

"Get it?"

"Yeh," panted the other as they headed for the treasury wagon. "Had to chase clear to Thermopolis to put it over. I did the best that I could—thirty-five thousand."

"And of course the original eighteen?"

"Sure."

"I'm thankful for small favors. Come on!" They stumbled through the darkness to the treasury-wagon. Papers came forth. A pen scrawled. Dully the busy Mr. Rollins turned in his chair.

"Sorry I can't stick around and explain the whole thing," he said wearily. "I'm all in."

He rose. Honest John watched him make his tired way down the wagon-ladder, then leaned back in his chair. Lovingly he fondled the thousand-dollar bills which represented his half of the profits. Complacently he handed them over to the Old Man when he made his entrance. And—

IT was three months later that Honest John Barker and the Old Man sat beneath the marquee of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus, awaiting the return of the parade. The circus mail-carrier passed through the front gate and fished in his bag.

"There was a registered letter for you," he said to Honest John, "so I signed for it."

Carelessly the fixer took the letter. He glanced at the envelope—then stared.

"Where'd I ever hear that name before?" he asked, "The Eastern Promotion and Development Company?" Then he gasped with returning memory and hastily tore open the envelope. The Old Man, watching curiously, saw him—somewhat like a sleepwalker—take out a check and stare at it, goggle-eyed.

"I'm—I'm a sonvagun!" he exclaimed. "I'm a—"

"What's the row?" The Old Man moved closer. But Honest John already was reading the letter aloud—like a boy with a primer lesson:

"'Dear Old Boy: Forgive my not having written this before, but I have been awaiting developments. Inclosed is my certified check for sixty-five thousand dollars, the balance of the one hundred thousand dollars we agreed upon as the right and proper amount that should be gotten out of our little deal; and just to show I'm a good fellow, I'm not going to ask for my half of the proceeds. As you doubtless remember, you told me that you would be more than happy if I could sell that lot for six figures. Of course, at the time, you rather figured on Mr. Williams as a purchaser, but you did not bar anyone else.

"Well, to make a long story short, you know how easy it is to become interested in oil, and before I did anything I had a little talk with a geologist. It all sounded so good that I sold the land to myself; but since money was a little tight, I had to do that rush act on you circus-night to get away with the price at a small figure. However, a week ago my well came in with a three thousand-barrel-a-day production—and others around here are doing nearly as good. So, you see, it would be the basest ingratitude if I did not live up to all the desires of the man who made me a millionaire.

"'Yours for a bigger Barstow—L. V. Rollins, President, The Eastern Promotion & Development Co.'"

There was silence. Then the Old Man champed at his cigar.

"What's that Barnum said?" he asked at last.

"There's one born every minute," answered Honest John Barker, "—and two to grab 'em!"

THERE will be another of these diverting "Exploits of an Honest Grafter" in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Riders in the Fog

A Complete Novelette

THE gifted author of "Lighthouse Tom," "Sindbad of Oakland Creek" and "Toronto Jimmy's Accomplice" is at his best in this striking story of wild events in the backwoods regions of California.

CHAPTER I

I WAS about to ride away from the ranch house at the ending of the last rough wagon track and take the trail which loops and winds across the Santa Lucia Mountains to the sea when the owner of the place called after me.

"You there," he demanded, "where's the mail-carrier to ask at for that horse you've hired?"

"Why," I replied, "at my father's house."

I saw a blank look come over his face at the answer, and I realized that the years away from home and the changes in my circumstances since I last rode across those lofty summits from the coast had put me beyond his recognition. So I hastened to add, "I'm Bradley Lewis, David Lewis' son."

In other days, before I left the country, that announcement would have brought an exclamation—perhaps a hearty oath—and a hand-clasp which it would need all my gripping power to withstand. The oath came now, it is true, but there was something in the man's voice which made it seem as if he had called upon his God through sheer dismay, and as I swung up into the saddle I got a glimpse of him shaking his head, a movement which stopped abruptly when he found my eyes upon him.

Still I thought nothing of trouble and not the slightest suspicion of ugly tidings crossed my mind. I had no knowledge of the things which had been taking place of late beyond those ridges which stood out black-green against the cloudless sky.

When a man is young and has just tasted his first nibble of success, I think he is sure to be blind to every bad omen and deaf to every evil prophecy; I know that was the case with me on this morning of which I am telling. You see I had grown up through boyhood in the big wild country where the Santa Lucia Mountains come down to the purple ocean. After my mother's death my father had helped me through college; and I had worked hard to make my way upward, partly because I understood what of toil and careful saving my schooling had cost, and partly because it was in my blood—I came rightly by it, for my father never gave in to any man—to take life as a fight. I had done well, as the saying is, but the doing had taken me to far places and had demanded all my energies. This was my first visit home for years; I had not heard from my father for more than six months; and the joy of anticipating the surprise which I would give him that afternoon was augmented by a hundred other hopes awakened by familiar sights and sounds and odors of the out-of-doors. There was also the expectation that I would see Barbara

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Lathrop; for when one has kept his mind from other girls, the thought of a boyhood sweetheart is sure to stir up many pleasant hopes, each one born of some pretty memory.

So you may understand how I paid no attention to the rancher's look and voice at the time, but spurred the pony into the swift ford beyond the wide gate and saw the drops glittering like diamonds in the sunlight as he thrashed his way across the noisy stream. He scrambled out upon the farther bank and after one long and vigorous shake started to climb the trail up the first steep slope.

UPWARD and to the west I rode, and saw the live oaks glowing in their new bronze-green spring livery beside the path, the orange poppy patches among the young wild oats, the purple lupine and the trunks of the madroñas gleaming like tongues of flame. And as the pony climbed among the rocks, the keen tang of the chemisal came down to me from the hot treeless heights beyond. I had dreamed of that wild perfume on breathless nights in cities far away.

I gained the summit of the first ridge where the sun flared hot upon the bare granite outcroppings; I descended into the cañons where the deer had trampled the gravel beside the little streams; thence on and, as the morning wore away, upward again among the stiff-branched digger pines and forth to higher ridges until, when I had ridden long among the tangled summits and afternoon was well advanced, I came to a crest where the Spanish moss was drooping from the boughs of the live oaks and got the first whiff of the ocean three thousand feet below.

Just before me the trail dipped down and took a sharp turn around a shelf of rock. I looked upon that spot with the feeling of a wanderer who sees at last the front gate of his home; for when I passed the turn, I would come forth into an open stretch whence I should view the whole coast-line from Sur to San Simeon, with the little nook where I had passed my boyhood lying a quarter of a mile ahead. I passed the turn—and plunged into as thick a sea fog as I ever saw in my life.

Gray twilight enveloped me, and the nearest objects showed, vague, shadow-like, unreal. The birds had stopped singing, and I heard the low moaning of the distant surf, where it was flinging itself upon the rocks. It was so long since I had seen one of these fogs, which are common enough down the coast in the summer time, that I had forgotten how dense and clammy they could be; and this one made a profound impression on me; my heart sank, and the cheerful anticipations which had been making me spur my horse for the last five miles, gave way to forebodings. In-

stead of thinking ahead on how my father's face would light up at seeing me, I was recalling the uneasiness which I had felt at failing to hear from him for so long, conjuring up a dozen things which might have befallen him—not one of which came near to the truth.

THE trail, which was clinging here to the seaward flank of the mountain, began to rise again toward the little eyrie where our house stood overlooking the long coast-line and the sea far below. It occupied a small clearing at the very summit of our ranch, whose pasture lands extended clear to the foot of the mountain, where an old vaquero had a cabin, really much better located than the home buildings. But my father had followed the sea, and he had stuck to the height because he could sit here on the front porch and view the passing of distant ships through his binoculars. As I went on, I noticed that the mists were beginning to grow thinner, and, remembering the signs of this country as I had learned them when a boy, I saw that by the time I reached our front gate I would have passed out above them once more. That gave me a better heart and I brought the pony to a trot, peering eagerly before me to catch the first sight of home.

But now as I came on the place, I got a grim surprise. Right where the trail drew alongside the lichen-covered paling fence I passed out of the fog as abruptly as I had plunged into it. Great billows of mist rolled away under my feet clear to the western horizon, gleaming like foaming surf in the hot white sunshine. And in this blaze of light I saw the house. Across the ruin of a weed-choked garden it confronted me, deserted, windowless.

I pulled up at the front gate. A pathway led from here to the veranda where my father used to sit watching the passing of the distant ships. Squarely in the middle of this path my eyes fell on a long and narrow heap of earth. Verdureless, unflowered and without a headboard, it was none the less unmistakable—a grave.

The sight so shocked me that I sat there in the saddle gazing at it for some moments before I dismounted and led my horse into the yard. There was something ghastly in the revelations of the open door; for, excepting that some one had removed the windows—probably for his own use, as sashes are expensive in the country down the coast where they must be packed for many miles on a horse's back—the room was just as it had been when that roof sheltered living tenants. The cloth was on the table, frayed about the edges by the whipping of the sea wind and stained by the inrush of rain before the winter gales; several books were lying there, one of them open, its pages all yellow from weather. I recognized it as a boyhood favorite and took it away with me. The homemade easy-chair in which my father had smoked and read the long evenings through, was standing before the fireplace, wherein several charred bits of wood remained. A lizard basked where the sunshine streamed in upon the hearth.

I remembered how I had sat in that same patch of sunshine looking into my father's face while I was telling of my hopes and plans on the very morning when I left, and I was about to turn away in my heart-sickness from the dismal thing that had been our home, when I noticed the end of a cigarette lying on the mantel. It was rolled from white paper, which is unusual in California, and a thin thread of smoke was twining upward from it.

NOW it was plain enough that whoever had left that here must have heard me coming by the trail, for the tramp of a horse carries far on a still afternoon, and the animal which I was riding had made more than his share of noise, what with his shying at some vision of his fancy in the mist and his scrambling on the rocks when I had forced him back into the path. It seemed curious in this out-of-the-way country where passers-by are rare events that the man had chosen to vanish instead of coming forth to get sight of a traveler. I raised my voice in a loud hallo, but no one answered, and when I had twice repeated the call, the silence became disconcerting.

Angered at this and with a definite sense of outrage at his desecration of our stricken hearth, I set out to search for the unknown skulker and went around to the rear of the house. Now, this nook of the wilderness where I had been brought up had always been as peaceful a section as lies out of doors—and it is usually the wild places which are freest from lawlessness; I had never known a man to carry a weapon hereabouts excepting to shoot deer. But this afternoon as I rounded the corner of the house, I had a premonition which made

me keep as sharp a lookout as if I expected to find some one there in ambush. However, no living thing confronted me, except an exasperated rattlesnake, which I took time to kill before I hurried on to the barn.

This was a huge building of split planks, with the usual copious hay-loft upstairs and the usual row of earth-floored stalls below. I threw open its wide door and went inside. And hardly had I entered when I got the feeling that another man was very close to me.

I cannot describe that sensation in any other words. I have heard men say that there are senses which the lower animals retain but men have almost wholly lost, and that this vague but powerful feeling of another's imminence which then possessed me is one of them. I know I was as sure of the thing as if I had heard him breathing.

JUST then I stumbled on an obstacle. A heap of small objects clattered about my feet. I picked up one of these, and took it to the light; it was a small, rectangular tin package.

I would have examined this much more closely than I did—and probably would never have come to the telling of this story—if it had not been for that hysterical horse which I had taken the trouble to tie up in the stable-yard. Something frightened him, and he flung himself from side to side so violently that before I could reach him he had broken the bridle-reins. It took a good five minutes to catch and subdue him, and by that time I was so thoroughly disheartened, so shocked by outraged memories, that I made up my mind to leave. I spent some moments at the grave, torn by sensations on which I will not dwell. Then I swung into the saddle and rode out through the front gate. I had not gone fifty yards before the fog swirled upward and closed in over everything. A glance over my shoulder caught only the shadow of a house enwrapped in rushing wreaths of gray mist, and in the briefness of that glance it vanished like a ghost.

CHAPTER II

AFTERNOON was getting on toward evening now. It was an hour's ride down to the coast-line, three thousand feet below and five miles, as the trail wound. For in this country one has to let a horse move slowly if he would reach his journey's end.

I was intent on arriving at the nethermost boundaries of the ranch before darkness came, for I hoped to seek out Manuel, our old vaquero, and when I had learned from him what had happened, to find some neighbor who would give me shelter for at least the night.

I do not believe there is any credit in a man claiming he is not frightened; and if I wanted to lie on this point, I would only spoil a good story, for I had occasion to be badly alarmed more than once before I was through with this visit to my former home. The first of these occasions came as I was riding down that mountainside. I am not easily wrought up as a rule, for I spent my boyhood in a country where the little fellows learn to ride bareback before they go to school and where ten-year-olds handle rifle and riata with a fair degree of skill; and my profession as a mining engineer had taken me into several lively brushes with outlaw Mexicans and Yaqui Indians during the three years since I had left college. Besides all of which, I am my father's son, and he never gave back for any man, as you will very shortly see. But now, as I rode down the hill, I imagined that I could hear other riders about me, in the fog.

Sometimes the sound of hoofs would seem to be straight behind me, and again it would be off to one side, but it never came from ahead. How soon the idea that I was imagining all this gave way to the certainty of actual perceptions, I do not know, but when I had been an hour on the downhill trail the scraping of iron shoes on the granite somewhere above my head was followed by a rattle of dislodged fragments, which came avalanching down out of the mists. I drew rein and hallooed to the unseen rider, but got no answer. There was no hoof-beat now, as if the man had pulled up his horse and were waiting until I should go on again.

When I did so, it was with the consciousness that invisible companions flanked me on either side. And shortly afterward I got more startling evidence of this espionage. The trail, like all these hill trails along the California coast, looped back and forth to catch the easy grades; and in the bight of one of these loops it dipped into a redwood cañon, which it descended for two yards or so, crossing and recrossing

the creek. It was deep dusk in the shade of this ravine; beneath the interlaced branches which shut out the sky on the clearest days the brook ran as black as ink this afternoon. The moaning of the surf came in through the pillared trunks with the gray fog-wisps. I stopped my horse at the second crossing of the little stream to let him drink.

STRAIGHT back of me I heard the crunching of a foot on dry twigs. It was so near that I pulled up my pony's head and whirled him round expecting to catch sight of the man in the first leap or two. But when I had galloped some twenty yards I came to a muddy place where a little spring exuded from a clay bank; and in the mire I found the print of a boot with the water still seeping down into it. The fellow had evidently left his horse behind with the purpose of dogging me more silently, and had leaped off into the brush, where he must now be lurking, watching me. I rode on once more, thinking that things had changed a great deal and for the worse down in this country, whose few settlers had always been glad to greet a traveler in the old days; and I was wondering who the newcomers could be as I came forth into the open lands and drew nearer to Manuel's adobe house.

It stood close to the trail, which widened here into what we down-the-coast people call a "sled road." This is a literal expression, for in that remote region beyond reach of vehicles, the ranchers of this day use wooden sleds to do a great deal of the heavier hauling. As I came in sight of the building, I noted with considerable relief that smoke was rising from the chimney; and when I reached the gate, I called the old vaquero loudly by his name. He came forth from the front door, and I was not surprised now—as I would have been in other days—to see him bearing a rifle in his two hands.

With him came our old bull terrier, who had been as vigorous a young "lion dog" as there was in the Southern part of the country before I left. I had shot more than one of the big cats which Northerners call cougars but which go by the more formidable name down here, after he had treed them for me. And now, although he moved stiffly with the advent of canine old age,—my absence had occupied the majority of the advent of years allotted him in this world,—he knew me! He was first to welcome me home. When he had made sure of me, and while he was leaping upon me to his heart's content, Manuel came up and took me by the hand.

To my anxious question, "Yo' have seen the house," he said, and then, first letting me read the tragedy in his darkening eyes:

"Last weenter, late in November eet was, one day I rode up the trail and I found your father w'ere they had shot heem. I buried heem out there een front because he liked to watch the sea."

"Who—"

He laid his big brown hand on my arm as I said the word. "Ah, eef I knew for sure, then I would say hees name; but I can tell you wot I know." He had a fine thin nose and keen dark eyes, and as I looked into his face I thought of an old eagle that I used to watch sitting on the top of a wind-gnarled redwood, gazing out upon the distant sea. The eyes softened quickly as they went toward me, then hardened as he began his tale.

THREE years ago, while I was on my way to Mexico, four strangers had come into the neighborhood, whence no one knew, nor did they ever say a word to give the sligthest hint. They were silent men and purposeful, and began acquiring land from the far-flung ranches, until they held nearly everything of range and fenced fields, from the summit to the beach and for a distance of ten miles. All this did not come about easily, as you can well imagine—for men do not like to give up their old homes for new ones, even if those homes be in a remote section where crops mean nothing but bodily sustenance and stock goes a four-days drive to the nearest market; but other strangers came to join these four, until there were eight in all, and every one of them a wild and reckless rider; and what with the trespassing and broken fences and maimed cattle driven over cliffs which came about with the new settlers, men became glad to sell and clear out.

All save Barbara's father and mine. Jim Lathrop seemed, for some reason or other which Manuel did not explain at the time but which I came to learn soon enough, to get on well with the leader of the bunch; and my father stood out against him sturdily. Sugden was the fellow's name, a big black man who rode like a centaur and—

"Always," said Manuel, "he packs a

short gun on heem w'erever he goes." A "short gun" is our down-the-coast name for the long-barreled revolvers which horsemen used to wear in those days back in the Rocky Mountain country, but which one rarely carries in this part of California.

That was the beginning of the story which my father would have told me in his letters if he had been one to call for help from those who owed him aid. Being the man he was, he contented himself with fighting his battles against the larger rancher—for Sugden was a huge landholder within a year after his advent—alone. There had been bad blood over broken fences and similar acts of vandalism on the part of Sugden's riders; and more than once the black-bearded man had tried to get my father to sell out, but without result. And then—

Manuel rode up the hill to find what he had told me. It seemed, he said, as if my father must have been writing a letter at the time, for he was sitting in his chair at the table when discovered, and the pen lay as he had dropped it on the cloth. But there was no sign of written paper there. It was plain enough that the murderer had come upon him from behind.

"And then I jost wait because mebbe—I theenk—yo' weel come back," said Manuel, "or mebbe yo' weel answer my letter telling yo' all thees." At what risk he had abided I could well judge from the weapon in his hands.

"I never got the letter, Manuel," said I. It must have missed me in my wanderings, if indeed it ever went back across the trail to the stage road—for there is a good chance that it did not, as things turned out.

HE bowed his head and was about to make some answer when a clatter of hoofs came from the trail. Several horsemen were riding from the direction in which I had come, and I thought of those who had followed me through the fog.

They burst into sight from the mists, three of them, big fellows, riding recklessly. But the foremost of them was the greatest in stature and the most devilishly splendid in his horsemanship. I got a glimpse of him, as he came on a dead run down the sled road; and then he did a thing which came near to costing him his life—and probably me mine.

Our old bull-terrier had run out into the roadway at the first wild halloo and was standing there close beside the horse-track when the big man passed him. I noted that the fellow's hand was busy at his saddle-horn, and now, in the passing, I saw it move—one lithe dexterous gesture, and the coils of the rawhide riata unwrapped themselves until the rope was like a striking snake. Its loop widened and fell, and falling, tightened about the old dog's body. The horse leaped on.

I saw that much, and then Manuel's rifle was in my hands. I never did remember taking it from the old man. I had it leveled at my shoulder and called my warning, with my finger eager on the trigger as I raised my voice.

The horse came to a stop inside of two jumps.

"Unloose that rope!" I shouted. And as the order was obeyed, I watched the other two. Their hands were moving toward their sides, but I let the muzzle of the rifle swerve toward them and the movement ceased. There was an uncomfortable moment which passed in dead silence; and then they rode on while old Boxer came limping back to lick the hand which I extended to him.

"Thees one ees Karmany," Manuel said quietly, and pointed to the big leader who had roped the dog. And although he said nothing more, I was certain from what I saw in his eyes that I had leveled that rifle at the man whom he believed to be my father's murderer.

And then he bade me kindly to come within the house while he got me a bite to eat. While I ate the meal which he had prepared for me, I thought the matter over, until—

"Manuel," I said, "will you go with me and show me this man Sugden's house?"

I saw his eyes light fiercely as he nodded. Before we went, he took down the gun which he had placed in its rack on the wall, and I was sufficiently impressed by what I had seen and heard to get a single-action pistol from my saddle-bags; I had picked it up in Tombstone, Arizona, and used it down on the border more than once; and I was in a frame of mind where I really hoped that occasion might arise to use it again.

As he was saddling his own horse and one of ours, which he had caught up for me in the corral, "I am glad for you to come jost now," said Manuel, "because thees Sugden send me word last week that I have got to clear out from the country

mighty queek." He hesitated as if he did not want to tell more bad news to me and then went on, "Yo' see he had got papers from the jodge thees month to take the ranch."

"You mean they made him administrator of the estate?" I cried.

"Something that sound like that," he said.

"Where was Jim Lathrop all this time?" I asked. For Barbara's father was my father's nearest neighbor and an old friend.

Manuel shrugged his shoulders and finished tightening the latigo before he replied quickly: "Lathrop ess made a lot of money off of thees Sugden, I guess, and don't bother heem w'en he wants something."

CHAPTER III

I COME from a stubborn breed of fighters on both sides. My father was a master of men and ships in his day, and his father before him. My mother's people crossed the country by the old Santa Fé trail in the years when to emigrate into the West meant to battle for your own life and the lives of your womenfolk, against Indians, renegade whites and the very land you traveled. During the years since I left home, I had lived in Tombstone through the troublous periods that town went through in the late eighties, and had warred, farther to the southward, against roving Mexicans and Yaquis, to maintain the rights of those who hired me.

All of which I am telling you in order that you may understand why it was that the sorrow of my homecoming did not bow me down, but rather moved me to immediate action. It was not that I grieved the less but that I saw my work cut out for me, and tried to take it up as I felt my father would have wished me to do, had he been there to speak his thoughts to me.

And Manuel's last words made me see that it was high time I had come home; else there would have been no remnant of a home left. I swung into the saddle now, more set than ever on seeking out this newcomer, to see, for one thing, what he would be like,—for I realized already that it was war between us, and I wanted to appraise my enemy,—and for another thing, to warn him henceforth to respect the boundaries which he and his had so wantonly violated. I meant to do this last with the idea of establishing my position right in the beginning, that I might fight a clear issue through from that time on, until I either went under or brought justice down upon my father's murderer.

What Manuel had told me of Jim Lathrop was a bitter blow, and as we went down the road, I thought of Barbara. The day before I left the country, and on this very track which I was now traveling, we two had pledged our word to bide my homecoming, when we would marry. We were not much more than children then, it is true, and many things may happen with a girl when a lad is gone from her; but I had cherished the memory of that plighted troth through these years, cherished it the more tenderly, I presume, because there were so few women in the wild lands where I had spent most of my absence. There had been some letters between us; and then hers had abruptly stopped, though I had continued to write to her for a long time afterward. Now, what had happened to Jim Lathrop, to so estrange him from my father that he would sit by and allow an interloper to administer the estate, was beyond my knowledge at this time. But I knew Barbara's father for a canny fellow, with always an eye wide open for his own interest, and after all the news did not so much astonish me as it set me to conjecturing. During this period of metamorphosis, what had become of Barbara? I had the question on the tip of my tongue several times but forbore to ask it.

THE moon had climbed up, and the fog had gone seaward with the coming of the land-breeze after sunset. The sled-road wound along the flanks of the hills, two or three hundred feet above the surf which roared and hissed among the rocks right under us. Now we would be riding out on open lands with the whole country visible in the moonlight and the young wild oats swishing in the soft breeze, which carried down intermittent waves of warm fragrance from the summits far above. And again the track would follow the contour of the hill into a deep fold where we passed first among live oaks and sycamores and then descended into the gloom where the great redwoods shut out the stars.

As we rode beyond the boundaries of our ranch, I saw the changes which had come with the arrival of Sugden and his

crowd. For here lay an interval which had been occupied by several small ranches, whose houses in the old days had sheltered thriving families. Now those houses stood out ghastly in the moonlight, their windows as blank as dead men's eyes; and broken fences let the cattle into the orchards whose trees stood dying in whole ranks. Everything had been given over to the herds of the newcomers; and a pretty little neighborhood lay about me, stripped and stark, as desolate a sight as man can see.

ALL save the Lathrop ranch. Coming out on the summit of a bare grass ridge, I saw it away ahead of us, with a grain field glimmering soft green in the moonlight, and a patch of warm orange light to mark the living-room in the house. Even in that bitter moment, I could not help wondering if Barbara would be sitting in the radiance of that lamp, and what she would be doing if she were there.

Then we made a turn to the right and away from the sea, passing through a wide gate and climbing the hill by a by-trail which led us to Sugden's place. The ranch buildings stood on the crest of a wind-swept knoll; and even in the half-light which the moon gave, I could see, long before we reached them, how bare the ground had been tramped all about, right up to the front door of the house. Now, most of the people in this down-the-coast country either had a strain of the Spanish in them or had followed the custom of their native Californian neighbors about their homes, making them very pretty places with cool half-courts, hedges of cypress, and climbing roses. The bareness of this fellow's surroundings hit me between the eyes, as the saying goes, and this in spite of the fact that I had been seeing a great many such places during my travels in the cattle lands of the Southwest. A great live oak tree stood hard by the front door, a tree to shade a bit of watered turf or a flower garden, to my way of looking at it. But the only living thing it sheltered was a drowsing sow that arose and scuttled away, shaking her young from her as she fled at our approach. And the only use the great oak had been put to, was holding a rack of "jerky," as we call stripped beef, which is hung out to dry, unsalted, in the open air. It was freshly cut and made the place smell like a slaughter-pen.

The moonlight made all objects plain: the drove of shaggy dogs that came snarling down to meet us, the saddles hanging by one stirrup each from the front wall, the litter of rawhide riatas, bridles and hackamores on the porch; the group who sat there among them watching us do battle with the troop of curs. It was like riding into an Indian village so far as welcome went.

I kicked away the last and most stubborn member of the pack, and with Manuel by my side, each of us leading his own horse, we completed our advance and faced the group.

Several of its members were lounging back in the shadows of the porch, barely visible, with here and there the glow of a burning cigarette among them lighting up a portion of a sinister face. I caught the dull glint of a stray bit of moonshine on a rifle-barrel in the crowd. Three others sat on the front steps, and, even as these watched us, we kept our eyes on them.

ONE was the giant Karmany whose sportive tendencies had brought him under my rifle-muzzle two hours ago. He was talking as we drew near, and, though he continually watched us from the side of his eye, he did not stop. He sat with his huge booted legs wide apart on a lower step, and the moon shone full on his ugly face. He had the thick nose and lips of a negro, though his skin was quite fair with large freckles; and his kinky hair was as white as tow. A long, thin, flaxen mustache hung down well below his chin, the sort of mustache that looks as limp as if it belonged to a drowned man. His blue eyes rolled as he talked.

"Yes," he was saying, and I think he raised his voice a little for my benefit. "I was standing that clost to him, that I could o' mashed his head in with the piece o' two-by-four I had in my hand."

"Well, then, why didn't you brain him?" The speaker used in place of that last pronoun an epithet which made my blood tingle. For I knew that Karmany had been talking of what had taken place in our barn, the thing which I had not seen but which my senses had warned me of while I was searching the place. I knew it from the cigarette like the one I had seen smoking on the mantel of our desecrated living-room.

It was Sugden; no need for Manuel to nudge me; I could tell the man as the

leader at once, even if I had not heard him described. He was big, black and handsome, in a coarse, arrogant way; so neatly built that you need look twice to realize his bulk. His white teeth flashed as he spoke, and his eyes glowed in the moonlight. He made me think of the black mountain lion which they find down in the mountains of Mexico. I noticed then that he wore the collar of his flannel shirt turned up high and clasped with a pin in front so that it hid the lower portion of his throat.

THE third member of the trio laughed. If you have ever heard the mirthless screech of the old, worn courtesan in a mining-camp, you will know how she sounded. She was a highly colored baggage, even yet, and must have been flashy enough in her beauty once; but her eyebrows were unpleasantly heavy, so that she always seemed to look upon you like a bird of prey. She shrugged her thin shoulders clear to her ears with the outcry and threw herself back against Sugden, right into his arms. He pushed her away so violently that she almost fell, but recovered herself just in time. And then I saw those heavy brows contract; her eyes shot fire.

Manuel and I had come to a stand. Sugden let his eyes go slowly over me; then nodded. "Evenin'," he said. "You the man that's so careless with your rifle?"

"Never careless," I answered with enough emphasis on the last word to let him know I was replying to the challenge in his tone.

I saw the woman's eyes go swiftly to me, widening just a little as with surprise, and there seemed to be gladness in them too.

"I am Bradley Lewis," I added, and waited to see how he would take that.

It was an unexpected blow; no doubt about it; he leaned sharply forward, and his face tightened. He was a fierce fellow and fearless; that much was very plain.

"So,"—he did not speak so loudly now and there was speculation in his voice,—"you're his son."

"David Lewis' son," I said. "And I want you to know—" I was going on to tell him my intentions as I recounted them in the beginning of this chapter, when he broke in.

"I tell you what: I'll give you five thousand dollars for the place, the way it stands."

"I'm not going to sell the place." I found my temper rising fast. "And I want you to understand this too, I'm going to see that those letters of administration which you hold are revoked at once."

He rose slowly, and in the movement jostled the woman so rudely that she was obliged to spring to her feet in order to save herself from pitching off the step. Her face went white, and she drew away from him so tensely that I almost looked for her to strike him.

"You're as free with your talk as you are with your gun-play," he said jeeringly.

"There's some one here," I answered quickly, "has made a gun-play that I mean to see him hanged for before I'm done. And I'm staying until I find that man. In the meantime, I want you to know that if you or any of your men set foot on my place, you want to come prepared to shoot it out."

He nodded coolly enough. "You've heard him, boys," he said and then, to me: "That goes double, partner, from to-night on."

CHAPTER IV

I FELT better when Manuel and I rode away. At least the issue stood out clear between me and these men; it was me or them—war to a finish now. In those days the down-the-coast country was as peaceful as it is at this time, years afterwards; I would not have you think otherwise of a section where the people abide by the law closely, and perhaps more so than they do in the cities. These strangers belonged to another breed, came of other environment, and were no more a part of the land than any invaders are. I knew them from the first sight; I understood their kind, for I had spent a good deal of my time in a section where every man carries his law in a holster strapped to his waist; and the different mining excitements of the Southwest had brought me in contact with some of those who rode alone, ever vigilant, pariahs in that desert land. There was about these men at Sugden's ranch-house—it showed in many little things, a trick of gesture, a bit of slang, a manner of speech and above all in their restless eyes—a something which made me suspect that they belonged to that lost legion whose horsemen have

vanished from cattle-range and mining-camp, to appear at intervals, silent, deadly, their eyes red-rimmed from sun and blinding alkali, like specters of the mirage, and to vanish again into the desert.

Why they had come here and whence, remained, just as the reason for my father's death and the identity of his slayer remained—a mystery. But I was pretty sure of them from the very first for what they were. And the belief that I stood opposed to so formidable a company did not prevent me as I came back to Manuel's adobe house from feeling something very much like relief at the certainty of who these foes were.

He put up the horses and followed me indoors, and when he had shown me a bedchamber off the living-room, he told me, "Thees ess your house now," and leaving me to my own devices, went off to bed.

I sat alone for a long time in the little living-room to think the matter over and map out my course. The lamplight threw large black shadows on the whitewashed walls; a crucifix over the mantel stood out startlingly dark against that blanched background; it was the only mural adornment of any kind. Within the deep window-seats some plants, potted in tin cans, gave color and freshness to the place. And although there were some of the usual men's belongings about,—a pipe, a *riata honda* and a box of rifle cartridges upon the red-clothed table,—the place was as neat as if a woman kept it up.

I saw all these things, unconscious of them at the time and yet noting them so that, when I recall that evening, I always see them again. My mind centered itself on my father's enemies and mine. What to do next? For when one deals with such men of parts as Sugden and his fellow Karmany, he needs to start in with what carefulness he can, if he would be on hand to see the finish of the affair.

I had two things to do—that is the way I saw it then; in less than an hour I discovered another which overshadowed even these in its importance, and changed the course of the whole proceedings in more ways than one—but at this moment, I could only see the two, and they were—to hold the place and find my father's murderer.

So far as the former purpose went, I could, of course, set out on legal methods and leave the matter of handling the estate to the bickerings of lawyers over at the county seat. But I realized that this would be only marking time at the best, for the court proceedings would consume weeks at least, and whatever decision was made in my favor would be worth about as much as the paper it was written on, unless I chose to enforce it myself. Besides which I would have to leave the place while I started my suit, and give my enemy opportunity to act unhampered and unseen. So I made up my mind to hold the ranch right from the beginning, as I would have to hold it in the end, by force of arms, and bide my time until Sugden made the first overt move. The apparent imprudence of that decision was not so great, when you consider the fact that if there were any danger here, to set forth for the county seat by that lonely mountain trail would be as perilous a project—and probably more so—than staying right where I was.

As to the discovery of the murderer, I had only my own suspicions to begin on, and these were born of nothing tangible. But I believed then, as I sat there in the white-walled living-room, that the huge man Karmany had done the thing; and I made up my mind to set to work at once and see if I could not discover the reason back of the deed, which would bring the crime home to its perpetrator. And as I thought of that man lurking there on this same afternoon, in the room where my father had been slain—for after what I had heard him say on Sugden's steps I was quite certain it was his cigarette that I had seen smoldering on the mantelpiece and his presence I had suspected while I was searching the barn—I determined that I would lose no time in taking up quarters in the house, that I might guard it against further trespass, at the very least.

And then my thoughts strayed to Barbara's father, probably because I was feeling very much alone, like a man who stands against odds with his back to the wall—and of his failure to take any interest in our affairs after my father's death. Jim Lathrop had been justice of the peace down here for many years, a careful man, deliberate in acting, canny in making his decisions. He was—before Sugden came—the richest man among the ranchers. Most of his money had come through a small two-masted schooner which carried tanbark to the Northern market; and there had been many a complaint over his ship-

ping charges. Barbara had nothing of his "Look out for number one" disposition in her make-up. All the fineness in the strain came from her mother, who died when she was a little girl. I remembered how Manuel had hinted at Lathrop's being on close terms with Sugden, and I wondered what the nature of the alliance was. I did a good deal of thinking on that point, but I came nowhere near the answer; had I done so, I might have acted differently from the first, thought I am sure it would have come out all the same in the end anyway.

FROM Lathrop my mind went to Barbara, and I wondered how the years had dealt with her. My hunger for a word from her and a look at her face returned, for I have told you she was my one sweetheart; I had never had another since I left home, but had kept the picture she gave me on my departure and had continued to cherish it and look at it long after she had ceased answering my letters. And then while I was sitting thinking, I heard a light footfall. Some one was tapping at the door.

Barbara was standing there before me in a great pool of light from the newly risen moon when I opened in answer to the knock. I cannot say that I was surprised, for my heart had leaped at the first sound of her little foot, telling me it was she.

There was no word between us for some moments, but her two small hands went out to me, and I took them in my own and held them there while I looked at her; and the knowledge that my boyhood love had never died but had grown to a man's love with the years, came over me. I think she saw that in my face, for the color deepened in her cheeks, and, before she dropped her eyes, a sudden light had come into them which made my heart race again. Her head was bare. I noticed how she wore her hair in two great flaxen braids, which she had brought over her shoulders so that they hung down over the curve of her slim breast away beyond her waist, which was the way that I had seen it last; and how she wore just such a riding suit as she had on the day she said good-by to me. Yet she had changed; there was in her clear gray eyes a presence which I cannot describe in words beyond saying that it was as if vanished tears had left a memory, and something like that in her face which made it perhaps a little finer than when I had left her a laughing girl.

She was the first to find speech. "I am so sorry, Brad," she told me simply, and then: "Only a little while ago I heard that you were here. I had to come to tell you—"

Back there in the roadway where the shadows of the live oaks fell black as ink between the moonlit places, I caught sight of a moving form. It slipped away into a patch of darkness as my eyes fell on it, but I was sure that I had seen the flutter of a woman's skirt. My face must have betrayed my discovery, for Barbara paused.

"What was it?" she asked quickly. "Was there anyone? I thought I heard some one behind me on the road."

"No one at all," I lied to her, for what good was there in disturbing her by telling her the truth? "Except I saw a doe there in the oaks." And then I noticed the dust of the sled-road thick upon her high-laced boots, and it came to my mind that I had not heard the step of any horse before her own footfall sounded on the porch. "You've walked!" I cried.

SHE laughed, as if perhaps as much relieved by my answer to her question as amused by my solicitude. "Is that so terrible? Four miles!" She shook her head at me. "Brad, *you* don't think I'm such a lady that I can't go about any more, do you? Even if I have been away to school."

"Away to school?" I echoed, and the surprise in my voice begot astonishment on her part.

"Why, you knew that, Brad!" she said slowly. I shook my head.

"You mean to say"—she caught her breath and a shadow came into her eyes, a shadow of suspicion, but not for me, I could see—"that you didn't get my letters?"

"Not for three years now, Barbara," I told her. "But I wrote you in that time."

She said nothing to this except to shake her head, and when I asked her whether she had not heard from me, she repeated the movement.

"That is strange," I commented, and thought of what Manuel had said of Jim Lathrop's friendship for those who were my enemies. There was no connection in the thought; it simply leaped into my mind.

She seemed to want to change the subject, for she went on quickly to tell me how she had been three years away at a private school and had returned only the other day, to learn for the first time of my father's death.

Her face became more serious. "What are you going to do, Brad?" she asked me softly.

I had my wits about me by this time and remembered that I had kept her standing on the porch, for which I apologized, and brought her inside before I answered the question. When she was seated in the living-room with the door closed between her and that mysterious follower whom I had caught sight of out there in the road, I told her very much as I have told you, of my reviewing the situation, and I saw something like a shadow of fear come into her eyes along with the pain when I spoke of Sugden and his crew. "I can't believe it!" she cried, when I had done.

"Those are my plans," I said without answering that cry. "I mean to stay here and see it out."

AT those words she turned quite white. "Don't, Brad!" she cried as sharply as if I had struck her. "You cannot do that! You'll only stay and— Brad, you go away! Please go!"

She sat there clutching her throat as if it pained her, and her eyes were full of pleading.

"I must stay, Barbara," I told her quietly. "There now! We wont talk of it any more." For she had lowered her head into her hands, and I saw her breast heaving while her little shoulders shook. I slipped my hand behind her, patting her, for I believed that fear for my safety had prompted that outcry, as indeed it had—in part. Then she raised her head, and I saw that her eyes were dry; but somewhere far back in them were tears whose shedding would give her relief.

"I'm sorry I distressed you by telling you all this," I said from my heart, but she shook her head and smiled wanly.

"It's all right, Brad." She rose. "I must go home." Her voice sounded weary now. "It wasn't very nice of me—when I came to comfort you—and then to act this way."

I did not make any answer at the moment, for as I stood there with my arm still half round her and my hand upon her shoulder in that caress which her sudden grief had brought, I was facing the window; and against the pane a face showed, with the light of the lamp full upon it; and it was the face of the woman whom I had seen Sugden spurn on his steps. A strange hard joy was flashing in her black eyes and contorting her lips, as if she were in the instant of a discovery which had overwhelmed her with a sense of triumph.

She saw my eyes on her and drew back, and when Barbara looked up at me the face was gone, so that she saw me staring at the empty window.

"I'm glad you came, Barbara," I said then. "More glad than I can tell you. I've thought of you, while I've been away—so many times."

I think she knew that I was remembering my unanswered letters, for she answered very softly, "And I have thought of you," and dropped her head. She started for the door.

"I'm going to catch up the horses," I said quickly, "and ride back with you."

"Ah, no!" Her voice was sharp with that same anxiety whose note I had detected before, and she caught my arm in her two hands.

"Why, yes," I answered. "Surely you don't want me to let you walk home by yourself!"

SHE said nothing to that but went with me to the corral; there I found that Manuel had turned his animal out to pasture, leaving mine with a bite of hay. I bridled and saddled him and was on the point of taking the hired pony which had carried me from the San Antone valley when I found that he had gone footsore, and it occurred to me that, as youngsters, Barbara and I had ridden double many a time. I brought out my horse where she was standing in the moonlight and told her the circumstances, asking her whether she minded getting on behind; and this time she made no demur but nodded in silence and leaped up after I had mounted, clasping my waist with her two soft arms just as she used to do before we two had left the country years ago.

Now as the horse started down the sled-road, dancing a little, for he was not accustomed to his double load, and pricking up his ears at the sudden gleams of moonlight before, I felt the soft clasp of Barbara's arms about my waist, the yield-

ing pressure of her body as she leaned close to me, and now and again the warmth of her breath against my neck. And I held in the horse and brought him down to as slow a walk as he could take. For a long time neither she nor I said a word; but both of us were thinking of the same things, and those things were the days when we had ridden thus upon this same stretch of road between my home and hers.

The oaks stood out black upon the hill-side, and between them the moon shone soft on the young green grass, and it was so light that we could see the flame of the wild poppies and the soft light-blue patches where the flowers grew thick which we used to call baby blue eyes. Then we came down into a redwood cañon where it was as dark as ink, and the smell of the hay laurel came to us from the slope farther on. The dust was quite deep from much hauling of bark, and the horse's hoofs drummed softly on it. We passed the trail which led to Sugden's house and drew near to the Lathrop place.

I felt Barbara's clasp tighten, and it seemed to me as if she were trembling; and I thought I knew the reason, for we were climbing the hill out of the ravine toward the summit where we two had sat on the afternoon before I had left the country and had promised each other how we would wait until I should come back and take her for my wife.

We were little more than children that afternoon, and yet I felt her arms tremble now upon my waist as we came on up into the moonlight among the scattered oaks. It was a narrow ridge, and beyond it the roadway descended once more into a cañon where a bridge crossed close to the waterfall. I do not remember doing it, but I know that when we had come to the spot which had remained all these years in my memory, I had stopped the horse. Barbara said nothing.

The moments passed. And then, "Barbara!" I said softly. "Do you remember?"

She did not answer at first, and I was beginning to think that maybe I had been too importunate when she spoke. It was just one word:

"Yes."

And the way she said it was as if she had defied all the world by its utterance. It was so sharp and fierce.

And then there came to me the joy of a great relief, for I knew that her love too had endured. I shifted in the saddle and brought my arm about her shoulders, pressing her face close to mine, and kissed her on the lips. She uttered one little flutter of a sigh and gave herself to my caress; and in that moment all the bitterness went from me, and all the sadness was forgotten, and I knew only the one thing: my love and hers.

Then there came from the darkness of the ravine just below us the jingle of a bitt chain, and Jim Lathrop's voice calling, "Barbara!"

CHAPTER V

IT was as black as ink in the ravine, excepting at one point; in the center of the crazy unrailed bridge which crossed the stream so close to the waterfall that one riding there was always wet with spray, the moonlight came down between the tops of two great redwoods and made a soft white circle like that which a calcium leaves in the center of a stage. In this little lake of radiance, whence we on the hilltop were plainly visible and where they in turn were in clear sight of us, Jim Lathrop and another horseman had halted their animals. Nor did they move now, but bided us as we came riding down to them. I saw the other rider nearer now, and it was Sugden. Barbara's arms had gone limp, and she was silent as her father spoke.

"Well, Barbara?" Lathrop's voice made it clear enough that he had seen what had passed between us two on the hilltop, and the resentment in his voice came in marked contrast to the demeanor he had shown when he last saw us two together. He turned toward me, and I could see that the smile he gave me was forced; if ever a man showed by his look, and in spite of visible effort on his own part too, that he was lying, it was my father's old neighbor as he extended his hand and told me he was glad to see me back. In the days before I had left the country, Jim Lathrop's plump face was as smooth as an egg, but now the moonlight revealed a myriad of fine wrinkles about the corners of his small eyes, and there was in those eyes a fishiness which I had never seen before. I took the hand which he offered me, although I do believe I would have refused it, had it not been for his daughter's presence.

Now, he had always been a ready man when it came to speech, and this was the first time I ever found him at a loss for words. There was a queer constraint on him as he sat there in the saddle between me and Sugden, an embarrassment which I came to understand well enough before long, but which struck me then as being extraordinary. His eyes met mine, dropped and went to Sugden, all in an instant, and he remained mute. My anger toward him rose.

"Well, Lathrop?" I said, just as he had spoken to his daughter a moment ago.

He cleared his throat, "Bradley," he replied, "why didn't you let us know you were coming back, instead of slipping in on us this way? You should have come down to the house and stayed with us."

Even then I am sure that he was afraid I might take him at his word and accept as half-hearted an invitation as I ever heard down in that country, for he drew a deep breath when I told him that I was quite comfortably placed at Manuel's.

BY this time we were riding on again, up the shadowed hill and out of the ravine. And as we came into the moonlight at the crest, I noticed Sugden's face; it was as rigid as a face of stone as he rode on beside Lathrop's horse, looking straight before him, uttering no word; and it was suffused with blood until it was almost black. He still wore that collar clasped together in front and turned up about his neck, and this, together with the straightness of his body in the saddle and his queer intent stare before him, gave him the look of a statue more than a man.

Once, as we were going down the roadway toward the house, Lathrop spoke to him, a word or two in an undertone; but the black face remained rigid, staring ahead, and there was no answer. I could see that our old neighbor was in a fever of uneasiness, for his eyes kept shifting from one of us men to the other, never remaining on either for more than an instant; once, when they happened to rove to Barbara, I saw his face tighten with anger, which he did his best, when he caught me looking at him, to conceal by asking me how long I intended to remain. I told him that was a matter beyond my knowledge at the time; and a moment later we drew in our horses before the house.

Now, it was only a matter of a few minutes from the bridge where we had come upon these two to Barbara's home; and what little speech there had been between me and Lathrop had filled in the time. The other two had remained mute. Barbara's hand was trembling as she slipped it inside of mine to let herself down from the horse, and her face was pallid in the moonlight as she looked up into my eyes. Her lips went tight. "Good night, Brad," she said softly. If ever there was pleading in a girl's face, there was in hers now. I lifted my hat. "Good night, Barbara," I bade her, and because I knew that this fellow Sugden was getting on her nerves,—I knew that all right, but I did not suspect the truth yet, only half of it,—I turned my horse to ride away. As for Lathrop, he said nothing to either of us but led his horse to the corral, and I looked over my shoulder as I started up the road, to see Barbara standing alone in the moonlight by the door gazing after us.

SUGDEN had turned in his horse beside mine and was beside me now, and he remained mute as he had been, nor did he change that rigid stare straight ahead. His animal was a big black, a good hand taller than my own, and as we rode, he crowded close beside me so that our stirrups sometimes touched. Thus we went, keeping to the running walk, and the only sound was the drumming of the hoofs in the soft dust, the jingle of the bitt chains and the creaking of the leather; that was all.

I kept my eyes on him now as we descended the hill, watching his right hand, for I knew that he would be sure to be very quick at the draw, and I saw that he was wearing that long-barreled revolver of which Manuel had spoken. I did not like that black silence of his nor the look on his face at all. But there was no movement of the hand, no sign of any purpose on his part. We reached the bed of the ravine, without either of us saying a word, and the horses stepped gingerly out upon the crazy little bridge. The split planks rattled to the impact of their hoofs; the roar of the waterfall came louder and I felt the cold spray upon my face. Nearly a hundred feet below us the stream ran, white as snow from the lashing of the current on the rocks.

Save for that patch of moonlight in the middle of the bridge, it was as dark as in

a cellar, with the tops of the redwoods black between us and the stars. Of what footing there was, I could see nothing; it was a passage which the horses must negotiate for themselves and by that superiority of sight which belongs to them. But as we drew nearer to the interval of radiance which I have described, it seemed to me that Sugden's big black horse was crowding my lighter animal toward the edge of the structure.

I instinctively shifted the reins on the pony's neck as that thought came to me and turned him in toward the center of the narrow runway; the movement brought his shoulder against the shoulder of the black. And the horse gave no ground.

Suspicion became a certainty right then. And as the knowledge came that the man was deliberately pressing me toward the brink, he must have discovered that I knew. For both of us acted at once.

Just as we were passing into the light, he did the thing, which I have no doubt he had planned from the time when I came riding down the hill with Barbara. And as he did it, I had already begun the movement which saved my life.

For as he drove his spurs into the flanks of the great black, goading the brute to the plunge that swept my horse before it, I was shifting my feet loose in the stirrups.

It came with a crunch of colliding bodies, a wild rattle and scrape of hoofs on the planks, a snort of terror from my pony. I saw Sugden's face as the man leaned forward in the saddle, and the rigidity had gone now; it was all alive with hatred and a savage joy; the eyes were flashing, and the lips were moving to curses which I could not hear. Then suddenly the expression changed, for I had thrown myself from the saddle and had him with both arms around the neck; and as I dragged him closer to me, I saw the eyes widen with the shock of his surprise.

MY horse went out from under me in that same instant and I heard his forehoofs scraping on the planking as he fell. There came a little interval and then through the roar of the waterfall I heard the crash as his body struck the rocks. With that crash—perhaps it was before, I do not know, for in the stress of quick action it is hard to gather correct impressions as to the sequence of things—I dragged Sugden from his saddle, and we fell together under his plunging horse.

Locked in each other's arms—for his had flown about me now, clasping me as mine clasped him—and with our bodies pressed so tightly together that I could feel the heave of his chest with his indrawn breath, we struck heavily in the roadway. The great hoofs of the black horse thundered on the planking close beside our heads, and we wrestled madly, each fighting to gain the uppermost.

A moment before all the advantage had been with him, for he had known what he was attempting and I had been in ignorance, but now the odds that went with this same knowledge were with me; to find himself locked in my arms and fighting for his life with me alive and battling against him instead of being dead with my horse down on those rocks, was a revelation which had caught him by surprise. And it was just as well that this was the case, for he was a larger man than I and marvelously quick.

The frenzy of our first struggle passed; the black horse had cleared our bodies with a sidewise leap and trotted off up the hill. We lay pretty much as we had fallen, and in the falling luck had been against me, for he was the uppermost. But he was still contending with a wild aimlessness which gave me a little opportunity to think.

And as I centered my thoughts on my position and what was best to do, I became conscious of a sharp pain under my shoulder blades, and I realized that this was caused by the planks pressing upon me while my head and neck were hanging out over the abyss.

I saw his face above me looking down into mine, and his eyes were widening with the joy of that same discovery. He tried to tear away from me; and with all that I could do, I knew I could not hold him close much longer. Another moment of this and he would free himself from my grip, to thrust me on over before I could shift my body back upon the bridge.

I FELT his coat scraping against my finger-nails as he drew slowly back and then, as I found that all my strength was of no use in this struggle, I thought I saw an opportunity. Releasing my grip so suddenly that his head and body fairly flew away from me, I caught him unawares. Before he could take advantage of the freedom which he had fought so hard to gain, I struck out with all my

face. The blow caught him fairly in the [illegible] and left him dazed with pain; his hands fluttered uncertainly in the very act of grasping for my throat. I struck once more, this time upward for his jaw and he collapsed upon me, limp as a sack of meal.

I shook myself free from him and rose unsteadily. He was clear out; no doubt about it, lying with his head lolling over the edge of the planking, his lips parted and his teeth gleamed white in the moonlight. One push and he would be down there with my horse. I bent to give that push, for the hate which that murderous attack of his had aroused in me was strong; and as I stooped, I saw I could not do the thing. I hesitated briefly, and then I dragged him back into the wagon-track and left him lying there in the little pool of moonlight where I had first seen him, the spot whence he had seen me and Barbara as we interchanged our caress upon the hilltop.

I turned away, and I had gone perhaps halfway up the slope when I became conscious of some one moving near me in the darkness. I halted; out of the shadows came the rustle of a skirt. Then the woman whom I had seen looking into Manuel's window while I was talking to Barbara came so close that I could see her eyes glowing like two coals in the darkness.

"You fool!" she whispered.

I stood there speechless, and although I was breathing hard from what I had gone through, I could hear her breath coming almost as loud as mine. She seemed to struggle with pent-up passions before she could articulate. Finally:

"Next time he'll get you. Why did you give him the chance?" She uttered something between a gasp and hard laughter as she asked it, and started on down the hill. I found my voice then. "What was it you wanted at the house?" I demanded. She halted abruptly.

"I found what I wanted," she answered, "when I looked through the window." She hesitated a moment, and when she spoke again, it was as one who has made a sudden decision. "If you'll leave a saddled horse there in the oaks across the road from your gate to-morrow night—if you'll do that, and see he's a good animal—Ah!"

The exclamation made me follow her gaze, and I saw Sugden stirring on the bridge. Before I looked back, she was gone, and I heard the stealthy movement of her feet in the grass where the shadows lay black among the oaks.

The great black horse was cropping grass beside the roadway as I climbed the hill. I passed him and walked on to Manuel's house, and it came to me that perhaps the woman had been wiser than I when she had mocked me for not having killed the man whose treacherous attack had come within a hairbreadth of costing me my life. But I was glad that I had not done the thing for all that.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY the next morning Manuel and I rode down to the bridge to salvage the harness of the dead horse. And while we were about this I got the first suspicion that I was neatly trapped.

The animal lay in the bed of the gorge, with his back broken by the fall; and we had considerable difficulty getting down to him; for the rock was sheer and slippery from constant laving by spray from the torrent. However, we managed it with the help of a rope and found ourselves at last beside the carcass. The water ran waist-deep here and so swift that it made one dizzy to look at it; and while we toiled at tugging and cutting away the straps we had all that we could do to maintain our footing against the wash of the current. There was no speech between us, for the roar of the falls was deafening; but when either wanted anything he made a sign. While I was in the act of dragging the saddle forth from the stream, I saw Manuel give me a meaning look and raise his index finger until it pointed heavenward; all the time, however, taking good care to confine the gesture to the finger alone as if he feared some one might see him doing it.

I glanced upward and there, almost straight above me, poised over the brink of the little bridge and looking down upon us, stood Sugden. He was holding the bridle-reins in one hand and his big black was beside him. Evidently he had dismounted to get a closer view of us or—

It came upon me that this would be a wonderful chance for him to do what he had tried and failed the night before. Every instant I expected to see his hand fly to his pistol holster, while as for me,

I stood there helpless with the saddle in my arms. But he did not move; until he had gazed down upon us for some moments; and then it was to whirl upon his heel and mount. He rode on down the road toward his house without turning his head toward us again.

NOW, I confess that the incident left me a little weak; there is no feeling that I have ever experienced which quite approaches the sensation of absolute futility that had come over me during the time between sighting him and his turning away: and I was never more surprised than when he left without so much as lifting a hand against me. But when Manuel and I had finally dragged the saddle and ourselves up the slippery cliff, and were recovering our breath in the roadway, the grizzled vaquero offered an explanation on the matter.

"Mebbe 'e don' want to keel yo' w'en somebody ees aroun'; mebbe 'e feegures 'e can take hees time an' do eet the way 'e wants to—so that nobody can say 'e done eet. 'E has got yo' here, an' 'e knows yo' aint going away becuz 'e wont let yo' out."

I asked him what he meant by that last statement and he merely shrugged his shoulders, but while we were riding up the hill toward home he said that he would show me by and by.

And that was the last word from him on the matter until afternoon when, "Le's go an' ketch that hoss," he proposed, "an' I show yo' wot I tol' yo' thees morning."

I had told him of the request the woman had made in the road the night before, but he had made no comment on it beyond the same shrug that he always used when he did not care to speak his mind on a subject; and up to now I had no idea whether he approved of granting the favor.

"You think it's a good scheme then?" I put it to him, for I had a high respect for the old fellow's judgment.

"Mebbe so," he answered quietly. "I theenk she ees want to do Sugden dirt. Yo' 'ave seen the way 'e handles her las' night an' how she don't like that."

He went into his room, and when he came back, he had my father's old binoculars with him. "Thees glass," he told me, "I got them w'en I found your father daid, an' I pack them down here, and sometimes they 'ave come een handy too."

WE saddled up in the corral and rode forth into the lower pasture which reached from the sled-road up the hillside to the crest of some live-oak knolls which rose five hundred feet above the sea. We found the bunch of horses which we were after grazing in a little swale, but before we caught up the big bay which I had chosen for the purpose, Manuel led me to the summit of one of the knolls. Here, in a thicket of manzanita he pointed to a little nest, not much bigger than a deer makes when it beds down, but all littered about with old cigarette stubs.

"Sometimes I lie 'ere very long," he explained as he threw himself upon the earth. I followed his example and watched him adjusting the glasses in silence. It was a fine clear afternoon; there was a bank of fog far out to sea, but hereabouts the sun was shining brightly, so that from our vantage-point we could see the whole coast-line: fold on fold of rugged hillside, with the dark green trees in the crevices of the cañons and the rippling wild oats under the oaks on the ridges, clear from Point Sur to Point San Simeon. And it came to me as I looked out on that view, which is one of the most wonderful in North America, how peaceful a place this country had been before I had left it, and what a change had come with these men, whose ranch buildings stood out with the patch of bare ground around them, an unsightly blot on their ridge far below us and three miles down the road.

Manuel had first trained the glasses on these buildings; now I saw him point them up the mountain-side; and when he had gazed a long time, he handed them to me, bidding me look at Sugden's place.

The ranch-house seemed to spring toward me as I raised the glasses to my eyes. I almost believed I could distinguish the cloud of flies about the rack of jerky which hung from the branches of the live oak. The sow whose repose we had interrupted the night before—or perhaps it was a sister—was coming round the corner of the bleak house, with a dozen of her progeny trailing after her, their mouths agape so that it seemed as if I could hear them squealing their importunate demands for sustenance. A big hulking fellow in his shirt-sleeves—he must have been one of the group in the shadows last night—was tying a new latigo on a saddle; he sat there on the steps with the sun blazing down on his red face; occa-

...ally he stopped working to puff on a cigarette, for I could see him raise his fingers to his lips and remove them again.

Two men came out of the house as I was gazing on the saddle-mender; and they got all of my attention immediately, for one of them was Sugden and the other, with whom he was talking earnestly, was Jim Lathrop. Evidently there was something of an argument there, for Lathrop's hand went out and up in a swift disclaiming gesture, and Sugden, at that gesture, clenched one fist, bringing it down upon the other palm with a good deal of vigor. Then the pair went down upon the steps past the saddle-mender and passed behind the corner of the building, leaving me to wonder what they had been discussing, and how it bore on this ugly situation in which I found myself.

MANUEL merely nodded when I told him what I had witnessed, as if such closeness between these two were an old story with him, and bade me turn the binoculars on the crest of the ridge behind the house. It was a bare hillside, which had once been clothed with grass but was now trampled hard by horses and littered with tin cans, clear to the summit, a good one hundred feet. And there I saw what puzzled me a good deal.

A bit of canvas had been spread, making shelter from wind and sun and rain, when they came from the direction of the sea, but open on the side which faced up the hill. Here lounged one of the company whom I had seen last evening on the front porch; a homemade chair with ample arms served him for a seat, and he was lolling back in it with his feet resting on an empty box. To all appearances he was as busy at doing nothing as the most accomplished and assiduous village loafer, resting there with his hands clasped back of his neck and gazing out into the hills. Before him, a few paces in front of the canvas which was keeping the sun off from him some one had built a pretty good-sized fire of dry wood—rather they had prepared for a fire and failed to light it. And near this unlighted pile of faggots stood a pyramid of small boulders from whose summit a short flagpole arose; I could distinguish a white rag fluttering at its foot.

When I recounted these things to Manuel, he bade me turn the binoculars up the mountain-side and search the summit where a cliff of granite rose close by my father's house. This took some time, although I knew the rock and its location well, for there was some adjusting of focus necessary; when it was done, I steadied my hands by resting my elbows on the ground to take a good long look.

The cliff arose within two hundred yards of the house, a sheer wall of rock with a little shelf at its top perhaps ten feet wide, and covered at this time of the year with ferns and maidenhair. I noticed, as soon as I got the focus, that some one had beaten down a well-worn path which zigzagged up the steep hillside beside the cliff and reached the shelf. And here, on the little level spot, there was a shelter somewhat similar to the one which I had seen down by Sugden's house; only this canvas was covered over and pretty well concealed by boughs; so that although it was in plain view of the mail trail where the latter came along the mountain-side approaching our place, for a good mile, one traveling into the country would never catch sight of the cloth, nor would he suspect that men were lurking there. Yet from that vantage-point, a man could watch the bridle-path as far as it showed and see everyone who came along it.

I GOT that much at the first glance; then I saw how the only opening in the cover which concealed the nest faced Sugden's ranch and us two in our concealment, which was almost in line between. And there, at the summit of the cliff, were three men. Karmany was one of them; he was seated cowboy-fashion with one knee bent and the other leg folded under him so that he rested his body on the heel. Another fellow, nearly as big as he, was squatting facing him, over an outspread blanket. I caught the flash of a playing card as Karmany flung it down upon the cloth. While these two gamed, another stood near by apparently at a loss for employment of any kind, for now he would stretch his arms and again he would thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets like a man who is being eaten up with ennui.

Here, where the trio lounged to all appearances so aimlessly, the glasses picked out another heap of dry branches ready for the burning. There was no flagpole in evidence, though I found its makeshift soon enough.

For while I watched, I saw forms come

into sight where the trail took its turn out of the timber—in the same spot where I had ridden into the fog yesterday afternoon. "A man on horseback and a pack animal," I said.

"The mail-carrier," Manuel told me promptly. "Now keep watch."

There was no need for his injunction, for I had already seen a movement among the three men. The fellow who was standing had evidently spoken, for the other two were now on their feet. For some seconds all three of them remained in the same tense attitudes peering out through their leafy covert upon the trail; and then, when the mail-carrier had come on for some distance, Karmany stepped over to the foot of a madroña. I saw his hands busy with something; and a white rag came fluttering up among the branches of the tree. It rose, dipped, rose again and dipped once more, this time for good.

BEFORE Manuel bade me, at my announcement of what was taking place, I had already turned the glasses toward Sugden's ridge and here I found the lounger under the canvas fly busy at his flagpole. The signal rose and fell and rose again to linger for some moments before finally descending.

"Yais," Manuel said. "Thees ees the way w'en the mail-carrier comes along. Sometime' he breengs some feller weeth heem or mebbe eet ees some stranger comes alone; an' then they mak' a deeferent signal."

I thought of yesterday afternoon. "And when there's a fog?" I asked.

"I never could see them then," he answered, "bot yo' know wot yo' see yourself, an' how they follow yo' down here. Any man who comes acrost them hills ees watched, an' w'en 'e goes out too."

I laid the glasses down. The sun was very bright upon the hillside and the flowers were tossing in the sea breeze; a meadow-lark sang somewhere near by. But to me the beauty had vanished from the place. I saw it as an animal looks upon the sides of the trap into which he has unwittingly walked. And I began to understand why Sugden had not taken the trouble to shoot me this morning when he found me waist-deep in the torrent, helpless under him. What use to risk a bullet-hole and investigation when he had me here securely guarded by sentries? He could easily bide his time until some opportunity came to do away with me in some less bungling manner.

Finally I found my voice. "How long has this been going on?" I asked.

"Right after they keel your father, I seen thees first," Manuel told me. "I theenk something scared them then, for always after that time they 'ave got men watching by day and night."

He rose. "Le's ketch up that there hoss," he proposed. When we were riding down the swale after the bay, he paused in the act of loosing his riata, to call out to me: "Yo' see, mebbe thees woman she has got some scheme; an' we are op against eet good an' hard jost now."

CHAPTER VII

MANUEL saddled the big bay that evening just before the moon rose and led him over into the oak grove across the road. When he had tied the animal there, where no passer-by could see it, he came back to the corral and caught up his own horse. I noticed that he had slung his gun on his saddle.

Now, I was about to ride forth myself, for that day, in spite of its wealth of revelations, had been long to me; I was chafing to see Barbara, not only for the love which had flamed up again within me, making all other things—even that determination to hunt down my father's murderer—of less consequence, but because I felt that there were phases of this affair known to her, of which I was in ignorance. Something was disturbing her besides the danger in which she had found me; something had taken place to bring that memory of weeping into her eyes; and it had come to me that perhaps Barbara too was walking among dangers, that she was keeping the secret of her troubles from me now. It was plain enough that Sugden's attempt to murder me had come about because he had seen us kissing on the hill; the man's jealousy was written on his rigid face when he rode beside me. What persecution she might have suffered through his wooing was question enough to disturb any lover, I am sure.

So I told the vaquero that I was going down to Lathrop's place, which did not appear to be news to him, for he merely nodded, as much as to say he expected it. And when I asked him what he purposed doing, he shook his head.

"Donno," he answered. "Mebbe somētheeng ees come off to-night. I like to see wot happens; then I know wot to do." With which he slammed his foot against the animal's side and tightened his latigo, and I knew by that care with the cinch that he rather expected to do some rough hill-riding. There was no use crowding the old fellow; he had got out of the habit of talking during his lonely herding days, and his manner with me was verbose compared to that which he employed with most people. So I let it go at that and swung into my saddle, riding away secure in the knowledge that, whatever his intentions might be and whatever plans he might conceive, he would follow them out bravely and to my interest. And if the time came when I should need him at my side, I was assured that if human possibility could bring him to me, I would find him there, ready to act, willing to outface any odds.

THE eastern sky was whitening to the approach of the moon behind the mountains; but the darkness lay thick upon the road; and only the tree-tops showed against the star-flecked heavens; all else was hidden in the velvet night. The surf boomed far below me where the trail swung out toward the sea, and sometimes there was a flicker of phosphorus down there, a light that crawled upon the surface of the troubled waters revealing nothing, adding the mystery of its presence to the gloom's other mysteries. I passed the knoll where Barbara and I had silently renewed our troth; I descended the hill and crossed the bridge where I had come so near to death the night before, and the cold breath of the waterfall came full upon my face; I saw no other rider nor heard any sign, until the light of Lathrop's window threw a yellow patch upon the roadway before me. I flung the reins over the hitching rack and knocked on the front door.

Jim Lathrop opened it, and his face showed no pleasure at my appearance, although he moved his lips into what was meant for a smile. "Brad," he said, "there's some letters for you by to-day's mail. Come in."

"I came to see Barbara," I told him, but he shook his head.

"She's gone out—went a quarter of an hour back, some'eres up the road," he told me, and repeated his invitation, which I declined.

I do not believe that hurt his feelings at all, although in other days for a man to choose to stand outside would have been enough of an affront to start a family quarrel in that country; he was as glad to have me elsewhere as I was to avoid contact with him; that was very evident. I stood there on the step while he hunted out the letters, and I wondered how long he had been postmaster, whether it dated back to the time when my correspondence with his daughter went wrong. He brought the mail; it was business correspondence, and I tucked it into my pocket, turning to leave; but he followed me out into the yard.

"Brad," he said, "how long you going to be here, anyhow?"

"Lathrop," I told him, "that depends on how long it takes to hunt out the fellow who killed my father."

"That's what I was afraid of," he muttered, and went on under his breath as if he feared some one might be lurking near by to overhear him: "Now, here's the way of it; things are in bad shape down here these days, and that's a fact. I wouldn't go to put myself into danger when I couldn't do myself or anybody else any good by it, if I was you, Brad. Some of these fellows ridin' range for Sugden's pretty hard cases; and if they was to catch you out alone in these hills—why, then I'd just hate to have that happen, Brad. 'Twas bad enough when your father got his."

"You mean, you think I'd better get out?" I said dryly.

"Fact," he replied briskly. "I know you had. Slide out and thank God you got the chance. You could sell the place—get good money for it too."

"You seem to be doing well enough, Lathrop," I answered with some heat. "No one's been taking any shots at you that I've heard of."

HE was caught off his guard, for he hesitated and cleared his throat before he spoke. "Well, I have aimed to do the best I could for myself," he said, "and I have took quite a bit of slack sometimes to get by without having trouble. I never was one to fight it out, Brad; leave the other fellow do the fighting and see if you can't get even without running chances by any fool notion of taking it out of his hide. That's my way. Mebbe it aint what you'd do or what your father would, but

I have got to look out for Jim Lathrop, accordin' to my way of thinking." He paused, and then lowered his voice. "And I tell you here, man to man, and it going no fu'ther, there aint any use in *tryin'* to make a fight down here at present."

"Why are you so anxious for me to clear out?" I demanded.

"Now, that's it," he replied with the first heat he had shown—and it was a very mild heat too. "Put it up to me, as if I wanted to get shut of you! I'm saying this because I don't want you should get a bullet put through you; and there aint another man in the country I'd do as much for, either." Which I really believe was the truth—to give the devil his due. And I do not doubt he liked me, in his way, which did not prevent his liking himself first and best and last.

"Well," I told him, "I'm going to stay." A thought came to me and I added, "Anyhow, how could I get out if I wanted to?"

"Oh, I'd fix it up to get you out easy enough, Brad," he assured me hastily.

That made my temper blaze. "See here," I told him, "I don't want any help that comes from Sugden's friends. So I guess I'll just stick and fight the thing through."

And with the words I went out to my horse. I was down at heart because of Barbara's absence. And I was wondering where she could have gone. There were no neighbors here any longer, save the crowd at Sugden's and Manuel and myself. She could not have gone to our place, or I would have met her on the road. I grunted an answer to Lathrop's good night and mounted. And as I rode away, the moon came up over the mountain-top.

THINKING of Barbara, and whither she could have gone, I passed Sugden's gate before I noticed a man standing where the track took off from the sled-road to the bleak house on the hillside. It gave me a bit of a start and my right hand instinctively went toward my shoulder holster where I was carrying that single-action gun; but the fellow made no movement; he might have been a wooden image, for all the attention he gave me.

Now, keeping my eyes on him, I was of course looking toward the house, which was in plain sight of the road, some two hundred yards away. And the opening of the front door, which cast a sudden flare of yellow lamplight against the white moonshine, attracted my attention in that direction, just in time to see Barbara standing there in that doorway. She was facing away from me, but there was no mistaking her; and she stretched forth her hands to some one in there, in a gesture of appeal. She stood thus for some moments, then turned and came out down the steps, and I saw Sugden's bulk in the doorway which she had left. He remained on the threshold looking after her while she walked swiftly down the path toward the sled-road.

The man by the gate was watching her, but now he turned his head, and I thought quickly enough to realize what was best for her sake, if I had no regard—in this moment of discovery—for my own. I rode straight on and down the next hill out of sight, then tied my horse off the road and slipped back on foot among the shadows of the live oaks, with the sled track between me and the watcher by the gate. I passed without his seeing me and came out to the trail in a patch of dense shade, just as Barbara drew near.

She saw me before I spoke and sprang to me, begging me in a whisper to be still. And as her little hands gripped my arm, I made out the sound of voices by the gate, which was out of sight from my hiding-place.

"I tell you," some one said, "there's been no passed here but Lathrop's girl just now, and that there party Lewis that come up and raised the ruckus at the house last night. He rode down to Lathrop's and back. I could o' got him either time without his ever knowin' what hit him."

"Oh, to hell with *him!*" another voice broke in, "Sugden'll fix him when the time comes; and to hell with her—it's Lou. She's gone and holed up some'eres, I s'pose; but Karmany will sure tear into me if he knows I've lost track of her."

"Well,"—the first speaker was talking now,—"*I* wouldn't like yo'r job a-ridin' herd on that ol' battle-ax. It's bad enough to be staked out here a-watchin' the road to stop her, if she was to come. I want to know. She shorely would make a feller hard to ketch ef she tore into him. Yo' cain't shoot a woman, and yo' cain't very well beat her up. And Lou wouldn't be wastin' any time arguin' about it if she wanted to go on."

"That's the trouble," the other swore plaintively, "an' she give me the slip be-

cuz I dassent go to use her like I would a man. Now—look here, yo' can lend me a hand to rout her out before Karmany gets wise. She aint got fur, and chances is she aint tried to go anywheres but has just sneaked off by herself to be alone. Come on!"

EVIDENTLY the argument was successful, for we could hear their voices receding, and Barbara's grip relaxed on my arm. A moment later we knew that we could speak without being overheard.

"Barbara," I cried, "what is it takes you to that man's house?"

She did not answer me. "Brad," she said with an earnestness that made her voice shake, "if you love me—"

"Ah, Barbara!" I interrupted, and clasped her in my arms; but she became so limp and cold that for a moment I was afraid she had swooned. Suddenly she seemed to have summoned back her strength.

"Listen!" She drew away and faced me as she spoke. "You must leave this country down here right away."

"Your father said something very much like that a little while ago," I answered hotly, "and offered me safe-conduct out; and now you—"

"Ah, don't!" she pleaded. "It is not—you don't know, Brad. And I—" Her voice broke, and her head sank. "There's no use!" she whispered. "No use!"

That drove from me the anger that had come when she begged me to go. "Barbara, what is it?" I asked. "Tell me; there's something that I don't know. What has happened? Let me help you, dear!"

She shook her head. "If there was only some way," she said in a lifeless voice, "I would ask you, Brad—you know how quickly I would ask. But—"

She checked herself abruptly and uttered a faint cry at a new sound.

Dogs were barking up by Sugden's house; we could hear men calling. And with this fresh alarm she turned her white face toward me. "I love you, Brad," she said simply, "and I want you to take that love away with you."

A sharp clamor of voices came down from the hillside; a whistle sounded, and I heard the nicker of a horse.

And then, while we were both looking, there came a flare of red light from the top of the ridge behind the house. I saw a man's form silhouetted in that glare against the sky; and as he stood, his arms moved, holding forth a blanket before the blaze. He swept the blanket back in a great lithe movement of his body, and after a moment had passed, he threw its folds before the fire again. The signal was repeated thrice.

Some seconds followed. From the far crest of the mountain an orange-red spark sprang forth and grew into a wavering patch of firelight. I do not think I ever saw anything so lonely-looking as that little tongue of flame three thousand feet above us against the sky. It winked out, and for some seconds blackness endured where it had been; then suddenly it leaped forth again. And even as I had seen the blanket move down on this nether ridge, that beacon fire came and vanished on its lofty height.

BY this time the noises had increased about the house. I could hear some one calling orders; there was a scurry of hoofs, and before I had fairly realized what was taking place, the *rat-tat-tat* grew nearer, and five horsemen came on a dead run down to the sled-road. They stopped their animals with a sharp scrape of hoofs on the hard earth, while one dismounted to throw open the gate. I heard another cursing him for his slowness and recognized Sugden's voice. Then they were in the saddle and on again. They swerved into the road and galloped away toward Manuel's house.

I turned to Barbara. She had already started away and was in the road walking toward her home; when I reached her side, she begged me so piteously to leave her that the only thing I could do was to obey. I saw that she was weeping, and my heart was heavy with rage and sorrow as I hurried down the sled-road after my horse.

What was the meaning of this visit to the man whose black jealousy had driven him to try to murder me the night before? And why was she so piteously anxious that I leave the country? I could not doubt her love for me; and I could not doubt her steadfastness. But there was something here of which I was in ignorance, some development that had come to pass in my absence which was bringing black tragedy into her life.

My head was in a whirl with the puzzle while I hastened to my horse. But though I strove hard to get some inkling, I never

thought of the answer, nor came near it at all. Perhaps that answer may be clear to you who read this narrative, but to me, with the knowledge of my father's murder fresh upon me, it was too monstrous to be conceivable.

CHAPTER VIII

I MAY seem to you to be a poor sort of lover, who would leave his sweetheart in such a case to go weeping down that lonely road by night. To yield to a girl's wishes would be a flimsy reason for such a proceeding, I confess; but I had other reasons and potent for what I was doing.

It had come to me, while I was talking with Barbara, looking into her eyes where the shadow of a tragedy lay revealed to me, that I could do no good to her, nor to myself, nor to the cause which had in the first place kept me here, by insisting on remaining with her now. My pleadings would only disturb her the more; I was quite sure of that, for Barbara was one who did not make up her mind lightly, and her determination to keep her secret must be born of reasons which she deemed good; she would remain steadfast in her decision.

And that secret—together with the secret of my father's death, and the rest of the whole puzzle—lay with one man. Sugden held the key that I was after; when I had dealt with him—if I should be lucky enough to come out of this with any success—I would find what I was after. He was the person on whom my efforts should be centered now. It suited me well to be riding up the road after him.

There was another thing. The meaning of those signal fires came very plain to me. After that talk, which I had overheard between the two men at Sugden's gate, there could be no mistaking it. The woman, Lou, whose treatment I had witnessed at Sugden's hands the night before and whose request for a horse I had granted, as I have told, was evidently bent on leaving the country and suspected in her project. It was clear enough that she had slipped away from those appointed to guard her, and it seemed as if she must have stolen by me in the darkness while I was riding down to Lathrop's house. That at the earliest; and, giving her the best start one could possibly figure, she could not have been gone many minutes before the alarm was given. I had witnessed enough through my father's binoculars that afternoon to know how well the grim vigil over this place worked; and there was no route which the woman could have ridden out of the country excepting the trail which led up past the cliff where that sentry had answered the beacon with his fire. That there could be any purpose behind her movements other than leaving the country seemed impossible. And now it was, to my way of thinking, a certainty that she had been captured at the outset of her attempt.

I had no great interest in her escaping, beyond wishing any of Sugden's enemies good luck; but the incident was pretty sure to precipitate others. After what had happened during the last twenty-four hours, the man must know that action on his part would have to be taken quickly, lest news of what was going on here get to the outside world and the authorities come down on him. I was a little out of patience now with fate for having brought me her request for a horse, seeing as I did how my action was so likely to call down speedy reprisals at a time when the odds were all against me. But so long as the thing had been done, my best course of action seemed to lie ahead of me on this same trail. To learn what was taking place there up the mountain and benefit by the knowledge was my idea as I spurred my horse along the sled-road.

AS I had expected, when I reached Manuel's house, I found the big bay gone. Nor was the vaquero's animal in sight. It crossed my mind that he had also set out on hearing the riders pass. This made me the more eager to get up to the summit and take a hand if my man should come into any difficulties, which was quite within conjecture too.

Now, as I thought over the matter, I remembered a footpath up the mountain which took the shorter route; and as riding would only put me in sight of Sugden and his men, even if I took the cattle trails which Karmany and his companions had used in dogging me downhill that afternoon when I came home, I resolved to use this path, which was far enough from the other to keep me beyond the vision of my enemies. I put my horse in the corral and started out.

For the first few hundred yards the path

took me through scattered live oaks on the more rounded knolls down here near the sea, and while I was climbing, now out in the bright moonlight and again in the deep shadows which the great trees cast, I became conscious of something behind me. The sound reached my ears in a stealthy pit-pat. I turned and waited with my senses all keyed up; and here came old Boxer plodding up the path. He trotted up to me and rose on his hind legs, thrusting his cold nose into the palm of my hand and mumbling my fingers with his teeth. For a moment I was on the point of sending him home, but I could not quite bring myself to it, he was so pleased at being with me. It was a bit of sentiment on my part, but you will remember I was very lonely just now, with what had come and gone. Besides, I knew that the bull terrier would mind my slightest word, and lie as silent as a hiding rabbit if necessity for stillness came. So I let him come along, and he walked contentedly at my heels while I made my way on upward.

It was a rough path, more fit for goats than men; and now as it left the rounded knolls to twine up among the rocks, there were times when I had to stop and get my breath while the perspiration fairly streamed over my body. Once or twice I lost the way, straying off into deer paths, but I had traveled by this route so often as a boy that its details remained pretty firmly fixed in some nether portion of my memory, whence they came back now for my use, and the detours were only brief ones, ending before I had gone too far to retrieve my steps without great difficulty.

I CLIMBED through a rubble of broken rock where there had been a bad slide, and on upward beyond this over a series of low cliffs where I had to hold on by sharp projections with my hands while my feet sought leverage in the crevices. Of pathway there was nothing here save a sort of trough, not more than six inches wide, down whose winding route the water cascaded during winter storms. But it was dry enough now, and although it was getting well along in the evening, the granite was still warm, from the day's sun. I gained the topmost shelf and paused to get back my breath, as well as to let old Boxer catch up; it was a marvel to me how the dog negotiated the ascent here, but he did it with a good deal of scratching and clawing and used his forefeet as cannily as a man would employ his hands. It was a weird spot, at this lofty height, with the Spanish-bayonet clumps standing all shining where the moonlight struck the crests of the surges. Away off, where the main trail hung along the mountain-side under the summit—a half-mile away and five hundred feet above—I heard the clash of hoofs; it came quite suddenly, and swiftly diminished until it died away, and I knew the animals had gained the softer ground where the bridle-path mounted into the timber.

Now I went on, with the dog close behind me, up among thick chemisal, where the rains had gullied out the yellow clay and decomposed granite underfoot and the bushes grew high above my head. They were in blossom, and the stifling musty odor was almost overpowering. Out of the thicket again and into the timber which lay above, and I found myself at the summit of the ridge tight over our deserted house where my father had met his death.

Our home, you will remember, lay in a little cup below the sharp ridge which topped the mountain, and the cliff where the fire had been built was a portion of the rim of this amphitheater, just where it opened toward the sea.

From where I was standing, right behind the house, the ridge went around without a break, and following it, I found myself approaching that portion of it above the spot where I had seen the sentry through the glasses that afternoon. You understand the outpost was at the top of one cliff on a narrow shelf which in its turn lay right at the foot of another precipice; and I was nearing the summit of that second declivity.

I traveled very slowly now and with the utmost caution, for the ground was thickly covered with last winter's dead madroña and oak leaves, and, do the very best I could, my feet made considerable stirring among them. I warned the dog by a gesture, and he came along at my heels as carefully as a human being would have done. If a mountain lion had shown himself then, he would have got no more noise out of old Boxer than a low growl to warn me of his presence.

BUT neither mountain lion nor man showed here. And when I paused to listen, as I did every few yards, there was no sound to betray the presence of men below me on the cliff. The farther I went,

the more disquieting became this fact, for I argued, if any of Sugden's men had heard me from down there in their nest, they would be pretty sure to be lying very quiet, in order the better to learn my location. But there was nothing to be gained by remaining still, and nothing to be got by retreating now; and if I wanted any benefit from my trip, I had best be going on. Which I did, but more cautiously than before, and so slowly that it took me a long time to gain the edge of the cliff.

I crept the last hundred yards on my hands and knees, keeping my ears open for the first stirring to betray the presence of some stalking enemy, and now I was rather disposed to be thankful that I had allowed the old dog along, for I knew he would be sure to detect anyone before I could. By the time I was at the edge of the precipice, I could see that he was uneasy; the hair was rising on the back of his neck, and his nostrils were widened, snuffing some taint in the air which my poverty of senses could not get. Once he uttered what I may best describe as a whispered growl. No one was moving hereabouts. And the dog's alarm did not point to any lurking enemies on the ridge, for he continued looking straight ahead in the direction we were both facing, and in that direction there was only the far sweep of the open air at our level. Boxer must be worried over what was beneath me. It seemed as if some one was in the nest.

On my belly, and inch by inch now, I crept on out until my head was projecting over the summit. The canvas shelter which Sugden's sentries had so carefully masked by boughs covered the greater portion of the shelf below me. What lay beneath that shelter, I could only conjecture. But outside of it, beside the heap of coals which was still glowing in the moonlight where the beacon fire had blazed, there was no sign of anyone. Nor, while I listened, could I hear so much as a whisper. It was as silent as if there had never been a man here since the world began. The sniff-sniff of the dog beside me and the rustle of the cooling embers were the only sounds.

Then I saw a dark little shape moving along the outer portion of the shelf, and as it came into the moonlight, it revealed itself for a coon. The animal picked up something from the earth—probably a bit of food that had been left there—and climbed up into one of the madroña trees. I was sure then there was no man about, and I went back along the ridge whence I descended into the amphitheater and climbed up the zigzag pathway which led from the lower level near the house to the sentry's nest.

In spite of the presence of the little wild thing on the shelf, I made my journey slowly and with care, lest others hiding there might have been as cautious as I and so have passed the notice of the animal. The last portion was on the zigzag pathway of which I have spoken, and while I climbed up that hundred feet, I fairly perspired with the endeavor of keeping my senses alert. I gained the crest and found myself right under the shelter of canvas. There was no sound, nor did I see anything for a moment.

Then, as I stood there with my drawn revolver in my hand, I caught the glint of moonshine on a pistol barrel; and my eyes made out a form back there in the shadows by the cliff. A man was crouching there with his weapon leveled at me. I could see his face against the dark granite wall.

I wonder now that I did not risk everything and shoot; I know I expected to hear the report of his revolver at any moment. And I remember how sick a sensation it gave me to find myself standing thus under the round muzzle of that pistol, with my own as useless as if it were in my pocket; for in the time which it would take to raise it he could kill me easily enough.

Still he did not move; and as I gazed at him, he remained in that same tense crouch. I do not know how long I stood there awaiting some sign from him, unwilling to make the move which would bring a streak of flame from that barrel on which the moonlight shone; but in the end I could bear it no longer, and I took a step toward him, raising my revolver as I did so.

And then I saw that he was dead.

A dark wet patch on his coat showed where some one had stabbed him from behind while he was sitting there. His head had sagged forward and his body with it, but his hand continued to clutch the revolver which he had drawn—probably in the moment of his death.

CHAPTER IX

THE man was one of those who had ridden past Manuel's house when Karmany had lassoed Boxer, a big-boned old fellow somewhere in his fifties.

His face was all lined by resolute hard living; it could not have been a prepossessing face even when he was young. Now, with his grizzled hair and the pallor of death upon his brow, it was furrowed with a deep scowl. Malevolence had remained there after life had fled; and life had hung on stubbornly enough too; I could see that by the viselike grip of the warped old fingers round the pistol butt. I could not help looking on that grim remnant of mortality with a sort of respect; for the man had at least gone down trying to fight while the last breath whistled out between those big tobacco-stained teeth of his.

But I had little time to waste on tribute to this dead enemy, for I knew that at any moment the woods around here might be hiding his living companions. If I wanted to accomplish anything more in my own span of life it was up to me to be about it and without any further delay.

What had taken place was pretty clear. Some one had crept up the path and done the stabbing while the grizzled sentry, with his attention directed elsewhere, was keeping his back toward his assailant; and the body had sunk forward as I have described, leaning with one side against the cliff. I thought of the woman Lou, and then it came to me that there was a strong likelihood of there having been two parties engaged in the affair. It looked as if the victim had been talking to one while the other—

This worked out very nicely with the disappearance of Manuel from the ranch. If he had chosen to join forces with the fleeing woman, he must have got good reasons from her for his course of action. I remembered how he had decided to wait at the corral with his own horse saddled, and I wondered what she could have told him when she came, to make him incur this deadly risk helping her from the country.

I glanced out through the branches which hid this spying place; the trail showed empty in the bright moonlight along the mountain's flank; the whole great country lay outspread beneath my feet, and the sea was like quicksilver beyond.

Then I looked about me here. The little platform was made quite comfortable with a couple of boxes for seats and a bed of blankets right at the foot of the cliff. I found a candle, lighted it and by its flame discovered a worn old pack of playing cards, a box of rifle cartridges, a quart bottle nearly full of whisky, some fragments of meat and crusts of bread, and half a dozen obscene pictures crudely drawn with charcoal where the rock was smooth. That was all. Nothing here to tell a man the identity of these grim watchers. With small misgivings I made up my mind to search the body.

I did this quite carefully, taking pains to disturb things as little as possible, for I was sure that Sugden must have discovered the tragedy before he had gone on, where he was probably now riding hard over the trail in pursuit of those who had done the killing; and I did not want him to discover my presence in the meantime when he returned.

A PRETTY good store of cartridges for the .45 revolver was in the trousers pockets, together with a jackknife, a plug of chewing tobacco, and a roll of bills bound round with elastic. There was more than five hundred dollars in this last. All these things I replaced where I had found them. There was no coat, but the man was wearing a vest, and herein I ran across a very good watch, a stub of pencil, a nickel nail-clip—used for Heaven knows what: and—Heaven knows why the fellow ever carried it—a calling-card. "Miss Josie," it said, without any surname and under this a street address in El Paso. At last I brought out one of those little leather-bound vest-pocket diaries which I have so often seen in stores and never in any man's possession before or since.

This booklet I took to the candlelight and opened. You know how the pages are arranged, with printed dates and several lines under each. Now, at the beginning quite a number of the days were given over to meaningless writing—there was, I remember, a recipe for curing corns, another for a spavin remedy; and there was a bit of vulgar doggerel occupying a week's space; after that I recall one cramped page evidently copied from some "Art of Polite Letter Writing," for here were such statements as, "When addressing a lady acquaintance, My dear Miss Waltham" and "When addressing a close lady acquaintance, My dear Miss Lucille" and so on until that fervid stage where the letter must be headed, "My dearest Lucy."

All of this might have been interesting enough to one with a liking for character study and time to pursue that pleasant amusement, but my time was pressing, and

I was about to put the diary back when I came on a page with briefer entries. "Lordsburg, ten thousan cut five ways" was the first one and the next day, "Stage in Doubtful Cayun 6500 cut five ways Whitey Burk got!"

From that time on such entries became quite frequent; always the name of a town and an amount after it with the statement "Cut five ways;" and the towns were all the way from the Montana line to the boundary of Mexico. Sometimes there would be the supplementary statement, "So and So got 1 or 2" as the case might be. The name of Whitey came most often and once with the statement "got 4." Three times I came on, "1 for me."

And then I reached a page where there was just one entry, "Threw in with Black Butch," and on the next page:

"Winnemucca 100,000 cut ten ways but Jo and Red gets their's makin 8 to split it."

Several blank days followed until I read: "Everybody scatter." And then a long series of dates with nothing but foolish fancies and vulgarities. Finally there came one dated three years before, whose legend ran,

"Met up at new rust all the rest is there."

That "rust" puzzled me for a minute or so until I had tried all manner of phonetics, real and otherwise, and made "roost" out of it. Then I tucked the diary into my pocket and stole away down the path, secure in the knowledge that here at last was some tangible information to go on.

THERE was no doubt of it; the man had kept his accounts, presumably that he might know how much of the spoils was coming to him from each robbery; and these names of towns represented the scenes of the crimes in whose commission he had taken part. With grim exactitude the writer had taken pains to credit each companion with his dead. There were five of them in the band at first and then ten at the one-hundred-thousand-dollar affair where they had joined forces with Black Butch. And after that "Scatter" was the word. I could see them in flight, each taking his own direction, to "meet up" as the diary put it, when the word came, at the "new rust," which could be nothing other than this same secluded spot which Sugden had picked here down the coast.

I believed that I had in my pocket the evidence which would help to hang more than one man when the proper time should come; and I went to our deserted house, determined to see if that violated living-room might not house some shreds of testimony which might lead me to learn which of these outlaws was my father's murderer.

The place was tragic in the moonlight: the garden which my father had kept blooming at all seasons with water led down from a rivulet among the rocks, all choked with burr clover and resinous weeds; the fence agape where Sugden's gang had removed palings to feed their beacon on the cliff near by; the verdureless grave before the front step; the house with its blank windows. But its tragedy was in tune with my own feelings as I came into the yard, possessed by a hard desire to see this matter through and exact indemnity from my father's enemies according to the grim old code which says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." And if it seems strange to you that I had in this hour forgotten all else, even my love for Barbara, you will remember, please, that I had the picture of those killers of men vivid before me, and the memory of the old man whose face I had last seen in this same dooryard when he said good-by to me.

I know I was quite reckless of any consequences when I entered the living-room and began my search; if Sugden and Karmany and the whole gang had ridden up there, I would have been in the humor to meet them face to face. I lighted the candle which I had taken away from the cliff with me and began my search.

The moonlight entered through the window spaces and the open door, flowing over the floor in pools so brilliant that the candle flame was needless within their area. But in the shadows all was very dark.

The place had been left, as I have told, with next to no disturbance save that wrought by sea winds. The ink bottle, which Manuel had spoken of, was still on the table, with its fluid long since dried up; and the pen was there near by. I found a little square of blotting paper where the wind had carried it into a corner.

I remembered what Manuel had said about having discovered no trace of the letter which my father must have been writing at the time of his death, and I made a long hunt in the hope that I might yet come upon it; for I had a feeling—call it premonition if you will; I believe it was born of subconscious reasoning—that herein lay the key to the cause of the crime.

THAT search consumed a long time, for I went over the floor inch by inch and into every nook and cranny, even combing down the ashes and charcoal in the grate. I must have been at it for hours, for the candle had burned out, the moonlight was waning, and the dawn was coming before I found myself on the point of giving it up.

I rose and eased my back, which was aching from long stooping, and while I was stretching thus, my eyes went to the grate. I had, as I have said, gone over it; the ashes and blackened wood lay in a little heap on the hearth where I had sifted them. But as I looked, I thought I saw something white on the bricks well under the grate itself, which was one of those basket affairs so common in old-fashioned houses. I got down on my hands and knees and peered in. There, in one corner, some little animal had made a hole, and it had evidently dragged the bit of paper, which I had caught sight of, to its nest, from which one corner was still projecting. I reached in and, very tenderly, drew forth my discovery.

It was an ordinary sheet of note-paper, but it had been crumpled into a tight ball, as if some one had pressed it thus within his hand and flung it away. The light was getting better now and I opened the wad with all the care I could, until I had it outspread before me.

My father's writing was here, two lines at the top of the page, and ending in a blot. It was plain enough that he had crumpled up the paper when he had made that blot, and flung it from him. And the two lines said—

"—been expecting something like this for a long time, and now I have found—"

The blot almost obliterated the last word. It was all very faint, hardly legible at all in one or two places where dampness had made the ink run; but it stood out startling enough before my eyes. For I had no doubt that these same words, rewritten on another sheet, formed a portion of the letter which he was busy at, when death came upon him at the hands of his enemies.

What was it that he had found? Small doubt as to its general nature. I could guess that easily enough. Something concerning the identity of these men who had come into the country and had tried by money and by rougher means to drive him out. I knew he was a man of sparse correspondence; and from the tone of that brief portion of a sentence which lay here before my eyes, I was certain that letter was written to me. The chances were that the man who had killed him had destroyed that evidence. And right away afterward Sugden had begun setting a guard over the trail, to warn the gang if the newcomers looked at all suspicious. I could well fancy the consternation of the crowd when they found that this old man had discovered their identity, and I realized how slender a chance my own life had hung on since I had arrived, how surely they were determined to get rid of me by one means or another in the end. No doubt Jim Lathrop had tried his best to arrange matters, that I might be allowed to depart peaceably; and his interview with me bore testimony as to the success of his endeavor in that direction. Sugden would be glad enough to have me away at any cost. But how closely was Lathrop tied up with them? That bothered me even at this time when my mind was hot with my new discovery.

I had done with the living-room now; it had nothing more to offer me. And there seemed small chance of any further revelations; but I was set, if it lay within the limits of possibility, on finding what the information was which my father had found. And so I went on through the rest of the house.

DOWNSTAIRS there was nothing. The other rooms on this floor were just as they had been when they were occupied; even the provisions in the kitchen had been left untouched, excepting for the depredations of wood-rats and chipmunks who had been doing their best to remove everything within the limits of their strength.

I went up to the second floor. There were three bedchambers here; it was really only half a story, and they lay right under the eaves. The approaching sun was beginning to tint the eastern sky as I glanced through a window, and in the new dawn I resumed my hunt. I had not been about it very long—for I started in my father's room where he kept many of his belongings—when I ran across a worn old volume on seamanship and navigation which he used to read very often, although he had not followed the sea for years. It lay on the table by his bed and as I picked it up, rather carelessly, the covers flew open; a newspaper clipping which had been left between its pages fluttered to the floor.

To this day I do not know what the

paper was, for there was nothing but the item which had been cut out, with a portion of some dry-goods advertisement on its back; but it was a telegraph dispatch, and the date-line was "Winnemucca, Nev., Nov. 23."

At first it was not the name of the town which struck me so strongly; it was the date. For it took city papers several days to reach our place, and my father had met his death at the last of the month according to Manuel's account.

And then I read the item. It began with a résumé of a bank robbery which had taken place in that town many months before and went on to say that detectives on the case had, for the time being, given up the chase. For, the account said, the bandits had retreated to a rendezvous whither the officers had tracked them after weeks of effort, only to find that they had scattered again. And from that time no trace had been obtained of any member of the band. Then followed descriptions of the two leaders, which I set down here just as I read them that morning in my father's bedroom:

> Black Butch, alias George Longbaugh, height six feet one, weight about 190, but does not look it; hair black, eyes dark, manner rather rough but talks like a fairly well-educated man; has a peculiar star-shaped scar from a bullet wound on the side of his neck just above his shirt collar.

And then I saw the reason why Sugden wore the collar of that flannel shirt pinned up about his neck.

The next paragraph went on:

> Whitey Burke, alias Bill Lee, height six feet, very broad; weight 220 pounds, white, kinky hair, clean shaven when last seen but has been known to wear a mustache; flat nose, heavy lips like a negro. Scars: bullet wound under third rib on right side; knife scar on left thigh.

Appended were these words:

> One thousand five hundred dollars apiece reward for either of these men dead or alive.

When I had tucked that precious clipping away into my pocket, certain now that this was the news which my father was writing me when death came to him, I remembered that I had not read that little diary entirely through. I opened it, and turning the pages, I came on the last entry bearing any relation to the doings of the gang. "November 30th," was the printed heading. Under this was written in the same scrawling hand which ran clear through the book, "I for Whitey Burke and luks like trubble now."

I glanced up at some slight sound. Out there on the trail Karmany and Sugden came riding side by side toward the front gate, with two others at their heels.

Boxer, who had been following right behind me throughout all my search, uttered a low growl. I cautioned him to silence by a stern gesture. Already the four men were swinging from their horses at the gate. I saw them come into the yard, and as I was stepping out of sight I caught sight of the white flag rising among the branches of the madroña tree on the cliff.

CHAPTER X

NOW, when I came into the house, I was in that frame of mind where I would have been willing to face the whole gang, and die for the pleasure of getting one or more of them; but now, with this evidence in my possession, life began to seem more precious. I was glad enough to hide from their sight as they came into the yard with their spurs clinking on the pebbles, and within a very short time I learned that which made me anxious to preserve myself for something even more important than retribution.

It is not unlikely that you who read this have an idea of what was still a secret from me; but when a man is in the thick of such unusual action as that which had been taking place about me ever since my arrival at my boyhood home, he is not going to think matters out so clearly as when he sits down in a comfortable corner with a printed page before him and nothing to distract him excepting the occasional necessity of stirring up the fire.

They were a saddle-worn quartet, all disheveled and jaded by hard riding; I saw the steam rising from the horses as I watched them through a cranny where a winter gale had stripped one of the battens from the house-wall. Sugden and Karmany—Black Butch and Whitey Burke are the names by which they were known to ill fame, but I had got used to their pseudonyms now and continued to think of them by these—were sagging at the shoulders as men will when dawn finds them wearied after a wild night. They were scowling down at the earth as they flung their bridle-reins to the other two

and bade them mind the animals. Without another word these leaders came on into the house, leaving the pair outside to smoke and bask in the new sunshine, where the fellow who had been busy with the signal flag on the cliff joined them.

The bedchamber where I was crouching was in the front of the house, directly over the living-room, which these two had just entered. In those days—as custom still is in that down-the-coast country—they built houses of split redwood boards, for there was no sawmill so far from roads. Ours was a better structure than many in the neighborhood, but with all the care and work that had been put into it, there remained many cracks; and furthermore the California style of wooden farmhouse runs to single thickness, without lath, plaster or other sound deadeners. I was therefore at the advantage of being able to hear every word and movement of those two formidable enemies of mine down there below me, being at the same time put to the necessity of remaining absolutely silent myself, unless I wanted to have the whole gang come charging up the stairs. The dog, who seemed to understand the exigencies of the situation just as well as I did, lay there beside me, with his big head between his front paws, and the only sign of life he made was to blink his pink-rimmed eyes.

FOR a moment there was no sound from below excepting the heavy tread of the two outlaws and the creak of floor boards beneath their feet. One of them came straight over to the foot of the stairs, and I drew my heavy single-action revolver, with an ugly thrill somewhere in the stomach region; sweat dripped from my arm-pits in that moment when fierce expectancy was mingled with that bodily fear which all men but liars will acknowledge comes to one at such times. Boxer's eyes moved to get a sidelong view of the door which opened from the little cubby-hole of a hallway at the upper stair-landing. But the footsteps halted at the floor of the flight, and now the man turned, to pace back across the living-room. Thus, back and forth, twice more with his spurs rattling on the floor boards; and then he came to a stand near the front door of the house.

"Well,"—this was Sugden's voice, and it was heavy with suppressed anger,—"Say it. What's on your mind?"

There was a moment or two of dead silence, and then Karmany spoke slowly. "First thing I want to say is this: we're up against it this time, aint we? Is that so, or aint it?"

"Well, mebbe you'd call it that." The leader's emphasis on the pronoun was nasty. "We're likely in for a ruckus, if you think that's being up against it."

"Jesso," Karmany's voice was so low that I knew he must have come closer to his companion now, and I could imagine the two of them eying each other, with none too much good feeling. "A ruckus. Now, what I wanta know, before I go to sayin' anything fu'ther, is what yo' figger on doin'. We might as well settle this here proposition right now and not have no more lad-de-da business goin' on which the gang does not know about and which is gettin' good men killed. Me and you and the boys has rid together long enough fer us to have a right to know what we are a-goin' into, I reckon."

"I don't cotton to that kind of talk from you or nobody," Sugden said very quietly.

"Well, it's straight talk," the other answered so viciously that I began to have hopes they were going to fly at each other right then. "It's take it or leave it. Where are we at? That's what we wanta know, and right now. This here aint no express car with one man to run the job —*an'* something in it for all hands." He added the last phrase bitterly, "This is posses, this is."

"IT looks to me we are wastin' good time, me and you," Sugden said abruptly; "and there aint any good in wastin' more either. You want I should say what I figger on the gang doing now. Well, here it is. Lou"—he squandered some more of that time on whose preciousness he had commented in cursing the woman—"has got in the clear; that's all there is to it. How in hell she managed to knife old Joe is more'n I can figure, onless she had help, which is mighty likely; but she has outrid us, and she is burning the trail across them hills right now. But ridin' the best she can do, which is some gait too, she aint any more'n made the wagon-road by now. There is too much rough country where a hoss has got to travel slow between here and there. And it will be afternoon before she gets where there's men enough to rout out a posse—*providin'* she wants to tell what she knows, and I aint so sure—"

"Look here, Butch," the other interrupted. "Don't be a fool. That ol' trollop is dead set on playin' even with yo' and had said as much a dozen times in the last week, ever since she got the glad news. Yo' can jest make up your mind that she does want to tell what she knows."

I wondered, as I lay there listening, what he meant by the "glad news." Then Sugden spoke.

"Well, if she does tell, we have got to-day to clear out in. They cain't get no posse together before night at the easiest; and these damn' California ranchers wont ride very hard toward trouble; they aint goin' to make the end o' the trail before to-morrow morning." Sugden uttered something like a brief laugh. "By then, why, we can all be in the clear. But—if there is fighting, you and the boys have got to do it without me this time."

"An' where do you aim to be while we're slingin' lead?" Karmany demanded.

"I don't like the way you talk, Whitey," Sugden growled. "You haven't ever seen me dodgin' any of my work when it come to fightin' that I know of. This time I have got my own affairs to keep me out of it."

And still as I hearkened to the big voices, I did not realize what was in Sugden's mind.

"NOW I will tell yo'," Karmany cried hotly, "what the rest of the boys is sayin' amongst themselves and has been sayin' for two years back, and it is this. The women is a-goin' to be the ruin of us. Looky here! Here's me, honing to ride out again and take a chance, like all the others. And what do I get? Shet in this damn' foggy hole fer three years now. More'n ten thousand dollars in my roll an' not a dollar of it wuth a red cent when it comes to fun. Let anyone propose a job, an' yo' talk us out of it! Might as well be herdin' sheep. An' all this when we could o' been back in the ol' God's country livin' like men. Because why—because yo' get crazy over calico. An' looky! What comes along of it? Why, I have killed six men—an' chances is it runs up to eight or nine, but I never did count them that I was not sure got lead from my gun—an' every one in a ruckus, where I'd took my chances against 'em. Does one o' them men hurt my feelin's?" He laughed and spat so noisily that I could hear it. "But here, right here in this house and in this room where us two is standin' I come in through that there door—never thinkin' o' no trouble but sent by you to talk over that bunch o' hosses that strayed off the place—an' before he looks around to see it's me, I read what he has writ down in black and white, and—

"Well now, when I have took the letter away with me and left him here, just like I have left six men before, I get to thinkin', an' from that day I can't get shet of it. An' that happened because yo' got it drilled into us that we have to stick in this country! I would ruther be layin' out on some Wyoming hill with the coyotes waitin' round me fer me to pass in my checks so's they could come in an' get their meal, than stick here. An' so would all o' them.

"But all that is done an' gone now, an' we are a-goin' to ride out again; an' what we want to know is whether yo' aim to ride with us after this or whether yo' are still set on gettin' the hobbles onto yo'."

"I am just that," Sugden answered firmly. "Her father is a justice of the peace and he can tie the knot himself. Last week when I made that trip to Salinas, I brought the license back with me."

"An' lucky yo' come back at all, or did not bring back a half a dozen railroad detectives too," Karmany growled. "Yo' know they have your picture in the sheriff's office there. Keep us holed up here, an' go to runnin' chances like that yourself!"

Sugden ignored that last protest and went on as if he were talking to himself: "I am done with the gang after we ride out from here. I am going to take her out of here as my wife, in spite of all hell, and settle down with her."

Then I knew he was speaking of Barbara.

CHAPTER XI

I MAY have seemed dull to you, when I had failed to realize the imminence of this catastrophe before. Knowing Sugden's love for Barbara and already suspecting his power over her father, I had never dreamed that he was more than a suitor for her hand. The revelation left me stupefied for a moment.

Then, as its significance really came home to me, it took on a sudden great importance, overshadowing all the other things which I had heard and learned during the last twenty-four hours. Vengeance for my father's death was forgotten, and

my own danger ceased to impress me. Love for Barbara, whom I saw about to be taken by this wanted bandit, was the only thing in life now.

I think that was the case with Sugden too. He was paying no heed to the predicament into which his project had brought his companions, giving no attention to their salvation; they could fight their way out of this and leave the road clear for him to go in peace, and otherwise he was done with them.

Karmany, however, was looking at things from a different standpoint. "There's the land," he said abruptly, "an' all this stock. Me an' the boys had a wad o' cash in this here proposition, Butch. Where do we get off at now?"

"Lathrop can sell; it's all in his name, anyhow," Sugden answered indifferently. "He'll send the money to me, and I'll see you all get your share when the time comes."

"Looks to me as if Lathrop is bound to rare a bit when he gets wind o' this," Karmany speculated.

"I guess the money he is makin' off of me will help him to quiet down," Sugden said dryly. "And if it don't, why let him rare; he's going to do the marrying job for me to-day, if I hold a gun to him while he is reading the ceremony. He has promised it long enough,—ever since I sent the girl away to school,—and he had sense enough to know just about the way the land laid with this gang, all the time."

"Well," Karmany said with beautiful simplicity, "I wont say I am sorry to see yo' quittin', Butch. Yo' was a good man in your time, but women has spiled yo' for our line o' business, and that's a fact. An' now that it's settled and I have got the gang, I tell you what to do; yo' tell Kirt an' Luce, when yo' get down to the house, to round up the hosses an' throw the other boys' stuff onto them an' bring 'em up here late in the afternoon. I have got to figger out where we will head for an' how we are goin' to go there after we get shut of that posse. I aim we should be back to the old roost before this time next month. An' yo' can get word to us there—or send us the money that is comin' to us from the land and stock—when yo' are settled down."

I THINK they shook hands then, for neither of them said anything more, and directly afterward they went out into the yard. I know there was no farewell between Sugden and the others excepting a brief "So long" which he delivered over his shoulder to them when he had swung into his saddle; and their reply was equally indifferent. I suppose there had been a good deal of chafing among them for a long time past, and they were as glad to be rid of him as he was to be done with them.

I looked out through the chink in the boarding and saw him ride away down the trail, and as he went, the fog, which was coming in great white cumulous billows from the sea, swept up the mountain-side to meet him.

Karmany had already turned his attention to the men in the yard and was talking with them in low tones. They were nodding at his words, and one of them swore delightedly as if the prospect that lay before them now was quite to his liking.

They were still at this conference when the mail-carrier came riding by on his way back across the range. He drew rein before the gate. "Howdy, men," he called. "There was a young fellow come in here day before yesterday with a hoss he'd hired off of Bill Lant, and I was to fetch it back, but he aint about nowhere. If any of you meet up with him, tell him to have that pony down to Jim Lathrop's place before my next trip."

It gave me a queer lost feeling as I peeped out through the chink in the wall at this man, within one hundred feet of me; this law-abiding citizen on his way to a peaceable community, all ignorant of the fierce nature of these riders to whom he was talking. It was such a vivid reminder of the outer world, which lay so close to me and yet so remote from me. I could have told him what was taking place without raising my voice; and yet it was as impossible for me to tell him that as if he were a thousand miles away.

Karmany answered him coolly. "We'll see he gets the word all right." He scowled as the mail-carrier rode on, and I heard him saying to the others, "I'd plumb forgot about that *hombre* Lewis; and I didn't aim to leave the country without squaring up with him for the gun play." He raised his voice. "Well, yo' boys better get these hosses back there where they can find good feed, an' one of yo' go up there on the rocks to keep watch of the trail. If anyone shows up, I'll be in the house.

There's a good bed upstairs, an' I'm goin' to get a bit o' sleep."

HE turned at the last word and started for the door, and he had got as far as the step, while I crouched there with my fingers sweating around the butt of my revolver, when something crossed his mind and he went back to his horse. He was busy at the saddle-bags for a moment, hunting for I don't know what, and that object—which he only found after a considerable search—was the means of saving my life. For during the interval which that search consumed, the fog came sweeping up the hill and inclosed the whole place in its thick gray mantle. When he returned to the house, I could barely make out his form; and I heard the voices of the others cursing the mists as they departed to their stations.

I thanked Heaven for that same fog which they were cursing. It promised me one little chance for life. With these men beyond sight in the gray obscurity, I had only Karmany with whom to deal, provided I should dispose of him in time to flee before they should come to his aid. Once out on that mountain-side, I could avoid their observation easily enough now where fifteen minutes ago I would have made an easy target for those rifles which they carried on their saddles.

And there was much to live for. There was Barbara, and her happiness. I saw the reason for that shadow of weeping which remained in her eyes; I understood how her father had literally sold her to the man who was at that moment riding down the hill to take her away with him; how Jim Lathrop, yielding to the glamour of money,—and money had always held glamour to our old neighbor,—had shut his eyes to many things that were going on about him and been ready enough from the beginning to do business with this dubious new neighbor, until that neighbor got a hold on him and, as time went on, tightened that grip. And I could understand how Sugden had sent the girl away to school, in order to keep her in ignorance of what would have made her turn against him, until she should grow up to womanhood. I was sure now that her father had kept my letters from her and caused the breach, which she had naturally enough believed to be my fault. I remembered that she had come back here without even knowing of my father's death.

And now Sugden was on his way to claim her; and I was up here with Karmany about to climb the stairs to the room where I was crouching, and the other outlaws so close by that any alarm would bring them upon me in a body. I saw that even with the help of the fog which had come up here as if for the purpose of giving me its protection, I must act quickly and carefully if I wanted to save Barbara from that impending marriage.

THE worst feature of my position lay in the fact that the slightest movement on my part would start such a creaking of floor boards that Karmany would know my presence at once. I could only crouch here and bide his coming and then—

That was the question: what to do then. He was on the first floor now, crossing the living-room. I could hear his heavy tread and the scrape of his big spurs on the boards as he drew nearer to the stairs. I happened to glance at Boxer; he was drawing back his lip so that his teeth showed. He too was ready. I determined on my course of action. By this time the others would be back by the barn and that would give me several seconds' start of them. Karmany was in no hurry. He paused at the foot of the stairs as if he were perhaps looking about him at the room where he had committed the murder. When he reached the head of the stairs and turned into this room, I would have my revolver leveled upon him with the sights lined—an easy shot. I knew I could not miss it. And I felt I had the right—if ever a man has the right to kill in cold blood—to fire that shot.

Time enough then, before the others came within view, to drop from the window and vanish in the mists. I could slip away down the hill while they were combing the place to find me. And when I reached Jim Lathrop's, I could take my action as I found it.

My mind was quite made up. I trained the pistol on the door through which he must enter and waited for him to come on up, with my finger on the trigger.

It is an unpleasant moment to look back on, for when I recall it, the feeling which was upon me then returns; and it was an ugly sensation. I do not ever want to endure it again. It brought a sort of sickness with it, a nasty qualm which gripped me but did not weaken me. You see I had the knowledge—so recently gained

from the man's own lips—of what had taken place in the downstairs room; and the knowledge of what lay ahead of Barbara if I failed to come through this alive. And I was not thinking of myself at all, as I cast my eyes along that blued-steel barrel awaiting the moment when I was to turn executioner.

Karmany started up the stairs. He was a heavy man, as I have said, and it seemed as if the whole house shook to his coming. The boards creaked loudly; I marveled at the time it seemed to take him. Each second stretched out in minutes, as it seemed to me.

AT last he reached the top landing and came toward the doorway. Two steps and there he stood before me. I had the little half-moon of a bead at the end of the revolver barrel outlined against his chest; and my finger was touching the trigger. Just a fraction of an ounce more pressure and the bullet would fly home. But I could not do it. It was the same with me as it had been when I had Sugden helpless on the bridge.

My plans had gone wrong because I had failed to reckon with myself. Gauging my own actions by the acts which I had heard these men describing, I had determined on a deed which one of them might have done readily enough but which no decent man could perform. I had run afoul of the shred of difference between my own breed and that breed which can kill in cold blood, and the error came very near to being my undoing a moment later.

Karmany halted, and his eyes widened as he saw me with that leveled pistol. Then his hand moved—so slight a movement that it was really only a flutter of the fingers, but I knew it for what it would be in the fraction of an instant.

"If you stir," I said, "I'll kill you."

He remained frozen into immobility. The twitching of his fingers had stopped.

"Come over to the wall," I bade him.

He obeyed in silence. His coarse face was absolutely emotionless excepting for the eyes, which had narrowed, and showed that he was thinking quickly as he watched me. When I had him facing the wall beside the bed, I bade him raise his arms until his hands were over his head; and then I rose. My limbs were cramped from long crouching; it took me some moments to restore the circulation. When I had done this, I came up beside him.

His revolver hung low in the holster beside his right thigh. I shifted my own weapon into my left hand about to reach down and pluck his from the sheath. And as I did this, he whirled upon me.

How he had followed my actions—unless it was by reasoning them out in their sequence—I do not know; possibly he had been able to watch me out of the side of his eye as he stood there. But at any rate he caught me in that instant when my own gun was changing hands, and as he whirled, he struck the weapon from my grasp. It dropped with a loud clatter to the floor.

In the same instant I gripped him by the wrists and we wrestled in silence. A moment passed; I saw that he was getting the best of me. Slowly he was bearing me down, and presently I felt my back upon the bed; his great bulk hung over me. Then suddenly he tore his right hand free. I saw his eyes widen and the light of fierce joy spring into them as his arm swept toward his pistol holster. And then as I was giving up all hope, I got a glimpse of a white bulk that hurled itself between us, and Boxer had him by the wrist.

I heard the crunch of Boxer's teeth and saw the blood on his white muzzle and Karmany's weight went from me as he rolled to one side, striking the old dog with his free fist. He might as well have battered the house for all the effect his blows had.

I WAS out from under him now and groping for the weapon; and as my fingers closed on it, voices sounded outside. Two of the men were returning from the horses. I pulled the heavy single-action gun out from the holster and brought it down on that kinky head with a good free swing to give force to the blow. Karmany rolled over on his side; his big body on the bed, his spurred boots trailing on the floor.

The men whom I had heard were right under the window now. "I'm goin' to call him," one said and then, "Oh, Whitey!"

"I tell yo'," the other growled, "he's asleep already, and all yo'll get is a cussing."

"What was it I heard then?" demanded the one who had called.

"Search me," the other answered. "Mebbe 'twas his boots he dropped. Come on. There's a deck of cards on the cliff there; I'll play yo' seven up to see who gets ol' Joe's gun."

They departed to gamble for the dead

outlaw's pistol. I bent over Karmany, and I could find no sign of life about him. With Boxer at my heels I stole downstairs.

CHAPTER XII

I THINK that if I had come on Jim Lathrop then it would have gone hard with him, in spite of his gray hairs. But I came on no man as I ran down the mountain-side through the fog.

How often I fell in the desperation of my haste as I made that race to Lathrop's house, I do not know; I remember the warm blood oozing over my face from half a dozen cuts; and once I came to my senses after pitching over a ledge with old Boxer standing over me. I can recall the cold gray fog drifting by me as I plunged on; the swift glimpses of rocks and trees that seemed to spring out at me through the drab wreaths and leap back again into the mists; the sting of thorny branches lashing my cheeks and the terrible, unceasing punishment that comes with lack of breath. Yet all those things are vague impressions and to this day the torture of suspense stands out sharp in my mind compared to them.

That suspense was like a heavy burden on my back weighing me down; it was like the ordeal in those bad dreams where one strives to run and finds that he can barely move his limbs. It overpowered every other sensation and allowed me to think of nothing else. It aroused a score of pictures in my mind, in every one of which I saw myself at Lathrop's house too late; in every one beheld that marriage taking place while I was still far away. And every ugly passion that I owned grew with those visions to a deadly intensity.

And all those passions merged into a blind hatred of one man. I hardly thought of Sugden, and Karmany lay forgotten in that upper room where I had left him for dead. I wanted to get my hands on our old neighbor, who had sold his daughter, as I would not sell a horse, without a single thought of what suffering must lie in store for her.

Of all the revelations which had come to me since my arrival at my boyhood home this was the most incredible; it stood out even beyond my father's murder, monstrous in its cold-bloodedness. It seemed to me sometimes, as I plunged on down the winding trail, that I must awaken to find it untrue. Jim Lathrop had always been keen beyond most men when it came to money, and a dodger when it came to facing any unpleasant issue; I had known him to do many a tricky thing in his dealings with the other ranchers when his schooner used to carry tan-bark to the market. But with all of that he had been a kind man where his own people were concerned, and his affection for Barbara had been beyond any doubt in those old days. All of which made my hatred toward him more bitter, now that he had shown this unexpected change.

I reached the bottom of the hill and passed Manuel's house; there was no sign of life about the place. The sled-road was empty of travelers, but I saw the tracks of Sugden's big black horse before me, fresher than any of them; and I knew the man had ridden hard. I passed his gate, and no man showed to intercept me. I staggered onward, all but spent, and hearkened for some noise of riders before me, but the roaring of the breakers in their endless struggle with the rocks was the only sound that reached my ears, save the whistling of my own breath.

I do not know what to tell you as to my intentions when I reached Lathrop's house. I believe that I had none tangible enough to tell, excepting to get there and take such action as I should find awaiting me. I was desperate enough to adopt any plan and too desperate to conceive a single one. Once or twice I did try to think along the lines of what to do, but at these times Barbara's face came before me; and when I saw her eyes, with that shadow in them like the memory of tears, I ceased my attempt and centered all my energies on hurrying.

AND so I reached the house at last. It was an old-fashioned one-story adobe building, of the Spanish-California architecture, and rambled over quite a bit of ground, with a half-court in the rear. In front the thick walls were overhung by a growth of flowering vines and climbing roses which all but covered the narrow windows, hiding all things behind the little panes. The door was made of heavy planks with great hinges of strap iron and a mighty latch. All of which things have some bearing on the affair which took place here later in the day. There was no porch.

I noted, as I came inside the yard, that there were no horses at the hitching-rack;

But the sudden surge of relief which this fact brought was followed by as sudden a foreboding. Sugden had plenty of time, with his long start and his fast riding, to have married Barbara and ridden away again. That thought made me raise the latch after one thump of the knocker and fling open the great front door. I stepped into the living room and Jim Lathrop turned in his chair to face me.

He was sitting there alone, and the first thing that I noticed about him was that he was wearing his black suit with the white shirt, which he always donned for ceremonial occasions. He had married half a dozen couples in this raiment when I was a boy. And then I saw that I had come in on him while he was busy writing; and the paper was a printed form. I stepped up beside him with no word of greeting, not even a nod, and looked closer; he had laid down his pen just after filling out a blank portion with the words, "Barbara Lathrop, spinster." It was the marriage certificate of his daughter.

I am glad to know now that I did not even raise my hand, but stood there looking down into his wavering eyes. I believe that if I had allowed myself to speak, I would have lost my head and done that which would have brought bitter sorrow afterward; but I let him have the first word.

"Brad!" he cried. "What's this now?" And his eyes widened as they went over me. I must have been a sight to startle any man, at that.

I remained silent, and I could hear old Boxer panting at my heels; Lathrop gave the dog an uneasy glance,—he always disliked the animals inside the house, I remember,—and then his eyes came back to me. I found my voice.

"Where's Barbara?" I demanded, and I had to moisten my tongue to make the words come.

"Now, Brad—" he was beginning when I raised my hand in a gesture which made the words die on his lips.

"Well, then, she's in her room," he answered slowly. "And she aint feeling very well. And now, what's more,"—he seemed to have found courage by this time,—"she can't see anybody just now. She's"—he cleared his throat and went on with a sort of desperation that was apparent to me—"gettin' ready for—"

"She's not married then?" I interrupted.

"Not yet," he replied complacently, and I saw him glance swiftly out of the window as one who expects some one at any moment.

"Nor will be, then," I told him, "to this man." I pointed to Sugden's name on the certificate.

HE rose deliberately from his chair and now there was about him something like dignity; a faint color had come into his cheek, and there was a gleam in his small eyes. "I am an old man," he said quietly, "and you are in my house. You have not got the right to talk that way to me in here. But it is for your own sake I am telling you to go now. Sugden has been here, and he went back for witnesses, and when he comes with the others—they are rough men, and there's been too much trouble in this neighborhood already." He finished with a sort of gasp.

"I do not need you to tell me of the trouble that has come here," I reminded him bitterly, "and I do not need to tell you what I am going to tell you now." I reached into my pocket and laid the newspaper clipping and the vest-pocket diary before him. "But I want you to read these, just the same."

He stood there beside the table, with the clipping and the book on the marriage certificate, and I saw his hand tremble as he smoothed the former out, to see the print better. His shoulders drooped visibly as he scanned it, and once he turned his head to me as if he were about to speak, but he said nothing. His face was paper-white then as he returned to the reading. And when he had done with the clipping, I opened the notebook for him to two or three of the more potent items. By this time he had sunk into his chair.

"Now," I said, "my father was killed because he knew these things. If you were not deaf and blind, you must have known this too. And you've got your sight and hearing yet. But here is something more." I recited the conversation which I had overheard between Sugden and Karmany, and while I was doing this, he dropped his head into his hands.

"Lathrop," I finished, "I think that even you will have to balk at turning over your daughter to this man, when the sheriff is so close after him."

He raised his head and gave me a look so full of mingled shame and anguish that I came near to pitying him; but before he could answer, I heard a light step in

the little hallway which opened from this sitting-room into the wing where the bedrooms were. He started violently at the sound.

"Barbara!" he cried. "Not now, girl. Please don't come in."

I had taken a step toward the door, but he made me a gesture so appealing that I stopped. He listened until she had gone away and then turned to me.

"Brad," he whispered, and his face had grown all drawn and haggard in this little time, so that he did not look like himself at all, "I swear to God, I never knew one word of that."

I HAD to shake my head to this although the man's eyes were pitiful as he uttered it. "Make me believe you didn't know anything of what has been going on in plain sight, if you want me to take your word for that," I told him. "Those guards on the trail and my father's murder. And—what you've told me your own self—to get out of the country before I came to any harm. I wish to Heaven I could swallow your statement, Lathrop."

"I never knew," he repeated. "I never knew, I tell you—Brad!" He passed his shaking hand before his lips as if he were brushing off something, and I saw those lips go tight. Suddenly his voice became firmer. "I have got to tell you how it was. It was me that was afraid of jail all this time, not dreamin' men was after them—not for the like of such wild doings anyhow. I thought they watched that trail for—" He uttered a sort of choked groan, and I could see him stiffen himself for the effort it required to go on. "I thought they killed your father, because of what I was into myself." He drew a deep breath, "Thank God, that's not hanging over me any more," he muttered. " 'Twas as if *I'd* done the thing.

"I have got to tell you everything, I guess, right from the start. And God knows, it's bad enough, the way it stands. You see, Brad, the schooner wasn't making much money before Sugden came into this country. Tan-bark business had fallen off in the last year or two, and I'd seen a chance to pick up something easy, as the saying goes. I was"—his voice rose suddenly to a high pitch and he ran the words out so swiftly that they flowed into one another—"running opium, Brad, up over the mail trail; that was the start of the whole thing."

He paused, and I could see that he felt better already with the facts out; it was as if a weight had gone from his chest. He went on more quietly:

"Well, Sugden came along and began buyin' up the land, and I did business with him and got along well. But pretty soon, o' course, them riders of his got next to what was goin' on with the schooner; and he come to me one evenin' and made the proposition that his men would help me. They could take the stuff from the schooner when she brought a bit of it up from Mexico, and fetch it up the hill where the people from the other end of the trail could slip in and get it; and I would be taking no chances. I took him up, and that put me right in with the whole bunch o' them.

"I knew Karmany and the others was a wild lot, but I never knew they was wanted murderers; and Sugden had a mint o' money and was making more, and seemed like a good solid man. 'Twas his say-so of sending Barbara away to school; and he footed the bills, and I looked on him for a blame good match for her. O' course there was that woman, but many a good man has got tangled up that way.

"And then came the killing, Brad; and Sugden told me your father had been trying to get word out informin' on me and his men about the opium, and that had caused it. And ever since that day I've looked on it, that I was to blame as much as the murderer; and Sugden has owned me from that day like I was his dog. That's why I wanted you should get out, when they told me you'd been up there in the barn and must have seen the cache they had there."

I remembered then the queer little tins which I had stumbled upon and knew they must be tael tins of opium.

"That's why he held me to marryin' Barbara to him. And I told her 'twould ruin me if she did not. And even then she went to him last night to beg off, Brad."

LATHROP rose slowly and went into another room, and when he returned, he was carrying his rifle. He pumped a cartridge into the chamber and stood before the window, peering out.

"They'll be coming back any minute," he said, "and I do not aim Sugden shall cross my doorstep again. When he rode up this morning, he told me he'd got news

which would take him away on business before night, and he wanted he should marry now, so he could have Barbara along with him. I did not know—" He looked at me piteously. "You'll have to take my word for it, Brad—I did not know the rest of them was goin'."

"I'm going to see Barbara," I told him, and my voice must have shown the change that had come over me; for I could not feel toward him as I had felt before.

"I'm glad you've come, Brad, while there was time," he answered, and turned to the window with his rifle on his arm.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was a sunny little room in the wing where I had heard Barbara's step; its windows opened on the half-court in the rear of the house and through them on clear days there came the chirping of birds and the odor of wall-flower, which was always in blossom in the patio. In this chamber which her mother during her lifetime had used for a sewing-room, I found Barbara. The fog hung damp and gray about the windows this morning, but her presence was better than any sunshine to my eyes.

She had risen and was coming toward me as I entered, and I saw that the shadow had lifted from her eyes. "I knew that it was you, Brad," she said quietly. "Thank God, you've come!" And then as my arms went around her, "I was about to go to you, Brad, when I heard you in there. I couldn't—" She lowered her head against my chest, and I kissed her hair.

"There, Barbara," I told her, "that's all fixed now. You're not going to be troubled by him any more."

Which was untrue; but neither of us knew it then, nor suspected what of wild action lay before us, and we were tasting much of happiness in this moment. She looked up into my eyes and I saw hers darken.

"My father, Brad?"

I understood her question. "We've straightened out some things between us, Barbara," I answered. "No need for you to worry."

And I may as well say here that this was all the talking I did over Jim Lathrop's behavior. I will not pretend that I ever came to a high regard for him; nor was there even so much as close friendship between us in the years that have passed since that morning; but he had to a certain extent cleared himself from a very ugly charge, and he had shown me that he was at least human. I know that he suffered—as much as Jim Lathrop could suffer—when he thought back on his part in the matter. So there was now a truce between us, and a pretty good understanding. We both of us loved Barbara, you see, and that gave us a common ground henceforth.

She was silent for a moment after I had given my answer and then, "That man?" she whispered. It was the only way she ever did allude to Sugden from that time on; I never heard her speak his name.

"Before night comes, he's going to clear out of here," I assured her. "And all we've got to do is sit down and wait until we're rid of the whole crowd."

I had hardly spoken the words before the heavy roaring of a rifle fired within doors came from the front part of the house to contradict my last assertion.

AS I ran to the living-room, I had a fleeting glimpse of Barbara's face; her lips were resolute as she came on after me.

The living-room was reeking with the fumes of black powder; that was before the days when every hunter came to own nitro cartridges, and if one discharged a firearm, everybody within a reasonable distance knew it. Within the smoke-wreaths Jim Lathrop stood, on the threshold of his open door facing the roadway; and out there before the front gate was Sugden on his black horse, with two other riders. I do not think that any of the parties to the affair had spoken a word as yet, for as I came up behind him, Lathrop called out to the trio, bidding them not to come within his line.

"For the next time I shoot," he announced. "I aim to line my sights on you, Sugden."

One of the pair who had come with the leader said something in an undertone, and Sugden smiled; he looked bold and reckless enough sitting there, bolt upright in the saddle, handling his dancing black horse with loose rein, his white teeth flashing, his arrogant dark eyes alight.

"So that's the way the wind lies now, Lathrop," he said easily. "Well, I am coming—" He broke off to speak a soothing word to his horse whom the shooting

had startled into a state in which he would have been unmanageable for most riders. "—when I get ready," he finished quietly.

For some moments the three of them sat there on their horses facing the house, and not one of them had made the first movement of his hand toward his holster. I am sure that, had any one of them chosen, he would have had his big revolver out and spitting flame before the average marksman could have trained his sights on him. But shooting was not their purpose—not as yet, at any rate. Sugden was a little ahead of the other two; he was bending his head forward as if to see better, and now he caught sight of Barbara and me. He uttered a sharp ejaculation which I could barely hear, and his face darkened until it was an ugly sight to look upon. Then suddenly he wheeled his horse. "Come on, boys," he called and at the word they galloped off up the road.

LATHROP closed the heavy front door and dropped the thick iron bolt across it. It was the first time I had ever seen him show anything like genuine physical courage; and his lips were pressed tight together as he faced me.

"Brad," he said, "do you go to the back of the house and keep an eye open. Those *hombres* are going to come back before long. I'll stick right here; and if either of us hears anything, he can run to the other." He let his eyes go to Barbara, and they grew softer; then he dropped them, and I saw that he had the grace to be ashamed; but she came to him and laid her hands on his shoulders and kissed him before she went out with me; and when the two of us were in the wing with the door between us and him, she said softly:

"He is an old man, Brad; and he had a hard life when he was a boy. I've heard my mother say so many times." That apology, the same, I suppose, as her mother had made to her in other days, was the only comment she ever made to me concerning her father's vice of money-getting.

Now, the half-court in the rear of the house was flanked by two narrow wings, each of which opened into the living-room; and each had its own doors opening outside. Furthermore there were windows in each wing on the sides away from the court; which made my post in this portion of the building the more difficult. For men approaching the other wing would be out of my sight unless they came straight from the rear. There was only one thing to do, and that was to choose the wing where attack seemed most likely and abide there, in the meantime keeping the other one as well secured as possible; and with this end in view, Barbara hastened across the patio. She returned presently to tell me that she had locked the doors and windows; and with the knowledge that no one could gain entrance in the opposite portion of the house without making enough noise for us to hear, we felt pretty safe.

Then we sat down to await developments. I was sure these would not be very long in coming, for I knew the situation in which the outlaws were placed and thoroughly understood their need for flight before evening. Whatever Sugden intended doing, he must do within the next three or four hours, for noon was passing already, and it was a long ride from here to the summit where Karmany and his companions were biding their coming.

There were times when I was inclined to believe Sugden would give up the idea of further attempt for Barbara; if he had been any other sort of man than he was, I would have been sure on this point; but with his utter recklessness and the passion which was swaying him, I could not do any more than hope that he would abandon his determination.

THE fog was as thick this afternoon as it had been when I rode down the trail that first evening; even with the full light of day it was impossible to see more than twenty yards into it, and at that distance one could not be sure of the object he was looking at. There was a thick growth of young oak brush on this side of the house that offered good cover for anyone who would seek to approach us. I kept my eyes on this thicket nearly all the time and always listened for some sound of trouble in the front where Lathrop was. Once, when I was standing near the window of the sewing-room where I had found Barbara after my talk with her father, I was sure that I heard stealthy steps in the dried leaves under those young oaks; but look as I would, I could not make out any moving form. Save for this there was no sign of our enemies during the next two hours.

Barbara remained with me while I stood guard and, although there was little said between us—for I did not care to risk

losing everything now at this last moment by any relaxation of vigilance—it was very good to steal a look at her now and then and to feel the soft pressure of her hand on mine.

It was away past three o'clock when things began to happen—and happen swiftly.

Barbara was the first to sense any approach of danger, "Hark!" she whispered, "What's that?"

And as I listened I heard the *rat-tat-tat* of hoofs up the sled-road. Several riders were approaching on a run. It came to me then that Sugden must have sent a messenger to the summit, and this would be reinforcements. I ran to the living-room.

Lathrop had heard the sound and was standing beside one of the front windows with his rifle ready. "All right, Brad," he said without turning his head, "I'm not going to let anyone in this way."

I returned to my post. As I reached the last room of the wing there came a dull rasping roar from the direction of the water.

"The schooner," Barbara cried. "They're dropping anchor."

"In this fog?" I exclaimed, and then I remembered what Lathrop had told me of his smuggling and understood the reason. The noise of hoofs was growing plainer now. A shot rang out in front of the house. Old Lathrop called my name loudly from the living-room.

"Go, Brad!" Barbara cried. "He may need help there. I'll watch here, and I'll call the minute anyone shows himself."

I was on my way before she had finished. There were three rooms to pass through before I reached the living-room; I had crossed the last one, and I had my hand on the knob of the door when I heard, from the chamber where I had left Barbara, a choking cry. I whirled from the door and ran back, but when I reached the room, it was empty.

CHAPTER XIV

WE had not locked the doors in this wing, wishing quick exit in case it might prove necessary to reach the other side of the court in a hurry. It was easy enough to see what had happened in my brief absence.

A chair was overturned, and the door was swinging wide on its hinges. And there in the middle of the floor lay Sugden's hat. I remembered the stealthy footstep which I had heard in the oak thicket; he must have ben waiting there, watching us, biding his opportunity. I suppose his finger itched to press his revolver trigger many times during that stalking; and only Barbara's closeness to me had made him forbear lest the bullet injure her.

As I stood there, smitten for a moment by the catastrophe, there came a crescendo of hoof-beats from the road in front of the house. I heard rough voices shouting; and I thought—as a man will think in the midst of action—of the woman who had ridden over the trail. If she had only gone a day before! Give her all the benefit of speed and time that one could conceive, and she would never get help in here until long after these bandits had ridden away. Luck had been against us.

And I had lost Barbara!

But even in that instant of despair I was rushing out through the open door seeking some sign to show me where Sugden had taken her. The gray fog swirled in past me, bringing with it the cool, damp breath of the sea, hiding everything about me here. I crossed the court and halted, uncertain which way to turn.

And then Barbara screamed again.

Now, Jim Lathrop's house stood on the level of the sled-road; and from the rear a well-beaten path wound down the hill in a good three-hundred-feet descent and twice that distance horizontally, to the rock-girt little cove where his schooner found haven. In the old days there had been a branch of the sled-road running out to what was known as Lathrop's landing—a boom and tackle at the edge of the cliff overhanging that anchorage. But this road had fallen into disuse and the path was the only surviving means of communication between the house and the waterside, where a small boat had always lain, ever since I was a boy, moored to a ring in the rocks. From this path, over which I dare say many thousands of dollars' worth of opium had been carried in these latter years, the cry came. And, as I ran down the narrow foot-track, I wondered why Sugden had chosen this route, unless it were to take Barbara away from the fighting which must accompany the arrival of his followers.

And that, as it turned out, was a bad guess.

BETWEEN the house and the beginning of the descent to the cove there was only an interval of fifty feet or so of level ground. After that the path twined downward in a series of dizzy loops, clinging for most of its distance to the face of the granite cliffs. It was no easy going if you took it slowly, what with the abruptness of the grade and the rubble of broken rock underfoot; a slip on one of those sharp fragments was good for a plunge over the brink to the ragged outcroppings, all covered over with barnacles below. Yet I ran headlong down that slope, and hardly let my eyes stray to the pathway, but peered before me into the mists which were rising from the cove like dense clouds of smoke from a great fire. This recklessness came near to being my destruction, for twice on reaching sharp turns where the trail doubled back on itself, I found myself on the very point of rushing straight on; and catching myself in each instance in bare time to avoid that catastrophe, swayed heavily in the balance between solid earth and air.

The noises back by the house had ceased; or perhaps the roar of the breakers, which came loud from both headlands bounding the little cove, was drowning them. Ahead of me there was no sound beyond that conflict of angry water and living rock. The fog hid everything. I came on toward the last turn. Here the pathway had been gouged into the granite cliff and the bight of the turn overhung the ring where the dory was moored. From this point the track swerved inland and downward, reaching the pebble beach several yards away from the boat.

And then I saw them.

Sugden was carrying Barbara in his arms, down the pebble beach toward the dory, which lay tossing on the troubled waters right under my feet. At the outermost point of the turn I checked my pace, for I had come on down full speed; and in the little instant which followed, I saw how she was lying limp in his great arms, as if the life had gone from her. He took the one stride that remained between himself and the dory and then as he was laying her down between the thwarts, looked up.

I hovered there right over him, still in the very act of recovering my balance, to save myself from plunging straight on into the cove; and his eyes met mine. There was no passing of time to accompany that look between us two; yet in the meeting of our eyes we told each other our hatred to the uttermost. His great shoulders drew back as he straightened up, facing me, and his hand went to his gun.

At that moment I heard the heavy rasp of feet behind me on the trail. A voice rang out above me, and another answered with an oath. The certainty of absolute despair came over me.

ALL of this had taken place so quickly that I was still swaying half-balanced on the brink, when Sugden's hand started toward his holster and those two shouts came to announce that others were behind me. With the certainty that all hope was gone I suddenly put the weight of my body toward the edge, from which I had been striving to pull back. I threw myself, rather than leaped, upon Sugden.

It was a good twenty feet, and while I was in mid air I saw the red flash of his revolver in the fog; the acrid powder smoke enwrapped us in a dense cloud as I crashed down upon him.

His bulk was all that saved me from the sharp rocks; I struck high on his great chest and bore him back before me; and when I came to my senses after the shock, I found myself in four feet of water, grappling with him, clutching for his throat.

They tell of the sensations which drowning men endure; how many things pass before them as they struggle for their lives, and seconds see the review of events whose occurrence took years of time. I believe that is true, for I know a long time seemed to me to go by while I was lying there with everything black before me and the rushing sound of water in my ears; but there was no thought of past or future among the many thoughts which went through my mind. All I knew was that I was seeking to get good hold on his throat and that he was fighting me off with the desperation of a strong man in utter extremity. And then I found my fingers sinking in and in, and the rushing of the water became a mighty roaring, and my senses went somewhere off into a black void which reeled before my eyes.

I came back to this life and its realities, to find a pair of hands pulling at my arms, and to hear a voice which seemed to come from a long distance saying, "Lend me a hand here, or he'll choke him yet."

And now another man was tugging at me, and I struggled to maintain my hold,

until the two of them flung me from them like a sack of grain. I could see them dimly now as I lay gasping on the pebbles. I tried to rise and make for them, and a voice called into my ear bidding me be still.

The last of the blackness which had come over me departed at that voice, for it was Manuel. I sank back on the beach and saw his face looking down into mine. "*Buenos!*" he said. "We got heem—eef he ees not drown by you."

THERE was a strange confusion upon me then, and I would have continued to struggle, even with Manuel looking down into my face,—in fact I was still making some resistance to his efforts to hold me down,—but Barbara came to me; and when I saw her, I knew it was all right, as the old vaquero had said.

So I allowed Manuel to minister to my physical needs, which were acute enough at this time, for I had been in the water too long to get over its effects very easily. And he was wise enough to bid me hold my tongue and not trouble myself as to what had happened until I was in proper shape to know what was being said to me.

It was a good half-hour before we were back in the house and I got the account of those things which I had not seen. Manuel's story was delivered in brief phrases, and there was a good deal left to the imagination in spite of close questionings; he never was a man to dwell much on action in the telling.

The woman Lou had come and got the horse which I had left for her, and he had learned from her those same intentions which I had overheard Karmany telling Sugden. He had gone forth with her in the hope that he might be the means of helping her past the sentry-post at the summit. Just what had transpired there, he did not know himself, beyond the fact that he had gone ahead with the understanding between them that she would be able to deal with the man, if Manuel would attract his attention. I presume the fellow had thought the signal from Sugden's house concerned the vaquero, for he was calling down from his cliff for Manuel to halt, and he ended that summons in a sort of choking groan. After that the woman joined Manuel on the trail and they rode away, the latter knowing that his only chance for safety now lay ahead of him. He had been a long time in the timber, where he had managed to hide while the pursuit went by, and was on his way back, when other riders overtook him coming from inland.

These were the men who had saved us, for the woman had no chance to betray Sugden after all. The authorities had got word from one who had recognized him when he went to the county seat for his marriage license and had been spending the intervening week in trying to track him down to his hiding-place. Manuel guided the posse the rest of the way in.

They came upon the most of the gang at the summit and caught them absolutely unawares, for the thickness of the fog had made their approach easy. Karmany, who was the most formidable of the crowd, they found lying all but dead where I had left him; and there was a chance that he would not pull through for hanging as it was.

However, it turned out that he did recover very thoroughly and subsequently underwent trial, conviction and execution for one of the six killings which he had himself described in my hearing as being done in fair fight.

ONLY one of the band had made any real resistance, and he was one of the pair who had accompanied Sugden to Lathrop's house. It was this shooting that I had heard while I was on my way after Barbara; but a bullet had broken the fellow's right arm and the sheriff had closed with him before he could shift the revolver to his other hand.

They took the prisoners to Manuel's house soon after I came up from the cove, and when they had gone, Barbara told me how Sugden had come in upon her while she was alone. He made no sound until he confronted her in the doorway; and he started toward the oak thicket with her in his arms. The sounds in front of the house made him turn, and he fled, in desperation, toward the water. His intention of boarding the schooner and forcing the tow hands to make sail was evident enough; and it is quite probable he would have carried it out if I had not come upon him as I did.

While Barbara told me this, I could see that Jim Lathrop was in a fever of uneasiness. What had come and gone seemed as nothing compared to what was worrying him now; he walked back and forth across the living-room floor with his hands deep in his pockets and his shoulders sagging

heavily; and whenever one of us spoke to him, he started violently. Finally he called me to one side.

"Brad," he whispered, "d'ye think the sheriff would believe this fellow Sugden—if he was to say anything about me, you understand?"

And then I realized that Lathrop was in a panic over his smuggling. I had no consolation to give him, and I do not know whether I would have administered it, had I been able. He left the house after our interview, and within a quarter of an hour I heard the rattle of the capstan as the two hands weighed anchor. There was no sign of the schooner in the cove when the next morning came. But it appeared that Sugden and his crowd must have their own particular code of virtues, which forbade them to betray confederates; for not one of them uttered a word about the smuggling.

The rough code of chivalry, however, did not extend to the point where they were willing to give up their own property. There came about, later and over at the county seat, an interview between Lathrop and Sugden at which I was not present, but which I heard described by the jailor who witnessed it. On this occasion my father-in-law made over to the outlaw the real estate which belonged to the gang. Both the jailor and Sugden's lawyer, who was also present at the conference, said that the two men seemed to get on amicably enough; but I know that Lathrop showed up after the affair, decidedly the worse for wear, as one who has passed through an ordeal. I never saw Sugden myself from the time when they carried him limp, and half strangled, up the winding trail. Nor do I know what became of him in the end. For soon after a federal judge had sentenced him to a life term he managed to escape, and made his way into some wilderness where no one has tracked him yet.

THE sun came out the day after the capture; and on that day Barbara and I rode up the hill trail to the deserted home where I had lived as a boy. What of sadness there was here for both of us was mellowed by the happiness that had come into our lives. That happiness, after what had taken place, was like the brightness following the fog, a brightness which now hung over the whole coast-line, with its grass ridges and its dark redwood cañons, its brown rocks where the breakers leaped snowwhite without resting, and the golden poppy patches stirring in the breeze.

That day was the last we saw of the country where we had lived as children and grown to plight our troth. We rode out before evening, leaving to Manuel the management of my ranch; and we have never come back since.

THE END

AND NEXT MONTH—

HARRY IRVING GREENE, who wrote "Barbara of the Snows," "The Hot Tamale Kid" and other striking stories, has just completed a novel which far surpasses his earlier work, and which you will find in the next, the December, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. It is a vivid, virile story of the Southwest border, crammed with exciting adventure and swift action — a tale to take you far from humdrum things and everyday experiences. Turn to "The Border Runners" when you open your copy of our next issue: it will offer you a treat indeed.