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MARCH 1924

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

Beginning "The Amazing Dare," a great novel by Henry C. Rowland

Stories of Detective Poirot. the Free Lance, Deep Water Men and others

for Economical Transportation

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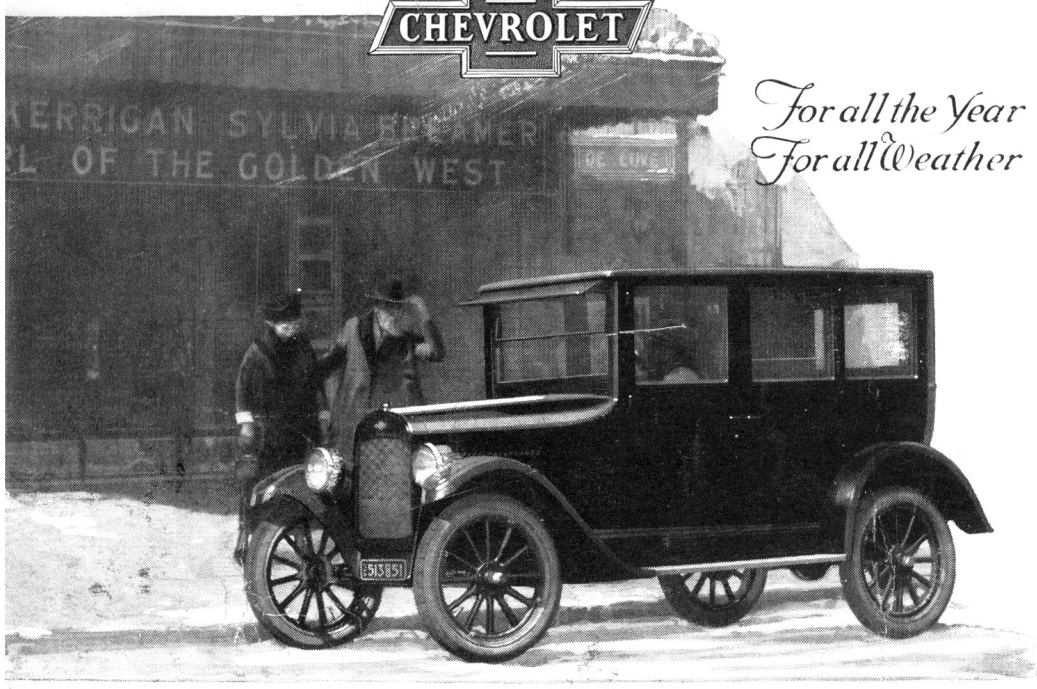

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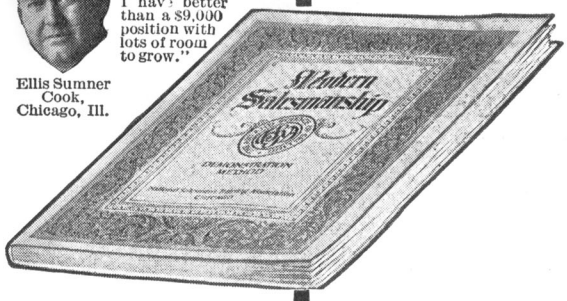

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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COVER DESIGN: Painted by T. D. Skidmore to illustrate "Into the Blue."

Two Important Serials

The Amazing Dare By Henry C. Rowland 1

A spirited romance of adventurous youth, cleverly conceived and brilliantly carried out by the distinguished author of "Sea Scamps," "Mile High" and many another famous story.

The Florida Kid By Charles Horn 94

This faithful and impressive chronicle—of a young man's descent into a tramp's life, his adventures as a hobo, and his rise to the surface again—here comes to its climax.

Twelve Spirited Short Stories

The Case of Mimbres By Frederick R. Bechdolt 28

Few writers have so well recaptured the fine robust flavor of the old-time West as Mr. Bechdolt; and the exciting tale he gives us here is one of his best.

Into the Blue By F. Britten Austin 36

A British soldier and war-correspondent here presents a drama of peace-time airplane adventure that is distinctly unusual and convincing.

Loose Ends By McCready Huston 47

This is much more than the story of a prizefight—as you will discover when you make the acquaintance of its notably real and interesting characters.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 54

"The Map of the Mediterranean" is based on certain recent and significant international events—and is, moreover, a conspicuously vivid and spirited story.

The Warden of Seal Cove By Charles Saxby 67

The man who wrote "At the Café des Princesses" here contributes an equally attractive but wholly different story. Be sure to read it.

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, **The Blue Book Magazine,**
36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

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RALPH K. STRASSMAN
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Office of the Advertising Director, 33 West Forty-second Street, New York City, N. Y.
R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 80 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

MARCH
1924

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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The Family Compact By George L. Knapp 76

This striking story of a father and son who discover each other in the gentle art of burglary is one of the best things the author of "Poetic Injustice" and "The Lobster List" ever wrote.

Le Sport de Golf By Elmer Brown Mason 86

Certain quaint and joyous episodes which followed golf into France are here amusingly narrated by the man who wrote "The Anthropoid Caddy."

The Marsdon Manor Tragedy By Agatha Christie 121

Hercule Poirot is a detective who uses his beloved brain with fascinating dexterity—as witness his adroit solution of this mystery.

The Fate of Old Points By Austin Hall 127

The author of the justly popular stories of Rex the great sheep-dog knows other animals well too, and here presents a fine story of wild life.

Deep-Water Men By Culpeper Zandtt 136

"A Piratical Expedition" continues the captivating romance of a secret platinum mine with the story of another desperate attempt to steal it.

Nerve By Rex Vancil Bixby 150

The fantastic adventures of a gob on the loose are here set down in jocund fashion by the author of "Sand."

Madame Glorious By Louis M. Henoch 161

A writer new to our pages has in this story contributed a bit of novelty which we are confident will please you.

A Complete Novelette

The Arizona Callahan By H. Bedford-Jones 166

This well-liked Blue Book author has the gift of versatility; and you will find this keenly exciting story of lively events on a strange Lake Michigan island enjoyable indeed.

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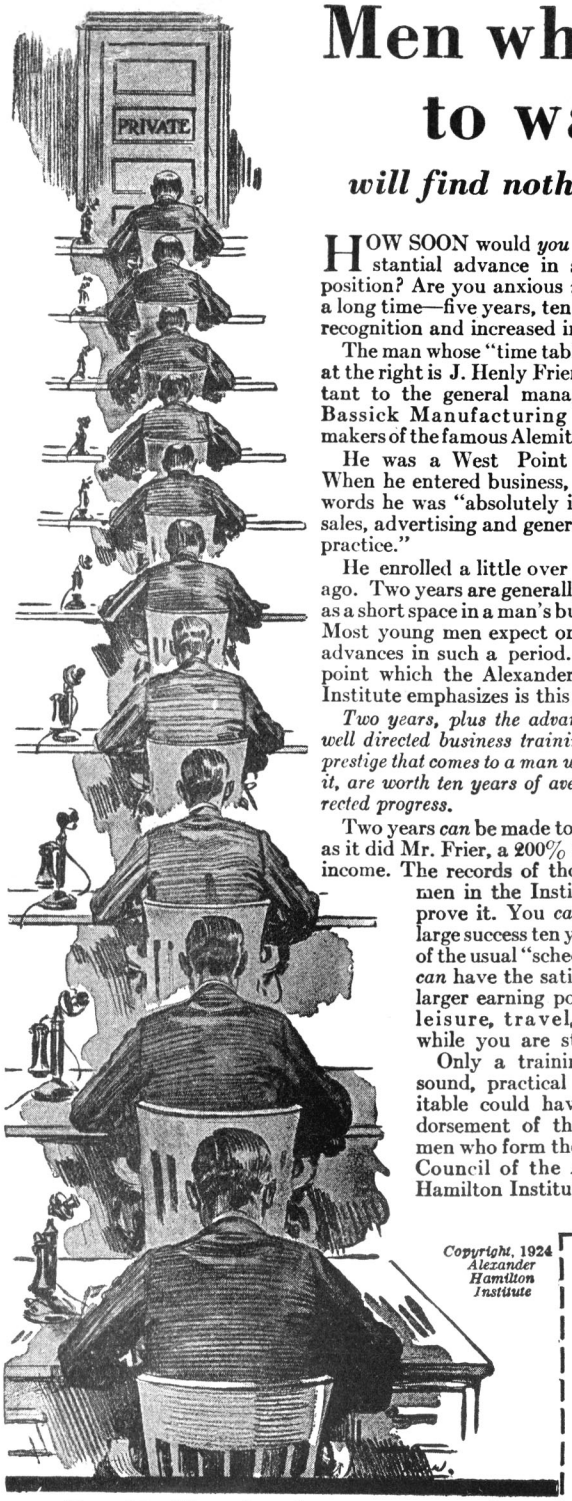
Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.



Men who are satisfied to wait 10 years

will find nothing interesting on this page

HOW SOON would *you* like a substantial advance in salary and position? Are you anxious *not* to wait a long time—five years, ten years—for recognition and increased income?

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Business Address..... *Please write plainly*
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Business Position.....

How old will you be when success comes?

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 38 MARCH 1924 No. 5

The Amazing Dare

Henry Rowland's stories, and the people in them, live—vividly, passionately, with spirit. And to a degree even greater than in the previous books which have won him fame, this splendid novel gives you vigorous and vital drama, consummately interesting.

By HENRY C. ROWLAND

THE first squall of the hard summer thunderstorm drove past and left Dare Colfax struck adrift.

Her father, a wealthy amateur inventor, had launched recently a sort of seaplane surface glider that was known to the family as "the fool killer." The antics of this flimsy little craft and its poor stability had led Mr. Colfax vexedly to express the desire that somebody would take it out and sink it. Dare, without intending to gratify his thoughtless wish, had just done that thing.

Mr. and Mrs. Colfax, and the two elder daughters Randon and Elsinore, had run over to the mainland in the small seagoing power-yacht that was a necessity to their off-shore island summer home on the coast of Maine. Dare, while bathing just after their departure, had seen the black thunderstorm making up behind the distant promontory known locally and aptly as Thunder Point. The machinist, Tim, had been trying vainly to get the fool-killer's motor properly tuned up when he was requisitioned for duty aboard the yacht.

Mr. Colfax, sometimes fussy and impatient, was in a hurry to be off. He would not wait for Tim to get the freak speed-craft started again from its fit of sulks, nor for the machinist to take it in tow of his rowboat up to its moorings in the safe shelter of the cove. The approaching squall had not yet made itself manifest. Tim therefore threw out a light grapnel and rowed in to the landing, leaving the dangerous invention in an exposed position at the mouth of the little bight.

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Dare, when bathing half an hour later, noticed the deep indigo blackening in the northwestern sky. Her past summers on the island had taught her how rapidly such storms came up, and how savage was their onslaught. She knew that the fragile toy was in danger of being blown onto the rocks and smashed. Not taking her father's petulant wish too literally, she swam out and climbed aboard the fool-killer, with the intention of paddling it in to its mooring.

But on hauling up the grapnel, Dare discovered that Tim, having used but one oar in his rowboat, had taken the oar kept aboard, in order to row himself more rapidly ashore. Dare should then have swum to the float, secured the rowboat and taken the glider in tow of it. But the squall was coming up rapidly, and the girl, experienced in motorcraft, found it preferable to start the engine and run the freak boat in under power of its own.

SHE put the first part of this plan in execution. Then something went right and something else entirely wrong. For some mysterious reason the engine started off with the full power of its airplane motor. The bow of the light, slender craft was headed toward the mainland, and as Dare set the propeller in gear, the fool-killer with a sudden, dangerous swerve that swung the bow around on Thunder Point, darted seaward like a startled flying-fish. It did not entirely leave the water, but its bow and quarter inclined planes fetched it up until it barely skimmed the surface, which was fortunately (or unfortunately) smooth.

Dare was startled, then exhilarated. The next moment she was badly scared, for the steering-wheel turned freely in her hands, against no resistance. Something in the steering-gear had fetched away, the rudder, perhaps, which might have been hard over, so that it had been torn off by the first terrific rush. Or the rudder-post might have twisted in the tiller-socket.

Whatever the damage, here was the fool-killer tearing off for Thunder Point, six miles away, with the speed of a hydroplane as it taxies across the surface before taking flight. Before the startled girl fully discovered that she was powerless to guide it, a good half-mile was flicked away astern. She did not want to stop the engine, for fear it might not start again. And from her experience of boats, it seemed that there must be some way of swerving the craft, to turn in a wide circle and return.

But there seemed nothing aboard that might be used to serve such purpose. Dare's questioning eyes fell on the narrow strips of flooring laid fore-and-aft. Some tools were strewn about, and so she picked up a screw-driver and started feverishly to get up one of these strips. The small brass screws came out easily, but before Dare could loosen enough of them to clear the strip, she found herself more than halfway across the stretch of water between the island and Thunder Point.

PERHAPS she lost her head a little, then, though distinguished for her good control of this directing agency. The darkness was alarming, and it was cleft in frequent vivid glares. As the fool-killer had been rushing to meet the squall, so had the squall been rushing to meet the fool-killer. Then, just as Dare poised herself to thrust the strip of four-inch planking down ahead of the starboard quarter fin, she was struck by the cyclonic blast.

To save herself from being whisked overside, Dare let go the piece of flooring and crouched down abaft the motor. All solicitude for this last product of her father's mechanical bent was now submerged in solicitude for her father's child. It struck her that there could be but one way out of this bad fix, to let the fool-killer run wild, in the dubious hope that it might live long enough to fetch the lee of the shore ahead. This providentially achieved, Dare could cut off the current and throw out the grapnel.

For three or four minutes there seemed a fighting chance. The fool-killer drilled into the impact of rushing air as if determined to prove its sobriquet a slander. It seemed even steadied by the very pressure of the weight opposed to its tremendous force. Then, as Dare was beginning to exult, the catastrophe occurred. A furious slant of the squall swerved its head. Something caught and tripped, destroying its scant stability. It glanced upward with a sort of flirt, like a skipping stone, then sliced down like that same flat stone on edge. Dare was flung out in a catapulted way, foamed along the wind-lashed surface of the water, and as she struggled in the smother, she caught a glimpse of the propeller, still whirling as the fool-killer plunged to the cold depths.

Dare found herself smeared on the sea's surface like a struggling moth. But unlike the butterfly, she was to a consider-

able extent amphibious. While the first fury of the squall lasted, she remained hove to, as sailors say, content to keep afloat and to breathe as best she could, on her back, with the spindrift lacing over the top of her head but fairly clear of her air-intake. Then, as the first violence began to abate, she looked back over her shoulder and saw the tower on Thunder Point looming dimly through the driving rain, about a mile away. She turned and began to swim in that direction.

Dare had never been a fast swimmer, but she was a good long-distance one, and her strokes were strong and measured to conserve her power. For precisely such a test at this, Nature and training had equipped her with smooth, long tireless muscles and that fullness of chest required to oxygenate without undue fatigue. Like most healthy girls, she was curiously resistant to cold water, and the resiliency of her supple rounded arms and legs was of the sort that does not suffer cramp.

THERE was slight chance of any passing boat. As often happens in that locality and season, the short, sudden storm was apt to be followed by another of less violence, and with a deluge of rain. It was nearly six o'clock, and unless the weather quickly cleared, it would be dark before Dare could hope to reach the shore. This early nightfall would oblige her to avoid the cliffs and ledges, at the foot of which the long ground-swell boiled. Even at the cost of a considerably longer distance, it seemed wiser to make for the deep, narrow inlet that put in a little just around the point.

Dare, swimming easily and changing her stroke and position from time to time, wondered with a curious lack of alarm if she were destined to make it. She reflected that in any case her family was in for a bad time until she should be able to report herself. Nobody had seemed to be about when she had spun off in the fool-killer, and if her direction had been noted, there would be already a boat heading off for her general position.

Presently she began to consider the singular manner of her prospective call on one Perry Bridges, by the description of whose life and personality her interest had been aroused. Since coming to the island that summer, she had learned from some source that the young man was living in the more or less habitable remains of the ruin on Thunder Point—a Norman tower with its battlements and flanking terraces that were faced by heavy masonry. She did not know whether he was living absolutely as a hermit or served in some fashion. And here was she, paddling in for this stronghold in a costume that next to nothing was about the best imaginable for the accomplishment of such a feat, if not for the introduction that seemed unavoidable. There was nowhere else to go, and Dare was compelled to believe that she would require some immediate care on landing.

AT the end of about an hour Dare found herself still surprisingly fit and strong and was pleased to discover that she was getting well inshore. The puffy breeze had dropped flat, and the swells were long and oily and dark under a lowering sky. A following storm was fomenting slowly with distant rumbling thunder, and now and then a flash of lightning. There would be no sunset, no afterglow, and with the passing of another hour the daylight began to wane. By this time Dare was at the mouth of the inlet, being drawn into it by the tide, and she was pleased to see by the suck and eddy of it around a lobster-buoy that the current was strong. The Norman tower loomed up dark and forbidding as it bulked against the black sky that was beginning to break away in patches with high masses of flying wind-cloud. Dare caught a glimpse of Venus, bright and big as a low-hung lantern, until suddenly it was obscured again.

Then all at once lights flashed out from the lower Gothic windows of the tower, and the sight of them gave the girl a fresh strength that she was now in need of. She was less tired than sleepy, and this of an encompassing drowsiness. It seemed to her also that there was the sound of distant music, less soothing than riotous, and as if mocking the approaching storm. But Dare could not be sure about it.

The flood-tide was slewing her rapidly into the place with scarcely any effort of her own, and presently a brighter flash of lightning showed a big stone jetty close at hand, with a float and runway rigged out from it, and a yawl or ketch-rigged boat lying to a mooring. Dare paddled to the float; then, lacking strength to raise herself upon it, drifted in to the rocks and even there had some difficulty in getting out, due to a surprising lack of power in legs that had never failed her before. She sat

for several moments resting, then rose and made her way to the stone steps leading up over the terraces from the pier. She sat down to rest again, rubbing her limbs and moving them about a little. The soft night air was strangely sweet and perfumed, and in the dim light she discovered the source of these odors to be from masses of roses and jasmine planted under the foot of the masonry.

Then all at once she heard the music again, and this time there seemed no mistake about it. There appeared also to be a babble of voice and laughter, confused and riotous, like the strains of what might have been a diminutive jazz orchestra. It all sounded singularly out of keeping with the gloomy aspect of the place, and the hollow booming of the surf and rumbling of thunder, high in the air and all about, as if the storm were too spent or lazy tc break.

BUT the girl was safe ashore, and that was the important feature. She did not feel terribly exhausted, but merely in a curious dreamy state, as though there were nothing real about her situation. Then, as she made her way up the steps of the terrace, she became conscious of hunger and thirst. Her splendid health and vigor were reaching for an immediate repair to the physical force expended. Dare lost all consideration for her scanty swimming costume. She was drowsily jubilant at her victory over the sea, but her sensations were those of the tired athlete whose system requires immediate fuel before the mind pauses to dwell on the features of the triumphant event.

As Dare plodded up the steps, there came down a sudden flood of warm rain. It gave her the sensation of being far wetter than the sea, and the desire of refuge from it, no matter how or where. The sweet drenching deluge and a sudden burst of thunder reverberating on the iron rocks were horridly demoralizing. If she had known the tower to contain a Bluebeard, Dare would not have hesitated to demand its sanctuary. The ruddy light that shone from its lower windows was a lure that promised respite from the crash of elemental forces, and rest and the dryness that must be quickly obtained if she were not to become entirely dissolved.

Reaching the summit terrace, a flare of lightning revealed a door against which the torrential rain was driving. Dare, half blinded by the flash, and dazed by the violent concussion that immediately followed, lurched forward against the wall of the tower. At the same moment the door opened suddenly, to let out a gush of light and a tumult of furious voices. A man plunged forward onto the terrace, recovered himself and turned.

"I've had my fill of the lot of you," he cried. "I hope you all kill yourselves and each other."

THE answer to this came in a clamor of abuse from the threshold. Dare, in the shadow, listened to such a torrent of invective in the hoarse voices of men and the shrill falsetto of women as to chill her blood and send goose-creeps over her numbed skin as the clean cold of the ocean had not done. She would never have believed such speech possible outside the nethermost pit of the infernal regions—nor such tones and horrible inflections of degradation. In the stream of light she could see projecting from the portal the bare, hairy arms of men and gleaming ones of women, all waving in the incoherent emphasis of hatred and abuse, fists clenched or fingers spread and hooked, like fleshy talons. She saw also the naked shoulders of a woman, symmetrical and glistening in the disregarded wash of rain, the bodice torn down to the waist.

Through this squall of maudlin vituperation the man who had first emerged stood as if eager to drink in the full disgust of it. He had plunged out as though breaking from the grasp of some one who had tried to restrain his going, but now recovered and erect, he seemed to wait some more overt act than wordy vituperation. The mellow light shone on a face that was pale and sufficiently composed, but fierce and challenging. Then in a momentary lull he cried tauntingly, and with a sort of snarling contempt:

"Come out, some of you rotten scum, and make it good. I wouldn't dirty my house with the smashing of you, but I'll do it here."

This challenge brought immediate response. A bulky figure flung itself forward. Above the clamor of savage voice and the sounds of thunder and rain, Dare heard the smack and thud of blows. The assailant fell backward grotesquely, to be reached for and hauled in across the threshold. A woman screamed wildly, "Go to it Perry!" as if in a sudden hysteric change of sym-

pathy, and then in shocking disarray rushed out with frantic, grappling arms. She was caught up, her hold broken, and flung back into the doorway. Then, as if maddened with a fury of disgust that had decided him to make a massacre, to clean his house and put in some sort of order, if only that of death, the alert figure swayed slightly forward and moved back toward the door. At sight of his expression in the blaze of light, Dare choked back a scream.

But dread of him had struck into the others. There was a backward rush and scramble. The door closed to with a crash, and there came the metallic clatter of a shot bolt. Then, halting, the man discovered Dare as she crouched against the rough wall on which the rain was foaming.

"Who's that?"

DARE managed to gasp out: "I've just swum ashore. I was caught in the squall—out there—"

"Caught in the— Good Lord! A girl!"

A shimmering wave of lightning played over them. Dare shrank back, arms extended, palms against the heavy stones, like an Andromeda. But in the quivering illumination Perry had glimpsed her face and recognized it. He had seen her at the town landing on several occasions, though unobserved by Dare, and he knew of her identity.

The shock of finding such a girl under these dreadful conditions, crouched against the wall of his profaned abiding-place, was swept away by the instant necessities of her distress. He understood immediately what must have happened her, a canoeing or sailing capsize, and the girl reckoning her chance of swimming to the shore a better one than that of being picked up before succumbing to exhaustion.

He could not take her into the saturnalia from which he had just broken away, but another and better shelter offered. Perry stepped to her side and held out his hand.

"Come with me," he said gently. "Don't be afraid."

Dare shrank away. "Not in there—"

"I should say not! Down aboard my yawl. I'll take you to your island."

"In this storm?"

"It's over. You've nothing to fear with me."

Dare felt instinctively that this was true. She took his hand. But the shock of the scene just witnessed had taken most of her remaining strength, so that her knees shook and yielded. Perry passed his arm under her shoulders, and this contact as much as the support, gave her strength enough to walk with him down the white steps to the jetty and to reach safely the float. Perry hauled a smallboat alongside and lowered her into it, then picked up the oars and rowed out to the small vessel that she had noticed when swimming in. Dare's resilient strength had by that time revived, so that she was able without much difficulty to get aboard and below and into a roomy cabin abaft the little saloon. Still in the dark, Perry gave her a robe of soft vicuña wool which she slipped on. He then lighted the two lamps and stepping to a locker, took out a carafe of cognac, poured some into a tumbler and filled it to the brim with water from an earthen jug. Dare drank thirstily and sank down on the wide bunk that was spread over with a fine grass sleeping-mat.

PERRY raised her head and placed a pillow under it, then stood for a moment looking at her anxiously. Dare closed her eyes and gave herself up to a delicious relaxation. Her sense of safety and well-being was complete. The spirits began quickly to produce their reaction, so that she could feel the warm blood tingling to her finger-tips. Perry went out, to return almost immediately with a box of arrowroot biscuits, which he placed on a folding table beside the bunk.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Hungry," Dare answered, and smiled. "Nothing could be better than this." She took a biscuit and began to nibble it.

"As soon as you feel up to it," Perry said, "you had better rub yourself dry and put on these." He took some white flannels from a locker drawer and a pair of felt slippers. "I'll start the motor and get under way. Your family must be nearly crazy."

"I don't believe so," Dare answered. "They all went over to the mainland for tea with friends, and they wouldn't start back until the weather cleared. Mamma dislikes to be uncomfortable."

"You were alone, of course."

"Yes. I got fooling with a sort of hydroplane Papa invented. The squall hit me and wrecked the thing off Thunder Point. It sank, and I must have been over two hours in the water."

"Then you're a wonder. I'll get going, and we'll try to beat them back."

He went out, closing the door behind him, and Dare heard presently the purring of an engine just abaft the bulkhead of the room. A few moments later the soft ripple of water alongside told her that they had started. She was feeling better with every passing minute—so well, in fact, that she found it difficult to understand. The truth of the matter was that her splendid reserve vitality had been quite equal to cope with the uncommon strain, while her peculiar quality of courage had kept her from being nervously overwhelmed by the danger of it. To natures like Dare's, a certain amount of perilous adventure is stimulating rather than depressing, and something that the cosmos actually demands in order to function fully, to stretch and exercise the nerves and to develop the love of life itself and a rich appreciation of it. This accounts for the fascination of the more dangerous sports to the richly endowed; mountaineering, airplaning, steeplechasing on a rough countryside—or even, when carried to a perverse degree, outlawry.

Discovering now to her pleased surprise that there was to be no crushing physical reaction, Dare followed Perry's advice. She got up, slipped out of her swimming-suit and gave her limbs and body a vigorous rubbing down, using a little of the cognac for this admirable purpose, then put on the soft, fresh flannels, and turning the vicuña robe inside out, slipped that on over them. She was still thirsty and hungry, but no longer drowsy; so she drank another tumbler of spirits and water, then took the box of biscuits and went on deck.

THE sky had cleared miraculously, and though still dark over Thunder Point, the storm clouds had been rolled back like a furled awning to disclose a multitude of stars twinkly and bright. Dominating them all was Venus, low-hung, like the lantern at the taffrail staff. The boat was gliding slowly past the outer ledges, for the motor was a small, low-powered one, auxiliary to the sail. A faint leading breeze from the northwest was imperceptible, as they moved with it at equal speed.

Perry, at the wheel, did not see Dare as her head and shoulders rose above the hatchway. He was staring back over his shoulder at the flaming star. It was not merely a look of speculative admiration, but a sort of tense, absorbed contemplation of the heavenly body, as if he were trying to read some message from it. Dare stood watching him and wondering why Venus should hold such a fascination as to interfere with his steering of the boat, which as she could see from the distant shore against the mizzenmast was swerving a little in her course.

Then Perry, as if sensing this, turned suddenly and gave the wheel a spoke or two. As he did so, he discovered the girl, and the quick, involuntary motion of his head showed that her close presence had startled him. It was almost a betrayal of the fact that his thought was concentrated on her, so that her actuality seemed like the materialization of it—that she and Venus had been closely associated in his mind. This of course was not unflattering. Dare gave a low laugh.

"Star-gazing when you ought to be steering," she said. "Or were you making use of Venus to lay your course?"

Perry shook his head. "No. I did that once before, and she led me into the reefs and shoals. It was my own fault. I should have known." He changed the topic quickly. "You ought to be resting."

"I feel perfectly fit. I'm used to long swims. Sometimes I do one with my sister Elsinore, just to let her down a peg. She's the athlete of the family, and it's fun to show her that supertraining isn't everything."

"You are right about that. Clean, healthy living is the recipe for real strength, not dieting and overworking your muscular machinery."

"I should say that you followed that recipe yourself," said Dare, and seated herself on a raised skylight.

"It's more than good of you to think so, after what happened back there," Perry answered bitterly.

"Well, I've been thinking about that," said Dare, "and I don't believe that you were any way to blame. I'm not trying to apologize for you, Mr. Bridges; but my theory has been that some group of undesirable acquaintances you had carelessly made somewhere took it into their drunken heads to use your place as an objective and swooped down on you for a surprise party. You stood it as long as you could and then broke loose. Am I nearly right?"

"Nearly—and a thousand thanks. They came this morning in two big cars, and they have been hard at it all day long. But their being there at all was entirely my fault."

"Well, it will not be your fault if they ever come again," Dare said. "I'm rather glad I got there in time to see the finish. It showed me the sort of man you really are. I've heard some curious stories about you. If I hear any more, I'll know better than to believe them. Why don't you frequent your own kind?"

PERRY threw out his hands with a little gesture of despair. "It's too late. I'm completely *déclassé*. I started with the wrong idea, and then I was too stubborn to chuck it when I saw where it was getting me. Instead of being dissipated myself, I trailed around with people that were, as a sort of interested audience of one. I thought I was seeing life and studying character from animated human documents. Naturally, I got the name for being about everything that's rotten, myself. I deserved it, and I was too stiff-necked to defend the position I'd been fool enough to take. After all, it was scarcely more than the desire to gratify a morbid curiosity."

Dare leaned forward, clasping her hands. "But it's *not* too late. You are young and clean and strong. It's your aspect of yourself that's morbid. Where's the sense of mooning about alone in this little boat, as if you were really a social leper? Make the right people accept you at your proper valuation. Call it a fight. You look like a born fighter—and you act like one, too."

Perry shook his head. "It can't be done. You ought to know that, yourself. Even at Harvard none of my classmates would ever think of asking me to their homes—not even the ones I've put to bed drunk time and again. They'd have thought better of me if I'd taken an active part in their dissipations myself. But there seemed no reason or excuse for the mere observer and associate of scum. I hadn't even the pale apology of a restraining influence. I was always ready to pay my shot to see the show."

"But did you like the show?" Dare asked.

"Sometimes, when it wound up in a row. That got me a worse name as a dangerous brawler. I thought of myself as a sort of reckless swashbuckler. My point of view was sheer folly, except in one respect. I always thought that some day I should write red-blooded fiction, and that I was gathering first-hand experience for it. But I discovered too late that while I had no lack of material, I had not the other things that go to make a writer. I hadn't the spark, the craftsmanship. I simply couldn't write. So then I'd go out in a sort of desperation to get still more experience, as if that was bound to help."

Dare nodded. She was beginning to understand a little better. "Like a man who is driven to make more and more money, always hoping to get some good from it and never learning how."

"Precisely—or like the man who tries to drive his brain with whisky to the performance of some mental task beyond its scope, until he gets it congested and then maudlin. It seemed to me that a person of intelligence and education and good powers of observation couldn't very well help but successfully express something of human life and passions if he saw an awful lot of both. I've had a good deal of study and travel, too. It's given me plenty to think about, but beyond that, the cogs jam."

DARE pondered this curiously unfortunate condition. "What if you were to sit down and try and try and try?"

"I have, many a time. All I get out of it is an undigested bolus of raw, unpleasant flesh. One book of mine was published. It was like setting on the literary dinner-table the transverse amidships section of an undressed hog, inside workings and all. I beg your pardon. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I can't remember having apologized to anybody before."

"It's not an apology," said Dare softly. "It's an appreciation."

Perry bowed. "That is perfect. If I had ever had the good fortune to meet a girl like you, or at least to know her, it might all have been different. But that would have been impossible, because there isn't any."

"There are a great many," Dare retorted, "but you don't often find them in disreputable gatherings. Or if you should, they might be hard to recognize. I've done some slumming myself, but disguised in the color-scheme of the dive. However, now that you have found me, why not cultivate the discovery? I've been looking for a real live man these last few years, and I am beginning to think I've found one."

Perry was silent for an instant, then answered: "I wonder if, after all, my horoscope is right. It prophesies that great happiness with dreadful trouble should

come to me out of the sea with Venus, my birth-star, still high in the heavens."

Dare sat upright. "So that is why you were staring so at Venus."

"Yes. I thought the prophecy had been fulfilled. The happiness left much to be desired, but there was no mistake about the trouble. In the present case the beatitude would last, even if I were never to see you again—which is very possible."

"Why?"

"Because I am perfectly sure that when you tell your father what has happened, he would not let you see me again."

"I don't need tell him about that party."

"It wouldn't matter if you did. Your father has spent his summers here for a good many years, and knows the family histories of the place. He knows that my father was a sort of local pest whose chief occupation was buying lobsters that he paid for with rum that he ran in from Nova Scotia after Maine voted prohibition, about forty-five years ago. Mr. Colfax is also quite aware that my great-uncle, who made me his heir, was generally regarded as the Shylock of the region, a dangerous man in all respects, and one whose private life was considered the community's disgrace. In fact, Uncle Benny once trimmed your father pretty badly on a real-estate deal."

"So that was the man!" Dare murmured.

"Yes. I'm afraid my benefactor was a good deal of a shark. He sold this Thunder Point property to a war profiteer, then foreclosed a mortgage on it and got it back. But it is pretty certain that your father has learned enough of my own career to know that I was bilged at the Naval Academy and regarded as a rowdy at Harvard and came very close to losing my commission during the war by starting a Donnybrook in Queenstown, and that I have since figured in some unpleasant episodes in West Indian and South American ports when captain of a four-masted schooner of my Uncle Benny's. He may also have seen or heard of some of the few stories and articles of mine that have been published under the pen name of 'Captain Falconbridge.' "

DARE sat suddenly upright. "Do you mean to say that you wrote that terrible story 'A Kindly Deed'?"

"Guilty. I called it 'Lead Kindly Light,' but that was of course considered too blasphemous."

"I might have known. About Venus! And the *nom de plume,* 'Falconbridge'—Peregrine Bridges. A peregrine falcon. Well, at least it was strong."

"So is hung game. Most of it was personal experience. If your father saw it, his inventive mind would put one and one together. I wonder if he did."

Dare nodded. "So that's the reason he has always put me off when I have wanted to visit Thunder Point, and see the ruins of that burned monument to war profiteering."

"Of course. No doubt he considers my name anathema, and I really believe that this mishap of yours and what it has led to would be almost enough to make him quit the island and locate elsewhere. I'm sure it would, if he thought there was any danger of your becoming the least interested in me. Perhaps he's right. I am really not the sort of man for a girl like you to know. And the finality of it is that, feeling as I do about it and knowing you to be what you are, I shall henceforth avoid you."

"Out of pride—and for the sake of Papa's peace of mind?"

"Partly. But mostly for my own—and possibly yours."

"If you knew me better, I don't think that last would worry you."

"It's not conceit," said Perry quickly. "I mean that I might become for you a sort of semi-tragic nuisance. I've been saddled with that sort, myself."

"Well, I never have and never will," Dare said decidedly. "I'm far too selfish. Any of my friends could tell you that. The men ones would be very glad to."

PERRY laughed. "Not to me. Men never tell me things like that—unless they are drunk. Then they'd tell a pawnbroker, or a policeman."

"You see," said Dare, who was scarcely listening, "all my life I've been an involuntary trouble-maker. I seem to start fool-killers, without meaning to, then like to stand and watch the finish of them. My attitude toward trouble is like yours toward drunkenness and debauchery. I'm often in it without being of it. As Papa once remarked, it's a natural medium in which I'm insoluble. You are that way too, I think."

He laughed again. "Not noticeably, after the trouble starts. I stood clear tonight because of a dislike to beat up guests in my own house, even uninvited ones."

"Are you going straight back?" Dare asked him.

"Yes; but I shall sleep aboard the boat and wait for morning to hold a board of survey on the wreck. There really isn't much to break."

"Have you any servants?"

"One—a Jamaican negro who sailed with me as quartermaster. I'd sent him to town in the motor dory for supplies. Then there's an old loon named Fosset who is sort of caretaker and looks after what are left of the sheep, and some other animals I've just received. Here's your island right ahead, Miss Colfax. I don't see anything of the yacht."

The night was not very dark, and absolutely still. Under Dare's pilotage Perry let the twenty-ton yawl drift slowly up to the landing, where as the tide was now high, there was plenty of water. Dare, with the sinking feeling of one who takes indefinite farewell of a valued friend, held out her hand. After what Perry had told her, she could not see how she was to add him to her list of eligible friends without infinite trouble and embarrassment. For all of his bland sophistries and personal preoccupations, Mr. Colfax was immovable about certain things; and Dare had too long been in the habit of drawing aloof from any trouble she might start, to change her technique easily. She had also a hatred of clandestine affairs.

BUT she found it singularly hard to dismiss Perry with a few brief words of thanks. His personality not only interested but attracted her intensely. She found a surprising thrill in the firm but gentle pressure of his hand as it took hers for a brief instant, then released it. Then a sudden fatigue enveloped her, as if a stimulant had been withdrawn.

"I like you, Perry Bridges. I want to see you again."

He reached suddenly for the hand she had just let fall, raised it, bowed his head and brushed it with his lips. "Please consider me your knight errant, lady dear. If ever you have real need of me, then send for me. But better not, unless."

He stepped to the wheel, reached for a lever, and the heavy boat of which Dare did not even know the name, turned slowly and glided out into the night. Then, as she swung, the glimmer of the jetty light was reflected from the burnished letters *V-e-n-u-s.*

CHAPTER II

THE domestic personnel of the island had not been seriously alarmed by Dare's absence. She told them briefly that the machine had been disabled, and that after drifting about for a couple of hours in the storm, she had been picked up by a small cruising yacht and landed on the island. She instructed them to say nothing about it to the family on their return, as she was exhausted and did not wish to have her rest disturbed by a fuss being made over her. There would be fuss enough the following day, she opined.

But here also she got off easily. Finding her father alone when she went down next morning, she made her brief confession.

"Just as I was going to bang on the door," she concluded, "Mr. Perry Bridges himself came out. The storm was about over, and thinking how terribly worried you all must be, he insisted that we go right aboard his cruiser and get out here to the island as quickly as possible. He showed me below and gave me some dry things and a dressing-robe, then started off. Nothing could have been kinder or more considerate than his behavior."

Mr. Colfax had listened to her account with round and rather popping eyes, although Dare had modified its terrors a great deal, letting him believe that she had been fairly close to the mouth of the inlet when the catastrophe occurred. Nevertheless he was most naturally a good deal shaken.

"My own silly fault!" he sputtered. "I should have had that infernal machine scrapped long ago."

"It is now, Papa dear. You said you wished that somebody would take it out and sink it, so like a dutiful daughter I carried out your desire." She laughed softly. "It seemed to fly into as many pieces as a bursting shell, and all of them went straight to bottom. When the splashing was over, there was only me."

Mr. Colfax raised both hands and looked up in an attitude of prayer. "I have Providence to thank on quite a number of counts: that my daughter's life was miraculously preserved; that the storm prevented our immediate return, thus saving your mother a nervous collapse; that the beastly contraption is gone for good with no further chance of killing anybody; and that Bridges had the tact and delicacy to

act in such a prompt and chivalrous manner, in bringing you home immediately and without asking you inside the ruin. I am engaged today, but tomorrow I shall run over at once in the speed launch to express my obligation and appreciation."

A GOOD night's rest soothed Dare's jangled nerves, and she took care to be up and out and gathering a bouquet of nasturtiums when her father came out to give his permission for the perfect day to carry on. Dare gave him a kiss and a flower, a time-honored custom that nothing can improve upon.

"Lovely morning!" He looked over toward Thunder Point. "I suppose I might as well run over there and fulfill my obligation."

"I think I'd like to go with you," said Dare. "I'm curious to see that place."

"All right—come along."

They breakfasted alone, the others being not yet up; then went down to the landing and got aboard the speed-boat.

The swift launch ripped a long undulating seam through the blue cover of the sea and stopped at the border of it secured by Thunder Point. Turning into the deep, narrow inlet that widened into a little estuary known as Short River, the elaborate grading and leveling and terracing work that had been done became in evidence. The late unfortunate purchaser had in the vanity of human expectation meant to build for perpetuity, and had either known precisely what he wanted or left the shaping of the grounds to a skilled expert. Yet the actual cost need not have been so great as it would seem at first sight, because the natural contours had been followed in a fashion that was impressive and effective without much labor beyond that of placing the big stones that lay ready to hand in great abundance.

But the result was imposing in its solid simplicity, such as is seldom seen in the United States, where so much perishable material is used. And here even this ambitious builder had fallen short by constructing the main body of his house of wood above the first story, so that all the fire had left of it were the lower walls and three stark chimneys. The Norman tower had been detached, communicating by an arched passage of stone and pierced by narrow Gothic windows. It stood out boldly, the most conspicuous feature, on a flattened knob of solid rock and commanding the land- and seascape on three sides, but flanked by a park of big oaks with a sprinkling of pines and firs.

There was great beauty to the place, and it was because of the landscape gardening that had been started to relieve its massive features, that it was less melancholy than one might have expected. Shrubs and flowers had been planted at the foot of the terrace walls, and had flourished in the shelter of them. Lombardy poplars had been set out at the proper salients, and though they were yet small, defined them picturesquely. There were some big urns that gave a softened Italian note, and in the rear a pergola of white stone. One could half close the eyes and restore the whole, or more properly, develop it.

MR. COLFAX and Dare had never viewed the place from this angle, nor so close at hand. Dare of course had got but a confused impression of it in the dark and rain when she had struggled exhausted up to the tower. Mr. Colfax sighed.

"That's what comes from trying to profit by a world calamity. Lots of 'em did, though, and got away clear; but he started too late. Besides, Halsted was a shoe-string performer. Always mortgaged up to the ears, and trusting to his next turnover to square the books."

"Arthur Dower was right when he said this place ought to be called 'Halsted's Folly,' " Dare observed. "But it's a very beautiful folly. Look at those red ramblers all the way up the terraces."

Mr. Colfax nodded. "It was folly on a scale to awaken suspicion of G. P. Wonder if he really didn't die of paresis. Frist he counts on two or three more years of war. Then he buys heavily mortgaged to an old Shylock that was just hanging back to get him, and goes ahead and builds a big house on what anybody hereabouts could have told him was the very bull's-eye of heaven's heavy artillery. He starts to build it bomb-proof, then finishes up in wood, and it gets struck by lightning and burned down. It didn't matter much to Halsted, though."

Nobody appeared about the premises as they glided up to the float. The *Venus* was dozing at her berth upon the placid water, and there was no sign of life except the gulls wheeling over the tower. Mr. Colfax and his daughter mounted the flagged steps, pausing once or twice to admire the flowers and to let their approach

be observed, should there happen to be any unseen observer. They felt a certain constraint at thus invading the tacitly guarded privacy of a mysterious individual whose goings and comings by sea and land left much to the imagination, but no more than that. Old Uncle Benny had pretty well plastered the property with "No Trespass" signs, but these were for the most part obliterated, and Perry had never renewed them. His estate was seldom visited, even by the curious, because it had come to acquire that most inviolate of privacy that comes from the aloof and reticent habits of its proprietor.

CHATTING a little to mask their uncomfortable sense of intrusion, Dare and her father came to the heavy flagging at the door of the tower. Mr. Colfax reached for the big bronze ram's-head knocker, but before he could sound it, the door swung open and they found themselves confronted by a personality that was curious and startling despite the quality of respectful and exuberant welcome with which it was charged. This was a very black negro, rather squat, of abnormal breadth of chest and with huge, knobby shoulders. He appeared to be of late middle age, for the snug wool was grizzled about the temples, and he was costumed in a sailor suit of spotless white, with cuffs and collar of navy blue, embroidered with the usual stars—what used to be known as "muster" uniform. His smile on greeting them was rather terrible in its exposition of gleaming ivory and its bisection of his ebony face. The simian character of this was even enhanced by a pair of big shell spectacles, and Dare observed that he held in one great hand a calf-bound Bible, a thick thumb between the pages.

"Yo sarbent, sar an' madam," said he, and bowed.

Mr. Colfax acknowledged the obeisance with a nod. "Is Mr. Bridges at home?"

"Dat he am, sar, Mr. Colfax. De marster am at dis moment on de moor inspectin' dem alpacas dat arrive yesterday." His inflection was distinctly Anglican, the voice low and rumbling. "Hab de goodness to enter, sar an' miss." He stepped back with a wave of his great arm. "I summons de marster immediate."

"What did you say Mr. Bridges was inspecting?" Dare asked.

"A 'erd of alpacas, madam." Then at her blank look he added: "De alpaca am a wooly quadruplet resemblin' to a sheep but bigger and longer in de neck. He am 'bout de size ob a donkey, but not possessin' harf de sense. In wiciousness dar aint much ch'ice, but whereas de donkey kicks, dis abdominal alpaca beas' dey regards a body superstitious and spits."

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Mr. Colfax, on whom the truth was dawning. "Those animals the schooner brought were not sheep then, but alpacas. Sort of a wooly guanaco, I believe."

The negro radiated pleasure at this comprehension. "Dat him, Mr. Colfax, sar. Dat him to a ha'r. De marster reckin he find dis ha'sh clime salubrious to de alpaca, so he done impo't 'em in bulk. Dey not lose a 'oof on de v'yge."

"I'd like very much to see them," Mr. Colfax said.

"Hit's about three furlongs, Miss Colfax, ma'am. Marster see fitten to barrack 'em on de high pasture, for dey don' get 'omesick. I leads the way, if it please you, sar an' ma'am."

He bowed and stepped aside to lead the way back through the park of big oaks, and beyond it an orchard of young fruit trees planted around a sunken garden that needed care. Mr. Colfax noted all the details with the eye of a country gentleman, and a sigh escaped him.

"The ruin of any fine old place is sad," he said, "but that of such a beautiful and incompleted one as this is tragic. I doubt if it will ever be restored. It's too remote, and most people would find it desolate. Americans are mostly gregarious. There's not one person in a thousand able to afford it who would care to establish a summer home out here."

THEY skirted a potato field and came out upon open, rocky moor that rose in broken ledges as it receded. Their squat guide plodded on some distance ahead, following a sheep path.

Perry discovered his visitors at a distance and came to welcome them. He was clad throughout in white flannels, wore a loose white coat of the same material, white shoes and a Panama hat. Dare had never been to South America, but it struck her that Perry against that background of rocky pasture and the herd of alpacas might pass for the proprietor of some hacienda on a Chilean mesa. His look and dress and general bearing suggested the authoritative aristocrat of Spanish descent.

But his skin had a ruddy instead of a sallow tan; and his features, though cleanly cut, had more of the rugged Puritan than the Castilian chiseling. His eyes also were of a rather light, granite gray.

She presented him to her father, who in his hurry to get to the subject of the alpacas almost forgot the object of the call.

Perry took them over to inspect the beasts at closer range. Some were shy, some merely stand-offish, but one handsome young male sauntered nonchalantly toward them and planting himself in front of Mr. Colfax, eyed that gentleman with supercilious disdain. Perry quickly placed himself between, and flicked at the alpaca's head with the light bamboo cane he carried. The alpaca blinked, gulped and swung away. Dare thought of what the negro servant had said: "Dey regards a body superstitious and spits." She asked Perry about McIntyre.

"I picked him up at Barbados, some years ago when I was sailing a four-masted schooner. He had been a man-o'-warsman for three terms of service and afterward a domestic servant of the Governor of Jamaica, the coxswain of his gig. Then he felt that he had a call to preach the gospel and resigned his billet to become an itinerant evangelist around the West Indies. But he wasn't much of a success, I imagine, as I found him on the beach in considerable distress. I took him on, and he's been with me ever since."

AT Perry's suggestion they returned presently to the tower, by a longer but easier path that led along the shore. On the way their host remarked that it was no part of his plan to bother personally with the alpacas. They would have to adapt themselves as best they might under the fostering care of his herder Fosset, who was completely fascinated by them and whom they seemed to recognize already as a sympathetic friend in a foreign land. Fosset had a natural gift with animals, especially wooly ones, and the voluminous coats of the newcomers enchanted him. Perry would see that proper winter quarters were constructed in a dry and sheltered spot, with a well-stocked fodder barn and granary, then turn the enterprise over to Fosset's management. He might have a helper or two if this proved necessary.

"Then you are not going to stop on here, yourself?" Mr. Colfax asked.

Perry shook his head. "I am a migratory bird, sir. The tropics with their light and color suit me better for the winter. Usually I manage to combine business with my inclinations. Last year and the early part of this I was hunting bauxite up the Maroni River and found some considerable deposits that I disposed of to the aluminum people. This year I think I shall have a try for diamonds, up the Mazaruni. They are small, commercial stones, but seem to occur in considerable quantities."

"When do you expect to leave?" Dare asked.

"As soon as the snow flies. I don't object particularly to the cold, but I dislike to be cramped up in winter quarters."

They came presently to the tower and entered. Here another surprise was offered the guests. The room was twenty feet square by about fifteen in height; the floor above supported by big rough-hewn timbers of oak braced at the sides by knees, like the deck-beams of an ancient wooden frigate or whaler. The walls had been left in their fitted stone facings pointed up in whitened cement, but they were almost entirely covered by hangings of different sorts, most of them in deep, rich colors worked into barbaric designs, of Peruvian and Chilean and Central American fabric. The light from the long Gothic windows was even and sufficient.

But that which caught immediately and held Dare's attention was the life-size portrait of a fierce-faced naval officer with the usual cocked hat, epaulettes and telescope, over the high chimney. Although rather crudely painted, age had softened its defects, and the resemblance to Perry was so striking that there could be no question of ancestry. The features of the portrait differed slightly but importantly from those of the descendant in a nose longer and more pointed and mouth with a cruel quirk to it.

"Who was that ferocious gentleman?" she asked.

"My great-great-grandfather, Captain Peregrine Bridges. He was a picturesque character, and from the time I was a little boy, I've tried to be exactly like what I thought him to have been." And he added with a smile: "Dangerous practice—that sort of hero worship."

MR. COLFAX came back to the topic of alpacas. Dare moved about the room examining its different features. In one corner she discovered behind a screen of

painted Spanish leather a small pipe organ of the modern studio sort. Glancing at the keyboard of the instrument, she made a fresh discovery that swept all thought of the musical aspect of Perry from her mind. This was the winsome head and shoulders of a fluffy-haired French doll that projected from under the leaves of some music in a V-shaped rack tucked away in the corner between the organ and the wall.

Dare turned quickly away, stepped to an open window and looked out. The fresh sea-breeze that had sprung up fanned on her flushed and heated face. What was that doll doing there? It was not a purely ornamental doll, but a toy one that had seen service. Dare's quick eye had observed that the tip of its *retroussé* nose was the worse for wear, and that its chiffon frock was slightly smudged. That doll had been played with. But who was the child mother, and what had she been doing in this mysterious bachelor tower? A live baby could scarcely have been more compromising.

Behind her, in another corner of the room, Perry was telling Mr. Colfax something about the problematical Aztec ruins of Peru. Dare, catching a word or two, was perversely tempted to confront him with the problem of that doll. She no longer desired him to impress her father favorably. For the first time in her life she was in the grip of a fierce, unreasoning animosity, the more bitter because she had no right at all to any such emotion where Perry was concerned. He owed her nothing, no explanation nor apology for any loose dolls she might pry out of chinks about his premises. He had not asked to see her again, to call or to be called upon. He had made no pretensions of virtuous living nor the least appeal to her social recognition. The final touch of his adieu had been chivalrous but not expectant.

But Dare had felt the proprietary sense of having discovered Perry, a sort of dark unknown island in the human archipelago, and as though she were about to hoist the flag of Respectability over him. Her father was now by way of doing that. Lots of people had of course discovered Perry at different times, but they did not count, either because they were not decent people or because such as were had evidently passed him by. Nothing is actually discovered until described and claimed. Dare had been on the verge of having these steps taken, and now here was that wretched doll. Her prospect appeared suddenly worthless—pyrite instead of possible gold.

For just as the paleontologist can build up a monster of the slime and ooze from the finding of a tooth or knuckle, so now Dare seemed able to portray one from the presence of that doll. Perry Bridges was not the sort of man to whom a fond mother would bring her little one for the pleasure of an organ recital unless he had some particular and personal interest in both. The presence of the doll in the folio of music would surely indicate that the child had laid it there while Perry played. No doubt it had remained undiscovered for some considerable time, escaped in its niche the cyclonic storm of last night's orgy. Dare bit her lip, and her eyes grew hot.

A SUDDEN impulse seized her. She would not have been the sort of girl she was if she had let it wriggle past. Turning away from the window, she stepped back to the organ and took the doll from its musical bed, then crossed the room and held it out to Perry.

"Some little mother will be wondering where she mislaid her baby," said she, smoothly and with a smile.

To her astonishment Perry sprang up with a look more pleased than if she had found his lost and well-filled pocketbook. "Thank goodness! Where in the world did you find it?"

"In the music *porte-feuille.*"

"So that's where!" He stepped to a Colonial writing desk and touched a bell. The bulky shape of McIntyre appeared, first as to feet and legs, then the upper segment as it came down the circular stone stairway in one corner, leading to the upper story and top of the tower.

"McIntyre," Perry said, "Miss Colfax has found that little girl's doll."

"Dat berry good, marster. Po' little missy broken-hawted."

Perry looked at Dare. Something in the smiling gentleness of his expression struck a curious pang through her. It was tender. If he had not been a man of the sort she pictured him, Dare would have described it to herself as "sweet." He turned the doll in his hands. "The news of my alpaca herd has got about, and this morning a nice old lady brought her four grandchildren here in a launch and asked if they might see the animals. On their way back she stopped to thank me, and while we were looking at the view from the

terrace, this little girl must have got curious about the tower and slipped inside. She missed her doll when they got into the boat, and we made a hasty search for it. But the launch was engaged by another party for ten o'clock, and so they had to start back without the doll. McIntyre and I thought she must have dropped it up in the pasture and one of the alpacas eaten it."

"Dem beas'es quite capable o' dat can'balism, sar."

"Well, now that it's found, you will have to get in the motor-dory and run to town and restore it to its grieving mother. Next time we'll check the dolls."

"T'ank you, sar. Away de dory—"

"McIntyre—" Dare held out her hand. "Give me the doll. We are going to town from here for the mail, and we ought to be starting now. That will save half an hour of maternal anguish."

MR. COLFAX made a half-hearted protest. Despite his homily on contentment, life had been a little dull for this brilliant inventor, and he was now thoroughly enjoying himself. It is possible that Dare was quite aware of this, and meant that he should so desire to enjoy himself again at no period remote. When that occurred, she would take care to be of the party. We are told that we should leave the table still hungry, in order the more to relish our next meal. Dare wished her father to leave Thunder Point with a zest for another visit not long postponed. But she was also sincere about her desire to return the doll as soon as possible. As a little girl herself, she had lavished on a certain doll such passionate devotion as no other individuality had ever extracted from her.

She was therefore all the more touched at Perry's kindly thoughtfulness. It revealed him in another and a brighter light, like the flash on Monhegan as its ray sweeps the arc of visibility on a dark and threatening night. This sector of Perry's nature coming so unexpectedly to illuminate Dare's shameful suspicion of him dazzled and confused her. But she was vaguely conscious of more than the relief of finding it unwarranted. The fact of his being proven a man of such kindly warmth of heart was infinitely more important to her than either her wrong conclusion or his being the victim of it for a few brief bitter seconds. She felt now that unknown island actually might hold a precious treasure, and that she had found the chart of it. She desired to get away and study it.

"You must run out to see us, Bridges," said Mr. Colfax cordially as they were casting off. "And I shall give myself the pleasure of another visit, very soon. I am tremendously interested in your experiment and shall be delighted if it succeeds." Then suddenly remembering the actual object of the call, he thanked Perry for his kindly and chivalrous service.

Dare listened to all this with a good deal of amusement. It was so very far from the result that her father had deluded himself into thinking he had planned. But the wise girl made no comment on this fact. She looked down at the doll whose mignonne face shone brightly back at her. It seemed to hold a wealth of deep, infantile knowledge in the blue apertures of its half-closed eyes. Dare's own grew a little misty as she looked off dreamily into the blue haze of distance.

CHAPTER III

MR. COLFAX was warm in his appreciation of Perry Bridges. "There's nothing the matter with that young chap. Strikes me as a fine, manly fellow. No swank nor pose about him, and looks you squarely in the eyes. Traveled and well educated and talks in a careful, scholarly way you don't often hear from the slipshod, slangy youth of this country. More like a well-bred Britisher."

"But you don't like Britishers," Dare objected, knowing her parent for a mild Anglophobe.

"I like well-bred folk of any country, especially in these days when they're so hard to find. Bridges has an old-fashioned accent to him." And he added with a good deal of acumen: "I suppose he sits and stares at that rakish ancestral namesake over the chimney and wants to be just like him."

Returning to the island, Dare found her sister Elsinore in a state of bitter resentment at having been left behind. This vigorous damsel never sulked. She expressed her displeasure in some very active way, verbal or physical or both.

"It was the rottenest trick ever played me," she stormed. "I was crazy to see that man and his piratical lair, and I will yet, if I have to swim, the way you did.

If you hadn't wrecked the fool-killer, I'd go in that."

"You take it too hard," said Dare. "There's nothing so wonderful about Perry Bridges, and you can see about all there is to Thunder Point from the water."

"There's never anything wonderful about any man, for you," Elsinore retorted. "You're the sort of stuff that sirens and the Lorelei were made of. You lure 'em to destruction for the fun of watching 'em kick around in the eddies."

"They've always managed to swim out, so far," Dare said.

"Yes, and some day a real he-one will swim to shore where you're sitting on your rock and get a half-Nelson on you—and then good-by, Dare!"

DARE'S serene expression may have shown a ripple, for Elsinore shot her a keen look and said with a sort of malicious triumph: "I believe he's heading your way now, with strong sure strokes that spurn the whirlpools. You don't look quite so self-sufficient, and—" A gust of involuntary admiration seemed to grip her. "You never looked so pretty in your life, nor so provoking. I begin to understand why men go crazy over you. It's that perpetual silent dare you can't help but give out. Your name is right."

"I never give dares, my dear."

"No, you are just a living dare, yourself—a constant moving, breathing challenge to the dominant male. You can't help it, I suppose."

"I wouldn't bother to. If anybody sees fit to find a challenge that's not offered, he can go and fight it out with himself, or anybody else. It doesn't interest me."

Elsinore looked at her curiously, and a little enviously. "No, I don't believe it does. At least, it hasn't yet. You sit up on your ivory tower and watch the animals perform with the cool-eyed curiosity of a Vestal virgin at a Christian-martyr baiting."

"There have never been any Christian martyrs in my show," said Dare. "Satyrs, mostly, and there's no law protecting such animals. But they haven't been hurt. We seem to understand each other pretty well."

"That's just it," said Elsinore. "For some reason I've never understood, they never try to maul you. Randon and I have both had our fang-and-claw debates with these same satyrs, and fought our way out of the woods. But nothing of that sort ever happens to you, any more than it would to the goddess Diana. You walk about armored in chastity and magic spells. And if ever a girl seemed to invite grabbing, you do."

Dare frowned. "If your trend of thought is animal, you can't wonder at its attracting other animals. Lion-trainers have to keep their morale at a high level to avoid getting mauled, and I suppose the same thing applies to girls. If you slacken the least bit, you are in danger. I've read that it was as much as a lion-tamer's life was worth to take a couple of drinks before going into the cage, but girls of our set are doing that thing all the time."

"I don't," Elsinore protested. "I'm always in strict training."

"Yes, physical training. But you ought to get in mental training too. You think too much about your body. That's the trouble with physical-culture amateurs. They get to consider their bodies so wonderful that they feel the need of their appreciation."

"That's natural, isn't it?" Elsinore asked.

"No. It's peculiar to the genus homo, and actually sensual and effete. About all wild animals have strong and beautiful bodies, but they don't fool away their time trying to improve upon them, or gloating over the perfection of their own and each other's. They take them for granted and make use of them to serve the purposes of their lives. The males may fight and strut and spread their plumes in the mating season, but they don't go through a course of training with that idea in mind. The enticing quality of the female is her retiring modesty."

"Well, we are not wild animals," said Elsinore.

"Not always, fortunately. The female of our species is sometimes bigger and stronger and more beautiful than the male with whom she mates. But somehow that arrangement does not seem very satisfactory to her. It's one that is found invariably in the world of insects, commonly known as bugs."

"Then I'll be a bug," said Elsinore, "—by preference a queen bee. And since you admire the social arrangements of wild animals so much, you might be a modest doe, one of the harem of the antlered monarch of the waste."

Dare smiled at the quick way in which Elsinore had riposted her comparative natural history. "Well, I would rather be

one of several belonging to the strongest than the only mate of a weakling."

"I believe you would," said Elsinore. "But that's where physical culture comes in. You might put him through a course, so that a little later he would be king of the herd himself."

"Where would that get me?" Dare asked. "Why take the trouble? Anyhow, I shouldn't care to be a silly deer. Why not be the only mate of the strongest? I'd rather be an eagle."

SHE spoke unthinkingly; but Elsinore, still smarting from her wrongs, was too quick to let such a chance get by. "A sea eagle?" she asked innocently.

Dare knew that she had got the worst of it. Here was a new experience, the second in that day. About two hours earlier she had for the first time in her life found herself seriously disturbed by her discovery of the doll. She had been thinking about this all the way home, and wondering why this should have roused her to such a pitch. What could it possibly matter to her if she had even heard a live baby toddling about overhead? Why should the private life of a comparative stranger concern her?

The answer to these questions was not forthcoming, though Dare would have faced it honestly enough. She was convinced that she had no strong personal interest in Perry Bridges. His conquest of her father had not included herself. Dare still felt Perry to be a wholly unknown quantity. She had made no effort to assay his actual worth. While ready to admit that he had unusual magnetism, she could not be sure whether their poles attracted or repelled. She had felt a certain fascination in him the night he brought her home, but fascination was not enough for Dare. Other people had exerted it at certain times, yet left her cold. A young man named Arthur Dower had done so, and might even do so again. But it would not have upset her in the least to have stumbled on anything concerning Arthur Dower. On the contrary, Dare thought it probable that there might be a good deal about this suitor that she would rather not learn.

And here she was now beginning to blush like a schoolgirl at Elsinore's chance shot, to which she had exposed herself in such a silly way. But Dare was a good loser, and so she merely gave a short laugh and said: *"Touché,* my dear. It will be some time before I get over feeling like a fool when I think of how I paddled up to that falcon's eyrie in my syncopated swimming-suit. And I suppose it will be some time before I hear the last of it from you."

Elsinore shook her head. "No fear. I only wish it had been me. I'd have got some sort of an adventure out of it."

"And you as good as engaged!" said Dare.

"That contract is very far from being sealed, signed and delivered. Besides, with marriage scarcely considered binding any more, what does a mere engagement rate? I'll have to look over this fish-hawk, since you don't seem to take much interest in him."

"Help yourself," Dare answered. "He's a semitropical bird and might have a taste for red flapper like you. I'm going to take a dip. Want to come?"

"No, thanks. Had mine while you were studying the habits of the Alpaca. That was a rotten trick that you and Papa played me, but I'll get even. You'll see."

CHAPTER IV

A CERTAIN Mr. Arthur Dower, author and clubman, was a popular writer who by his own admission had failed at everything he undertook until at the age of thirty he discovered accidentally that he was a natural-born narrator, in print as well as orally.

His peculiar education had made an excellent preparation for literary effort. Left an orphan at the age of twelve, his upbringing had been undertaken by the young widow of his father's brother, an aunt of restless habit, with a fondness for living in different foreign countries a year or two at a time. She had been left a sufficient fortune to gratify this craving for new environments, and as a result of it Arthur had enjoyed advantages of the best schools in Switzerland, Italy and Austria, and at the age of eighteen spoke colloquial French, Italian and German with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. He also sketched and painted rather well, and was rather a showy if not very sound performer on the piano and violin.

Arthur's aunt, Mrs. Van Dieman, was twenty years his senior, of an old New York family that had gradually ceased to exist without leaving any monuments, and

she seemed to be perpetually seeking the fountain of youth in fresh interests and enthusiasms that lasted only for the season. There was nothing perennial about her. She required to be planted each year and in different soil to bloom anew. Having fortunately discovered this vital necessity, she took care to be thus gardened, and as a result found herself still decorative at fifty-four.

Returning with his aunt to America after the war, Arthur renewed his slight acquaintance with New York, which he viewed from a very interested and interesting European angle. As a result he saw a good many things scarcely noted by American writers more or less familiar with the metropolis. His aunt and he occupied the old but pretty house on Gramercy Park left to Mrs. Van Dieman and Arthur's mother by their father. They went out a good deal, and also entertained. Arthur met the Colfaxes the first winter, at their home in Washington, and fell in love with Dare. She visited frequently in New York, on two occasions for ten days at his aunt's, Mrs. Van Dieman having been an old friend and schoolmate of Mrs. Colfax's elder sister.

All this time Arthur was trying in vain to learn and interest himself in the stock-broking business, under the friendly patronage of Mrs. Van Dieman's financial advisor. It took Arthur about six months (and the rest of the office about six days) to discover that he had better admit another failure before the firm was compelled to do so. Then, quite by accident, he found that he could write fiction, and write it extremely well.

AT the time that Dare had decided to accept Arthur Dower as an intimate friend, he was thirty-four. As a writer of popular fiction he had arrived. The year before this, his aunt had decided to go to Buenos Aires for the winter. She had not urged Arthur to accompany her. His affairs required that he remain in New York, and besides, Mrs. Van Dieman had for some months been sadly conscious of his alienation from her. She had reason to believe that New York had demoralized his morale, not superficially, but at the heart of him. She felt that just now any effort on her part to keep him closely to herself and shield him from insidious dangers as she had done through boyhood and early youth would be regarded by Arthur as a flare-up of doting age, and Mrs. Van Dieman could not envisage this. She had a greater dread of being impeached with age than she had of death.

Besides, this new danger that she feared for Arthur was of a sort that she did not know how to combat. She had nothing with which to neutralize it, no fire with which to fight the fire of what she feared might become a low, creeping flame that would burn out the core of him before any smoke became perceptible, like a spontaneous combustion in the hold of a ship at sea with hatches battened down, so that a rich cargo may be destroyed and the hold itself gutted before there is any warning of the menace.

As may be guessed, the scaly monster of Mrs. Van Dieman's fears was a drug—morphine or heroin or cocaine. She could not be sure, because there were no positive signs for even as observant an eye as hers to read—no contraction of the pupils nor irrational speech and conduct, nor catarrhal irritation of the nose nor any other symptoms particularly significant. But such were not to be expected in Arthur's case. She knew that he would approach and conduct any new and potent experience tentatively, and pause to study its complete effects before proceeding further.

Realizing all of this, Mrs. Van Dieman did not make a fuss. She went to South America. The world-wise lady accepted with her usual charming grace the fact that her regency of Arthur had expired, and so she quietly abdicated to hunt up a new fountain of youth, taking with her the maid that she had kept with her for years, and leaving Arthur his Italian manservant. On the eve of her departure, Arthur was seized by the strong and perfectly sane impulse to go with her, and let his affairs run themselves automatically. But he seldom obeyed impulses, and in the period of pause that followed this one, he reflected that the voyage was pretty certain to be fraught with nervous discomfort unless he could get in immediate touch with a young woman who called herself Helen Chomondeley, or her husband one Señor Ramonez, of Havana. Arthur had dealt with them both for over a year and found them fairly reliable. But on this critical occasion he could not locate either, and so decided not to go to Buenos Aires with his aunt. Perhaps Mrs. Van Dieman may have been just as well pleased. She and Arthur's quests were now so dif-

ferent as to be in danger of conflicting: hers for the fountain of perpetual youth, sweet little springs that gushed up in new places, their flow no more than enough to reward the seeker; his, a Stygian river enshrouded in a glamour to be mistaken for the Lethe, and the Hades that flanked it for the Elysian Fields. Mrs. Van Dieman was geographer enough to see how their antipodeal research was bound to hamper them, as if a mountain climber and a deep-sea dredger were to pool their resources for scientific exploration, one to mount the heights of Everest or Kichinjunga and the other to scrape the ooze and slime of ocean depths. Better to go about it each one on his own.

Arthur experienced a sense of relief after his aunt had sailed. She had begun to encumber him a little. It seemed to him that in the matter of age he had already overhauled her twenty years' start, and that she was in danger of dragging on him. He was sincerely grateful for all that she had given him, and his superior intelligence was able to appreciate the value of it. He was even more grateful to her for having made no reference at all, even with invisible barriers down at the moment of parting, to what his instinct told him she must have discovered. This was in the nature of a high tribute to his manliness—as if she had said: "You know yourself better than I or anybody else can ever know you; so spread your wings and fly in the fashion that seems best to you."

CHAPTER V

ARTHUR was delighted to get Dare's invitation for ten days at White Island —so named, perhaps, after a member of the White family, but possibly also because of a rim of white quartz rock that edged it on its seaward side.

It was also a compliment to be asked to visit the Colfax family, one very discriminating in its choice of guests. But most of all, Arthur hoped that it indicated a very considerable interest in himself on Dare's part. He was not any more in love with Dare than any young man could be who had taken postgraduate courses in a sentimental education, and fell in love anew with each of his fresh heroines of fiction. But he wanted to marry her, for a number of reasons.

He would have been very much astonished if he could have known that his invitation was that he might serve as foil for another man, also a pretext for seeing that one oftener. Dare had overestimated the acquaintanceship and mutual liking of Arthur and Perry.

Meantime a crisis occurred. It broke on Dare from Thunder Point and out of a clear sky. Mr. Colfax had asked Perry Bridges to call at the island, but had not mentioned any date. Dare found herself alone when he came, the others having gone off for the day aboard the yacht, which sort of family expedition Dare was apt to find tedious. They were all right for the indolent Mrs. Colfax and the equally reposeful Randon, while Elsinore liked to practice her navigation; but Dare grew restive.

About the middle of the afternoon she took her color-box and went across the island to sketch a bit of shore, one of several studies she had promised for raffling at the church fair. They were of good technic, simple, bright and altogether charming. Dare had worked for about half an hour when her attention was diverted by the clamor of some fish-crows disturbed in their peculiar habit of eating crabs and sea-urchins in the treetops and dropping down the carapaces to strew the ground.

Dare glanced back over her shoulder and saw Perry Bridges walking toward her under the pines. She had been thinking of him so constantly that it seemed now as if he had suddenly crystallized from the supersaturation of her mind by his personality. She was surprised that he should have come, and although ardently desiring to see him, not altogether pleased. His presence there was out of key with Dare's mental portrait of him. She had not thought that her father's affable but vague, "Do run over and see us," would be enough for Perry Bridges. There must be a definite invitation for a fixed date, Dare had believed, and that even then her own indorsement would be required.

IF Perry had shown at that moment the least embarrassment or accent of apology or defensiveness, his hold of Dare would have pulled out like a lubber-knot. But he did nothing of the sort. He bowed and said pleasantly but briefly: "Good afternoon, Miss Colfax. I'm very sorry to miss your father, but perhaps you will be kind enough to explain my errand to him. I've

got to sail away south as soon as I can get my little boat ready for sea."

Dare had a sinking feeling. She laid down her brush, slowly and carefully, as if it had been fragile, and looked up at Perry with questioning eyes. She had acknowledged his bow without rising from her folding stool, and now she felt too inert to rise from it. He stood with his brown-backed hands in the side pockets of his coat, staring down at her thoughtfully.

"You see, I'm bothered about my alpacas. It seemed hardly worth while to go to the trouble and expense of their winter quarters and forage until they were safely landed. There's plenty of time, but now I find that I've got to leave."

"For how long?" Dare asked in a dull voice.

"I don't know. The chances are I sha'n't get back before next May. There couldn't be a better man than Fosset to look after the beasts, but that's as far as he reaches. Your father appeared to take so much interest in the experiment that it has occurred to me to make him a business proposition." He smiled.

Dare motioned to a big flat boulder opposite. "Sit down and tell me about it."

"Thanks." Perry perched himself on the stone, looking rather like a white sea-eagle, Dare thought. His intent eyes were very clear, and the darkness of their setting under straight black eyebrows and even blacker lashes made them appear lighter than their actual shade of gray. But this and the piercing quality of their gaze was not annoying, nor of the sort to provoke defensiveness, because neither challenging nor inquisitive.

"Mr. Colfax seemed so keen about alpacas I thought he might like to have some of his own," Perry said.

"I'm sure he would," Dare answered. "What must he do to earn them?"

"Just supervise the present herd a little. He told me that you expect to stay on here until early in October. I've drawn some plans for the stables, and figured on the winter's forage, and I'd leave an amount of money in the bank to pay for everything. If your father wants to take an active interest in the scheme, I'd ask him to see that the work is properly carried out. His gratuity would be in alpacas." Perry smiled.

"How about the winter?" Dare asked.

"Mr. Colfax mentioned having a reliable caretaker who came off here from time to time throughout the winter to see that everything was shipshape, and I thought he might detail him to make rounds on Thunder Point and do the same. Just see that Fosset is still alive and on the job, and how the beasts are thriving, and report to Mr. Colfax. You see, I inherited some of my Uncle Benny's unpopularity with other legacies, and aside from that, I'd be too remote to get any reports, or take any action on them. Fosset might get sick or something, and necessitate the finding of somebody to replace him. Besides, I'd like to have Mr. Colfax for a business partner."

"Why Father, particularly?" Dare asked.

"Well, for one thing because of his interest in the project, and his confidence in its success. If the latter is justified, and your father feels like tackling it, you might have a little bunch of baby alpacas browsing around here next summer. I thought I'd offer Mr. Colfax every third lamb."

"That seems liberal enough," said Dare, "considering the fact that it doesn't cost him anything."

"He might consider it a cost of time and trouble," Perry said. "It would save me that, and ease my mind about leaving these valuable animals entirely to the care of Fosset and somebody who might or might not take any particular interest in them."

DARE nodded. For her part, there was nothing at that moment in which she felt less particular interest than alpacas. She hated the beasts, and Perry Bridges, who seemed to possess their haughty superciliousness. She was again conscious of having made a fool of herself, to herself, as she had about the doll. Here she had been resenting his unexpected call as disappointing in her conception of his pride, only to have him tell her calmly that he was about to sail away south and desired to ask her father would he kindly ride herd on the silly animals!

Also, Dare was furious with herself for the pang caused by the news of his being about to leave. It was worse than a pang, because it left her with such a bitter emptiness. It was as if Perry had assumed some vital responsibility and then coolly disregarded it. The fact that he had not been made aware of any such responsibility did not help the matter. It made it worse, because there was no just blame that Dare could attach to him. That always makes it harder for the injured party, especially if that one be a woman.

Dare's habitual fair-mindedness came near deserting her. There seemed to be about Perry some fiendish faculty for making her absurd, for belittling her dignity. He had half carried her down the terrace steps in her swimming-suit, landed her at home clad in perhaps the very suit of white flannels that he now wore, as it had been laundered and returned. Dare knew that she would have not burdened herself with the entertainment of Arthur Dower if it had not offered the chance of seeing Perry Bridges oftener.

And here now was the man who had shattered her repose and abolished her conventions of mind by no more than the look and sound and touch of him, calmly telling her that he was about to leave for a long indefinite period, and would her father kindly act as guardian of his pestiferous alpacas! A sort of hopeless gust of outraged self-respect shook Dare, but she managed to contain it. She felt as if she had been betrayed and then abandoned; but as often happens in such cases, a profound sore-heartedness numbed her power to express herself. She could only say:

"I should think if you are in such a desperate hurry to get down there, wherever you are going, you would take a steamer instead of making such a long voyage in so small a boat."

"I'll need the boat when I get down there," Perry answered. "Besides, the difference in time might actually be in my favor. There's no ship for ten days, and by then I ought to be halfway there."

"When did you come to this sudden decision?" Dare asked.

"This morning. But I had already thought about making this proposal to Mr. Colfax. Do you think he is really interested enough in the alpacas?"

"Oh, bother the alpacas!" Dare's patience slipped a cog or two, but she got in gear again. "Father will jump at the chance, of course. He spends most of his spare time looking for something new to play with. I can already hear him dilating to his friends on '*our* interesting experiment in the culture of the alpaca—a variety of llama, y'know.' If you stay away very long, it's apt to be 'my' interesting experiment. He's a great appropriator, Papa."

PERRY smiled. "He's welcome to it. But why 'Bother the alpacas'? Do you think they are apt to be too much of a bother to your father?"

"Oh, no." Dare was cleansing her pretty fingers with a paint-rag and turpentine. "He might better be messing round them than inventing dangerous fool-killers or fretting over patent-infringement suits. I'm disappointed at your bolting off this way. It's sometimes rather dull out here, and I thought we might count on seeing a little of you, now that you and Papa seem to have established friendly relations. I've even gone so far as to invite a friend and admirer of yours for ten days here."

Perry shot her an incredulous look. "That's more than kind of you. But I didn't know that there was any such person, least of all in your acquaintanceship."

"There's probably a good deal about yourself that you don't know," Dare retorted, "and a lot more about me. It might surprise you to learn that I stalled Papa's visit for twenty-four hours to give you time to put your house in order. I like to pay my debts."

"There was no debt about my little service, unless on my side," Perry said quickly. "And I think I told you enough about myself for you to understand that it would be better if you were not to include me in your list of friends."

"Well, you didn't, then. But you did tell me"— Dare's black lashes swept slowly up, and her eyes looked intently into his, "that I was to consider you my knight errant, and that if ever I had need of you, I had only to send for you. It happens that I have need of you now, or may have within the next ten days."

A thin, vertical line drew itself between Perry's straight black eyebrows. "I believe I said a *real* need. Trying to relieve your dullness from time to time would scarcely be that. Besides, I don't believe you ever actually feel it. You've got too much resource of mind—like that—" he nodded at the color-box of which Dare had closed the lid that held the panel study in its clips.

"How do you know what I feel," she demanded, "or how real a need I may be in? I'm afraid you're given to romantic posing. Young men of solitary habits are apt to be. They would rather dream of chivalric service to a make-believe girl than render a useful but unexciting sort to a live one."

"What sort do you require?" Perry asked directly.

Dare raised her shoulders, prettily incased in a fine white woolen jersey. "Why

bother to tell you about it, since you are getting ready to sail away?"

"Because," said Perry slowly, "if it is actually important, I shall not sail away."

Dare felt a flutter at her heart. Her quick wit seized on a pretext that would still be the truth, one that would be in the nature of a test of Perry's sincerity. The temptation was too great to be resisted.

"Well, then, since what I just said wasn't fair, I'll tell you, Perry Bridges. The man whom I've invited here wants me to marry him. When he asked me in the spring, I couldn't think of marrying at all, though more attracted to him than I had ever been to any other man. I put him off, and we remained good pals, and now I've asked him up. I wanted to compare him with such a character as yours, and—to see you two together."

"Why?" Perry asked. His face had set a little and his eyes looked bright and hard.

"Because my focus on him was confused. You two are such distinctly different types that I thought it might clear the picture to see you side by side. He is a close-range person, and you are the reverse. He is a studio and lounge and salon man, and you are a man of the sea. But you are both interesting, and know how to express yourselves, he in pleasing if sometimes exotic colors and you in raw, crude contrasts that are intended to clash, like the studied discords of barbaric music."

DARE paused, disturbed by the gleam in Perry's eyes. He nodded. "I understand. You want to use me as a sort of measuring-rod for Arthur Dower."

"Yes."

"Hadn't you better measure him by somebody built on his own scale?"

"I have, and his dimensions stand the test. They seem more preferable, because whatever he may or may not be, Arthur is at all times interesting and never tiresome."

The gray gleam in Perry's eyes flickered to one of amusement. "He doesn't talk about alpacas."

"Not to me. I am apt to be the center of attention. That would make it rather dangerous for a period of ten days, with no other man to stand him up against. Even last spring I might have agreed to marry Arthur Dower, if I had been able to accept the idea of matrimony at all."

"Then," said Perry, "your present need of me is not only as a measuring-rod but possibly an acid reagent to neutralize him."

"Call it that. Don't you think it a real need?"

A swarthy flush swept over Perry's aquiline features. "I do indeed."

Dare leaned forward a little toward him as he sat on the edge of the quartz boulder "Would such a service conflict with your friendship for Arthur?"

"No. I can't claim any such tie with him. It wouldn't make the slightest difference if I did. I'll stay, of course, and you can make any use of me you like."

Dare felt as if the exultant throb of her heart would smother her. She had never looked for any such degree of chivalry as this. A delicate color spread over her face, and her eyes were misty as she asked: "Would such a service cost you very much?"

Perry made a gesture of impatience. "There's no such thing as cost where anything that touches your welfare is concerned." His voice was husky, although the following words were bold. "I was leaving for no other reason than on your account—because I thought it would be for your best good."

"But why?" Dare cried.

"I might as well tell you," Perry said, "so that you can decide for yourself whether I can serve you better by going or staying. It is perfectly impossible for me to deny that some sort of bond exists between us. I have felt myself being drawn to you, by you, just as strongly as I have felt myself drawing you to me. It's not vanity or conceit that makes me tell you this, but conviction. We two are hauling in on each other, like terrestrial bodies caught in each other's force of attraction and torn from their orbits."

"Why are you so sure?" Dare asked breathlessly.

"Instinct backed by observation. I felt the tug of you from the very first moment we met—perhaps sooner. It may have dragged me out of the tower, away from that gang. I had never before felt such an overwhelming disgust and imperative need to tear away, though I've been present at just as bad, and worse. Then, when I found you there against the wall, something blowed up inside me—as if I'd some one infinitely dear to me and not merely a young girl in distress. I had that feeling all the way out. And since then it's been getting stronger every moment. I've had to fight against rushing out here to you, as if you needed me, which every sensible

reason would or ought to have told me you certainly did not."

"And so at last you came—" Dare murmured.

"Yes, I managed to fool myself into believing that this errand was a perfectly rational one. Perhaps it is—but there was more. You needed me. Or at least you thought you needed me. What do you think about it now?"

"I think so still," said Dare. "I've felt the tug, too, and wondered about it, because I'm not at all ready to admit that I've fallen in love with you, Perry Bridges. It must be something else—I don't know what. Strong animal magnetism between two rather concentrated natures that have been self-contained, and mine let out by the shock of my first contact with you. I haven't been myself since that night."

"It was more than enough to dismast you and smash your steering-gear," Perry agreed, "and of course all idea of your having fallen in love with me is absurd. I'm not the sort of man you could fall in love with."

"Well, what is it, then?" Dare demanded. "It's not because I'm sorry for you, as you are about the last man in the world I could possibly feel pity for. Your lonely life is entirely of your own choosing, and no doubt it suits you best. I think you mighty lucky to have been left the means to gratify it in so comfortable a way, what with your yacht and Thunder Point and McIntyre and Fosset and the alpacas and everything." She looked at him with a sort of perplexed despair. "I don't see why I should be grabbed by the hair and hauled into your self-sufficient scheme of things."

PERRY rose with another of his quick, impatient gestures, a little downward thrust of both hands. "I'll tell you why. It's all my fault. You've been the victim of my overwhelming want of you. It's carried across this short stretch of sea to overcharge you and come back to me as if you had sent it of your own accord. That was what I've felt to be your tug—merely my own. As if I'd reeved a line through the sheave in the topmast truck and made the running end fast to myself and then hauled in."

"Don't be so nautical," Dare protested. "You mean that I've been no more than a pulley?"

"No. The topmast truck, high above me in the free air, and firmly fixed there. But you have felt the strain. You represent the perfect type of womanhood I've longed for all my life, and saved myself for. When you came swimming into it, I recognized you, and my ideal became the real. I couldn't help it. Here was a dream come true, so far as its object was concerned. I could never have believed that there really lived such a girl as you, one so fearless and strong and lovely, and whose nature burned in such a pure and clear and steady flame." He flung out his hands with a helpless gesture. "I couldn't help it. And besides, it was all good. Some of the splendors that rush into a man's heart are stronger than he is—like the divine impulse that suddenly turns a hardened criminal into an evangelist, or the inspiration of self-sacrifice that makes a hero of a coward in a moment of crisis."

DARE, nearly overcome by the flood of this passionate declaration, still kept her head sufficiently to ask: "But Perry, why should I be swept away by it?"

"You don't need to ask me that," Perry answered more calmly. "You have already been touched by it. I have become a disturbing element in your life. Men like myself who live a great deal alone and face to face with elemental things and try always to be true to their ideals, can't help but fund back a good deal of some sort of force. If for some reason, and whether for good or evil, it gets away from them, it's very apt to overwhelm its object and then come back to them by repercussion. That's what I'm afraid has happened here. I've been loving you so hard that it has overflowed you, and the echo of it made me think that you were calling me."

Dare smiled a little to herself. "Perry Bridges, you are the very first man who ever felt that way for me and who did not seem to think that if I were not calling, then at least I ought to be. I never called before, but I have called to you and wanted you. Perhaps I started it. Why should you think that it was all Perry, and none of it Dare? Do you think I'm such a supine creature that I need to be galvanized into loving? Can't I do it of myself—at least my share of it? Are you the only one who has been true to ideals and stored up strength for loving? You are very modest in some respects, my dear, and in others you are most tremendously conceited." She rose and stood facing him, eyes glistening. "I think I'm ready to ad-

mit that I'm in love with you, Perry. So let's not have any more nonsense about tidal waves and repercussion and the overwhelming of my poor little unfledged will. It's grown its wings." She held out tempting arms.

So here was the situation wrenched from Perry's grasp. Most men might not look at it precisely in this way, nor perhaps for the moment did he. But there could be no more talk of noble renunciation in the face of such generous gifts. There is no record in mythology of a refusal to accept the kiss offered by the Dryad to the lucky fellow who unlocks her tree, with the wish that goes with it; but the chances are that such churlish ingratitude would result most properly in the ingrate's being blighted on the spot, no matter how worthy his motive for such abnegation.

Perry was not struck down by any bolt from the blue. There were a number of statements and some few confessions that he had desired to make, but his lips were busy with better things, and his arms no longer free to gesture. He found himself murmuring endearments that he had always previously supposed were used only by fools and fiction-writers, and their echoes were whispered back in synonyms.

PRESENTLY Dare freed herself, and sitting on the flat rock, drew Perry down beside her. This falcon seemed a little dazed after his high flight, though content enough to come to rest beside the lure.

Dare laughed softly and happily and laid her hand in his. "You've said quite a lot about how much you love me, Perry dear. But haven't you forgotten something?"

"Oh, you darling girl," Perry sighed, "I forgot everything when you held out your arms. What particular detail have you in mind?"

"I can't seem to remember your having asked me to marry you."

"There's an awful lot I've got to tell you, first," he sighed again.

Dare's smile faded. "Could it prevent?"

"Not as matters now stand. Never, if you have faith in me."

"Then let it wait, dear. I don't care if I never know. I believe in you, Perry darling. I could never have loved you so if you were not what I know you are, a chivalrous and gallant gentleman, quaint but sweet. I want to marry you at once, Perry. I don't want to wait to hear unpleasant things, or for them to happen."

"But your family, sweetheart."

"We shouldn't have to worry about the family if we were to get married first and ask for their approval afterward. Mamma is so lazy that it would relieve her infinitely to be saved all the fuss and bother. Papa would get off some sophistry about Youth having to whirl upon the Lathe of Time with edged tools variously applied until rounded into their appointed forms by the Hand of Destiny. He likes you, now, and would no doubt keep on liking you. Randon has Mamma's passion for being undisturbed; and Elsinore would be enchanted at my tumble from the serene heights of self-sufficient spinsterhood. And for my part, I've always held that the conventional wedding was a barbaric and indecent custom, with its parade and the smirks and smiles. . . . . Oh, horrors!" Dare laughed, but her cheeks were aflame. "Once a man and woman know their hearts, there ought to be no cold-blooded interval of publicity. I've always said that if ever I got married, nobody would know about it until I introduced my husband."

Perry nodded. "It's the only self-respecting way. The usual one is shameless, as you say. But there's another aspect to sneaking off and marrying a girl whom you have just met. That looks too much like undue influence or mesmerism or taking advantage of a moment of folly."

"Well, let it," Dare retorted. "But it looks more like the real thing, to me—That is, if you have the general reputation of being nobody's fool, and all the people of my acquaintance grant me that."

Perry took her in his arms again. "You shine more brightly every moment, you star-girl. But I'm not going to let your light be dimmed by any black cloud of malice. Besides, I've got to put my house in order, and things to tell you. We shall say nothing about this immediately. I'll give your family the chance to overhaul me, and you can take an observation on me from Dower's angle, instead of his from mine. Then, if you are still sure that it's not the back-fire of what I feel for you—"

"Oh, hush!" She laid her hand across his lips, and had it kissed. "You wakened me from a sleep that was getting tiresome."

"Then, all being shipshape and proper, we can be married as you suggest, with no baboonery, and get aboard the lugger and sail away."

"How heavenly! I love you, Perry!"

"My starry goddess-girl!"

CHAPTER VI

THE pith and pattern of vacation elegance, Mr. Arthur Dower stepped from the gangplank to be greeted in quiet, friendly fashion by Dare. Arthur was stylish, not only in dress but in carriage and physical proportions, these beginning to thicken a little about the legs and shoulders, but still small of waist and of free mobility.

He made a point of systematic athletic exercise whether feeling well or ill, and possessed unusual muscular strength. He could do such feats as tearing packs of cards in two, within the cover, and "chinning" one-armed, and was a good gymnast. When a student he had won prizes as a fencer. Indeed, Arthur, by virtue of his uncommon gifts and accomplishments both mental and physical, might have made some claim to the rank of superman. But he no more thought of himself as such than did his large number of friends and well-wishers so consider him. For one thing, he lacked the dominant force that is the first essential of the superman, the intrinsic masterfulness. Arthur was authoritative, but in the manner of the officer or official who knows himself backed by an organization, military or commercial or political. He could not have put out much compelling power against antagonistic forces from his own individuality alone, but he could do so admirably if well supported.

Arthur was entirely conscious of his limitations and had stopped trying to enfranchise them. He sometimes wondered if he were not a good deal of a bluff, but if so there was the consolation that he was at least a brilliant one. In moments of depression, which were thus far widely spaced and brief, he became the victim of doubts as to how long his success might be hoped to last. He could visualize himself at forty-five, bald, thick-bodied, drained of inspiration, and a talker. He knew his writing to be clever and amusing rather than illuminating, witty and epigrammatic instead of wise, and that his contributions had the faculty of skimming along on the crest of the brimming wave of popular movements and events, and getting their propulsive force from them, like a surf-rider coasting ashore on his plank. There would always be such waves, just as there always have been, but the question was how long he could retain his facility for riding them.

Arthur had therefore wisely decided that he had better get in his harvest, literary, social and commercial (for his aunt would keep on finding fresh fountains of youth, or might at any time remarry) while the season held good. The richest part of this crop must be a wife, and Dare Colfax was the only girl or woman that Arthur had ever greatly desired to marry. Here now was his chance, almost too good to be true. Dare probably getting bored on a lonely if charming sea-island, her indolent mother reading French novels on a chaise-longue, her father buzzing round his workshop like a blue-ended fly, one sister absorbed in beauty and the other in physical culture, and the only limits to Arthur's game the blue sky and the wide horizon, this latter swept clean (so far as Arthur knew) of marauding pirates and buccaneers.

The time for action had come. The seed had been planted, and Arthur hoped that it had by this time grown and burgeoned, and would be ready for the scythe. At sight of Dare's delicately glowing face, which shone out from those on the end of the wharf like an eglantine rose, he could not help but feel that this perennial phenomenon of nature had really happened.

HE felt even more assured of this on her demurely cordial greeting, and the faint flush that accompanied the welcome. For Dare's whimsical sense of humor was stirring her with soft inward mirth. She knew precisely how Arthur would have read her invitation and just what the nature of his amiable intention toward her must be. His expression could not help but show it a little. Dare's provocative type of loveliness was more seductive than he had ever seen it, and more ripened, as if like a peach that has had a satiety of sun kisses, it needed but the touch of a caressing hand to relinquish the bough.

"You don't look one bit the island-imprisoned princess I'd expected to find," Arthur said as they started to walk down to the launch; and his French training asserting itself he asked: "How are Mr. and Mrs. Colfax, and Miss Randon and Miss Elsinore Colfax?"

"All nicely Colfaxing, as usual, thank you," Dare answered. She glanced at the case he carried. "I'm so glad you brought your violin."

"I'd have brought a harp and bass viol and pipe organ if I owned them and thought that it would enable me to make any slight

return for the delight I feel at your kindness in asking me to come. I'm ready to do every parlor trick I know, and bark and run into the water after sticks. If you had any children out there, I'd swing them by the hour. In a word, I am from this moment your slave. Command me, please."

"Mamma always said your aunt had brought you up very nicely. All you have to do is get an appetite and a tan. It's about all there is to do."

Arthur glanced at her exquisitely tinted profile. "You don't seem to have managed the tan yourself. When the steamer was still some distance off, your face shone out in the midst of those others like a single wild rose in a pale green vase entirely surrounded by pumpkin pies."

"Thank you, for all of us. We also discovered you. One boy said: 'Gee, here comes the Count o' Monte Cristo.' I hope you brought some warm old clothes."

"A sweater will keep me warm, and under the proper treatment clothes age quickly, like moonshine whisky. I follow my dear aunt's policy and never keep old clothes. The inspiration is worn out of them, and in contact with one's person they induce depression and fatigue. They are also apt to be reminiscent of past failure; and if not, they suggest present failure, because no longer new. These are Auntie's maxims, but not copyrighted."

"Sometimes it's rather pleasant to feel old," Dare said.

"Only when you are young. Then it gives a gratifying sense of wisdom and responsibility, like a little girl putting her doll to bed."

Dare's eyes went involuntarily to Thunder Point, far out beyond the mouth of the bay. With the thrill that went through her at every sight of it, there bubbled up also a deep little well of laughter, happy laughter at thought of the bad fifteen seconds that doll over there in the Tower had given her. Most of the fog of mystery that had seemed to envelop Perry would be like that, she thought—his source of revenue, about which there was local gossip and dark hints of secret goings-out and comings-in. Dare was also mildly amused at Arthur's rather ridiculous position, coming there to conquer what had been already won. She was fond of Arthur and would have been very sorry to give him pain, but she did not think that this would be severe. His interests were too diverse and his philosophy too smiling.

TIM, having stowed the luggage, cast off, started the motor and took his post respectfully out of earshot in the stern, Dare at the steering-wheel well forward, and Arthur in a wicker chair at her shoulder. It was a mild gray day with a faint southeasterly breeze that threatened fog.

"Where's the enchanted island?" Arthur asked.

"That blue smudge ahead—the fog is sneaking in around it." She glanced at the compass.

"Can you always hit it on the nose in thick weather?"

"Oh, yes! This boat runs in a groove, and we've learned what to allow one way or the other for the tide—usually about half a point. Then there's a light and a siren on that island to the eastward, and a bell-buoy off the west end of ours. Over there is Thunder Point, where your friend Perry Bridges lives."

"Oh, yes." Arthur's tone struck Dare as a little flat. He seemed to hesitate a moment before asking: "Haven't met him, have you?"

"Why, yes," Dare answered, smiling. "I had a spill experimenting with a crazy surface hydroplane Papa claims to have invented, and Perry Bridges picked me up and brought me home. But don't say anything about it. Papa doesn't care to have it known."

"On your account?"

"More on his own, I should say. He called the thing 'the Fool-killer,' and it came near proving its title. Flew all to pieces. But Papa is quite keen about Perry Bridges. We called to thank him for my rescue and found that he had just unloaded a herd of alpacas from South America. He is going to try to breed them for their wool."

"That sounds like Perry. What did you think of him?"

"He appeared to be intelligent and well-bred, and entirely self-sufficient."

"He is all of the first and last, but I'd skim lightly over the second."

"Why?" Dare asked.

"Well, he is one of society's Tomlinsons. Not of the upper class, and in personality and point of view above the middle. There's nothing common, or even commonplace about him; but on the other hand you couldn't call him an aristocrat, like your father."

"I'm not so sure," said Dare. "He owns and lives on the land that was bought and

cleared by his great-great-grandfather, Captain Peregrine Bridges. He seems to be well-educated, and a thinker. Just what do you mean by 'well-bred,' Arthur?"

"It's a good deal a matter of friends and associates and habits and tastes and what is generally known as 'culture.' Then, the last preceding generation counts for a good deal, too. Of course, you might have a lapse in a line of good stock, but the longer it lasts, the longer it would take to get back. I don't think that I'm knocking him, Dare, when I say that I don't think he's at all in your class, or the sort of person you would accept on an equal social footing."

"That's unfortunate," said Dare, "because Papa seems to have done so already. He felt the way you do until they met. Now he says that Perry Bridges strikes him as a 'gentleman of the old school' and 'clean as a hound's tooth,' and all that sort of thing. But that's apt to be the way with Papa."

ARTHUR turned to her a clouded face. His buoyancy at their meeting appeared to have collapsed. "No doubt your father is right. I don't believe that Bridges has any vices at all—merely a passion for hard adventure and a taste for tough society. That's apt to queer a man, socially. And there's a sort of old-time chivalry and dash about him. He can be as sanguinary as a game-rooster when—" He checked himself.

"When?" Dare questioned.

"Oh, when he's up against something offensive to him."

"Have you ever seen him so placed?"

"Yes, once." Arthur spoke reluctantly. "I sometimes frequent rough crowds and places, myself. Most writers do, now and then. It looked as if there was going to be an ugly row. Perry was playing a lone hand, and I think everybody felt that it wasn't going to be a mere knock-down and drag-out rough-house. There was death in the air. It didn't come to much, possibly on that account, but it gave me a slant on Perry. I couldn't help but wonder how much of that sort of thing he might have swum through, and what he may have left behind him. All the same, I believe him to be a man of high ideals to which he has been true."

Dare repressed an impulse to lean over and squeeze the back of Arthur's hand. His face had turned a little sallow. The swift launch was lifting and dropping in wide arcs as she rushed to meet a long ground-swell that would not have been felt a great deal by a smaller and slower boat.

"Does the motion upset you, Arthur?" Dare asked.

"I'll admit a slight *malaise*. Never was much of a sailor in spite of all my sea travel."

"Then let's break the run at Thunder Point. It's almost on our course, about halfway. I'm asking Mr. Bridges for luncheon tomorrow, at Papa's request. He wants to talk alpacas. Papa has a mania for experiments, you know, and he wants to get in on this one. We'll stop only for a few minutes, and that will give you a chance to readjust yourself and have a look at the place, and say *bonjour* to your friend Perry."

"Whatever you like, Dare."

"That tragic ruin is worth seeing, if only as an object lesson on the vanity of human hopes. It's only twenty minutes from there to the island, with this boat. . . . . What have you been writing, lately?"

"Not much. The midsummer period of pause. Besides, I'm tired of doing the same old stuff. Once you establish your *genre*, the editors want that from you and nothing else. I wish I had embarked on a deep-sea voyage of current literature, instead of the frothy shoal-water sort. The former is what Perry Bridges ought to do. No doubt he will, some day. He has it in him."

Again Dare felt a warmth for Arthur. "I'm afraid he is more interested in alpacas and fights and navigation. There are lots of things we all might do if we had the tenacity of purpose. I might really paint, but all I've managed this summer is a little church-fair confectionery in aquarelles."

"It seems an odd summering for three modern girls," Arthur observed, and moved restlessly in his chair. "But then, you are modern only in your minds and not in your behavior."

Dare laughed. "We are too keen about keeping our health and looks."

"I don't believe you ever gave a thought to either, Dare. It's simply not in your nature to cheapen yourself."

"Well, why depreciate the value of your best gilt-edged securities?"

"'Gilt-edged' is not the word," said Arthur slowly, but with another uneasy squirm. "You are pure gold—virgin gold.

I often think of individual people in terms of metals, and colors. Just as they appear to many in their paratypes, to coin a word, of lower animals. Gold is your exponent, the metal and its color."

"Thank you," said Dare. "What's yours?"

"Brass. An alloy of zinc and copper, that requires constant polishing to keep from it the greenish tarnish that even now must be forming on my face. Perry Bridges would be steel, and his color the crimson that has so often bathed it."

"You seem to admire him," Dare said.

"More than that, I envy him. But I would rather be myself if somebody could discover the lost art of tempering brass. Even as it stands, brass actually is more lasting than steel, and verdigris a more pleasing color note than iron-rust. Weight for weight, brass also has a much higher intrinsic value."

"What is Elsinore?" Dare asked, amused.

"Gold also, but with an alloy to harden and strengthen her—that ruddy gold. My dear aunt is platinum, practically imperishable and able to withstand high temperatures and become incandescent in them."

"And Papa?"

"Sheffield plate, if you don't mind. But you needn't tell him that I said it. Your highly respected mother is radium, emanating light without the loss of any of her substance. Randon, I don't know well enough to assay."

"If you turn your chair around," said Dare, "you can see the tower and terraces in a minute or two."

"Thanks, but I would rather not move until I can see the green grass under my feet a minute or two later. This boat, like some girls of my acquaintance, is beautiful but too fast, and I do not approve the way she dances."

"I'll slow her down if you like."

"Dear me, no. Speed her up, to the last spud. Put wings on her. Let her fly. Honestly though, Dare, I'm not such a rotten sailor. Just a little brittle from a synthetic party on the boat last night. Ran into a couple of chaps I knew who wanted to get rid of the last of it before greeting their wives."

This was in some measure the fact. Arthur made it a point to tell always at least a part of the truth. But the glass or two of so-called gin taken with a couple of admiring acquaintances was not the root of his disquiet now. Neither were his slight few qualms at the motion of the boat. Dare's calling his attention to Thunder Point and their discussion of Perry Bridges had first stirred, then caused to develop rapidly in him, a horrid nervous unrest, and such that only one expedient could solace. He tried at first to fight it down, suddenly alarmed at the violence of the craving, and its imperative call. It had never gripped him like this before, never shown its teeth and growled, hitherto containing its hunger to a plaintive whining.

ARTHUR was frightened. The beast was snarling to be fed, and he had not made provision for its wants. He had counted on the change and the strong sea air and the pleasurable excitement of seeing Dare to rid him temporarily at least of the payment of a tithe that he had deceived himself in thinking was due only when engaged in concentrated mental effort, or to quiet nerves taxed in the pursuit of feverish enjoyments. And here now suddenly it had him in the toils, extorting payment on the rack. A clammy sweat dampened Arthur's forehead and trickled down his body, chilling him in the rush of cold, salt air.

In the panic that seizes such a victim, his first thought is for immediate respite, no matter how obtained or at what cost. After that, he can rationally consider his danger and how best to remove it, in whole or part, temporarily or permanently. The same condition obtains with the alcoholic, but except for extreme cases, the strain is infinitely milder than in the case of the narcotic habitué. Much also depends upon moral resistance, and Arthur's was not of high grade.

Then suddenly in his distress he remembered an unintentional cache he had made not so very long ago, and not so very far away. This would be at the bottom of the V-shaped music-rack beside the organ in the tower on Thunder Point. He had slipped it there while playing some sort of frenzied Hungarian mazurka that horrible night.

Arthur mopped his forehead. "L-let her buzz, Dare!" he muttered. "Unhook the jolly little gas imps and make 'em spin. I can just about hold out."

The second of the three generous installments into which we have divided this powerful and picturesque serial will appear in our forthcoming April issue. Better order a copy from your newsdealer now.

The Case of Mimbres

This fine story takes you out to the barren, sun-scorched mountains of the Arizona-New-Mexico border—and back to a day when men administered justice promptly and picturesquely.

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

OLD Beaver Smith, the justice of the peace of Paradise, was holding court. Behind his chair, on the store's dingy wall, hung the certificate of his appointment. Before him on the counter lay a yellow volume of the Arizona statutes. Tinkham, the constable, sat conveniently between the whisky-barrel and the counter's end. Thus every morning at the hour of ten, for a month past, these two had assumed their places in the rear of the establishment, which forthwith suspended its functions of supplying the community with every sort of wares from patent medicines to cartridges, and became, for the time being, the law's temple.

Of that serene judicial calm which is the proper attribute of those holding the reins of justice, old Beaver's countenance bore not a trace. An unpleasant light gleamed in his narrowed eyes; his goat's beard stood out at an angle with his chin; at intervals he tugged it savagely. And Tinkham sat bent forward glowering beneath his bushy brows. Confronting court and constable, the town's six leading citizens stood waiting in heavy silence upon the former's word.

The law had come to Paradise; but on this morning, after a month's sojourn, the question was whether or not the law was going to remain.

The justice of the peace ceased tugging at his wisp of whisker and addressed the sextet whom he had summoned here for conference.

"The showdown's come," said he. "What do yo' aim to do?"

They shifted their booted feet uneasily. This experiment with formal rules of action had been rather pleasing as long as things moved smoothly; there was not one of them but had felt a certain enjoyment—which was not unmixed with pride—in watching the application of the Territory's statutes to such cases as had arisen in their midst. But now that complications had developed, they were smitten with a sort of trepidation at the idea of laying their hands on the machinery.

CURT WILCOX was the first to find expression.

"When the Sheriff come over from Tombstone," the cow-man said slowly, pausing between phrases to stroke his drooping mustache, "an' give out the word that this camp had grown too big to run itself, we got yo' to take this job an' promised yo' we'd back yo'r play. We aim to see that this co't gets an even break. But we have got to know the right way to go about it, an' yo'r the man to tell us." He looked around him for assent.

"Curt is right," Bronco Bob Lee asserted with finality. He was the youngest of them all, but the width of his experience, which had included border cattle-raiding, faro-dealing and traffic with Mexican smugglers, before he became part owner of the camp's best-paying mine, gave him high standing. "We are plumb busy these days, making money, every man of us. So none of us is keepin' cases on yo'r justice-co't. Me, I'd like to hear the hull business from the start. All that I know is that this outlaw Mimbres an' his gang has been shootin' up the town ag'in."

"That's all there is to know, I reckon," the outraged court informed him. "An' it ought to be enough fer any man. Here I be, every mo'nin', finin' miners an' Mexicans that has raised too much hell the night before. An' all han's take their medicine without a kick, ontel Mimbres gets the notion of ridin' over to Paradise. Fust time he shows up, the' aint much harm—only a few lights shot out an' busted windows an' the like o' that. But last week he puts a bullet through Lon Jenkins' back-bar mirror an' drills a Mexican between the eyes. So Jenkins comes an' makes a kick—which I don't blame him none, fer them mirrors cost a heap of money. Me, I send out word by Tinkham that sech foolishness has got to stop. Then Mimbres rides into town last night along with Black Jack Davis an' Bill Fallon, an' when he hears my orders, he tears loose an' busts the hull street wide open. What's more, he creases Tinkham, who is tryin' to get action with a sawed-off shotgun."

He paused and clutched his shred of whisker while he spat.

"That brings the showdown. Question is, does this here co't, or Mimbres, run the town of Paradise."

"The way it looks to me," suggested Pony Deal, whose wagon-outfits had been carrying freight into the country since the days when Cochise was on the warpath, "this would be easy. All we got to do is lay fer the gang next time they come along, an' kill 'em."

Old Beaver shook his head.

"That aint the law. The statutes are plain in these here matters. If a man would tell the co't to go to hell over in Tucson like Mimbres has done here, the jedge would show him where to haid in mighty quick."

"Well," Curt Wilcox demanded, "what would the jedge do, Beaver?"

"Make out a warrant," the latter answered briskly, "an' send somebody to fetch the feller in."

The cow-man smiled grimly under his heavy mustache.

"Tinkham aint hurt too bad to ride, I reckon," he drawled. "An' we are here to go along with him. Write yo'r warrant, Beaver."

CONSTABLE TINKHAM straightened in his chair, and for the first time that morning he looked as one who regards life as really worth while.

"How many do yo' want?" Curt asked him.

"Three's enough of us." The constable's voice was soft, with the gentle singing drawl of Texas. "The's only three of them. They've been up Fort Grant way stealing hosses from the reservation; but last night Mimbres give it out that he was aimin' to shove on to La Cañada. Yo' know that kentry, Curt; s'posin' I take Bronco Bob an' yo'."

"Which makes me think," said Bronco Bob Lee: "what is the charge in that there warrant, Beaver?"

The court glanced up over the steel-rimmed spectacles which he always wore while writing or administering justice.

"Disturbin' of the peace," he answered, "—onless Tinkham wants to get action fer that bullet that glanced offen his ribs last night."

The constable shook his head.

"Aint no call to go to law about that," said he. "I'd o' done the same ef I was Mimbres."

"What I was goin' to say," Bronco Bob went on thoughtfully, "—La Cañada's in New Mexico. Aint the' some kink in the law about crossin' the line fer a man?"

"The's sech a thing," the court informed him tartly, "as bein' too damn fussy about

the statutes, Bob. Yo're as bad as that Tombstone lawyer that I had Tinkham throw out of the place fer sassin' me las' week. Now, my instructions is to get this feller Mimbres, no matter if yo' have to foller him to hell."

"Hell or La Cañada," Bronco Bob rejoined serenely, "it's all the same to me, as long as yo' are backin' the play in proper shape."

THE pale, oak-dotted mountains, between whose granite folds the little town of La Cañada lay concealed, were drenched by a downpour of hot sunshine when the three men of Paradise rode down the winding wagon-track which looped its way across the divide. Constable Tinkham was expressing himself concerning the scattered population of the region.

"Sheep-herders an' prospectors," he growled. "Cain't say I think much of 'em. This feller Mimbres 'pears to have 'em all plumb locoed. Jes' speak his name among a bunch, an' they'll quit talkin' like they'd gone dumb."

"La Cañada," Curt Wilcox interrupted, "lays almost under us. We'll see it when we round that next turn. We ort to get some news there. . . . . Now what in hell!" He pulled up his pony, and the others came to a halt beside him.

A rider, coming toward them around the curve, had stopped his horse on getting sight of them. As the cow-man was speaking, he whirled the animal and fled. They looked blankly at one another.

"Beats me," old Tinkham muttered. "Well, le's shove on."

They passed the turn and saw a huddle of one-story buildings in the base of an amphitheater whose opening gave a long view to distant flat lands shimmering in the hot afternoon sunshine, and a range of saw-toothed mountains beyond. They came on down the hill, and the road straightened out between two rows of flat-topped adobes whose vega-poles cast sharp, slanting shadows against the mud-colored walls.

"Nice town," Bronco Bob Lee commented, "but mighty quiet. Puts me in mind of Sunday mo'nin' when I was a kid back in Kentucky."

The rider whose abrupt flight had astonished them was not in sight, nor was any other of the inhabitants. The men of Paradise found themselves flanked by deserted sidewalks; from under the wooden awnings empty windows stared at them as as if they were intruders.

"Reckon the Apaches is out," Curt hazarded. "They're hell in these mountains."

A door banged somewhere ahead of them, and they heard voices in the next cross-street, but when they reached the thoroughfare, it was lifeless.

"There's a saloon," Tinkham announced, and pointed to the opposite corner. "My tongue is hangin' out."

They left their ponies at a hitching-rack before the building. As they entered the establishment, a half-dozen men who were standing at the bar forsook their glasses to depart hurriedly through a side door. The bartender alone remained.

"Yo'r customers," said Bronco Bob, "seems techy. What ails 'em?"

The bartender drew a deep breath, as of relief; then force of habit reasserted itself, and he fell to polishing the counter. He nodded his head to indicate Curt Wilcox.

"It's that long mustache an' the Texas hat he wears. They think he's Mimbres."

"So that's what made the hull town hole up," old Tinkham drawled. "How many is in Mimbres' gang, a regiment?"

"What'll it be?" The bartender shoved forth the whisky-bottle and the glasses before answering the constable's question. While they were drinking, he enlightened them.

"Mimbres," said he, "killed six men back in Texas, an' there's two a-ridin' with him that's jest as tough—Fallon an' Black Jack Davis. When them three come to town, they run the place. An' most folks finds it handy to get out of sight."

"I see," old Tinkham answered dryly. "They're the big he-wolves in these parts. Well, le's have another."

"He-wolves is right," the bartender nodded. "Las' night they stood up the stage from Silver right at the aidge of town. The sheriff has been out all day with ten men after 'em."

"It is," Tinkham told him, "plumb interestin' to listen to you, but we have got to be shovin' on." In the doorway he turned. "Which way did your sheriff ride?"

The bartender pointed down the street in the direction of the long flats which lay far below the town.

"He allus goes that road when he is after Mimbres," said he.

"The sheriff," said Bronco Bob when they had swung into their saddles, "ort to

of stayed to home fer fear them three outlaws might come back an' carry off the hull damn town."

Old Tinkham shook his head.

"Eleven men! They'll shore eat up Mimbres and the other two. Wont be nothin' left fer us to fetch back to Beaver."

"Mebbe," Bronco Bob suggested hopefully, "we'll come up with 'em before the fightin' starts an' get a chance to throw in with the posse. Them outlaws is gen'rally pretty good at hidin' their trail."

"That's what I'm hopin' fer," the constable replied. "Le's make the best time we can, boys."

EVENING was approaching when they reached the flat, and their shadows stretched grotesquely long before them on the white alkali. Out of the blanched expanse, backed by an empurpled range of saw-toothed mountains, they saw a group of horsemen emerging as from beneath the surface of wide waters.

"It's the sheriff all right," Curt Wilcox announced. "I can count eleven of 'em."

"Reckon he's killed 'em this time," Bronco Bob Lee's voice was heavy with disappointment, "or he wouldn't be comin' back so soon."

They halted at the edge of the plain beside a cluster of crosses which marked the graves of Mexican victims of some Apache ambush. Here they awaited the oncoming posse. The New Mexico sheriff was in the lead; and as he drew nearer, the men of Paradise could see his silver star gleaming in the slanting sun-rays. They noticed how his head was bowed as if from weariness; the others followed, straggling in two's and three's, backs bent and shoulders drooping.

"Howdy," old Tinkham bade them. The leader pulled up his pony and barely raised his head to answer the greeting.

"I reckon," the constable went on, "we have come too late fer what we want. We was lookin' fer Mimbres."

"I reckon so." There was no joy in the sheriff's voice. He touched his pony with the spur.

"Yo've killed him, then?" Curt Wilcox asked.

The sheriff shook his head in passing them.

"Done lost their trail?" Bronco Lee called.

The sheriff drew rein.

"The trail," said he, "is plain ef yo're lookin' to foller it." He pointed toward a notch in the mountain-range beyond the flat. "They've rode acrost the pass." He gazed upon them briefly. "I dunno who yo' men be, but I kin tell yo' this. Nobody that wears a star crosses them mountains. That country belongs to Mimbres."

"Hol' on," old Tinkham bade him as he spurred his pony again. "Us three will throw in with yo' ef yo' say the word."

The sheriff laughed unpleasantly.

"Not me," said he. "Them there long flats an' mountain ranges is held down by renegades. The' aint an honest man between here an' the Mexican line, only the stage station-keeper at Ash Springs, an' he puts in a heap of time at mindin' his own business. The outlaws does what man-huntin' is done over there."

"We have," the constable replied, "come a long ways, an' I reckon we may's well ride fu'ther—" But that sheriff did not hear. And the members of the posse did not heed; they were too busy urging their ponies up the trail toward La Cañada.

THE marvelous blue night of New Mexico had soothed the fevered land to grateful coolness and softened every savage outline until the ragged mountains were as purple velvet, and the great alkali flat below lay glimmering like the ghost of a departed lake enshrouded by long mists of shadow. Under the faint light of the stars, the low mud-colored stage-station in the pass had become a mauve blur from whose center, as from the midst of a setting, a small window glowed like an orange jewel.

Within the room a kerosene wall-lamp was sending a thin spiral of ill-smelling smoke to the dingy ceiling-cloth, leaving in one corner a deep pool of shade that drowned the battered little bar, and casting upon the whitewashed wall black silhouettes which wavered to every movement of five players busy at poker around an oil-cloth-covered table. At times a face emerged into the area where the light bathed it; and again the wide-rimmed hats obscured the features of their wearers. Always there were the butts of big revolvers and holsters of burnished leather gleaming somewhere around the table in the lamp's shine.

"Ef the' aint no harm in askin'," Curt Wilcox was saying to the fat station-keeper, "why do yo' call it pain-killer?"

"Three cards fer me," the latter said; and when he had picked them up: "Becuz

yo' don't have to buy revenue stamps fer patent medicine."

"Nothin' like travelin'," Bronco Bob commented genially, "to give a man an edication. I'll take two cards."

"Where be yo' fellers from?" the dealer asked. He was a pockmarked man with a long nose.

"I'm betting ten," old Tinkham interrupted quietly.

"An' ten," the station-keeper chimed in. The pockmarked dealer relapsed to watchful silence, and his question remained in abeyance during two more raises. On displaying a king-high flush at the showdown, Constable Tinkham seized the opportunity to relegate it still farther into the background.

"A dose all round," said he. And when the station-keeper had returned from the bar, with allopathic portions: "Trade good?"

"Sometimes." The station-keeper settled himself into his chair with obese unhurriedness. "An' sometimes only so-so."

"My deal." Bronco Bob picked up the cards. "All sorts of folks passin' through, I reckon?"

"I fed a minister one time," the station-keeper told him. "An' Jesse James played poker at this same table, two year ago on his way back east from California."

"Where did yo' say yo' fellers come from?" the pockmarked man asked.

"Jesse James," the unreconstructed Tinkham cut in, "was a good man. I would of done the same as he done ef I had been in his place. I will play these."

"Which bein' the case, I'll jes' deck my hand," Curt announced. "Good man is right. Yo' don't find none like him around here."

"Oh, I dunno." What with the briskness of the night's trade and the four jacks which had been dealt him, the station-keeper was warming to loquacity. "Mimbres aint so damn slow. An' there was two with him the other night when he stopped off, that would pass as tough in any comp'ny."

"Two cards," the pockmarked man growled. "Mimbres may not be slow, but this game is gettin' to be."

Old Tinkham was stroking his mustache thoughtfully.

"Mimbres, yo' say?" He turned to the station-keeper. "Which way was he headed fer?"

"Me; I will take one card," the station-keeper told Bronco Bob hurriedly. Thenceforth he remained silent. The game went on. During the next hour there was no talk, save those brief remarks which its necessities demanded.

It was getting on toward midnight when the pockmarked man yawned loudly and stretched his arms.

"Reckon I'll cash in," he announced. "I aim to saddle up early. Where be yo' fellers goin' to sleep?"

"We'll make down out there in front of the house," Tinkham replied indifferently.

"That bein' the case, I'll roll up behind the corral." The pockmarked man rose. "I snore. Some folks don't like it." In the doorway he turned. "See yo' at breakfast."

TWO hours later the men of Paradise were unrolling their blankets on the hard earth before the adobe building. Curt Wilcox was swearing softly.

"Pain-killer!" he murmured. "Wow!"

"I have drank as bad," old Tinkham told him, "up Taos way. They make it out of corn which they have raised themselves, an' it is white as snow."

"What I want to know," said Bronco Bob, "is why yo' asked about which way Mimbres was haided? Yo' like to stampeded that there fat man."

"I reckon that aint all I done." Tinkham shook the tarpaulin to smoothness. "Do yo' mind what the sheriff said the other day about the outlaws doin' what man-huntin' was done in this country? Well, I happened to think of that, an' it come to me that the feller who is bein' hunted gets the chance to pick his fightin'-ground. This here strikes me as a right good place."

"Think our pockmarked friend will ride tonight?" Curt Wilcox asked.

"He's rode already, ef I aint mistaken," the constable answered quietly. "Slip over by the corral, Bob, an' see ef you can hear him snoring like he says he does."

"Not a sound," Bronco Bob announced when he had returned, "an' his hoss is gone."

Old Tinkham was settling himself beside the cow-man underneath the blankets.

"Take the first watch," said he, "an' wake me in an hour to relieve yo'." He sighed. "Ef yo' hadn't dropped out of that last pot, Curt, I'd o' caught another ace an' got ten pesos more off'm that station-keeper."

THE first suspicion of the coming dawn was beginning to show above the eastern skyline when Tinkham shook the blankets of his two companions.

"I hear their hosses in the pass," he whispered; "an' jedging by the sound, the' must be four or five of 'em."

They were on their feet before he finished speaking, with their rifles in their hands. Within the narrow space between the flanks of the surrounding mountains, the darkness still lay thick. As they were hurrying to the corral out by the road, they caught the rasping of hoofs against the rocks less than a hundred yards down the ravine.

"Mind," the constable bade them, "ol' Beaver wants Mimbres. Don't kill him onless yo' got to."

Now as they slipped along beside the high corral fence, there emerged from the blackness just ahead of them a vague mass which changed in form as it approached, then stopped. They heard the riders dismounting. The voice of Mimbres came to them.

"Hold the hosses, Ed. Us three will slip up on 'em where they are layin'."

"Han's up," old Tinkham interrupted loudly, and before he had uttered the second word of his command, he felt the breath of a leaden slug against his cheek. Thin tongues of orange light were licking the darkness before him; the flashes of his own and his companions' rifles leaped toward them. The stillness of the place was riddled by a brief series of sharp, dry reports which came in irregular succession and of a sudden ceased, like the noise of a cluster of firecrackers set off together.

With the same startling unexpectedness as its breaking, the silence resumed. But only for a moment! There came from the darkness a sobbing cough.

"Don't shoot." It was the voice of the pockmarked man who had been playing cards with them. "My han's is up."

"I think my shoulder is busted," Bronco Bob was saying.

Tinkham was straining his eyes in the effort to seek out the form of Mimbres in the darkness.

"Keep your gun on that feller with the hosses, Curt," he bade the cow-man. As he was speaking, there came a sudden clatter of hoofs. The constable leaped forward and stumbled over a body in the roadway. The hoofbeats were already growing fainter down the pass.

"We got the other two," Bronco Bob called to him. He made no answer. The pockmarked man stood before him with both hands uplifted; he heard one of the horses close by, and edged over toward the animal.

"Easy, boy," he said, and his fingers found the trailing reins.

AS Tinkham was swinging into the saddle, he saw the first faint flush of the dawn creeping over the eastern horizon. He drove the spurs in, and was off down the pass on the dead run.

At intervals the sides of the mountains drew closer, and as he passed through these narrow spaces, it seemed as if new stores of darkness had been poured into the ravine. Then the summits would spread again, and the blackness would melt into a deep gray dusk. The noise of his pony drowned all sounds ahead of him; it was as if he were riding alone, with no man near.

When he passed between the last bare hills at the cañon-mouth and came out on the flat, he pulled up for a moment and listened. From far before him there came the *rat-tat-tat* of hoofbeats. And even while he was looking, the heavens grew brighter in the east; the blanched surface of the old dried lake-bed became more clearly visible; it was as if the veils of twilight were being swept away by an unseen hand. He got sight of the fugitive through their last thinning shreds, a blurred shape, small, and growing smaller in the distance.

"Plenty of time," he told the pony. "We'll take it easy fer a while."

During the next mile he contented himself with keeping to a gentle trot. The bands of pink were widening on the eastern sky, and growing deeper in hue. The whole flat was beginning to throb with reflected tints. The receding horseman showed more plainly. Constable Tinkham rode on at the same pace, his rifle athwart the saddlebow.

The form ahead of him ceased moving. He saw how it had resolved itself into two shapes, one a mere dot. A rifle-bullet whined above his head.

"Yo'r sights is fuzzy, Mimbres," he muttered, "but we don't take no fool chances." He reined his pony to one side and drew off from the other's trail, still pressing forward. So for another mile, keeping always the same distance between them, and at the same time edging nearer to the range

of mountains which showed dark purple under the splendors of the sunrise across the plain.

Mimbres was in the saddle again and urging his pony to the utmost. He had caught the significance of Tinkham's maneuver, and he did not mean to be cut off from those mountains. For half a mile they raced. Then the constable drew rein so abruptly that a cloud of alkali rose from about his pony's hoofs. He flung himself from the saddle. Before the dust had fairly settled, his gaze was traveling along his leveled rifle, finding the rear sight's slender notch, lining the bead with it. The muzzle of the weapon swung across a brief space, following the movement of the pony five hundred yards away. His finger pressed the trigger.

"Yo' are afoot now, Mimbres," the constable said quietly, and rose. The fugitive's pony was pitching forward on its knees.

The sun came up. The surface of the wide plain lost its shell-tints and turned to glaring white. Upon it two specks showed. The smaller one was moving slowly; the larger crept more swiftly toward the eastern mountains. Now and again a bullet kicked up a little flick of dust before it. And at intervals there rose toward the cloudless sky the report of the outlaw's rifle, sounding strangely small and flat in these vast spaces.

Then from the base of the dark western mountains a third speck crawled forth upon the white expanse. And as it moved on, the horseman in the east halted.

Thus Tinkham waited, with his rifle ready, watching Curt Wilcox closing in behind, and watching Mimbres, who was coming slowly toward him, with both hands upraised.

THE little town of La Cañada was drowsing in the heat of a New Mexican midafternoon when the three men of Paradise rode up the wide main street with their prisoner. A few cow-ponies stood before a hitching-rack with heads bowed and eyes half closed; a group of swarthy sheep-herders, shod in flinty rawhide sandals, lay asprawl under one of the wooden awnings, their steep-crowned sombreros drawn down over their faces; all others were within doors.

As the four riders came on, the street began to awaken. Faces showed in the wide doorways on both sides of them; the sidewalks behind them resounded to swift footfalls.

Constable Tinkham smiled grimly.

"They aint afeard of that Texas hat of yourn no more, Curt."

"They shore are turnin' out fer us," the cow-man drawled. "I've an idee we'd jest as well shove on right through. Think yo' can make it, Bob?"

Bronco Bob Lee was busy readjusting the bandana handkerchief which was serving as a sling for his left arm.

"Suits me." He glanced at the prisoner, who was riding beside him. "Nobody here yo' want to kiss good-by?"

The outlaw grinned under his drooping mustache.

"The's too many rawhide ropes an' cottonwood limbs in this here town, ef yo' are askin' my opinion."

THEY rode on up the street and left La Cañada buzzing like a hive of bees. As they were nearing the summit of the hill, they heard the beating of hoofs. Behind them half a dozen horsemen were following on the dead run.

"Ef I aint mistaken," Tinkham said, "that is the sheriff in the lead." He drew his rifle from its sheath beneath the stirrup-leather. Curt followed his example. The pair halted their ponies side by side; Mimbres and Bronco Bob rode by and took their places in the rear.

The sheriff of La Cañada drew rein. His companions did likewise, cursing the impetuosity of their mounts. The voice of Constable Tinkham came down the hill to them.

"What do yo' want?"

The sheriff touched his pony with the spur. When he had come within a hundred yards, he saw the pair before him raise their rifles to their shoulders, and he stopped.

"I want that man Mimbres," he called. "I hold warrants fer him an' Black Jack Davis an' Bill Fallon."

Constable Tinkham lowered his rifle, holding it athwart his saddlebow while he made answer.

"Yo'll find Black Jack Davis an' Bill Fallon at the Ash Springs stage-station. Their graves is back of the corral. But ef yo' want Mimbres, yo'll have to talk business with the jestice-co't of Paradise."

The rifle came back to Constable Tinkham's shoulder, and his voice grew colder, traveling across the leveled sights.

"That is where we are takin' him. An' don't yo' dast to even look as ef yo' wanted him, ontel he gets there."

The silence that followed was broken by the scraping of hoofs in the hard roadway. The sheriff looked behind him. His followers were not blessed with that enthusiasm which will lead a man to try conclusions with a single-action revolver against repeating rifles. And as he saw them departing, it occurred to him that the law offered its own solution of this problem. He turned and rode away to find recourse according to the statutes.

OLD Beaver Smith, the justice of the peace, was holding court on the morning when the sheriff of La Cañada rode into Paradise. Constable Tinkham was sitting in his place beside the counter's end. He glanced up and nodded greeting to the visitor.

"Howdy," said he.

The sheriff made no answer. The memory of their last meeting was still fresh; but things had changed since then; the executives of two commonwealths had been invoked and had come to aid him. He felt that the situation was in his hands. He reached into his pocket and brought forth the extradition warrant, for whose procurement he had set the law's machinery in motion before Tinkham and his companions were fairly out of sight from La Cañada. He laid it on the counter.

Old Beaver took the paper and unfolded it. He peered at the large seal through his iron-rimmed spectacles for some time; he thrust his nose a little closer and read with painful slowness, moving his lips to shape the words.

"As nigh as this co't can make out," he said at length, "this here comes from the Guv'nor of New Mexico, who makes demand on this here co't fer the pusson of one Mimbres."

The sheriff nodded. "And," said he coldly, "yo'll notice that it has been duly honored by the Governor of Arizona. I'll take my man right now, ef yo'-all aint got no objections."

Old Beaver cleared his throat portentously.

"When yo' ride back," said he, "jest give the Guv'nor of New Mexico the compliments of the jestice-co't of Paradise, an' tell him this co't is plumb sorry, but it cain't accommodate him."

The sheriff frowned.

"I'm tellin' yo'," he declared, "this warrant has got to be honored. Yo' cain't hold no man again' the processes of extradition."

"This co't," old Beaver retorted, "aint looked up the law in them there matters; but how kin the Guv'nor of New Mexico expect me to turn over a man when I aint got him?"

A sudden foreboding made the sheriff speechless for a moment. When he was able to find the words:

"Have yo'-all lynched him?" he demanded.

Old Beaver laid aside his spectacles and with them a portion of his judicial dignity.

"Lynched, hell!" said he. "I done socked him a hundred dollars fine for disturbin' of the peace an' warned him not to come back this way or he'd get it harder next time. An' jedgin' by what he said when he rode out of camp, I reckon he wont bother this here town no more!"

POWER, enthusiasm, color, life—these are the qualities for which the editors of this magazine search eagerly in their quest of the best possible fiction. And we are confident that our next issue will prove specially enjoyable. Charles Wellington Furlong's splendid story of the real West, "Feed 'Em Buckskin;" Freeman Tilden's absorbing novelette of business life, "The Quitter;" F. Britten Austin's brilliant story of Monte Carlo, "The Spin of the Wheel;" Henry C. Rowland's serial, "The Amazing Dare;" and many notably worth-while contributions by Clarence Herbert New, Agatha Christie, Warren Hastings Miller, Culpeper Zandtt, Lemuel L. De Bra and other noted writers—these will make up a magazine delightful indeed.

Into the Blue

The strange and tremendously dramatic story of an airplane pilot, intoxicated with the exaltation of great altitudes, setting his course, with his sweetheart, for the stars—by the distinguished author of "Nach Verdun" and "Out of the Night."

By F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

IT was in a bitterly pessimistic frame of mind that, having seen my baggage into the hotel, I went for a first walk along the asphalted esplanade of Southbeach. I had no pleasure in the baking sun, in the glittering stretch of the English Channel that veiled itself in a fine-weather mist all around the half-horizon. The exuberant, bold-eyed flappers, promenading in groups of three or four, the vivid polychromatism of their taste in sports-coats, seemed to me merely objectionable. The hordes of worthily respectable middle-class families complete with children—with many children—that blackened the sands and overflowed into the fringe of the water oppressed my soul with their formidable multiplicity.

I thought, in a savage emphasis of contrast, of the neat little yacht that should now be bearing me across the North Sea to the austere perfection of the Norwegian fiords. And I cursed myself for the childish imbecility of exasperation with which—when, at the last moment, with my suitcases all packed, I had received a telegram informing me that the yacht had come off second-best in a collision with a coal-tramp—I had picked up Bradshaw and sworn to myself to go to whatever place I should blindly put my finger upon as I opened the page. The oracle had declared for Southbeach—Southbeach in mid-August! I shrugged my shoulders—so be it! My holiday was spoiled anyhow. To Southbeach I would go. And now, as I contemplated it, I was appalled. What was I going to do with myself?

A paddle-wheel excursion-steamer came up to the pier, listing over with the black load aboard of her. Up and down the beach, in five-minute trips, a seaplane went roaring some eight hundred feet above the heads of the gaping crowd. I had done all the flying I wanted in the war, thank you very much. Other potentialities of amusement there were apparently none. If I could not discover a tolerably decent golf-course, I was a lost man.

I am not going to give the chronicle of that first day. It would be a study in sheer

boredom. That night, after one of those execrable dinners which are the peculiar production of an English seaside hotel, I had pretty well made up my mind that—oracle or no oracle—I would shake the sand of Southbeach off my feet on the morrow. Sitting over my coffee in the lounge, I was in fact already consulting the time-table for a morning train, when my cogitations were suddenly interrupted by a violent slap on the shoulder.

"Hello, Jimmy!"

I looked up with a start, before my identification of the voice had time to complete itself.

"*Toby!*—Toby Selwyn—by all that's splendid!" It was years since I had seen him, but in this dreary desert of uninteresting people he came like an angel of companionship, and I welcomed him with delight. "Sit down, man. Have a drink!"

HE did so, ordered a whisky-and-soda from the hovering waiter. I looked at him as one looks at an acquaintance of old times, seeking for changes. I had not seen him since the Armistice, when our squadron of fighting scouts was demobilized and a cheery crowd of daredevil pilots was dispersed to the four quarters of the globe.

He had not greatly altered. His face was a little thinner, more mature. His hair was still the same wild red mop. His eyes—peculiar in that when he opened them upon you, you saw the whites all round the pupil—had still that strange look in them, as though somewhere deep down in them his soul was like a caged animal, supicious and restless, which I so well remembered. The reason for his nickname jumped back into my mind. It was from his little trick of suddenly and disconcertingly going "mad dog," not only when he swooped down, against any sort of odds, upon a covey of Huns, but in the mess. Some one had called him "Mad dog;" it had been affectionately softened to "dog Toby;" and "Toby" he remained.

"And what on earth are you doing here?" I asked.

He smiled grimly.

"Earning my living, old bean. Introducing all the grocers in England to the poetry of flying, at ten bob a head."

"So that was *your* machine I saw going up and down the sea-front today?"

"It was. Five-minute trips—two bob a minute, and cheap at the price. Had to do something, you know. So I hit on this. There are worse things. Put my last cent into buying the machine—ex-Government, of course. She's a topping bus!" His voice freshened suddenly with enthusiasm. "It's almost a shame to use her for hacking up and down like this. You must come and have a look at her."

"Thanks," I replied, "I'd like to, but—"

OUR conversation was abruptly interrupted. Toby had jumped to his feet. Coming in through the door of the lounge was—miracles never happen singly!—an only-too-familiar, smiling and middle-aged married couple and—*Sylvia!* Toby obscured me from them for an instant as he went eagerly toward them—an instant where I weighed the problem of whether to stay or bolt. The last time Sylvia and I had met she had told me, with a pretty sympathy that ought to have softened the blow, that she would always be glad to have me as a *friend,* but— The problem was resolved for me, before I could decide. Toby was leading the trio up to me.

"I want to introduce an old pal of mine—Jimmy Esdaile."

Mr. and Mrs. Bryant shot a swift smile at each other and then to me as we shook hands. Sylvia almost grinned. I felt a perfect fool. "Good evening, Mr. Esdaile," said Sylvia in her sweetest tones, her gray eyes demurely alight.

Mr. Esdaile! The last time, it had still been "Jimmy." It is true that since I had somewhat boorishly informed her, upon that occasion, that I had no manner of use for being her *friend,* I had scarcely a legitimate grievance if now she chose to be frigid.

"Wont you sit down, all of you?" I suggested. "Mr. Bryant, you'll take a Grand Marnier with your coffee, I know."

"Thanks, Jimmy, I will," said Mr. Bryant, seating himself. I saw Toby stare. His astonishment visibly increased as Mrs. Bryant, having comfortably disposed herself upon the settee, added in her motherly fashion: "And what in the world are *you* doing here, Jimmy?"

"That's what I'm asking myself," I replied. Toby cut me short in what might have been a witty answer had I been allowed to finish it.

"You people know each other, then?" he demanded.

Mr. Bryant smiled.

"Yes. We've met Jimmy before—haven't we, Sylvia?"

"He used to be an acquaintance of ours in London," corroborated Sylvia imperturbably, delicately underlining the word *acquaintance.*

Toby probed me with a peculiar look, suddenly almost hostile. I could guess that he was asking himself whether I had come to Southbeach in pursuit of Sylvia. One did not need to be a detective to discover his own eager interest in her. It was patent, with no attempt at concealment. Those strange hungry restless eyes of his seemed to devour her. Quite apart from any personal feelings,—any time during the last six months I could have assured you, with perfect sincerity, that my heart was stone dead,—I didn't like it. Toby was not the sort of chap—

But I had no opportunity to intervene. Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, with a genuine kindly interest in me and my doings that at any other time I should have appreciated, monopolized me. And Sylvia flirted with him, demurely but outrageously. She called him Toby with the most natural ease in the world. He, poor devil, was awkward in an uncertainty whether she were playing with him, jerkily spasmodic in his answers, devouring her all the time with those strange eyes of his, wherein I recognized that same caged-animal look familiar to me as a preliminary to an outburst of "mad dog" on those nights when there was ragging in the mess. She, I could see, was enjoying herself at playing with fire.

AT last I could stand it no longer. I switched off from the amiable platitudes I was exchanging with her parents, interrupted her in her markedly exclusive conversation with him.

"I didn't know Toby was a friend of yours, Syl—Miss Bryant," I said.

She turned candid eyes upon me.

"Oh, yes, we have known Toby quite a long time—soon after you dropped us—nearly six months, isn't it, Toby?"

She took, evidently, a malicious pleasure in reiterating his Christian name. I messed up the end of my cigarette before I remembered not to chew it. Toby looked up suspiciously.

"I had no idea, either, that you were a friend of the family, Esdaile," he said. He also had dropped the "Jimmy."

Sylvia answered for me.

"Not exactly a *close* friend," she said sweetly. "Are you, Mr. Esdaile? We had almost forgotten each other's existence."

I could have smacked her.

Toby looked immensely relieved. I could see that, for the moment at least, he definitely put certain doubts out of his mind. He seemed to be trying to make up for his spasm of hostility when next he spoke.

"He's an old pal of mine, anyway, aren't you, Jimmy? It's like old times to see you again. D'you remember that little scrap with a dozen Huns over Charleroi? That was a good finish-up—the day before the Armistice."

I remembered well enough—remembered that after that last fight, at the very end of the war, I had landed by a miracle with my nerve suddenly gone. I had never been in the air since—for a long time could not look at an airplane without a fit of trembling.

Sylvia glanced at me in surprise. The secret humiliation of that finish had made me pretty close about my war-doings.

"Oh, you two knew each other in the war, then?" she said.

"I should rather think we did!" replied Toby. "Jimmy was my squadron-leader—and he's some scientist in the air, let me tell you." His tone of admiration smote me like a bitter irony. "Don't forget you're coming to look over that bus of mine tomorrow morning, Jimmy."

"I don't know that I can," I replied. "I'm off back to town tomorrow." I said this with a glance to Sylvia which found her quite unmoved.

"Are you, really?" she said. "What, on a *Sunday?*" Her eyebrows went up in mocking admiration for my courage.

Confound it! I remembered suddenly that tomorrow *was* Sunday. I can put up with any reasonable amount of hardship, but the prospect of a Sunday train on a South Coast railway!

"*Kamerad!*" I surrendered. "I go back on Monday."

"Good!" said Toby. "The tender conscience of the local municipality does not permit them to allow me to earn my living on the Sabbath. Tomorrow is a *dies non.* We'll spend the morning tinkering about the machine together. It'll be like old times, before we went up for a jolly old scrap with the Hun-bird. She's worth looking at, too—built for a radius of a thousand miles and a ceiling of over twenty thousand feet."

"Really!" I said, with a touch old-time professional interest. "But what on earth

do you want a machine like that for? She's surely scarcely suitable for giving donkey-rides up and down a beach?"

"She does all right," replied Toby. "And I like to feel that I've got something with power to it. That I could if I wanted to—" His curious restless eyes lost expression, as though the soul behind them no longer saw me, contemplated something remote.

"Could what?" I challenged him.

HE came back to perception of my presence.

"Eh? Oh, nothing." He looked at me with that familiar sudden suspiciousness which seemed to accuse one of attemped espionage into the secrets of his soul. I remembered that even in the mess, intimate as we had all been together, he had always been a queer chap. One had never really known what he was thinking or planning. He turned now to Sylvia.

"Miss Bryant has promised me that one day she will let me take her for a flight," he said, banishing the hardness of his eyes with that little smile of his which was so peculiarly attractive when he chose to exert his charm.

"I'll come tomorrow," she replied promptly. "And then you'll have to take me gratis."

"Of course I will!" he answered, clutching at her promise with a flash of eager delight in his eyes. "You didn't imagine I was going to charge you for it, did you? That's settled, then."

Mrs. Bryant interposed in motherly alarm.

"Oh, Sylvia! Don't do any of your madcap tricks! —You *will* be careful, wont you, Mr. Selwyn?" She turned to me. "Are you sure she will be safe with him, Jimmy?"

"My dear Mrs. Bryant," I assured her, "if there is a better pilot in the world than Toby, I don't know him."

Mr. Bryant took the pipe from his mouth and glanced cautiously at his wife.

"I'd rather like to go up too," he said.

But Mrs. Bryant vetoed this volubly and emphatically.

"No, no, no!" she exclaimed. "Not two of you together! Suppose anything happened!"

I smiled at her nervous fears.

"Nothing *will* happen, Mrs. Bryant—make your mind easy. Toby's perfectly safe. And if Mr. Bryant would like a flight, I'm sure Toby would be pleased to take him."

Toby was looking at Sylvia's father with his enigmatic eyes.

"Of course I will," he said. "But I don't want to worry Mrs. Bryant. I will take Mr. Bryant another time."

The conversation drifted off to other topics. At last, Mrs. Bryant rose for bed.

"And mind, Mr. Selwyn," she warned him smilingly as she shook hands with him, "I shall try hard to persuade Sylvia not to go."

"But you wont succeed, Mother!" announced Sylvia radiantly. "Good night, Toby. Good night, *Mr.* Esdaile!" With which parting shot she left us, and the lounge was suddenly horribly empty.

WE sat there for yet some time, Toby and I, puffing at our pipes in silence. He leaned back on the settee, with his eyes closed. I was thinking—never mind what I was thinking; but my thoughts ranged far into the dreary future of my life. My glance fell on him, scrutinizing him, probing him, weighing him, as he lay there all unconscious of it. About his feelings I had no doubt. Were they reciprocated? I remembered that peculiarly attractive smile of his, the alluring touch of mystery about him—and almost hated him for them. That was the kind of thing which appealed to women, I reflected bitterly.

He opened his eyes.

"*'Puro è disposto a salire alle stelle,'*" he murmured to himself, staring as at a vision where this somewhat gaudy hotel lounge had no place.

"What's that?" I said, not quite catching his words.

"Eh?" He looked at me as though he had forgotten my presence, was only now reminded of it by my voice. "Oh, that's the last line of the Purgatorio—where Dante, having drunk forgetfulness of the earth from Lethe, is ready to ascend with Beatrice into the stars of the Paradiso. . . . . All right, Jimmy," he added, with a smile of sardonic superiority which irritated me, "don't worry yourself with trying to understand. You wont. You're one of those whose idea of the fit habitation for the divine soul shining through the eyes of your beloved is a bijou residence in a London suburb. After a few years of you, your wife, whoever she is, will be another Mrs. Bryant."

"Many thanks!" I replied, somewhat

nettled, and a little puzzled also. This was a new Toby. We were not given to cultivating poetry in our mess. "But since when have you taken to studying Dante in the original?"

"Oh, I've had plenty of time," he answered, his eyes straying away from me evasively. "I've lived pretty much by myself these last few years." He rose to his feet, cutting short the subject. "Let's go for a stroll, shall we? Get a breath of fresh air into our lungs."

I ASSENTED willingly enough. At the back of my mind was an obscure idea that, in the stimulated sense of comradeship evoked between two friends who walk together under a night sky, he might open himself to some confidence that would help me to a more precise definition of the relationship that subsisted between himself and Sylvia. In this I was disappointed. He walked along the asphalt promenade, now almost deserted, with the sea to our left marked only by an irregular faintly gleaming line of white in the black obscurity, without a word. He did not even respond to my efforts at conversation. Apparently he did not hear them. Overhead, the metallic blue-black heaven was powdered with a multitude of stars, twinkling down upon us from their immense remoteness. He threw his head back to contemplate them as we walked in silence. He baffled me, kept me somehow from my own private thoughts.

Suddenly he switched upon me.

"There can't be nothingness all the way, can there?" he demanded of me with a curious vehemence of interrogation. His hand made an involuntary half-gesture toward the scintillating dome of stars. "There must be *something!*" His manner had the disconcerting intensity of a man who has been brooding overlong in solitude. "At a distance everything melts into the blue. I have seen blank blue sky where on another day there's a range of mountains sharp and clear across the horizon. And they pretend that in all those millions of miles there is nothing—nothing but empty space!" He finished on a note of scorn.

"But surely the astronomers—" I began.

"Pah!" he interrupted me. "What do you or the astronomers know about it? Shut up!"

Shut up, I did. He was evidently not in the mood for reasonable conversation. He also shut up, pursuing in silence thoughts I could not follow. At last he brusquely suggested returning to the hotel.

NEXT morning, when I met him in the breakfast-room, he was quite his old cheery self, and whatever resentment of his last night's rudeness still rankled in me, vanished in the odd charm of his smile. He reminded me of my promise to spend the morning with him tinkering about his seaplane. I acquiesced, for two reasons. First, I had nothing else to do, and I still retained enough of the impress of my old flying days to be genuinely interested in looking over a machine. Secondly, Sylvia would be coming to it for her flight. An uneasy night had not brought me to any satisfying theory of her real attitude toward him.

It was a bright sunshiny morning as we left the hotel, but a southwest breeze ruffled the surface of the sea; and the white isolated clouds that drifted across the blue overhead were evidently the advance-guards of a mass yet invisible beyond the horizon. Within an hour or two the sky would almost certainly be overcast. For the moment it was fine, however, and I enjoyed the fresh clarity of the air as we walked down the pier together. At its extremity, on the leeward side of the steamer landing-stage, the seaplane rode the running waves like a great bird that had alighted with outspread wings, the water splashing and sucking against her floats as she jerked and slackened on her mooring-ropes.

We hauled in on them, clambered down into her. She was, as he explained to me, intended for a super-fighting-scout, with an immense radius, a great capacity for climb, and a second machine-gun. The space where this second machine-gun had been, just behind the pilot, was now filled with four seats, in pairs behind each other, for the passengers, and he had had her landing-wheels replaced by floats. The morning was still young—nine o'clock struck just as we got on board the machine; and for the next two hours we pottered about her, cleaning her powerful motor, tautening the wire stays to her wings, looking into a hundred and one technical details that would have no interest for anyone but the expert. I enjoyed myself, and Toby was almost pathetically delighted to have some one with him who could enter into his enthusiasms. He had, I could guess, been leading a very solitary life for a long while.

Apparently he almost lived on board her. All sorts of gear were stowed away in her. In one of the lockers I found quite a collection of books, including the Dante he had quoted, and a number of others of a distinctly mystical type—odd reading for a flying man. In another, close to the pilot's seat, was a German automatic pistol.

"Souvenir of the great war, Daddy!" he smiled at me as I handled it.

"But do you know it's loaded?" I objected disapprovingly.

"Yes," he replied. "I shoot sea-gulls with it sometimes—chase 'em in the air. It's great sport."

I shrugged my shoulders. Chasing sea-gulls with a pistol was just one of those mad things I could well imagine Toby doing.

We gave her a dose of oil, filled up her petrol-tank—one of her original pair had been removed to make space for the passengers, but she still had a five-hundred-mile radius, he told me—and looked round for something else to do.

"Would you like to take her up and see how she climbs?" he invited me.

"No, thanks!" I replied hurriedly, uncomfortable in a sudden embarrassment. I had, thanks to the Armistice, managed to conceal my humiliating loss of nerve from the other fellows. "I've given up flying."

His queer eyes rested upon me for a penetrating glance, and I felt pretty sure that he guessed. But he made no comment.

"All right," he said. "I expect Miss Bryant will be along presently. We'll sit here and wait for her."

WE ensconced ourselves in the passengers' seats and sat there smoking our pipes. The mention of Miss Bryant's name seemed to have killed conversation between us. We sat in a silence that I, at least, felt to be subtly awkward. The intimacy of the morning was destroyed. Each of us withdrew into himself, each perhaps preoccupied with the same problem. Once, certainly, I caught his glance hostile upon me.

As I had expected, heavy clouds had come up from the southwest, and the sky was now almost completely overcast. But immediately overhead there was still a clear patch where, through a wide rift in the gray wrack, one looked into the infinite blue. Leaning back in his seat, he stared up at it with eyes that were dreamy in a peculiar fixity of expression.

"Jimmy," he said suddenly, in a voice that was far away with his thoughts, "in the old days, when you were flying high to drop on a stray Hun,—say, at twenty thousand feet, with the earth miles away out of touch,—didn't you ever feel that if you went a little higher—climbed and climbed—you would come to something—some other place? Didn't it almost seem to you that it would be as easy as going back?"

I glanced at him. Into my mind flitted a memory of his last night's wild talk about the stars. He had always been a little queer. Was he—not quite right?

"I can't say it did," I replied curtly. "I was always jolly glad to get down again."

He looked at me.

"Yes—I suppose so!" he commented. There was almost an insult in his tone.

Before I could decide whether to resent it or to humor him, I saw Sylvia approaching us along the pier, charming in her summer dress, but prudently with a raincoat over her arm.

"Here's Miss Bryant!" I said, glad of this excuse to put an end to the conversation.

He leaped to his feet with a peculiar alacrity.

"At last!" he ejaculated, as though an immeasurable time of waiting was at an end. He quenched a sudden flash of excitement in his eyes as he caught my glance on his face.

She stood above us on the pier, smiling.

"Here I am!" she said. "But it isn't a very nice morning, is it?"

"It will be all right up above," replied Toby. "Come along—down that next flight of steps." He was trembling with eagerness. I wondered suddenly whether I was wise in letting her go up with him. The man's nerves were obviously strung to high pitch. On the other hand, I had the greatest confidence in his skill—and it was only too likely that she would misinterpret any objections from me, would refuse to listen to them.

While I was hesitating, she had already descended to the lower stage, and Toby had helped her along the gangplank into the machine.

"You see I've brought my raincoat," she said. "It'll be cold up there, wont it?"

"That's no use," replied Toby with brutal directness. "Here!" He opened a locker where he kept the flying-coats for his passengers. "Put that on."

I HELPED her with it. She looked more charming than ever in the thick leather coat, the close-fitting leather helmet framing her dainty features. Then I made a step toward the gangplank.

"But aren't you coming too?" she demanded in surprise.

Toby answered for me.

"Esdaile doesn't care for flying," he said with a sardonic smile, looking me straight in the eyes. There was a sort of mocking triumph in that unmistakable sneer.

"Oh—but *please!*" Sylvia turned to me pleadingly. "Do come!"

"I'd rather take you up alone," said Toby in a stubborn voice, looking up from the mooring-rope he had bent to untether.

She ignored him, laid a hand upon my arm.

"Wont you?" she asked.

"I should infinitely prefer not to," I replied awkwardly. I cursed myself for my imbecility, but the mere idea of going up in that machine made me feel sick inside, still so powerful was the memory of that moment long ago when, ten thousand feet up with a Hun just below me plunging in flames to destruction, I had felt my nerve suddenly break, my head go dizzy in an awful panic. "Please excuse me."

She could not, of course, guess my reason.

"I sha'n't go without you," she said obstinately. Her eyes seemed to be telling me something I was not intelligent enough to catch. "And I want to go. Please—*Jimmy!*"

I surrendered.

"All right," I said, feeling ghastly. "I'll come."

Toby stopped in the act of pulling on his flying-coat, and looked at me. His face was livid, his eyes almost insanely malignant in a sudden fury of bad temper.

"Don't think you're going to spoil it!" he said, through his teeth. "I'll see to that!"

With that cryptic remark, he swung himself into the pilot's seat and started the engine with a jerk that almost threw me into the water. I slid down to the seat beside Sylvia. Toby had already cast off the one remaining mooring-rope, and with a whirring roar that gave me an odd thrill of old familiarity, the propeller at our nose a dark blur in its initial low-speed revolutions, we commenced to move over the waves.

For a moment we had a slight sensation of their rise and fall as we partly tore through them, partly floated on their lifting crests, and then suddenly the engine-note swelled to the deafening intensity of full power; the blur of the propeller disappeared; a fount of white spray, sunlit from a rift in the clouds, sprang up on either hand from the floats beneath us, hung poised like jeweled curtains at our flanks, stung our faces with flying drops. For yet a minute or two we raced through the high-flung water; and then abruptly the glittering foam-curtains vanished. Our nose lifted. We sagged for another splash, lifted again, on a buoyancy that was not the buoyancy of the sea. I glanced over the side, saw the tossing wave-crests already twenty feet below us.

Instinctively I looked round to Sylvia to see how she was taking it. Her eyes were bright, her face ecstatic. I saw her lips move as she smiled. But her words were swallowed in the roar of the engine, and the blast of air that almost choked one, despite the little mica wind-screen behind which we crouched. I bent my ear close to her face, just caught her comment as she repeated it.

"It's—*wonderful!*" she gasped.

Then she clutched my arm in sudden nervousness as the machine banked sidewise. Below us, diminished already, the pier, the long promenade of Southbeach, whirled round dizzily in a complete circle, got yet smaller as they went. Toby was putting the machine to about as steep a spiral as it could stand. As we went round again and yet again, with our nose seeming to point almost vertically up to the gray ceiling of cloud and our bodies heavy against the backs of our seats, I had a spasm of alarm that turned to anger. What was he playing at? It was ridiculous to show off like this! I did not doubt his skill—but it would not be the first airplane to stall at so steep an angle that it slipped back in a fatal tail-spin. I noticed that Sylvia was not strapped in her seat, and promptly rectified the omission. It might be all right, but with an inexperienced lady-passenger, it was as well to take precautions if he was going to play tricks of this sort.

UP and up we went in those dizzy spirals, Southbeach—disconcertingly never on the side on which one expected it—miniature below us; and I could not help admiring, despite my sickening nervous-

ness, the masterly audacity with which he piloted his machine on the very limit of the possible. He never turned for a glance at us, but sat, lifted slightly above us by our slant, doggedly crouched at his controls. I could imagine his face, his lips pressed tight together, his queer eyes alight with the boyish exultation of showing us—or perhaps showing *me?*—what he could do. I did not need the demonstration. I had seen him climb often enough like a circling hawk, gaining height in an almost sheer ascent, racing a Hun to that point of superior elevation which meant victory.

There had been a time when I could have beaten him at it. But there was no necessity to play these circus-tricks now—above all, with a lady on board. Why could he not take her for an ordinary safe flight over the sea, gaining, in the usual way, a reasonable margin of height on an angle that would have been almost imperceptible? I quivered to clamber forward and snatch the controls from him as still we rose, perilously high-slanted, in sweep after circular sweep. The gray-black stretch of cloud was now close above us, the rounded modeling of its under-surface like a low roof that seemed to forbid further ascent.

Again Sylvia clutched at my arm, her face alarmed, and I bent my head down to catch the words she shouted against the all-swallowing roar of the engine. They came just audible.

"Is he—going—through this?"

Toby was still holding her nose up, plainly intending to get above the clouds. I saw no sense in making her uneasy. I put my mouth close to her head.

"Blue sky—above!" I shouted.

She nodded, reassured.

The next moment we had plunged into the mass. Except for the sudden twists as we banked, we seemed to be motionless in a dense fog. But the engine still roared, and drops of congealed moisture, collecting on the stays of the upper wings, blew viciously into our faces. The damp cold struck through me to my bones, and I remembered suddenly that I was in my extremely unsuitable ordinary clothes. There was no saying to what height this mad fool might take us—he was still climbing steeply—and I had no mind to catch my death of cold. Hanging on with one hand to the side of the canted-up machine that threatened to fling me out directly I rose from my seat, I managed to reach the locker where he kept the flying-coats for his passengers, wriggled somehow into one of them.

It was only by setting my teeth that I did it, for my head was whirling dizzily and, cursing the day I had strained my nerves beyond breaking-point, I had to fight back desperately an almost overmastering panic that came upon me in gusts from a part of me beyond my will. I could not have achieved it, had it not been for the fog which, blotting out the earth beneath us, obliterated temporarily the sense of height. I was shaking all over as I got back into my seat. I glanced at Sylvia. She was sitting quiet and brave, a little strained, perhaps, staring at the blank fog through which we drove in steadily upward sweeps.

SUDDENLY we emerged into dazzling sunshine, warm despite the cold rush of the air. All above us was an infinite clarity of blue. Sylvia—I guessed rather than heard—shouted something, waved her arm in delighted surprise, pointing around and beneath. Close below us was no longer the earth, but that magical landscape which is only offered by the upper surface of the clouds. We rose for yet a minute or two before we could get the full impression of it. At our first emergence, great swelling banks of sunlit snow overtopped us here and there, blew across us from moment to moment, uncannily unsubstantial as we went through them, in mere fog. Then finally we looked down upon it all, the eye ranging far and wide over a magnificent confusion of multitudinous rounded knolls, of fantastic perilously toppling lofty crags from which streamed wisps of gossamer vapor, of grotesque mountains and tremendous chasms, such as the wildest scenery of earth can never show.

Familiar as it was to me, I could not help admiring anew the immense sublimity of that spectacle which drifts so brilliantly under the blue arch of heaven when the shadowed earth below teems with rain, that spectacle which the eye of earth-bound man never sees. To the extreme limit of vision it stretched, apparently solid, a fairy country gleaming snow-white under the vertical sun, across which our shadow, growing smaller at each instant, flitted like the shadow of a great bird.

I felt Sylvia's hand squeeze me in her delight. My exasperated annoyance with Toby died down, all but vanished. Per-

haps he wasn't such a fool, after all. It was worth while to show her this. That was what he had climbed so steeply for. Now he would flatten out, circle once or twice to imprint this fairy scene upon her memory, and then descend. But he did not. He did not even glance round to us. He held the nose of the machine up, climbed still, higher and higher, in those sheer and dizzy spirals.

This was getting beyond a joke. I glanced at my watch, computed the minutes since we had risen from that gray-green sea now out of sight beneath the horizon-filling floor of cloud. We must be already over five thousand feet up. That was surely quite enough. He might lose his direction, cut off from the earth by that great cloud-layer, miss the sea for our return. A forced landing upon hard ground with those water-floats of ours would be a pretty ugly crash. I craned forward, looked over his shoulder at the dial of the barograph. We were *seven thousand!* What on earth—

I shouted at him, but of course he did not hear it in the deafening roar of the engine. I caught hold of his shoulder, shook him hard. I had to shake a second time before his face came round to me. It startled me with its strange set fixity of expression, the wild eyes that glared at me. I gesticulated, pointed downward. He opened his lips in a vicious ugly snarl, shouted something of which only the ugly rebuff of my interference was intelligible, turned again to his controls, lifted the machine again from its momentary sag.

I sank back into my seat, quivering. Sylvia glanced at me inquiringly. I shrugged my shoulders. She had not, I hoped, seen that ugly snarl upon his face. The cloud-floor was now far below us, its crags and chasms flattened to mere corrugations on its gleaming surface. The sea-plane rose, circling round and round untiringly, corkscrewing ever up and up into the infinite blue above us.

I was now thoroughly alarmed. What was he playing at? I worried over the memory of his furious face when I had made my gestured expostulation. Surely he could have no serious purpose of any kind in thus climbing so steeply far above any reasonable altitude. There was no serious purpose imaginable. Unless—no, I refused to entertain the sudden sickening doubt of his sanity. He was playing a joke on us, on *me*. Guessing that I had lost my nerve, and angry with me for spoiling a *tête-à-tête* flight with Sylvia, he was maliciously giving me a twisting. Presently he would get tired of the joke, flatten out.

BUT he did not get tired of it. Up and up we went, in turn after turn—rather wider circles now, for the air was getting rare and thin, and sometimes we sideslipped uncomfortably, and the engine flagged, threatening to misfire, until he readjusted the mixture—but still climbing. Far, far below us the cloud-floor was deceptive of our real height in its fallacious similitude to an immense horizon of snow-covered earth.

I glanced at my watch, calculated again our height from the minutes. We must surely now be over twelve thousand feet! I shrank nervously from the mere thought of again moving to look over his shoulder at the barograph. An appalling feeling of vertigo held me in its clutch. That last glance over the side had done it, reawakening all the panic terror which had swept over me that day when—at such a height as this—I had seen that Hun plunge to destruction and had suddenly realized, as though I had but just awakened from a dream, my own high-poised perilous instability. I sat there clutched and trembling, could not have moved to save my life. I would have given anything to have closed my eyes, forgotten where I was, but the horrible fascination of this upward progress held them open as though mesmerized. I tried to compute the stages of our ascent from our circling sweeps. Thirteen thousand—thirteen thousand five hundred—fourteen thousand—fourteen thousand five hundred—fifteen thousand—I gave it up. It was icily cold. My head was dizzy, my ears sizzling with altered blood-pressure. My lungs heaved in this rarefied atmosphere. I glanced at Sylvia. She looked ill; her lips were blue; she was gasping as though about to faint.

She looked at me imploringly, made a gesture with her hand toward Toby's inexorable back. I shrugged my shoulders in sign that I had already protested in vain. But nevertheless I obeyed. Once more I leaned forward and clutched at his shoulder. Once more, after I had shaken him furiously, he turned upon me with that savage snarl, shouted something unintelligible, and switched round again to his controls.

Sylvia and I looked at each other. This

time she had seen. In her eyes I read also that doubt of his sanity which was torturing me. She motioned me toward the cockpit, pantomimed my taking over control. It was impossible. I gestured it to her. Even if my nerves had been competent to the task, it was certain that Toby would not voluntarily relinquish his place. To have attempted to take it from him—if he were indeed mad—would have resulted in a savage struggle where the equilibrium of the machine would inevitably have been lost—in about two seconds we should all of us be hurtling down to certain death. The only thing to do was to sit tight—and hope that he would suddenly have enough of this prank, and bring us earthward again. But even if he had suddenly vanished from his place, to clamber over into the cockpit and take charge was more than I could have done at that moment. There was a time when I might have done it. But now I was shaking like a leaf. I could not have pushed a perambulator, let alone pilot an airplane.

And still we climbed, roaring up and up. The yellow canvas of the lower plane, gleaming in the sunshine, seemed curiously motionless against the unchanging blue that was all around us. The earth, the very clouds below us, seemed totally lost. I could not bring myself to venture a glance down to them. We seemed out of contact with everything that was normal life, suspended in the infinite void. And yet the engine roared, and I knew that we still climbed.

WE must have been somewhere about twenty thousand feet. My head seemed as though it would burst. I was breathing with difficulty. A little higher, and we should need oxygen. Toby's face was of course hidden from me, but he sat steadily at his controls, apparently in no embarrassment. Probably he had recently been practicing flying to great heights—it would be his queer idea of amusing himself—and was more habituated to changes of atmospheric pressure. I looked at Sylvia. She was plainly much distressed—and more than distressed, *frightened*. I cannot describe the anguish which gripped me as I contemplated her. Whatever I had tried to pretend to myself down there on that distant earth in those six dreary months since my pride had been wounded, I knew now, with an atrocious vividness of realization, that I loved her. And I could do nothing—*nothing*—to save her, if that lunatic in front did not come to his senses! The imploring look she fixed upon me was exquisite torture. Speech was impossible in that deafening roar of the engine, but she made me understand—the bitter irony of it!—that it was in me she trusted. I took her hand, pressed it to my lips. If we were to die, she should at least know what I felt for her. And then—oh, miracle!—I felt my hand pulled toward her, taken to her lips. She met my eyes with a wan smile of unmistakable meaning.

And then, just as I was all dizzy with the shock of it, the roar of the engine ceased. There was a sudden silence that was awesome in its completeness. Our nose came down to slightly below the horizontal. Thank heaven, he was tired of the joke, was flattening out, was going to descend! We began, in fact, to circle in a wide, very slightly depressed, slanting curve. Toby twisted round from his seat, one hand still upon the controls. There was a grim little smile on his face as his eyes, curiously glittering, met mine.

"You get out!" he said curtly. His voice sounded strangely toneless, far off, in that rarefied upper atmosphere.

For a moment I had a spasm of alarm, but I could not believe he was serious. It was too fantastic, at twenty thousand feet in the air.

"Don't be a silly ass, Toby! Take us down. The joke has gone far enough." My own voice was thin in my ears.

He ignored my protest.

"This is where you get out!" he repeated stubbornly.

Was the man really mad? I thought it best to humor him, managed to force a little laugh.

"Thanks very much, but I'd rather go back with you," I said.

"We're not going back," he replied with grim simplicity. "But you are—here and now."

This was madness right enough! Our only chance was to get him into conversation, turn the current of his thoughts somehow, coax him back to earth.

"Not going back?" I grinned at him as if he were being really funny. "Where are you going, then?"

"We're going on—Sylvia and I."

HE smiled at her fondly, nodded as though sure of her assent. She uttered a little cry of alarm, clutched at me.

All the time, while we were speaking, he was steering the airplane automatically with one hand, bringing her round and round in wide, flat circles where we lost the minimum of height.

"On?" I said in innocent inquiry, while my brain worked desperately. Curiously enough, in that moment of crisis, I found my head as clear, my nerves as steady, as they had ever been in my life. All my dizzy turmoil had vanished. I forgot that I had ever had a panic in the air. I was merely trying to think of some scheme by which I might be able to replace him at those controls. "On—where?"

He jerked his hand upward.

"Up there! On and on, until we come to—" He stopped himself suddenly, his face diabolically suspicious. "You think I'm going to tell you, don't you? You think you'll be able to follow us? But you wont! You get out—here and now—d'you understand?"

I tried to be cunning.

"But Toby!" I objected. "I think I know the way—better than you do, perhaps. Change places and let me take the machine."

It was a false move.

"What?" he cried. "You think you know the way, do you? You think you know the way beyond the stars?" He burst suddenly into a hideous laugh, thin and cackling in the awesome silence of that upper air. "Then you'll never get there! I'll see to that! Get out!" He gestured over the side, into the blue abyss above which we circled. *"Quick!"*

I GLANCED at Sylvia. She was sitting numbed with horror, incapable of speech. As I looked, she jerked forward in a gesture of wild protest abruptly checked by the straps which held her in her seat. The airplane rocked in its now tender equilibrium just as something went *crack!* past my head. My eyes were back on Toby in the fraction of an instant. Still twisted in his seat, he was leveling that automatic pistol at me. I could see by his eyes that he was in the very act of pressing the trigger for the second time.

Four years' war-service in the air make a man pretty quick. In a flash I had ducked, flung myself upon him over the slight partition between us, wrenched at his wrist. Risky as it was, it was certain death to all of us if this homicidal maniac was not dealt with. His awkward half-turned position put him at a disadvantage, but he fought grimly, with all a maniac's strength, trying to point the muzzle of that pistol at my body. Automatically, of course, he rose to face me, relinquished the controls to use both hands. I felt the machine lurch and plunge dizzily nose downward. I had one lightning-quick thought —thank God, Sylvia was strapped!—and then I tumbled over the partition head-first into the cockpit.

It was not thought but instinct with which I clutched the steering-stick,—one had not much time for thought when fighting the nimble Fokker,—got into some sort of position on the seat. We were vertically nose down, spinning horribly—but not once but many times in the war I had shammed dead, gone rushing earthward in a realistic twirling spin and then abruptly flattened out of it upside down and come up like a rocket over the pursuing Hun. This was simpler. I had only to pull her out of it—and only when I pulled her out of it, circled her round once for a long steady glide, did I realize that I was alone in that cockpit. There was no Toby!

I glanced back to Sylvia. She sagged in her seat against the straps—fainted. Just as well, I thought grimly. I touched the engine to a momentary activity to test it, shut it off again for a long circling descent toward the cloud-floor far below. An exultation leaped in me, the exultation of old days of peril in the air. I thought of Toby, with whom I had shared so many, with a sudden warming of the heart. Poor old Toby! He had died as after all he perhaps would have wished to die, high up in the infinite blue—dead of shock long before he reached the earth. I thrilled with the old-time sense of mastery over a fine machine, delicately sensitive to the controls, as that massed and pinnacled cloud-landscape grew large again beneath me. My one anxiety was whether it hid sea or land. Then, just as we drew near, I saw a deep black gulf riven in its snowy mass—saw down through that gulf a tiny model steamship trailing a long white wake. . . . .

The wedding? That was last year.

"The Spin of the Wheel," another unusual, vivid and dramatic story by the gifted F. Britten Austin, will appear in our forthcoming April issue.

Loose Ends

The thrill-filled story of a blind man who could see many things, and of a great fight—told by a newspaper man who is rapidly winning a name in the fiction field.

By McCready Huston

AT the first beat of the fire-alarm bell, sounding in the news-room down the long corridor, the tall, gaunt man at the typewriter in the sporting editor's coop let his long, bony hands rest on the keys while he listened. Hesitating in the doorway of the dark coop, a visitor regarded him curiously, alternating with an appraising glance at Cassidy, the sporting editor, hunched at his desk.

The bell repeated the box number.

"Five twenty-seven! Forbes and Halket streets. Number Seven Engine Company and a chemical wagon on the first call!"

It was the gaunt man at the typewriter who spoke, raising his voice so it would carry down the corridor to the news-room.

"Right!" It was an answering call from Val, the city editor, after he had looked at the chart.

Cassidy twisted around in his chair and closed an eye at the visitor, at the same time making an impatient gesture toward the man at the typewriter.

"Mitch can call off any fire-box in the city and give you the companies responding on the first call," he explained. "It's quite an accomplishment."

"I'll say it is," murmured the visitor admiringly, smiling broadly and coming into the room, where he tried, with extreme caution, a broken swivel-chair.

"Who is it?" asked Mitch, looking around with that odd, startled stare the blind have. "Sounds like Pat Egan."

"Pat is right; but how did you know?"

Mitch got up, towering, pale and shock-headed, over the young prize-fighter, who sat there grinning nervously. Mitch ignored his question.

"Tell me, Pat—did Welsh hurt you in the sixth round last night?"

The other hesitated, looking at Cassidy, who had turned around to listen.

"Between friends, he did; but don't tell Kelly."

"What did I tell you, George?" demanded the blind man. "I said Welsh slipped one through. Egan must have raised his guard. The bell saved him. You're a fine sporting editor if you didn't know it."

"Hold your post-mortems after the edi-

tion," snarled Cassidy, turning back to his desk.

"He didn't see the punch. You felt it. I heard it," finished Mitch, feeling his way back to his chair. "I like to show these birds up once in a while."

"Mitch does everything with his ears," commented Cassidy, his voice oily with contempt and dislike.

"It's not only my ears," responded Mitch. "There's a sixth sense. You don't have it. You weren't trained the right way. You forget I was six years under O'D. on the old *Dispatch*. I learned to watch for the loose ends."

HE wrote a line on the typewriter, pulled the sheet from the machine and laid it unerringly in the wire basket on his desk. Cassidy hurried from the room with a bundle of copy.

"How can you use the machine without your eyes?" asked Egan softly, putting a hand on Mitch's arm.

"Touch-system. Learned it after I went blind. My copy's cleaner now than it was when I could see it."

"Cassidy doesn't exactly love you, does he?"

"He knows I am on to him. Besides, he wants me to get out. A blind man is a nuisance, especially,"—he lowered his voice,—"especially if the blind man can see as much as I can."

The boxer was silent. The direct route to publicity lay through George Cassidy, the most powerful sporting editor in the State. He had often wanted to punch him, but he didn't dare to let him know it. Mitch went on:

"You've got to remember to do as you're told. Kelly knows boxing and fighters, whether you like him or not. Letting Welsh hit you last night put you just that much farther from a fight with the champion. Those two counts of nine you took in the ninth round probably trace back to the punch you took in the sixth. Stay in with these fellows and get yourself a reputation. Don't cut loose with fellows like Welsh—don't lead much. Stay in and get a draw or a newspaper decision."

Mitch got up abruptly and shambled from the room before Egan could reply. He sat there, studying the shabby, dirty room, thinking of the time Kelly had taken him from the battery of elevators in the Oliver Building and introduced him to Cassidy, maker of prize-fighters.

PRESENTLY Cassidy lumbered in, hunching over his desk again, without looking at Egan. Cassidy believed in keeping fighters in their place.

"What I wanted to see you about was Jim Martin," began Egan uncertainly. "Martin wants me to come over to his stable. He says he'll make me middleweight champion."

Glowering, Cassidy leaned back in his chair.

"Say, you looked like the middleweight champion last night, lying on the canvas for the count of nine—a hundred and sixty-five pounds of you. You don't even know what the weight is, and if you did, you couldn't make it."

"One fifty-eight."

"I was joking. But seriously, you couldn't stay fifteen rounds with Madden if he'd give you a match. And he's only a cheese champion."

"But Martin says—"

"Never mind what Martin says. You stay with Kelly. How much has he made for you this year?"

"Six thousand, about."

"Then stay with him. In two or three years you may know enough not to lead with your right arm."

"I never did."

"Take a joke. But it's almost that bad, sometimes."

Egan, suddenly conscious of another presence in the room, turned and confronted Kelly, his manager, standing there smiling, oily, overdressed. He had no heart just then for a round with him, and so he turned to go.

"I was just trying to pound some sense into this kid's head for you, Joe," said Cassidy, as Kelly advanced and investigated the broken chair.

Egan smiled at his manager from the doorway.

"You and Cassidy fight it out. I'm going to stroll around town a bit. I just mentioned to Cassidy that Jim Martin is after me, Joe; you've probably heard it anyhow."

KELLY did not show his surprise, if he felt any. The smile faded out of his light, watery eyes, and the corners of his mouth fell into half-contemptuous lines.

"Remember, Pat—in bed by eleven tonight," he said. Then he turned his back on the figure in the doorway, leaning forward to talk with the sporting editor.

Sauntering into the corridor, Egan turned the first corner, thinking to come upon the elevator. Instead he found himself in another coop, next to Cassidy's. He was about to step out of the room again when he was arrested by the sound of his own name. The sounds came from Cassidy's coop; the partitions did not run to the ceiling.

"I thought for about two minutes he was going to take Welsh last night," Kelly was saying. "It would have cost us eight hundred apiece if he had. As it stands, we make a little dough."

The boxer stood transfixed. To him Kelly's words were a sentence of terror. He had been happy, elated, in believing he had helped his manager win on the number of rounds he stayed with Welsh; this sounded like something different, ugly.

"You've got to watch him," replied Cassidy. "He thinks Jim Martin is all right. He likes that middleweight-champion stuff Jim handed him."

Kelly broke in with a rough laugh.

"All right, laugh," said Cassidy crossly. "But don't let our best meal-ticket slip away. Keep him just where he is; I can match him up for ten thousand apiece for us during the year. We'll get a match with Madden, too; but it wont be the kind Jim Martin promised him."

The speaker gave a low laugh.

"Come on; I'll take my money now."

There was silence. The man standing in the darkened room put a hand against the wall and felt his way out softly. He had heard enough. Somehow he found his way to the street.

AT the exit he wheeled and started back. His normal impulse was master now.

"Why didn't I step in and smash them?" Muttering to himself, he turned and started up the winding iron staircase, two steps at a time.

At the third-floor turn, swinging upward at full speed, he came to a sudden and awkward stop just in time to avoid knocking over a man who was coming slowly down in the darkness. It was Mitch.

"Who is it—Pat Egan?" asked the blind man, laying a slender, bony hand on the boxer's arm to detain him.

"Yes, Mitch; I'm just going up and knock hell outa your boss."

"Cassidy? Why?"

"I just found out him an' Kelly are whipsawin' me—matchin' me up and then bettin' against me, bettin' I wont stay."

"Well?" The other voice was quiet.

"Well, I'm going up and smash both of 'em, and then I'm going over to Jim Martin's gymnasium."

The hand on his arm tightened.

"No; you're not going up and smash anybody. It would be plain assault and battery, and they'd have you locked up. Instead, you're coming along with me."

"No—let me go!"

"You're coming with me," came the quiet voice through the dark. "We're going up to Miller's and have a nice, quiet little supper, and we're going to talk. Then if you want to go and find Cassidy and beat him up, you can."

The fighter stood undetermined. Then he followed the blind man to the street.

EATING toasted sardines and drinking coffee in the old basement restaurant in Smithfield Street, watched over with smiling care by Henry, waiter extraordinary to the men from the newspaper offices, Mitch listened to the few sentences in which the boxer told his story. He did not reply immediately. After minutes, in which Egan begun to think Mitch had not understood fully, he snapped:

"You'll have to learn to hit."

"What's that got to do with a crooked manager?" came back Egan hotly. "If Kelly is crooked, so is Martin. The whole game's crooked. I might as well go back to the elevator. The next time I'm in there, my arms will be paralyzed."

Lighting a long, slender stogie on the match Henry held ready, Mitch inhaled gratefully and relaxed in his chair. He seemed not to have heard Egan's protest.

"Fighting is like baseball or football. Talent is something; but championship is a matter of heart and technic. A man has to tie up all the loose ends."

"Hell, Mitch! I don't get you. I want to know what to do about Kelly and Cassidy double-crossing me."

Color mounted slowly to the sunken, white cheeks of the blind man.

"Gee, I'm sorry, Mitch!" exclaimed the fighter, reaching across the littered table and touching the other's hand. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

There was a long silence. Then Mitch went on:

"The last fight I saw with my eyes was the Toledo affair. Have you ever seen Dempsey work?"

Egan muttered a negative.

"Well, you wont see him before you need what I'm getting at. I don't suppose Leonard will be fighting in time, either. He has what you don't have. Both of them know how to hit. I wish you could see Dempsey's punch—it travels six, perhaps eight inches. But it is enough, because he knows how to do it. If you knew how to hit—"

Mitch leaned across the ash-trays and coffee-cups and finished in a lower tone:

"They are betting against you because they know you're no good. Cassidy is absolutely right; so is Kelly. All you can do is to learn your stuff; then, some night when they are plunging on you to lose, which will be any time, uncover—take your man."

Egan stirred restlessly.

"I begin to get you. But I don't see why you say I can't hit. Some day I'll be in there with a champion or a near champion, and he'll let me see an inch of daylight through his guard, and I'll clip him."

"Clip him!" Mitch laughed shortly. "That's all you know about hitting. Besides, you're in no class. You're too heavy for the middleweights, and too light for the rest."

"There's the light heavyweight class."

"That's not a real division. You've got to make one hundred and fifty-eight pounds and learn to do your stuff."

Mitch rose slowly.

"I wouldn't bother with you, son," he said. "But I have other reasons. I could tell you some things about Cassidy—but it doesn't matter."

He held out his arms for the overcoat Henry had ready.

"I'd like to show you something, though. Come out to the ball-game tomorrow, come up to the press-box. Maybe you'll learn something about hitting."

He turned away and tapped out of the long, white-tiled room, a pathetic yet somehow majestic figure.

STEPPING from the elevator in the baseball park the next afternoon, Pat Egan found himself regarding a file of men huddled on stools at a long, narrow shelf fixed to the edge of the balcony and overlooking the green playing-field far below.

On an old camp-chair behind the row, his feet on the railing, sat Mitch, his eyes closed, apparently detached from the scene and the action. As Egan stood there, a sharp report from below almost startled him. The throng, invisible in the stands under him, had been quiet; now a volley of cheers broke out.

"Two bases," remarked Mitch without moving or changing expression.

"Give him two bases," said the scorer. "He went to third on an overthrow."

The stands were quiet again. None of the reporters paid any attention to the blind man. They were used to him. When Egan went and stood near, Mitch put out a hand and drew him down into a chair beside him.

"Adams' soft ball has been working for two innings," he commented. "But that hit sounded like the break of the game. The next man probably will hit too—the second or third ball pitched."

As he finished, another report cracked the air.

"No good," said Mitch. "It's a fly. Maybe the runner on third will score."

"Carey took it," threw back one of the men at the press-table.

Then that snapping sound, so like the first, raised again the rattle of cheering.

"Another hit and the run," said Mitch.

"Two bases," reported the scorer.

WHEN the inning was over and the teams were changing sides, Mitch rose and drew Egan away to a corner of the concrete stand.

"You see whether I know a real hit or not. It's the same in boxing. When Leonard lands, he really scores, just like those men who are hitting for McGraw down there. And there's this for you to remember, too: McGraw doesn't play exhibition games on the schedule. He gets the runs, as early as possible. He is there to win the game. A champion fighter must be the same. You don't dare box. You're in there to put the other fellow away, and it's better to do it in the third round than the tenth."

"But how can you sit up here and tell a safe hit?"

"I followed the game for years before I lost my eyes. It was the same then. I could close my eyes and decide. A real hit doesn't sound the same as the other kind. That's what I meant about you; the difference between you and a champion like Dempsey or Leonard is—well, they know how to do their stuff. The little things, the loose ends, are second nature to them now."

MOVING slowly streetward with the streaming crowd, Pat immediately saw Kelly, seated in his maroon car, surveying the throng. When their glances met, Kelly raised a fat finger and crooked it at Egan, who drew his blind companion to the car door.

"I phoned your house, Pat," explained the manager. "Your sister said you'd gone to the ball-game. Where can I drop you, Mitch? Home or office?"

"Take me downtown. I ought to go home, but it's so natural to beat it to the office after a game or a fight—even if you're blind."

Egan guided him into the back seat and climbed in beside him. In the precise and appraising manner Mitch used toward Kelly, the fighter suddenly sensed something new to him, a matter of values. Mitch was polite, but he was unresponsive. He was not, apparently, grateful for or interested in the lift downtown. Hearing a jammed surface-car clang past he remarked:

"There go the fellows who really know baseball, the ones who sit behind the screen in right field."

His good-by to Kelly was just enough. It left the boxing manager in no doubt as to his place in Mitch's mental index of important persons. But he laid a hand on the boxer's knee.

"Don't forget the loose ends," he said.

As he left the car and disappeared into the entrance of the old dark newspaper building, Pat changed to the front seat, and Kelly shot the machine into the outward-bound double line of traffic.

"We'll drive through the park," he explained. "I want to talk business."

NOTHING more was said until, after following the Serpentine drive to a place of quiet, remote from the main-traveled routes, Kelly stopped the motor and turned to his companion.

"This is a big day in your life. I'm going to let you celebrate with one cigarette. Madden has offered us a fight."

"You're kidding." Egan instantly supposed Kelly was trying to forestall the overtures of Jim Martin to persuade him to change stables.

For answer Kelly produced a yellow envelope.

"He'll take a big share of the gross, and we have to give him a guarantee and put up a forfeit to make one fifty-eight at the ringside. Also he names the referee. Outside of that, he doesn't want much."

"But I don't see—you kept saying I wasn't ready to fight the champion. Cassidy, he laughed at me."

"You're not ready. If you were, Madden wouldn't be willing to fight you. We have nothing to do with it. Brennan, his manager, has picked you out. The match looks good to him. You've got a fair reputation. Here in your own town the go will draw a big gate. On percentage they'll take nearly all of it. It is a matter of business with the champion."

"And what do I get? I get licked, huh?"

Egan was drawing on his one cigarette.

"You get a chance to stay in there twelve rounds with the champion. The papers will say you gave Madden the fight of his life. Cassidy will take care of that. And you get a return match. Anyway, it'll be advertising."

Egan was silent a long while. His mind was not on Madden, the middleweight champion. It was on the face of a blind man. Finally he said:

"I'm going good; you know that, Kelly." Then he added, turning slightly and watching his manager's face:

"Some of the boys around town'll bet on me."

"Yes, some. They'll bet you'll stay eight, maybe ten, rounds. And some wont."

"When is it?"

"Next month. You've got three weeks to take off five pounds. That makes it easy for you."

Kelly broke out in an ugly laugh.

"I guess I don't have it on Jim Martin, huh? Holding out a match with the champion and trying to steal you away from me. I've had this under cover a long while."

His boxer knew this was a lie. He said slowly:

"You'll bet I'll stay eight rounds, wont you, Kelly?"

His manager put the car into gear.

"Sure I will. I'll lay even money you'll last nine."

The fighter knew that too was a lie.

AT the head of the long aisle leading down steeply to the ringside, Mitch appeared from the gloom outside the arena entrance. Below and around him spread a silent, tense expanse of humanity, its eyes on the two figures moving in and out

under the white glare of the lamps, on the canvas-covered platform.

He listened, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. Then to the usher at his side he remarked:

"Last preliminary."

"Yes—sixth round."

"It wont last more than another. I might as well go down to my seat."

He walked, with that strange dignity which often belongs to the blind, down to the press seats around the circle of light.

Now the crowd was in that momentary uproar which sometimes precedes the chief spectacle. Understanding the noise, Mitch set about locating himself. He put a hand along the table until he touched the arm of the next reporter.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Harry," answered Devlin, from the *Post*.

"Looks like a big evening for Pat Egan," he went on. "The odds at Newell's were ten to five Madden would knock him out. There is some money at ten to eight Madden will finish him in six rounds."

Mitch laughed, leaning close to the other's ear.

"Do you know anybody who will give ten to five on a knockout?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing; but say, if by chance Egan is on his feet at the end of the fight, just glance around the ring and tell me what some of the faces look like."

Devlin's answer was lost in the cheering that followed the appearance of the champion in the ring.

"They don't mean it," remarked Mitch. "This fellow has never been popular."

A moment later the announcer introduced Pat, and the crowd went wild.

"They like Pat," commented Mitch. "By the way, where is Cassidy sitting?"

"Clear across the ring."

"How does he look?"

"Sore, as usual."

"Ten to five on Madden to knock him out, you say?" He leaned close to Devlin again and lowered his voice. "If Egan should stay, don't forget to look at Cassidy's face."

He leaned back in his chair and closed his sightless eyes.

THERE was silence, precious to him, broken only by a brief scuffing. The fighters, hands on the ropes in their corners and their backs to each other, were rubbing their shoes in the rosin. Then came the thrilling tap of the bell; and in a second there fell on Mitch's ears the padding of the boxers in and out in that vital first moment in which each sought the range and temper of the other. Only Dempsey, Mitch reflected, had the perfect psychic balance that permits a fighter to dispense with the sparring of the first round. He was ready to hit immediately. That was why his fights were so short.

He heard a thud, heavy but not convincing.

"Madden got one through to his body," explained Harry.

"I know; don't tell me. Madden didn't have any heart in it; that's what makes him a cheese champion. He doesn't really care much about fighting."

He sat up suddenly. The crowd broke into a cheer.

"What was that? Madden can't hit like that."

"No! That was Pat. He handcuffed Madden and sunk one into his stomach. He almost had to pull to get his glove out. Madden's hurt."

The bell brought the clatter of stools and the flapping of towels.

"Madden will either rush him or hang on now. He's got a mean temper, so he'll probably rush. Egan ought to step out slow and hit him when he comes in at him."

The hush that always precedes the round gong fell over the arena. Swift steps crossed the ring above Mitch's head.

"There he goes. If Pat's caught now, he'll be killed. . . . . He's on the ropes."

It was true. The champion, employing both his swiftness and his long experience, had Egan in a neutral corner and was pumping to his body with both hands.

"Those punches aren't the real thing," commented Mitch. "But they take the fight out of an ordinary man. Madden's getting ready to knock him out in the fourth round. Egan isn't yellow; if he can get out, he'll weather the round. In a way, it's too bad he hurt Madden and got him sore in the first round."

Again he was brought up sharp in his chair by a curious snapping impact, the precise climax of a perfectly timed blow, shot home at close range. The noise of the audience was deafening.

"Madden's down!" Harry was shouting at Mitch's ear. "Pat hit him from cover while Madden had him backed into the corner. Madden's taking nine."

There was a hush as the count went on.

"It isn't the end," said Mitch. "Remember, Madden's champion. He's taken nine many times, and you know the referee's bound to give him a good count. Pat probably doesn't know how to handle him when he gets up."

A moment later Mitch groaned.

"He let him get up and hang on. Well, you can't expect everything. Pat will be lucky if he gets an opening for that punch the rest of the evening."

The bell stopped the labored clinching.

"If it was my fight," said Mitch, "I'd throw my guard away in the next round and hit Madden with everything but the water bucket. Pat ought to size it up that way; but there's Kelly. He'll tell him to ride along a few rounds."

"Why should Kelly tell him that?" asked Harry angrily.

"You don't know Kelly as I do," responded Mitch. "By the way, how does Cassidy look?"

From the ring came, incredibly rapid, pairs of cruelly decisive impacts, easily six true punches in couples. Then Mitch lost count. The noise from the ringside seats and bleachers swept away his contacts. Everybody, it seemed, was on his feet, yelling. He leaned back, wishing he could hear, through the noise, the rhythm of those perfectly driven blows.

"He's taking him!" screamed Harry. "Egan's got him. He's using the one-two, one-two—he's got a knockout in either hand. There he goes. Madden's down!"

Silence, breathless, pregnant, settled over the vast hall.

". . . . Six—seven—eight—nine—ten!"

With a mighty roar the crowd surged toward the ring to hail their own Pat Egan, the new middleweight champion.

BUT the new champion did not wait. After bending hastily over Madden and helping him to his feet, Egan ducked through the ropes and leaped into the ringside seats.

People say he threw his arms around blind Mitch, the reporter, and hugged him, shouting the strangest words into his ears.

Mitch reached out sidewise and plucked Harry Devlin by the sleeve.

"Quick," he said. "How does Cassidy look?"

"He's gone," was the answer.

"Well, ten to five was a pretty long shot, anyhow," replied Mitch.

And then came the voice of Kelly, veiled and choked with rage. He had fought his way across the seats to Pat and Mitch.

"Well, damn you, you're middleweight champion now; but what d'ya think you cost me, huh?"

Egan laughed. "How much do you suppose, Mitch?" he asked.

"Oh, maybe ten thousand."

The crowd, to be held back no longer, swept Kelly aside and carried Pat out toward the waiting fringes of the hall. In a moment Mitch knew he was alone, a solitary, forgotten figure of a former day among the wreckage of the ringside.

WHEN Cassidy finally appeared for work in his coop next day, Mitch was bending over his old typewriter, tapping out a story, a sidelight on the fight. There was no greeting; none was given and none expected. When Mitch knew the other was buried in the mass of work waiting for him on his desk, he remarked casually:

"I won my first money on a prize-fight last night."

Cassidy whirled around in his chair.

"Won? How did you win on that match?"

"It was easy. I bet one hundred dollars that Egan would win. You know what the odds were; you ought to."

"You were on Egan to win! Well, of course you know you were crazy."

Mitch smiled and leaned back.

"No; I wasn't afraid to bet on him. Besides, George," he went on softly, "somebody had to take those odds that were being given on Madden."

He waited for the sentence to sink in. Then he added:

"You see, I'd been working with Pat a little—just visiting with him and talking. But I taught him to pay attention to the little things, the fine details. You saw the fight; you know whether I did or not."

There was silence; but the blind man could feel the hate in Cassidy's gaze. Finally the sporting editor managed to control his voice long enough to say:

"If you are so damned brilliant, you ought to get out of the newspaper business. You're too good for it."

"I am getting out," said Mitch quietly, getting up and moving toward the door, a look of serenity on his sightless face. "I am getting out," he went on. "After the first of the year, I am to be the manager of the new middleweight champion."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Map of the Mediterranean" again reveals Mr. New's extraordinary and "inside" knowledge of international affairs—and his exceptional skill as a writer of deeply interesting stories.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THERE is a comfortable house in Paris, furnished in excellent taste, where an old man lives with his daughter, a few devoted servants and a number of pets. It's living-rooms are familiar not only to many of the world's great people, but to most of the newspaper men who live in or pass through the city. The man has moved on the world's stage—spoken his lines, won his measure of applause—and is now living his life as pleases him, smiling under the drooping white mustaches at life's comedy as it unfolds to his understanding gaze. His daughter, a woman of striking appearance, nursed American soldiers along with her own French in hospitals near front-line trenches during the war.

On this particular morning she was idly pulling the ears of a pet cat on her knee while the old man, in the adjoining room, glanced through the pages of his paper and made observations to another cat on the table at his elbow.

"Look you, O somnolent Achille! Our young man who sits at the telegraph-key observes that their Majesties of Spain make the little sortie. They find their terrain a bit circumscribed; they desire to expand. They proceed to the borders of Spain. They count 'One, two! . . . . One, two!' . . . . And, *v'là!* They step over the border of Spain! They make the little journey that they may dine and gossip with relatives, friends, brother-rulers. *Eh bien!* It is to be commended, *n'est-ce pas, mon vieux?* It is good for one—the relaxation upon occasion. And observe—O Wise One! They do not journey to the lands of snow and icebergs which are full of la grippe and other unpleasant things. Not so! They stroll about in the sun and warmth of the Mediterranean, where one does not catch the cold and wrap up the neck. Well, me, I have like' their Majesties of Spain. I approve their step over the border. It is pleasant. It relaxes the mind. Me—I also like the sun of the Mediterranean. But to reach the spot I have in mind, I think I should first risk the fogs and the rain of *Angleterre* for a day or two—that one may gain information and

assistance on his way. *Eh—mon vieux?* You consent? *Très bien!* Then, if you are *bon chat,* you will not jump and flatten the ear when I touch the bell for Pierre? So! An excellent man, the brave Pierre—one hears his footsteps at once."

A door opened, and the old man's valet appeared—a loyal friend and servitor for thirty years.

"Oui, m'sieur?"

"Pierre, I think we make the little journey, while I am in the mood. First, thou wilt engage for me at Le Bourget a place in the afternoon 'plane for Croydon. Then, with clothing for London and much more for a warmer climate, you will pack a trunk and transport yourself by the *rapide* to Calais—arriving in London on the club-train about eleven, at Charing Cross. From there to the house of the good Comte Trevor de Dyvnaint in Park Lane, where I think you will find me. You comprehend? *Très bien!* You will drive me to Le Bourget at one hour—after I make the *au revoirs* to Madame."

It had been on Madame's mind for several days that her father should be starting for a milder climate than that of Paris in the winter, though cold agreed with him when he was out of doors, with plenty of exercise. But it was difficult to tear himself away from the center in which European politics revolved as in a vortex, filling the great daily which he owned with material for widespread catastrophe at the slightest reckless touch. So his decision gradually to work his way south was a welcome one to her. She asked few questions. In his own good time, when in the mood, he would write her where he was, and if staying there for any length of time, ask her to join him, provided her many engagements permitted. For the moment, both of them overlooked the fact that she was practically booked for an American tour and that he had talked of joining her on the Pacific Coast to come home through the Orient.

AT five in the afternoon he was getting into a motor-landaulet with his suitcase at Croydon; forty minutes later, he arrived at the famous Jacobean mansion in Park Lane occupied by the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, who were surprised and delighted to see him. While his suitcase was being taken up to a room on the second floor which he had been quite sure he might count upon, they made him comfortable in the big library—pelting him with questions as they did so. Why hadn't he telephoned that he was coming? Why hadn't he permitted them to send one of their own cars down to Croydon—meeting him upon his arrival?

"Because, my good friends—had I done so, others would have known that I was on my way to see you in London. They would have speculated upon what I could have in mind—jumped at this or that conclusion—would have had me under espionage from the moment I reached the city. As it is, I do not think either the pilot of the 'plane or the four other passengers recognized me at all—I was booked under another name, of course. Nobody seemed to know me at Croydon. With the hat pulled down, the coat-collar up, I look much like thousands of other old men, you see. And the newspaper men were busy with another passenger who appeared to be a celebrity—"

This drew a laugh from the Trevors. "Fancy! Imagine what their managing editors would have said to them had they gotten the least hint that you might have been on that 'plane!"

"Oh—*oui!* They missed a 'scoop,' as you call it—which does not altogether displease me, inasmuch as that was my intention. Well—I am here! I shall enjoy the little visit with you very much—if your many engagements and interests permit. Whether I shall obtain for myself something besides the pleasure of your company depends entirely upon whether we are *en rapport* concerning the best policy for Europe, and France in particular. If you approve my ideas concerning both, you are in position to give me information—more than that, to assist in my plans if you will. If you think the interests of France conflict too much with those of England and America, I shall ask nothing of you but a few days of pleasant companionship—and be quite content."

"Hmph! Do not forget, my friend, that I am American, though holding a British title by courtesy—and that Nan's point of view is Colonial rather than British. I'm a loyal supporter of the British Government as long as that doesn't conflict with my position as an American—but this doesn't mean that I approve the present drift toward Germany or Russia, here, or would support it in any way. In their anxiety for a renewal of active trading conditions, the English are willing to forget a

good many things which it isn't safe for them to forget—and it has drifted them along into a political condition where the make-up of the recently elected Parliament is a deadlock—a mere travesty of government! Until they muddle out of that, they're negligible as an influence in European politics—and I'm afraid that conditions in our Congress are none too favorable for effective legislation. So you may find us more nearly in accord with your views than you think. Give us some hint of what you have in mind."

"HAVE you any fear, *mon ami,* that France may become too powerful?"

"None whatever. I think it somewhat more than possible that France may be for some years the most powerful nation in Europe. That has happened twice before—under Louis Fourteenth and Napoleon. But to do that now would mean a series of alliances or *ententes* with other nations which would only hold while they were of advantage to all. If France became aggressive, domineering, filled with the lust for conquest, her supporters would drop off, one by one, until there would be a strong coalition against her. Neither she nor any other nation ever will be strong enough to stand alone against the world! Putting your question in a slightly different way, you mean to ask whether I would object to seeing France the most powerful nation in Europe for many years to come?

"Well—in my somewhat unusual position, I don't think I would object to that. Temperamentally, you French haven't got the lust for world-conquest. You already have about all the overseas territory you can handle and develop. You want non-interference while doing that—you want to be dead sure that you can protect yourselves against any German or Russian combination which may be hatched up. You're going to keep army enough—navy enough, air-force enough, allies enough—to give you the best possible fighting chance when some offensive develops against you. But you're not going to make war just because you may be strong enough to do it; you've enough vision and imagination thoroughly to understand the folly of that. The Germans lacked imagination—and didn't see it. Of course, I'm supposed to favor the British Empire occupying a dominant position in Europe—but political and social conditions within the Empire make that seem more dangerous than advisable at present. We've altogether too much socialism in England just now. If we were top-dog, we'd recognize the Moscow Soviet at once and accept it on equal terms, just for the sake of trade—and pay, pay, *pay* for the mistake, afterward. I don't think there's much risk of France doing that. As an American, I think France the safest nation to be intrusted with dominant power at present, even if a good many of my countrymen don't agree with me on that point. So you may consider I've answered your question and am quite willing to assist you in any reasonable way I can."

"Ah! I had *hoped* you might take that view—but I was not sure. No—I was not sure. As I understand my country and her people, I think you do us no more than justice in what you have said. We are not Huns or *conquistadores.* We wish simply to be let alone in the development of our own country—at home and overseas. But we do not intend to be caught napping—unprepared. *Très bien!* Have you knowledge as to the whereabouts of the good Cavaliere Scarpia? Is he in Rome—or in either of his other Italian residences?"

"He is in Rome, just now—occupying the upper floors of the old *cinquocento* palace which has been his home, there, for a good many years, just off the Piazza di Spagna—has made no change whatever in his manner of living because of— I wonder! Very likely you've not heard the latest in regard to Scarpia—eh? I think he has purposely hushed it up as far as he could—because of his age and disinclination for being interviewed. No? Well—three of his younger cousins passed out within a month—very unexpectedly. He has become Il Marchese di Soltaverno—at the age of eighty-nine, mind you! Before this happened, he was in some doubt as to whether he would spend his usual two months in the Sahara this winter. This has been his habit for years, 'to renew his youth'—and it certainly appears to have that effect upon him. The immediate future in Europe looks chaotic to him—said he didn't care much about living through it, felt ready to go at any time. Then along come this marquisate and Mussolini about the same time—and the old man begins to sit up and take notice again. He has never cared much about titles, has refused them half a dozen times, to my knowledge. But this came to him as his right—through his own family, who go back in unbroken line to the early days of

the Roman Empire; and he now says that he means to stick around ten or twenty years longer to enjoy it. Also, he's quite interested in seeing what happens to Mussolini—and what happens to Italy afterward. So in a few weeks he'll be crossing to the coast of Tripoli and going down by caravan to Ghadames, from where he goes on to his own pet oasis of the Ouri Beg."

"Is he—er—modern enough to have a telephone installed in that old Roman *palazzo?*"

"Oh, quite so! He even took a radio-outfit down to the Ouri Beg last winter. They think he's right next to the Lord Almighty, now. You see, a few of the natives there had been up to Biskra, where they saw a locomotive and train of cars for the first time in their lives—heard the whistle, the bell and the *chuff-chuff* of the loco. And they knew it was a good five hundred miles by camel-trail—knew there was nothing else like it within almost twice the distance. Scarpia had one of the Biskra outfit hold a soup-plate transmitter near the locomotive—and those Arabs five hundred miles southeast heard the bell, the whistle and the chuffing as distinctly as if the train were just outside the tent. The old man is going down by airplane this winter—just to make their opinion of him unanimous. But, getting back to your question, would you like to speak with him? I've a direct wire to my big radio-towers in South Devon—they'll get the station outside of Rome; and the Roman operator has a direct wire into Scarpia's *palazzo.* If he's at home, I can get him in a few minutes. He doesn't go out much in the evening—goes to bed at eight or nine."

"I would appreciate it very much, my friend, if you will do that—but it is better that I do not talk with him myself. The Roman operators must not hear my voice. Just ask Il Marchese if he could put up his friend Georges in that old *palazzo* for a few days?"

"If you don't mind, I'll make it 'Georges and ourselves'—because I think I'll be able to help a bit in what you have in mind. Might have known that you'd see the opportunity, old chap! Saw the possibility myself when the papers announced that Alfonso was leaving Spain. Nan and I talked it over, but we didn't see how anyone from your government could butt in without being specially asked to. And I'll bet you haven't said much to anybody in the Chamber, either! How about it—do we accompany you, or would you prefer not having us around?"

"*Ma foi!* I did not really anticipate such luck! Of course there are some things which I have in mind that I must handle myself—and you will be good enough to know nothing about them. But there is no question as to your assistance being most valuable in every other way. How would you suggest going down?"

"It's a hard trip by air at this season of the year, and a 'plane attracts attention—a lot of people watching for it to come down—curious to see who's in it. Of course we'd try to land at night on my Ancona estate—but engine-trouble might bring us down somewhere else, and you'd be seen. We can make it in a few days on the *Ranee Sylvia*—anchoring at Ancona, and going across the mountains in one of my cars. We'll reach Rome—get into Scarpia's *palazzo* without being noticed, if we have luck."

"I was quite right, then, in playing my 'hunch,' as you Americans say—approaching Italy by way of London instead of on the *rapide* to Marseilles. In this way, though supposed to be *chez moi* in Paris, I arrive at my destination without being seen or my plans guessed in any way. I thought I might depend upon you, *mon ami* —but would not suggest it until I had ascertained your views concerning France."

OWING to her great speed, the famous deep-sea yacht was not sighted by any other craft either in the Bay of Biscay or the Mediterranean, though a number of smoke-columns on the horizon indicated plenty of boats almost within recognizing distance, had the *Ranee* used her radio or permitted them to get any nearer. At Gibraltar they passed through the Straits at night without reporting to the Lloyd's station. Just south of Ancona in the Adriatic, the *Ranee* anchored off a private jetty built out from the Trevor estate, so that none but the Earl's own people saw who came ashore from her. That evening a comfortably heated landaulet took the Earl, Countess Nan and their old friend over the pass in the Apennines and down to Rome, which they reached in the early morning. They were out of the car with their hand-luggage, and had stepped into the storage-basement of Scarpia's old *palazzo* in its narrow street off the Piazza di Spagna before anyone passed along near enough for recognition.

On the fourth floor, Paolo—who had been Scarpia's man for many years—asked if they would bathe before breakfast, and took them to a suite of rooms whose luxurious furnishings were amazing. There are many old palaces in the Italian cities which, from the exterior view, appear falling into ruin—but in some portion of which noble Italian families live among magnificent surroundings that would involve ten times the upkeep-expenditure if the whole building were maintained upon a corresponding scale and had spacious grounds about it instead of, perhaps, a photograph-shop in the basement of the adjoining building in the solid block, and a dealer in phonographs on the other side. One rarely sees anyone but an occasional servant going in or out of these age-old palaces—in the daytime. But at night, when the shops of the Corso and its side-streets are closed, car after car stops before the little postern in the massive door, and a brilliant assemblage of famous people climb the stairs. There has been a good bit of migration to newer sections of the city and suburbs, but it doesn't include as many of the old aristocracy as one might think.

IN an hour they came together in a sunny breakfast-room overlooking a little court with a fountain, and found Scarpia waiting for them by one of the windows. The man has been described in these narratives before—but there now seemed to be a subtle difference in his appearance. The well-shaped, polished skull, the color of old parchment, was the same, as were the aquiline nose and drooping white mustaches, the deep-set, piercing eyes under their shaggy brows—the features and bearing which had made him known for so many years as the "old bald-eagle of Italian diplomacy." But for reasons of his own he had cultivated the impression of a rather slouchy old man—thoroughly at home in wrinkled, carelessly worn clothes, with a flopping straw or felt hat much the worse for wear. Because of this, upon the rare occasions when he appeared in court costume, he was an amazing surprise—and every chancellery in Europe had, somehow, the conviction that if all the information stored up in that polished skull during the previous seventy years (he had been in the diplomatic service at nineteen), should be published by the press syndicates after a confessional interview with him, it would probably turn Europe bottom-side up. It is said that he once laughed at a bribe of a million gold rubles,—with the alternative of possibly having his throat cut within a few days,—being quite well aware that nobody was entirely sure what memoirs he might or might not have left in a safe place, to be made public under such a contingency.

But—getting back to the man himself, in his breakfast-room at the top of the old palace, standing erect in a blaze of sunshine which accentuated the depth of pile in his velvet sack-coat which topped a stylish waistcoat and trousers with white spats and patent-leather shoes: This was unmistakably their old friend of many years—but an aristocrat to his finger-tips, a man of older blood and lineage than the King himself. Sargent or Abbey might have painted him as "The Prince"—and the title would have been superfluous. Even the charming accent with which he had formerly spoken English was almost gone—as one might drop a thing which he is too old to longer need.

"My friends, this gives me the greatest pleasure I 'ave had in many months—chiefly, from my desire to see and chat with all of you. Beyond that, perhaps, the fact that my old confrère of many generations, who is still but a boy of eighty-two, has unfailingly sensed a crucial moment in world affairs as I might have known he would, and has shown more confidence in my integrity than others of his countrymen would show, by coming down here to coöperate with me. Until his arrival—or that of some one backed by the French Government, if anyone could get such backing—I was but cooling my heels, marking time, watering my flowers, feeding my pigeons—who sometimes prove themselves great travelers. For look you, it is of little interest to me what Spain and Italy may agree upon among themselves as long as the broad zone of France and Algeria separate them. Well—perhaps we now have in Rome the ingredients of an international *compote*—or, how shall I say chicken-pie? It is not, however, quite as simple as one cooks anything of the sort in his kitchen. No! Publicly we cannot appear. It is not a thing of the council-chamber—either in Quirinal or Vatican—nor private interviews with their Majesties of Italy and Spain, nor of conferences with two premiers who play rather good chess. The matter needs consideration before we can act in any way—"

Here, Trevor remarked that this covered his reason for trailing along down to Italy.

"Suppose you leave that end of it to Nan and me, Signor Marchese? As soon as Georges appeared in Park Lane, I foresaw exactly what the conditions would be if he succeeded in joining you here unobserved—because I know what neither of you may have stumbled upon. One of the most brilliant women in Russia is now in Rome, sent here against just the contingency that there might be some such interview as you wish to bring about—with instructions to thwart it by cold-blooded murder if necessary. I don't know her name nor how she looks, but I do know one little rather unusual gesture which has become an unconscious habit with her. There are also in Rome one of the most unscrupulous secret agents who ever came out of *Wilhelmstrasse* in the old days—and two men who are only second to him in all-round cussedness, from Hungary and Jugo-Slavia. At least one of the three knows the woman, and all have been told to coöperate with the German."

"But—how will you bring about the interview which would provide our opportunity, my friend—you and la Contessa?"

"We'll motor up to the Quirinal after breakfast. Much depends upon just what the King and Queen happen to be doing this morning. Everything is undoubtedly full up until one o'clock at least—but I just telephoned one of the staff-officers in the Aviation Corps, and he thinks there might be ten minutes before the state luncheon to Alfonso—after the King has changed his uniform."

"Hmph! A serious breach of etiquette, old friend! A sample of American audacity—presumption—any Italian or Spaniard would say!"

"And your American says: 'Presumption be damned!' That it may be a case of preserving the peace of Europe. That's exactly what His Majesty would say—behind his hand. And if I get word to him at all, I'll bet you a thousand guineas he sees me for a few minutes whether he accepts my suggestions or not!"

"I will not bet, my friend. The government of Italy is under many obligations to you—if the fact is remembered. You will probably get your interview at the risk of being considered importunate at a very busy and responsible time. Which may weigh in the balance against getting what you ask—whatever that is."

"The point is—I'm not going to ask any favor! I'm just going to say one or two things and see whether the logic of circumstance is as clear to him as to the rest of us. The King is an exceptional man, you know—he's nobody's fool!"

NOW, at a time when one monarch is entertaining another visiting one, with all the detail and responsibility which that implies, even a well-known personage has about as much chance of sandwiching in a personal interview with him as the average radio-fan has of carrying on a conversation in English with an inhabitant of Mars. Court etiquette and various court officials seeing to it that the chance is just about that good. But the man whom the Trevors succeeded in catching knew them for valued friends of His Majesty—and when they seriously told him it was a matter of the gravest political importance, he took the risk of going direct to the King with the message—just barely making it, in spite of opposition from various attendants at every turn. It took a moment or two of concentration upon the King's part to clear his mind of other things sufficiently to comprehend just who wanted to see him and the urgent message they had sent. But that was sufficient. He knew both of his callers too well to imagine for an instant that they might have overestimated their errand. Stepping into a small anteroom overlooking the gardens of the Quirinal, he sent the officer back for them. In two minutes they appeared—getting down to business without the loss of a second:

"Your Majesty—your guests from Spain undoubtedly have seen the Villa Adriano at Tivoli more than once, but it remains a delightful motor-ride for an afternoon, all the same. Suppose you were to run them out there as a brief relaxation from tiresome dinners and ceremonies—nobody accompanying you but the two premiers and a cavalry escort of perhaps fifty, who would surround the Villa and permit no intrusion? Suppose that in one of the more secluded chambers of the Villa you came upon two very old men, with their valets, picnicking from a well-stocked hamper—and that, although carelessly dressed in outing clothes, you recognized in them men who not only have your confidence but whose combined knowledge of European affairs is probably greater than any score of men you could name? Suppose that one of them should prove to be a world-

famous Frenchman, that they should courteously ask you and your party to sit down upon camp-mats and join them in whatever they might have? (It would be of first quality, because they are of an age when one takes no undue risks with his digestion.) Would not the topics very likely discussed in such a chance meeting be worth the effort of arranging such an excursion?"

ALTHOUGH no names had been mentioned, the King would have come very close to the mark in guessing the identity of the two old men. His mind was racing over each possibility which such a conference presented—and the more he thought, the more imperative it seemed to bring it about in so casual a manner that no suspicion could be aroused concerning ulterior motive for the excursion. He knew a brief confidential talk with Alfonso would not only win over that bright and fun-loving young man to the suggestion, but that he would "play up" in any way to bring it about. In another moment Countess Nan had quietly told him of the four international agents in Rome who wouldn't hesitate at murder to prevent such a conference—and that settled it. With a memorandum of Scarpia's telephone-number, a keyword was given to prevent the possibility of either being deceived by fake or decoying messages—and the Trevors were told that when arrangements were completed, they would first receive word by an officer from the palace. They were not to act upon this, however, until they also received a telephone-message with the keyword. Altogether, the interview with His Majesty had taken just eight minutes. Instead of considering them importunate, presumptuous, he thanked them—and gave confidential orders to his personal suite that any message from either Il Conte or La Contessa di Dyvnaint was to be fetched to him at once—day or night. All of which was impressive stuff to everyone in the Quirinal. It spread—like ripples in a pond. Whenever the two appeared as their normal selves in public, the marks of deep respect were noticeable.

Returning at once to the Marchese's palace, they found that their friend who had come down on the yacht with them was still in the big living-room—not having gone out as yet. Both he and Scarpia had thought it better to wait until they heard what luck the Trevors had before venturing about the city—and the Earl drew a breath of relief when he found them there.

"After this little rendezvous has been accomplished, Georges may take what risks he pleases. Until then, he should not even show his nose at a window where he may be seen by outsiders! We don't know where that infernal woman is—or the three men. But you may wager they're not asleep, wherever they are!"

"You think them likely to be watching for some representative of France—more than men or women from other countries?"

"No—I don't. France is supposed to occupy a more or less isolated position just now. It is thought that she fears a coalition between Italy, Spain, Britain and Greece as a result of this royal meeting in Rome—that, if she were disposed to interfere at all, it would be openly, with a demand that her rights as a former ally in the Entente be recognized in any arrangements made. The idea is that France is suspicious of both Italy and Spain, at the moment—and about the last thing she'll attempt would be any secret understanding with them. Which is exactly why any Frenchman as prominent as our good friend, here,—if he were observed strolling about Rome,—would instantly arouse frenzied speculation as to what France may have up her sleeve, and suggest his immediate elimination as the surest way to block it! These four secret agents we know about are undoubtedly watching for representatives of Britain, Japan, Turkey, the Balkans—the one from Jugo-Slavia may be himself under espionage from the others. All of them would shadow anybody from the United States. It's their business to find out the whole inwardness of the Tangier Agreement, which is supposed to be the political reason for Alfonso's visit—and to spot anything else which is done under the cover of that."

"Did you suggest any details to the King concerning this little meeting at Tivoli?"

"Yes. If half a dozen of his personal suite—officers whom he trusts absolutely—happen to ride out that way a few hours before, they can easily clear the place of tourists or casual visitors in the vicinity—explaining to them that the neighborhood has been closed for a few hours by the Government, until damage done by certain unknown vandals can be ascertained. After this examination is made,

the Villa will be thrown open to the public again—with restrictions. That's plausible enough to keep everyone out of the place and start them back to Rome on the tram before the royal party with its little motor-cycle escort happens to be seen on the road. The six officers will be told to pass two old men with their valets, who wish to picnic in some corner of the ruins—one of them being Il Marchese di Soltaverno, whom they will recognize at a glance. As for the valets, who will get there an hour or so ahead, each will be given certain passwords so that there will be no question as to who or what they are, or what may be in the hampers they will bring. In regard to the valets, I think perhaps the safest plan will be to have one of them start with his hamper an hour in advance of the other—drive his car over another road, apparently bound in a different direction altogether. Now, there is no chance of the arrangement being made today—probably not tomorrow. Rain, of course, postpones the thing indefinitely—but the season and present indications are favorable for clear, fairly warm weather. Meanwhile, the sooner we know the other players in the game, and where they are located, the better. I'll make a few changes in my appearance and spend the rest of the day looking about."

THAT afternoon in the tea-room of the Hotel Quirinale, a handsome blonde smiled bewitchingly at a young cavalry officer of the Spanish suite. She had been introduced to him as the Countess Nirvanoff, formerly of Petrograd. There were at least a dozen men and women in Rome who would have vouched for her under that name, but what none of them knew or suspected was the fact that she had betrayed her proud old family, her order, and the sense of decency in which she had been raised to become the paid spy of the bolshevists. Earl Lammerford heard parts of the story, but not her name—Countess Nan picked up hints of it—Sir Abdool supplied the information that she had been one of the best amateurs in the private theatricals of the Imperial Court, demonstrating a natural gift for make-up and impersonations. Scarpia, when Trevor speculatively asked about this countess, said he had met her frequently, that she had a narrow escape in getting out of Russia alive. Of all the Free Lances, Trevor was the only one with a definite conviction as to her being a spy in the service of the Moscow Soviet—also the only one who had never seen her. And Scarpia thought she was at the moment a guest of some baron or marquis in the city. In this case, such a woman might be seen at one of the dinners or receptions to the Spanish rulers, but was less likely to be in the more public hotels. If she were pointed out to him, and he failed to observe the little habitual gesture which the spy most certainly had, the hint as to any connection with the Soviet would appear to be disproved—absurd. But if he did spot it—that settled the matter.

In the tea-room of the Quirinale there was little question but that the Spanish officer was putty in her hands. He had already told her all about himself, his family, his personal ambitions—but when she asked him anything of a political color, his face became a blank. Either he really knew nothing of what Primo de Rivera might have in mind concerning this little visit to Italy, or else he had been so well trained in the diplomatic corps that nothing short of drugged wine or hypnosis would dig out of him what he could tell. It was her intention to keep him tagging along from day to day on the chance that he might spill something, but she'd no idea of giving him more than a minimum of her time. So, presently, when a man who seemed unmistakably the Prussian officer in mufti came into the room, she smiled and held up one hand that he might locate her at once. Introductions followed—with the explanation that she had an engagement with Von Bodenheyn. Being a well-bred chap, the Spaniard managed to smother his disappointment, chatted with them for a moment or two and then went out, leaving the Countess and the Prussian seated at their table, which stood against the wall.

Just beyond them, in a corner, sat a man whose quietly impressive manner stamped him as a personage—an Englishman with his own little eccentricities and infirmities, one of which seemed to be pronounced deafness—for the small receiver of an accousticon was hooked over one ear, and the sound-collector with which it was connected hung from one of his waistcoat buttons. (It is a general supposition that a very deaf man can't hear much of anything distinctly, even with the aid of a scientific appliance—so that when a man openly advertises the fact of such infirmity

by wearing the appliance in public, his hearing capacity is considered negligible.) As the man's ears were rather better than a hare's, however—and his accousticon an instrument perfected to catch a whisper at a distance of a hundred feet, he caught every word spoken at the Countess' table in spite of the lowered voices. And he concentrated on remembering it, because the lady—absent-mindedly playing with a chocolate-covered biscuit—fell to spreading her thumb and forefinger apart in the form of a "V"—an idle, unconscious gesture which evidently was habitual with her when thinking of something. It was this little habit which the Englishman had been watching for—and it settled her status in Rome beyond any question whatever. As soon as they were alone, the Prussian had said—abruptly:

"Just received a code-message from our organization in Paris—may be something in it, but I think that's very doubtful. I'll repeat it:

" 'None of the French politicians appears interested in Rome. Tiger said to be confined to house with cold—but *mécanicien* at Le Bourget says he took afternoon 'plane for London last Monday under name Jules Feriot. Man positive as to identity—but no trace of Tiger in London—no evidence of his arrival there. Pilot of 'plane says all passengers landed safely at Croydon, including Feriot. Number of pressmen awaiting arrival of 'plane —would have recognized any celebrated personage instantly.'

"Now, in the first place, I think the *mécanicien* at Le Bourget was using his imagination—no one else appears to have recognized the man Feriot as a personage. But suppose he did go to London—the man has hundreds of friends there whom he might wish to visit without a lot of annoying publicity. I can see no connection between that and Rome!"

"Neither can I, at this moment; and yet—I don't like it! The *mécanicien* may not have been mistaken. I can't see a Roman connection any more than you do —and it's the least likely of any probability; but the French Ambassador here is one thing—what he does is more or less official, open, can be discounted. What the Tiger might do is something vastly more serious, his influence is too far-reaching!"

"Hmph! The man is out of politics entirely—"

"Not until they put him in Père Lachaise! Just a moment! When he does come to Italy, who are his more intimate friends—in Rome, Naples, Florence, Venice?"

"H-m-m-m—that's a difficult question to answer, because he knows so many of them very well. He saw a good deal of Orlando at Versailles—and afterward in Rome, Nitti also. Diaz—d'Abruzzi—Marconi—Scarpia—"

"Who is now Il Marchese di Soltaverno."

"So? That is something I had not heard—though I recall that the marquisate was in his family."

"How well does he know Scarpia? Are they intimate?"

"Quite so, I think. When one considers what each of them knows concerning European politics, it's natural enough—"

"Then—he might come to Scarpia—incognito?"

"For what, *ma belle?* Don't be foolish! Everything likely to be done here in Rome at present tends to build up a strong counter-influence against France in the Mediterranean! If France is doing anything at all in the matter, it is some kind of an Entente with other states to offset such influence."

"That would appear self-evident on the face of it—but we are considering the one man who *might* turn the tables in some totally unlooked for way. Look you, Von Bodenheyn! We of central and eastern Europe are very well satisfied to see an *entente* between Spain, Italy and Greece—because it's not strong enough to interfere with Turkish control of the Dardanelles and the Black Sea below our coasts. With the Franco-Algerian barrier between them, it cannot possibly dominate the Mediterranean. On the other hand, it centers attention in another quarter and prevents a good deal of interference with us. But if some new combination develops, it will be a vastly more serious matter—something we should block at any cost!"

WHEN the two went out to Von Bodenheyn's car at the curb, on the Via Nazionale, the Englishman in the corner stepped into another car and was driven across town along the Via Quattro Fontane and Via Sistina to the Trinita de' Monti, where he carefully picked his way down the steps among the artists' models and presently came to the old *palazzo* of Scarpia. Half an hour later, a more alert

man who might have been English or American and a person of importance left the *palazzo* and succeeded during the next two hours in introducing himself to the Countess Nirvanoff as an old Petrograd acquaintance of pre-war days in the diplomatic corps—and so hauntingly familiar was the something in his voice and manner, so excellent the Russian he spoke, with just the suggestion of a British accent, that she accepted him for what he claimed to be. In fifteen minutes, so thorough was his knowledge of people at the old Russian court, she would have laughed at the idea of doubting him in any way. That evening, he kept her occupied with a flirtation so original and so hypnotic that she let herself drift for the mere pleasure of it—thinking to herself many times that he would prove himself the perfect lover if she ever did let down the barriers.

Scarpia's palace, in the Via Due Macelli a couple of blocks south of the Piazza di Spagna, dates back to the XVth century and, like so many similar buildings in Italian cities, has its own peculiarities designed for defense, intrigue or other contingencies. At its back the little Via Gregoriana—being level with the top of the Trinita de' Monti steps on the Pincian—is something over three stories higher than the front entrance. The row of shops with artists' studios and dwellings over them apparently have no connection with buildings in their rear, on the streets below them. There are a number of small gardens and courts nestling against their foundation-walls in the centers of the blocks. But the Strezzi, for whom the palace was originally built, had galleries constructed from its upper floor into the basements of two buildings, one hundred feet apart, on the Via Gregoriana—then up spiral stairways in their walls to apartments on their second floors which are now occupied as studios by a couple of Scarpia's protégés—household retainers with artistic talent.

AFTER the fascinating Englishman had left Countess Nirvanoff that evening and returned to Scarpia's home, she dressed herself inconspicuously for the street, sent for a woman who had been placed by the Soviet under her orders in Rome—and with her, studied an excellent topographical map of the city. Running her finger along the Corso, she presently switched it off to the right on the Via Frattina until it rested on the Spagna Palace.

"Look you, 'Stasia! A little farther down this street is the old *palazzo* where one understands the Cavaliere Scarpia lives—on the opposite side—"

"Il Marchese di Soltaverno, madame! He is no longer Cavaliere—his *palazzo* is just here!"—placing her finger on the spot.

"Ah! We'd heard of that, I remember. This old *palazzo*—has it rear windows, a court in the center? You observe the Via Gregoriana is much higher—its houses on that side must be supported by a retaining wall going down to the lower level. With a prism-binocular we might catch a glimpse of several windows in the home of Il Marchese—not?"

"Si, Contessa—si! There is an artist who is one of us—his studio overlooks the court of the palace; it will be quite possible to watch what the Marchese and his household are doing. But why? What does the Signora suspect of the 'old bald-eagle'—probably the most loyal Italian in the whole country?"

"Oh, undoubtedly! But one may be an intensely patriotic Italian, yet favor some things which Russians would consider against their interests. It is the guests in Scarpia's house who interest me the most. I have a curiosity to know who and what they are. Come! Let us make an evening call upon your friend the artist! It is compromising at this hour, of course, but one laughs at the conventions in this game we play—and learns to protect herself."

Taking an automatic from some place of concealment in her clothes, she pulled out the clip and tested the recoil-action to make sure it was in perfect working condition. Then the two women went out—stepped into the Countess' car and were driven to the Piazza di Spagna, where the chauffeur parked while they climbed the steps to Trinita de' Monti.

The artist—whose canvases stacked against the wall of his studio were mostly rough studies done by better craftsmen, picked up here and there for small sums—was busy on a little study of Roman buildings against an afterglow, the one thing at which he was good enough to pass for what he claimed to be. There had been no particular occasion to inform himself concerning the occupants of buildings in the neighborhood. He was familiar with Scarpia's name, of course,—as anyone who has been in Italy a few months would be,—but there was no connection in his mind between it and the Marchese di Soltaverno;

nor was he even aware that said Marchese occupied the old palace below his studio window.

One thing he could tell them, however: there wasn't a chance of getting a view into any of the rooms through their binoculars —a sight of anything but roofs, the outside of a few windows, and one corner of the court. (Scarpia was much too old a fox to permit a chance of anything like that. In cold weather his windows were screened by shades and lace curtains—in summer by Venetian blinds and awnings.) The artist did recall seeing an old man with a white mustache part the curtains of one room on the court, that morning, and look up at the sky to see what the weather was like. When the Countess heard this, she said that she and the other woman would return at sunrise next morning. The description of the old man would fit Scarpia himself to a reasonable extent, but—she meant to be sure that it was Scarpia.

BLIND chance, of course, influences every activity of human life more or less. With all the attention we give to minute details, every safeguard with which we surround a project we wish to carry out successfully, there is almost always some little point that we overlook or, having covered it as we think, proves an unsuspected weakness. The last possibility which had occurred to Trevor that night was any immediate action upon the Countess' part concerning Scarpia. But in the hour just before daybreak he woke with a premonition that the woman was much too dangerous to leave unwatched for a minute. Without assuming any character but that of his normal self, he quietly left the *palazzo* and hurried through the dark narrow streets to a point near the other one in which the Countess was herself a guest.

Within fifteen minutes he saw her come out with another woman—followed them on foot to the little Via Gregoriana on the Pincian Hill, to a building on its south side, up two flights to a studio in the rear, where they were admitted after three faint knocks upon the door. Running up to the roof, he looked over the rear parapet, down upon the roof and court of Scarpia's palace, and with his knowledge of its plan, had no difficulty in spotting his friend Georges' room, with its window open wide for ventilation. Knowing the man's habits, he figured that he would be out of bed in half an hour at the most, shortly after sunrise—but hoped Pierre would close the window before drawing the bath for his master.

It may have been that the veteran below had satisfied himself that there was practically no risk of recognition at that window on the court, but the chances are that it was more unconscious habit than anything else. It was his daily morning practice to open the window, draw the curtains aside to admit all the air he could get in, and then go through his regular setting-up exercises for a few minutes—one of the little details which had preserved in him such marvelous health. This seemed to be the only thing on his mind when he pulled back the curtains, raised the shade and threw up the sash. It was enough. In the space of two seconds, it undid all the care and effort which had been expended in keeping his presence there from being known. Hurrying down the dark stairs, Trevor reached the landing above, when the Countess, her companion and the artist, came out of the studio door—planning their movements in low tones:

"The impossible has happened! The man is actually here in Rome with schemes in his head which we can't even guess! There's no point in watching the rear of that building another minute, because there's practically nothing more that we can learn from this side. But we'll need several of those available in front, including Von Bodenheyn and two other men he mentioned to me—their interests are ours in this matter! We will need at least two constantly on watch a short distance at either side of the *palazzo* doorway. At a corner beyond each, a car will be waiting with two of us in it—armed, of course. If the man goes out and drives or walks to the Quirinal or any statesman's house, he must be shot before he gets into it. If any politician comes to the *palazzo* to see him, he must be abducted when he comes out and either eliminated or kept in a safe place until the Spaniards go home, at least! We've no time to lose!"

BEFORE they got around where two of them could be left on watch in the Via Due Macelli, as it happened, an officer in mufti from the Quirinal arrived and had been admitted. Taking a short-cut through the little Piazza Mignanelli,

Trevor was able to just reach the building and slip in before the three turned the corner at the Piazza di Spagna—and came hurrying into the salon as the King's aide was explaining that the excursion to Villa Adriano had been arranged for that afternoon. This was confirmed while he was talking, by the expected telephone message with its test-words. All of this made Trevor's news the more temporarily paralyzing when he explained what he had seen.

"Chance has played us one scurvy trick in making our good friend relax his usual caution for two or three seconds at precisely the wrong moment—but on the other hand, chance has made amends for that by keeping the idea insistently in my mind that we are dealing with dynamite and that one of us should be watching that woman every second. I could better afford the loss of sleep than take any chances with her! And mind you, until she actually *saw* Georges through her binoculars, she had no real belief that he was in Rome—not the slightest evidence for such an idea! She was just playing a hunch—didn't expect to find out anything at all beyond the fact that Scarpia lived here and was entertaining a few guests who might be known to her but probably were not. That woman has altogether too much brain for the Soviet camp. Well—that's that! Now—what?"

Scarpia smiled behind his white mustache.

"In repeating exactly what the Countess said when coming out of that studio, my friend, you 'ave solve' ze whole difficulty! The Strezzi, when they build thees *palazzo,* four hundred years ago in the Cinquocento, were 'aving little contingencies of this sort as part of their everyday life. So they 'ave construct' two passages from the upper floor to houses on the little Via Gregoriana, above—houses more than a hundred feet apart. In the *camera* on the second floor of those house' where those passage' come out through panels in the wainscoting, two of my retainers live,—members of the secret political organization which acts upon any hint I may give. Those retainers know the artist you describe, by sight. When Paolo and Pierre go with the hampers in an hour or two, one of my men will be at the Trinita de' Monti on the lookout for the artist or the woman you describe—the other one an equal distance in the other direction. If they blow the nose and flourish the bandana, the coast is clear—the valet' may proceed—one after the other. If they do not blow, those valets will remain concealed with the hampers until they do. At half-past twelve, our friend and I will go up through those passage' with Il Conte and La Contessa Nan—if the coast lees clear, we get into the car—the gooo Georges and I with the white Van Dyck under the mustache to prevent recognition along the road. And while we proceed on the so-innocent little picnic in this lovely air, under the blue Italian sky, warmed by the bright sun of Italy, those others—they will stand on one leg and then on the other. The ones in the cars at the corners will stifle the occasional yawn at first, as they wait—and wait. At the end of the day they will be annoyed, perhaps—which we shall regret, but will not permit to spoil our day with sadness. No—perhaps we may even laugh. Perhaps not."

A grim smile appeared around Trevor's handsome mouth—and was gone, as he quietly said:

"Meanwhile—I'll just pack two guns which I've tested and which I can produce before your eye catches the motion. Here's hoping—just *hoping*—that woman's fiendish intuition wont prompt her to stroll around into that top street with her car just as we're driving off. I hate to kill any living creature—but if that handsome hellcat butts into our game too dangerously, I mean to stop her, permanently—and I think any court in Italy will acquit me!"

IT is difficult for the average citizen to comprehend the endless detail, the strain of heavy responsibility, which surrounds the visit of a neighboring ruler to one's capital. Arrangements must be made for practically every hour of each day the royal guests remain within our borders—which is as true in Washington as in London, Paris, Rome or Madrid, though perhaps in a less strenuous degree. In all this maze of ceremonial there must be some hours of what passes for relaxation, or no human constitution would stand it. So motor-rides to this or that pleasant spot, evenings at the opera, short cruises on royal or imperial yachts for part of a day, are sandwiched in, here and there, to prevent a breakdown. In the visit of their Spanish Majesties to Rome, so minor a detail as an afternoon ride in the direction of Tivoli over the beautiful Via Tiburtina may not even have seemed worth comment

in any but the local newspapers—probably not in more than one or two of them. It possibly appeared as a brief paragraph to the effect that "Their Majesties motored out over the Campagna east of the city for an hour or two of relaxation"—something of that sort. None but members of the King's personal staff and the small motorcycle escort were in position to give any details—and only a half-dozen of these saw what actually did happen.

THEY were on the ground an hour before the arrival of the royal party—word having been sent to the mayor of Tivoli that, owing to certain Government investigations being made at the Villa Adriano, no trams were to run there and no tourists permitted to approach the place until four in the afternoon. At one o'clock two men appeared in cars arriving from different directions, and after giving certain passwords, were permitted to fetch hampers into the Piazza d'Oro—which is isolated at the extreme northeast corner of the Villa ruins—and spread a cloth for an *al fresco* luncheon. At two o'clock two old men accompanied by a handsome couple, much younger, arrived in a touring-car and seated themselves on mats around the white cloth. A few moments later the royal car arrived. To the few people of the neighborhood in sight, it appeared as if the party were strolling through the ruins as tourists might—examining one of the famous places which they ought to see. In a few moments, however, they came sauntering into the Piazza d'Oro, where the picnic party, in the most secluded, sheltered corner, looked up in apparent surprise—then got slowly upon their feet—bowed, suggested quite simply that the new arrivals sit down around the cloth and share their luncheon. It was done with a dignity which placed the entire party upon a plane of equality—which somewhat ruffled the Italian premier, though he thought it better not to show it. After all—history might be in the making, for all he knew.

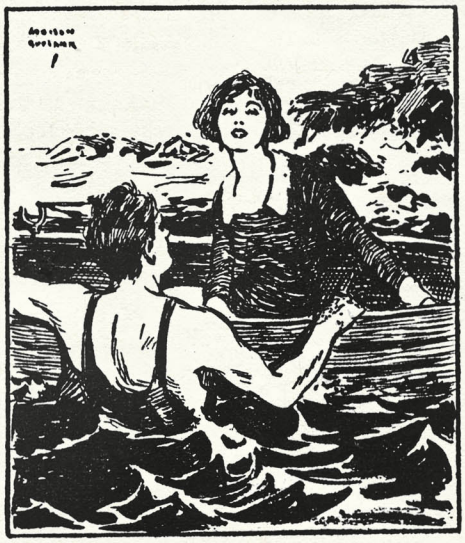
Half an hour of delicious sandwiches and wine and cakes—hot coffee, cigars which came from a plantation which at least one of the Kings knew, though no longer within his crown lands. Then somehow—a map of the Mediterranean with the surrounding countries lay upon the white cloth—a large-scale map, more clearly and beautifully engraved than any which they had ever seen—each country tinted in a color which made it stand out from its neighbors, but in a manner different from that of most maps. Spain was tinted a clear cool green, with gradations in the color to indicate the topographical features; Morocco was a lighter, warmer green. Italy was blue—with Tripoli in purple. Between the Spanish and Italian possessions appeared France in canary yellow—with Algeria, Tunisia and the French Sahara in orange—like a blaze of sunlight dividing the greens and the purple-blues. The royal party studied it in silence for two or three minutes. Then one of the old men made a few smiling remarks:

"An *entente,* my friends, between the greens and the blues is an evidence of good feeling—it will make for world-peace; therefore it is commendable. To go beyond that,—do more,—it would need bridges, ships, tunnels under the water, to cross the orange and yellow—would it not? *Au contraire*—if there were, say, a gentlemen's agreement—defensive—possibly offensive too—between the green, the yellow and the blue, it would blend in a similar way to the colors of the spectrum, *n'est-ce pas?* I do not say a blend of that sort could be accomplished in a day. The Camera—the Chamber—the Cortes—will have much to say in secret session. But is it not obviously to the advantage of all—this making a private fish-pond of the Mediterranean?"

An hour later the royal party returned from their pleasant motor-ride, much refreshed—lapsing occasionally into deep thought—and prepared for the round of evening ceremonies. At the flying-field of the aviation corps, two stanch 'planes of the latest type went up, with a war-ace at the joy-stick of each—with a couple of passengers—flying northwest until out of sight, then circling back and landing their four passengers upon the Trevor estate south of Ancona on the Adriatic.

And at points of vantage in the Via Due Macelli certain political spies stood first on one leg, and then on the other—sat in motor-cars until their limbs were numb. But the obstinate old fox in the *palazzo* wouldn't come out. He never did come out. At the end of the week, the impression grew upon them that they had miscued—somewhere.

Another fine story of the Free Lances appears in our next issue.



The Warden of Seal Cove

A moving story of the sea, and of a man and a woman—by the distinguished author of last month's success "The Café des Princesses."

By CHARLES SAXBY

THE fish was off again, taking three hundred feet of line at a rush, the rod bending to the zip of the reel.

Poised in the bow, Paul Merritt slowly braked and headed it off from the kelp-beds. It was a big yellow-fin, weighing forty pounds at least, and once in among the kelp, it would twist the line about a stem and sulk until it recovered strength enough to snap it. For an hour, now, it had fought him while he drifted slowly past the southern end of the island, where a fog-laden wind raised a nasty chop. Those masses of vapor blowing by shut out all but a narrow circle of gray, and his only guide was the lingering sensitiveness in numbed fingers. Cautiously he reeled in, testing the increasing languor at the end of the line. The fish was growing tired; so was he, with balancing like a dancing master in that pitching boat with its little slapped-on stern motor.

His shirt and trousers, drenched by fog and spray, clung about him, revealing his body from the shock of black hair to bare feet. Square-shouldered, spare, with a keen, dark profile, there was something vaguely foreign about him. People were sometimes surprised at his unmistakably American accents. But the Merritts had been on the Pacific coast for forty years, and in Maine before that. Men with the sea in their blood, clinging to the wet fringes of the world, coming at last to anchor in Coos Bay, twelve hundred miles to the north. So here he was, the last of them all, hooked to a yellow-fin on the Cortez Bank, with the thousand-foot wall of Valdez Island looming through the mists.

Only fifty feet, now, and he stooped for the gaff. It was ticklish work handling both rod and gaff with the boat standing straight on end. Twelve feet—eight—he'd have to take the chance. If he brought it closer, the boat might slap right down upon it and break the line. He made a swift lunge, then threw himself bodily backward. There was a weight on his arms, then a great rush of blue and gold

slithering all over him. Forty struggling pounds, leaping for freedom; he had just time to give it the butt.

He was in the very teeth of the wind which sweeps between Valdez and Santa Paula Island to the south. Tumbling astern, he started the little motor, frowning over its first squittering *put-put*. If the thing acted up, now—but it settled down into a steady cough. Shivering in his sodden clothing, he shipped the oars and bent to them for warmth.

He would take the fish up to the ranch. All they ever got up there were rock-cod, or occasional mackerel, caught with hand lines off the wharf. In spite of their island place, they were landsmen all—Basque shepherds, squat and swarthy, chattering their strange tongue, or moon-faced Swiss who attended to the vineyards. Paul lumped them all together as "Bohunks" and tilted them off his mind.

THE fog thinned under the lee of the island. When abreast of the huge shoulder of Mount Jack, he was in full sun again. Across the channel, eighteen miles away, the California coast range rose bluely. At his side the cliffs of Valdez went up like scarps of fluted bronze, the slopes above them golden with grasses drying in the May sun. Seal Cove slid by, a cup of blue and amber. There was his tent behind the prickly pears; and Foch, Cleopatra and a dozen others were basking on the rocks.

A breathy snort came from almost under the boat; then two sleek heads rose alongside, grinning their tusks in recognition—Bessie and Benny, the two seal pups that he had raised last year, almost by hand. Benny came closer, wrinkling his soft muzzle right over the gunwale, and Paul slapped it back. The mutt smelled that fish and was capable of trying to climb his two-hundred-pound weight into the boat. Paul flung them a couple of sculpin, and they caught them in midair, tossing them up again with a peculiar twist which broke the fish in two so that the viscera slid out and fell into the sea.

Instantly the gulls came. A moment before, not one had been in sight; but mysteriously here they were, winging down, after each other and more to come. The boat chugged on, leaving the beginnings of a deep-sea fight.

He was inside the kelp-beds now, the smoothed swells casting back a million round copies of the sun. It was hot there, and he unshipped the oars and lay back, a mechanical hand upon the tiller, his mind spinning dreams.

OF course, this job as a Valdez coast-guard was merely temporary. When discharged from the navy at the end of the war, he had found the former things of his life all passed away, and in that general wreck it was to the sea that he instinctively turned again. He had needed—time, it seemed, most of all. But now the healing of those scars under the sea salt had brought other needs to be faced. One was always needing something, as if life were woven on a loom of lack.

He needed a launch, for instance, or at least a share in one—one like Joe Hazlitt's forty-horse sea-goer. If he could only buy in with Joe himself! He thrilled at the magnificence of that. To be a partner of Joe Hazlitt, the acknowledged master of all the launch men from San Diego to Esquimault, a man who had been written about in the outdoor magazines! To be taking famous men out on angling trips, or a party of scientists to study ocean secrets! Weeks away on lonely waters, rifling queer treasures from the depths—that was worth while; and it was time he was about making something of himself, for now—there was Genora Bragg.

Genora—with the utterance of her name she seemed almost to stand before him, as though she had been there all the time, needing only the light of his thought to reveal her presence. He wondered if she would be at the landing as he ran in. Catching that fish had been just an excuse to go up there on the chance of seeing her. He could imagine her on the wharf, waiting his coming. A gay figure, acutely feminine with her shell-tinted face under hair of bobbed brown. It brought a queer drumming under his breastbone, and the waning afternoon turned golden with the thought of her.

THAT gold faded a little as he rounded the point, for there was no gay figure in sight. Only the curving beach, the bluffs swinging back to the mouth of a cañon. A line of corrugated-iron sheds, the wharf creeping seaward like a decrepit centipede, and a huge sign "PRIVATE PROPERTY. NO LANDING." Farther up was the manager's house, among wind-burned eucalyptus and a blaze of scarlet geraniums.

The place looked deserted as he slung the fish on a stick and padded in along the wharf. But Jem Whittey, the manager, was at home. He came out through the garden where beds of pink sea-moss were herded by rows of abalone shells. He was a big, thick-waisted man with the air of a suspicious bull. His land-going equipment of breeches, leather and flannel, somehow merely accentuated the masses of flesh beneath them. He admired the fish, punching it with his thumb.

"Caught it with rod and reel—what do you know about that!"

He gazed at it in the unintelligent surprise with which sea things always affected him. In all his ten years on the island, Whittey had never ventured out in a boat. Paul vaguely disliked him, but then, he was Genora's uncle.

"Rod and reel, eh? Well!" Whittey repeated heavily.

He had not the faintest idea of what it meant to take such a fish in such a way, but he appeared anxious to be affable. He told of the ranch—had to sulphur the vines twice against the mildew; one of the dogs had gone wild and harried the sheep on the big divide. And the men—somehow it seemed men weren't like what they used to be; getting too much money these days, made them too independent. Paul stood by, making noises of agreement, wondering where Genora could be. He was oddly reluctant to ask for her, and he hung on, hoping the other would mention her of his own will.

"Heard anything of Hazlitt lately?" he asked.

"He's back from where he's been," Whittey answered. "The office radioed over this morning that he'd be along sometime today with a load of stuff for us from Todos Santos. Say—you seen Genora and that feller?"

"What fellow?" Paul asked, instantly bristling.

"Oh, just a feller—I guess she's known him quite a spell. He came two days ago with a permit from the office. He wants to see you."

"You know where I'm generally to be found."

"He didn't seem in no hurry," Whittey said, looking past Paul. "No, I guess he isn't in any rush. He and Genora, they—"

He floundered to a stop, and Paul looked at his fleshy bulk in sudden distaste. Whittey was one of those men whose presence brings an involuntary reminder of entrails.

"Genora'll tell you all about it," Whittey finished, in relief of shifting the burden of whatever it might be. "She's around somewhere."

Taking the fish, he lumbered away, and with a supple shrug Paul tilted the other from his thoughts.

HE went down to the beach again, brightening as he saw Genora on the wharf. That was always her way: first she was not there; then all at once she was, and one never saw her coming from anywhere.

There was a man beside her, but Paul's eyes were for herself. A gay little figure in a narrow skirt of red and brown, a brown silk sweater clipping waist and bust like a second skin. The freshening wind blew the curls above her round-faced prettiness. Her expression was that of a changeless brightness, as though it were compacted from exquisitely tinted wax.

He saw her as through a rosy mist, that queer throbbing once more under his breastbone. He had kissed her three days ago; and with a girl like Genora, a kiss meant everything. This was their first meeting since that kiss, but there was no remembrance of it in her greeting. She was as unruffled as if meeting him for the first time. He admired her for that, even while disappointed; and he strove to meet it, for he saw that she was fooling this other man. That secret was a bond between them, an unseen wire across which he flashed messages to her sprightly calm.

"Hello, Paul—we were looking for you. Meet Mr. von Don."

Mr. von Don was short and broad, yet singularly flat, as if he were merely painted on a board. His mouth was as colored granite; the rest of him might have been putty done up in striped silk and shepherd's plaid. One hand bore an enormous diamond, and his shoes were the reddest and most brilliant that Paul had ever seen.

"Mr. von Don is an actor," Genora explained.

So that was it! The man's bow reduced Paul to the place of audience. He fumbled in his pocket with thick white fingers and produced a card.

THE GREAT VON DON
and his
SIX SENSATIONAL SEALS
Return Engagement Orphe Circuit.
New York to Follow.

"That's me," he remarked with a magnificent simplicity.

"You mean, it was," Genora explained, and her laughter rippled out without communicating itself to her face.

PAUL was puzzled and beginning to be angry thereat. It did not seem possible that this bedizened creature should be there against that background of sea and untouched shore. They knew each other too well, those two. It made him realize, with a shock, that Genora had lived, had had associations before ever he met her. He had not thought of that before. To him it had been as if she had sprung suddenly into being, gloriously complete, on the first time he had seen her. His eyes began to smolder.

"The little girl's right," said Von Don. That sounded tremendously important; then he returned to himself. "Those seals were marvels; I trained them myself. Six years I had them, booked solid and pulling down my eight hundred and a half a week. Benny Marcovich himself, when we signed the last contract, he said to me, 'Von Don,' he says, 'I don't know as I really ought to do this. Those damn' seals of yours stop the show every time.' 'Better headline them, then,' I says, quick as that. 'My seals hang their heads every time they see their name on one of your four-sheets.' In my position I can kid Benny a bit, you see. Well, that's the kind of act I had. But the other day, coming down from 'Frisco, there was a smash on the Coast Line, and—*bam!*"

He struck his hands together in a vicious slap. He had the dramatic instinct, and the gesture brought a horrid vision of blood and smeared flesh.

"All gone, but two," Von Don nodded, holding Paul with the consciously hypnotic gaze of the public performer. He placed a damply hot hand on the other's shoulder, and his manner became confidential, almost affectionate. "Now, old man, this little girl here, she writes to me—"

"Mr. von Don is just like a father to me," Genora explained brightly.

"Exactly," Von Don agreed, then returned to his own subject. "What I'm here for is seals, d'you get me? I got all the permits, from the company and the Government both, and I got a man coming tomorrow with the cages and all. Genora, here, tells me you got two good half-trained seal pups down there at your hang-out. Well, I'll pay you three hundred apiece for them, just for the trouble you gone to with them. And I'll pay a hundred and a half each for delivery in cage of two more good healthy two-year-olds."

"You mean you want my seals?" Paul demanded.

"Your seals—where do you get that stuff?"

THE instantaneousness of Von Don's contempt proved that it had really been there all the time. His manner cracked, and through it seeped that peculiar ugliness which sometimes seems the basis of the vaudeville profession. It was like a glimpse into another world, all seething malice under a varnish of false good-fellowship.

"The seals are public property and I got the permits to take four. If I can get them gentle and half broke, it means six weeks off their training." He paused, his glance sweeping Paul from head to foot as if adding up the financial total of the other's attire. "I'm giving you a chance to make a piece of change. If you don't want it, there are plenty of others that—"

A smother of anger came up in Paul. He wanted to hit the fellow, but Genora took charge in smiling calm.

"Of course he wants it; you leave Paul to me."

She took the front of Paul's shirt in waxen finger-tips. For an instant he chilled. The faint impact of her fingers on his chest seemed to have practice back of it. Then she looked up at him, and with her glance that rosy mist enveloped him once more, shutting them alone in a place where this Von Don could never enter.

"You see, Paul, when I heard about Mr. von Don's accident I wrote him about you and the seals. He was fixing to get new ones from Catalina, but I thought you might just as well have the money. Nine hundred dollars added to what you've got would mean a whole lot to you just now. You could buy a share in a launch with that, and then—well—don't you see?"

He saw, and the flushed veins on his temples relaxed their tension. He saw, around corners and into unreachable depths of the future. In spite of the gathering shadows, the air was golden again; for he saw, too, that this was a promise that she was making him. With an added drumming under his breastbone he realized that that letter to Von Don

must have been written days before that blundering, hotly snatched kiss. Even then she had been thinking and planning —for him! He laughed in sheer glory, wondering if she realized how much she was telling.

It was settled; the details he would remember later on. He chugged back to the cove surrounded by warm visions—Genora, in a pink cloud, dancing ahead of him down glades of time, pulling him after her by a glittering web, lighter than silk, yet unbreakable because he loved it so.

AS he swung into the cove, the seals raised their heads and grunted peacefully as he passed. He flung them some fish and beached the boat on the shingle. Bessie and Benny were back, and came swishing down to meet him, thrusting their muzzles against his hands, following him almost to the tent.

The tent was floored with white sand, furnished with a cot, two canvas chairs, a table and bureau made from boxes, and a sheet-iron stove. He set the kettle on to boil, thrust a couple of yellow yams into the oven, then stripped off his clothes. Outside was a zinc tub to catch the water piped down from a spring, and he stepped in and set to work with soap and much breathing. He hated the smell of fish on him while he ate.

He emptied the tub at the roots of the prickly pears, and pulled on a flannel shirt and a pair of ancient duck trousers. Slicing tomatoes and green peppers, he set them to fry in a huge amount of butter, then beat up eggs for an omelet. While he waited, he clapped on the head-piece of a radio set, and instantly a woman's voice, dripping syllables like separate globules of honey, informed him that, "Lit-tle Pe-ter set off for the Dark Fo-rest—"

Bedtime stuff; can that bunk! He flung the head-phones onto the table, but they persisted in a faint bass clicking—some man, one hundred and twenty miles away, informing the world that this was "Radio KHJ, Los Angeles, California."

The thing was uncanny; even here in this remote cove, the world came after one. Even though one did not listen, it was still there, beating its unheeded vibrations all about one. He had never thought of that before, and it made him feel "funny," standing there with the dish of beaten eggs in his hand. He was going to miss Bessie and Benny—but then, he would be leaving here himself. Everything ended sooner or later.

Things had ended for him. He thought of his brothers, Matt and Mark—silent men, six and eight years older than himself, who might have been carved from the salt-seasoned timbers of some blue-water ship. They had been good to him, nursing decrepit lumber schooners up and down the coast, that he might have an education. There had even been a year of college before the war took the patterns of life in its red grip and tore them asunder.

With the sea in their blood, it was to the navy they had all three turned. The two elder were gone now, Matt by a gunnery accident in this same Todos Santos Channel, Mark by pneumonia up in Bremerton Yard. Their going had left nothing for Paul to return to, and life seemed a vacuum. College was futile; the empty cabin on Coos Bay repelled him. He wanted some place where he could sit down and wait for things to form out of the sudden void. Since Prohibition, strange craft had prowled the channel, coming up from too near Mexico. The Valdez Company had no desire to see their island a bootlegger's base, and this position as coast-guard had seemed to Paul a refuge.

It too was nearly over now. He thought of Genora and glowed again, remembering how gloriously it was over. He sat long after supper, his lip curled about the stem of his pipe, bathing himself in that inner radiance.

IT was a voice that recalled him, a deep-throated hail which brought him up standing.

"Joe Hazlitt! Come in—I'll light up."

He reached for the lantern, and in its light Hazlitt sprang into being, stooping his length under the tent-flap, his thrust-in head and throat looking like a copy in copper from something by Rodin. The rest of him followed, lithe, hip-booted, leisurely. His handclasp was like a rock; by contrast Paul felt almost like a half-grown puppy wagging joyously before some great aloof mastiff.

A man of the sea, Hazlitt's first words were of that.

"There's a bad rip on the Cortez, setting eastward at about six knot. It'll run till the moon sets, 'long about two o'clock."

"Thanks, but I'm not going out tonight," Paul answered. "Things quieting down a bit?"

"They caught three round here last month. Now they are running north and working the Montara coast, they tell me."

That was settled. Hazlitt sat down, tamping tobacco into his pipe. He had the authority of a man known to the fraternity of anglers the world over. An English duke, half a page of Bradstreet, had been glad to go in his launch. Others had been refused, for it took more than money to hire his services.

"Ground-swell up at the Landing. Thought I'd tie up here in the cove tonight," he offered.

"Glad you did," Paul bubbled. "Had your supper? Where you been all this time?"

"Took a couple of Berkeley professors down to the Revilla Gigedos to study deep-water fishes."

"Where in time are the Reveeya Heehaydoss?"

Smoothing the sand, Hazlitt drew a map with his finger. Here was Mazatlan, and La Paz; and here, about a hundred fifty miles to the west— "Oh, those!" Paul had known them, but not how to pronounce them.

"What's it like down there?"

Hazlitt pondered; his eyes, from long squinting through sun and spray, were mere slits of gray light.

"Like they were started about quitting time on the Seventh Day," he pronounced. "They kind of get you, though."

He spoke of strange islands, sun-smitten and arid, their shores acrawl with great turtles, of a terrible sun on a sea of blue fire; of giant rays, thirty feet across, goggling up with bitter eyes while the nautilus sailed their gay fleets on the surface.

"They come sailing along," he said, "something like flowers or little boats with pink and purple sails. Soft as silk, they look, and you kind of wonder how they dare to be sailing out alone like that. But if you touch them, you find out. It'll take you all day to get over the sting of them.

"And there's places there where the bottom drops straight down ten thousand feet. You should see the things we pulled up from it—things with eyes big as pool-balls, and things like nothing God ever made. Some of them burst before we could get them to the top. Then there's the basking whales lying about on the water with the gulls roosting on their backs. And there's an inlet with a shack and some coconut trees and a spring of sweet water, and not a living soul on all the islands. It was getting toward hurricane-season, so we had to come north, but those fellows want me to take them down again, come fall."

Paul listened and adored, alight with the love of adventure, and his desire came out in a cry.

"Gee, if I could only—"

IT came upon him that now he could—and with that remembrance he filled himself. His mind expanded like a balloon with the heady gas of his own affairs. The gates of his speech were unlocked, and the fullness of his heart came pouring out until he was drunk with his own voice. Von Don, the seals, his luck—and Genora the perpetual refrain of it all. Her beauty, her marvelousness, the way she had so cleverly brought it about, and all for his sake. He paced the tent, unable to keep still. The years ahead were as an empty web on which his fancy wove bright tapestries.

"Man, but it's great to have a woman thinking of you," he cried. "I guess it's right what they say about a woman being the making of a man once she takes hold of him."

His words filled the tent, their sound beating upon Hazlitt as he bulked impassively against the lamplight, the salt-crusted boots molded to his long legs. He turned and spat meditatively out through the tent flap.

"They'll take hold of you, all right," he agreed.

Paul flung himself at the other's shoulders, his laugh ringing out, derisive, blatantly young.

"Why don't you get one for yourself, you solitary old stick? Don't you see what this means to me? And it was she who did it. With this nine hundred, added to the eight hundred I've got over in Todos Santos, I'll be able to buy a share in a launch now."

That was Hazlitt's cue, if he had really meant those half hints of a few weeks ago. But he sat there as unmoved by Paul's hands and words as a waking man by the dreams of one sleeping at his side. He rose, his brown and grizzled curls almost touching the ridge-pole, and before his cool height Paul felt suddenly small and—prancing.

"Yes, there's many launch-owners as will give you a quarter-share for seventeen

hundred," he said quietly. "I'll look around for you over in Todos Santos. Well, wish you luck, lad; guess I'll turn in now; good night."

HE went, and Paul turned hot and cold as he watched the figure striding away over the shingle. Then came a mounting anger. Who was Joe Hazlitt to look at him like that? What did the fellow want? He looked down at himself without, searching himself within, and again he wondered. Probably Joe was jealous—that was it. Hazlitt's wasn't the only launch and with Genora to help him a fellow could do anything.

The moonlight made the cove a place of ghostly gray. The prickly pears by the tent stood out in weird monstrosity, and Paul suddenly hated the things. They were like a kid that had started to grow and could only grow more heads—heads growing out of heads without even a neck between.

Hazlitt, looking like that—at him; he'd show that solemn owl a thing or two. He flung himself to bed full of hot thoughts.

It was late when he woke, the cove already hot in the sunlight as he ran down for a swim. Hazlitt's launch was gone, and he was glad of it. Bessie and Benny slid down to meet him, and they played together in the blue water while the elder seals yawned on the rocks above. Slapping wavelets at the base of brown pinnacles, the crisp smell of salt weeds and the water stinging like warm wine. He flung his arms about Bessie and she dived with him, deep down where great purple anemones starred the bottom. The blood sang in his ears, he pressed Bessie's chin upward, and she shot again to the surface. They grinned at each other, splashing mightily, and Benny came up from below and butted him softly in the stomach. They never hurt him; they were sleek as velvet, playing like vast kittens.

A pang shot through him at the thought of their future. But then—Genora—he held the memory of her face, shutting out all else.

It was about noon that she came to the cove.

Busy in his tent Paul heard the *put-put* of a stern motor and caught his breath as he saw her out beyond the rocks. Pulling on a faded bathing suit he ran down, shouting, waving to her to wait. No girl could negotiate that rocky passage alone.

"You have come," he gasped as he swam alongside.

She had come, five miles in that boat alone. Of course the sea was as a pond in the morning calm but even so it was another proof of her wondrousness. He climbed in over the bow, his eyes devouring her. In her pink dress, wide brimmed hat and ear-rings of mock jade she looked as frailly enchanting as one of those nautilus of the south of which Hazlitt had spoken. He played that fancy about her, marveling that such exquisite helplessness could dare to adventure itself in such a world as this. He swelled with an ache of protection.

"You have come."

HE said it again, oddly breathless. She looked up at him as he stood there, glitteringly wet, his eyes like dark pools with sun flecks in them. Her lips smiled back at him but her gaze was unchanged, a hint of purpose under its shallow brightness. For an instant a cool breath blew over him like a breeze from some more rational, clearly seeing region. He almost had a vision of her as that strange and primal thing—a woman wanting something.

Then she spoke, and with her raillery came again that rosy mist.

"I wonder if you've got another girl hidden in that tent?"

"I dare you to go and look," he laughed; then remembered the disorder of the place. "Or, no—I guess you can't."

She laughed back with an instant understanding which brought a glimpse of her own domain. As he turned the boat toward the beach, she checked him.

"I mustn't land; that wouldn't be proper, would it? Are those the seals up there on the rocks? My, aren't they big?"

That seemed the extent of her interest in them.

"Nobody knows that I came down here," she twinkled, and it was as another delicious secret binding them together.

"I didn't even tell Mr. von Don," she went on, and Paul glowered.

"What has he got to do with it?"

"Oh, he is very particular. Actors are apt to be; I guess they know too much."

"Painted ape!" Paul grumbled, and her laugh tinkled again.

"But you want his money, don't you?"

Paul came aft, striding over the thwarts, seating himself at her feet. His arms ached for her but her pink daintiness kept his

wet touch at bay. She let him have her hands and he raised them to his lips, mumbling insanities.

"God—I guess it's true about a woman bringing out the best in a man."

"You'll do your best for me, wont you, Paul?"

"Always—always!"

She shone appropriately, with a long look. Then her glance fell, and she started braiding his fingers with a charming air of practicality.

"Yes, I know; but I mean right now, about the seals. You see I wouldn't want to think—later on, you know—that we hadn't done our best by him."

"Do you doubt me?" Paul demanded mournfully. "Is that why you came?"

"No, I—oh—just came."

She stroked the back of his neck along the edges of his wet hair. Blue lights throbbed up about them from the sunlit sea. They might, in that unchanged place, have been the first man and woman in some newly made world. She let him have his hour, mostly of silence and long gazings. To him it seemed but a moment when she withdrew her hands, regretfully final.

"I must go back now; it is one o'clock."

"I'll take you up to the landing."

"No, you mustn't. They would know where I had been."

HE wondered if Hazlitt were still at the landing, triumphing to think that poor old Joe could never have known such an hour as this, or else how could he speak as he did?

"Is Hazlitt gone?" he asked.

"Yes, mean old thing. He came down to see you last night, didn't he?"

"Yes, he was here."

"I thought so. Did he say anything—about me, I mean?"

"He never mentioned you at all."

"I just hate him."

That disposed of Hazlitt. To Paul he instantly became a thing of naught.

"Can you get back alone? God, how can I let you go?"

It was like wrenching himself from the greater part of his own being. He slid over the stern and hung there, his face just below hers.

"You'll do your very best, Paul?"

"Always, for you."

She looked at him and for a moment her calm broke. Her arms went about his neck, surprisingly heavy, extraordinarily possessive. Her oddly practiced fingers strayed over his hair and she said a strange thing.

"Oh, I want to keep you—keep you, always."

With a little push she sent him adrift. He dived to avoid the edge of the rudder, and when he came up again, the boat was throbbing away.

THE day passed in a golden haze. Most of the time he spent with Foch and Cleopatra on their rock, feeding them fish. They followed him ashore, even into the tent, after the lure in his hand. In the morning a launch would come with the cages, the men would hide, and the rest would be merely a matter of enticement. Then—the future danced in his brain like a bright mirage.

It was about midnight that Paul woke. A high fog had crept in, hanging perhaps two hundred feet above with only a faint grayness seeping through from the moon. Pulling on some clothes, he wandered out on the beach, but it seemed more oppressive there than in the tent.

He sat down, feeling for his pipe. There was a soft swish over the shingle, and Bessie and Benny were upon him, thrusting their noses over his shoulders, tickling his cheeks with their bristly mustaches. The mutts actually liked him. He wondered how they would like what was coming?

Of course they trained seals with kindness. But even so—no blue water, no depths where anemones bloomed like purple flowers. No wide sea to wander in amidst the sting of wind and spray. No sun-warmed rocks, no surf flashing silver under the moon.

Locked cages on trains roaring through the night. Theaters hectic with calciums and the smell of grease-paint.

"Bam!"—a smear of bloody flesh. Perhaps a fire—and never, never any sea.

That was the worst. To take one's toll of the sea was one thing, but for a man of the sea to betray its creatures—

An iron compulsion was upon him, locking his jaws until the pipe-stem cracked under his teeth. He knew what he was going to do even while he fought it.

He couldn't go through with it; that was all. But then again, look at what it meant to him and Genora.

It was she who was the hub of the wheel

on which he seemed to be slowly broken. Like the invisible waves of the radio, the world surged into the cove, with Genora as its electrode. Its twin hammers of woman and money pounded down on his flesh until he rocked under their strokes.

Genora—if he did not do this, they would have to wait, and to twenty-four, delay is as death.

Genora—what would she think of him?

Then in a flash came solution, so that he laughed at its simplicity. Of course Genora would understand. With an added burst of light came the suspicion that perhaps this was what she had meant by asking for "his best." She had trusted him to know the best without her saying it. Fool that he was, glooming there in the dark! He ought to be shot for having doubted her.

HE sprang up, knowing what must be done. Even though he refused to capture the seals himself there were plenty who would. But he'd fix that.

The rest of the night was a feverish activity. Masses of dried grass and sage had to be torn from the slopes above and ferried out to the rocks. It took six boatloads before he was satisfied, and his arms were bleeding from the cactus thorns. Then handfuls of cartridges scattered through the piles, while the seals grunted uneasily, keeping beyond his reach, scenting something unusual.

The dawn was breaking through the fog and the cove grayed as with stale dregs of light. He must hurry, for in the stillness he already caught the throb of an approaching launch.

A dash of gasoline on each pile; then he poled from rock to rock, tossing up bunches of burning grass, then rowed for the beach, crouching to avoid possible bullets flying out from the exploding cartridges. A rush of flames, paling the graying light, a crackling of vicious explosions. The seals swished to and fro in panic, with great snarling roars of terror and defiance; then came the splash of their bodies striking the water.

It was about over by the time he reached the beach. From the rocks' incandescent piles spread a pall of smoke under the fog. And Bessie and Benny, Foch, Cleopatra and the rest were somewhere out in midchannel bound with the speed of fear for some far refuge. And only just in time—as he looked, a launch rounded the point.

It was Hazlitt's. So it was Joe who was coming with the cages; he had not expected that of Joe, and he spat as if to rid his mouth of a bitter taste.

SILENTLY he waited while the other rowed ashore and crunched across the shingle with his long stride.

"What's all this, Paul—practicing for Fourth of July?"

"You can take it that way if you want."

Hazlitt's slitted gaze turned curiously on him.

"What I'm wondering is how are some others going to take it?"

"That is my business. Did you bring the cages?" Paul sneered.

"And if I did?"

"You'll find nothing to put in them. The seals are gone, and after all that out on the rocks, they wont stop this side of Clemente."

Coolly searching himself for a match, Hazlitt surveyed the cove in all its strange effect of wreck. His straight mouth quivered in the ghost of a grin, and a warmth stole from him.

"So you did it, eh?"

"Yes, I did, and what are you going to do about it?" Paul flamed at him.

"Did you really think there were cages for sea-beasts on my launch?" Hazlitt asked. "I leave that for cattle like Pedro Miguel and his crew. All the same, the other evening I was here I was afraid that Genora Bragg had you corralled."

"Leave her out of it," cried Paul.

"She has taken herself out of it by this time, lad."

From above the light held to his pipe, Hazlitt looked at the other. It might have been merely the shifting glow from the match, but his copper mask seemed to stir as with pity. Exhausted, his mind chilling from the reactions of the night, that look struck in on Paul with apprehension. His arm went involuntarily up, as if to ward off a blow.

"What do you mean? Well, say it!"

"As I came away from the landing this morning, Genora was leaving for Todos Santos with that Von Don. They are to be married today—and he'll be her second."

IT was queer how quiet one's body could keep, while one's mind— But it was useless to rage, or to do anything, or to do nothing.

He knew that Hazlitt spoke truth. The

bitter light draining down through the fog seemed to reveal a vast uselessness of everything. All useless—and yet it hurt so. Out on the rocks the embers of his fires sent up reeking spirals like the smoke from unholy torches. He himself felt like that, all burned out, naked.

Yesterday, all blue and gold, with a figure of exquisite pink. But it was only seals that she wanted after all, coming to make sure that he was still upon the hook of waxen flesh. He mustn't show it. He wasn't going to let Hazlitt see—damn him, damn everything! He'd go to the dogs—he'd study, get rich and be a wonderful man—then she'd be sorry. He would—oh, God!

He tried to laugh, and the sound broke across the cove like the screech of a gull. His breath tangled up.

Hazlitt's hand fell on his shoulder. Paul tried to shake it off, but its steady grasp persisted, and he yielded, all at once aware how much he wanted it. Hazlitt's voice came to him, firm and casual:

"It hurts; I know all about that. But they aren't all like her, lad; there are others—though somehow we salt-water fellows don't seem to have much luck with women."

There was comfort in that thought, a hint of something big and fateful. It made Paul feel like a figure of some dark destiny, and he wrapped it about his sore pride.

"You'd better get away from here," Hazlitt went on. "How about a share in my launch?"

"I wont have the money, Joe, not after this."

"Have I said anything about money?" Hazlitt demanded. "What I'm looking for is the man."

It sounded like that radio, some one talking a long way off with no possibility of reaching them. This was what he had dreamed of, talked for in that boasting hour when all things seemed possible to him. And in some strange way it was coming now at this, the most barren, stripped moment of all his life.

"There's ticklish times when I have to know if I can depend on whoever is with me," Hazlitt went on. "Times when the wrong man may mean life or death to all in the launch. And when I find one who wont go back on his friends, not even though they are only beasts, and he thinks it means everything to him— Oh, hell—come aboard, and let's eat breakfast."

The Family Compact

By

GEORGE L. KNAPP

SOME are born crooks; some achieve crookedness; and some have crookery thrust upon them. When James Robbins, Junior, was twelve years old, he wondered if he belonged to the first class; when sixteen, he was sure he belonged to the third. He may have been right both times. I only know that Junior never took his place in the great middle class, which, in the under world as in the upper, occupies most of the landscape and does most of the work.

There was some grounds for the boy's early self-distrust of which he was wholly unaware. His father, James Robbins, Senior, was a small-town lad who began work as clerk in the local jewelry store. It paid scant wages, but he thought it more "elegant" than other forms of clerking. He gave good service, and when he moved to a fair-sized city, got a place in a jewelry store there on the strength of home experience and recommendations. Then came trouble. After being a model youth long enough to get solid with his new employers, Robbins proceeded to sample the gay life. Chance threw him in with a fellow named Gurney, no older than himself in years, but much more experienced in sinfulness. The young clerk soon was living beyond his sal-

The gifted author of "The Bull Boy," "A Dull Day" and many other well-remembered Blue Book Magazine stories here contributes his best one thus far—an absorbing narrative of a father and son, and what crime did to and for them.

ary, and Gurney suggested ways of making up the deficit. Robbins balked instantly at a proposal to rob the store in which he worked, but consented, after much urging and the threat of exposure of a poker-debt, to join in a raid on one of the local magnates.

This was in the days when people still fondly believed that a burglar-proof safe could be built small enough to install appropriately in a dwelling-house. The jewels of the magnate's wife reposed in such a device while the family was away on a Western trip, and the big mansion was tenanted only by a watchman. Gurney, who had learned the lay of the house, sent a confederate to get the watchman drunk; and then, while Robbins served as lookout, opened the "cheesebox." The loot was disappointingly small; its disposal value to the crooks did not exceed five hundred dollars, of which about fifty came to Robbins. He was encouraged to hope for better returns next time, and coached in the simpler technique of burglary; but before a next time came, Gurney went to the city to celebrate. There he was caught in a raid on a West Side pawnshop, and sent to prison.

ROBBINS suffered agonies of terror when he read of the arrest, fearing a confession which would tell of other "jobs." It was Gurney's cue, however, to pose as a first offender, and no confession was forthcoming. The shock sobered Robbins; he vowed to walk straight and did—though he made no move to restore or give to charity the small profits of his adventure in housebreaking. He soon moved to a larger city, then to the metropolis, and finally gained his goal, the position of traveling salesman for a wholesale diamond firm. Meantime, before he was twenty-one, he had married and become the father of James Junior, who is the real subject of this history.

The man who reforms from fear, whether of hell or the penitentiary, is likely to think terror the sole means of righteousness. It was so with Robbins. Junior was trained with precept and paddle in the way he should go. He was made to understand that lying is a terrible sin, and stealing a worse one, and that the size of the loot and the circumstances of the case make no difference in the gravity of the offense. Since every kid takes liberties with the truth and the sugar-bowl at times, the net result of such tactics is to make him think he is a sinner anyway, and there is always danger that he will decide to be hanged for a sheep rather than a lamb. Junior early realized that, at times, at least, he was a very bad boy. It was not that he was punished so severely, rather that his sins were rated as so serious that no punishment could atone for them.

He was seven or eight when he made the discovery that Sunday-schools can be made to yield a revenue. Candy was not lacking in the Robbins home, but it was well made, sanitary, grown-up candy, lacking in the pep so dear to a youngster. In a store window between home and church were some gorgeous suckers, compounded, I think, of mucilage and aniline dyes. Junior's soul yearned for these, but his unaccountable parents said him nay. He pondered over the matter for a week, and when Sunday came, bought a sucker out of his Sunday-school money. No fatal results following, he repeated the crime next week, and next. A playmate, noting this triumph of fiscal wisdom, demanded a share of the profits; Junior refused, and the playmate told.

Junior was spanked, which was proper enough; but the language he had to endure was far more daunting than the strap.

Robbins was really a devoted parent, who was alarmed at the tendencies which he thought he could note in his offspring. He was also as vain as when he chose his first job because it was elegant; and to have his son caught in a childish swindle stung the man on the raw. He wondered eloquently what he had done to have a boy who behaved like this. He asked fervently how Junior could do such a thing; and Junior, sniffling and bewildered, finally guessed he must have been born that way—which seemed to puzzle his father worse than ever.

THE human mind is such a mixed-up affair that Robbins probably took his pose of impeccable righteousness seriously. His wife and son did, and some years later, an event happened which made doubt on the subject impossible.

The worst of making the wrong acquaintances is that one never can be sure of unmaking them. Robbins had erased Gurney from his list of friends, but though the paths of the two men did not cross for years, Gurney had not done the same for Robbins. Gurney served the brief term given to a first offender, was caught again a couple of years later and sequestered for a somewhat longer spell. From that time on, though constantly and properly under suspicion, he paid no more penalties to the law. He had always wanted to specialize on jewel-robbery, and the moment Robbins went on the road as a diamond salesman, Gurney marked him down. On his second long trip, while Robbins came out of his hotel one day, a well-dressed man strolling carelessly passed, looked up and spoke:

"Why, hello, Jim! I haven't seen you for years. Don't you remember me?"

"Oh—er—yes. I didn't know you at first," said the salesman. His handclasp was as warm as the kiss of a fish, but Gurney did not seem to notice it. He fell into step alongside.

"You've come up in the world since I knew you," he remarked.

"Yes, a little."

"How's the graft in the new job?"

"I don't know," said Robbins. "I'm not grafting."

"No offense," said Gurney pleasantly. "It's all a graft, though. That's the way the world goes. I'm doing pretty well, myself."

"That's good," said Robbins. "You'll have to excuse me, now. I'm pretty busy."

GURNEY let him go. Robbins watched like a hawk for days, but nothing happened. A week later, in a distant town, he met Gurney again. The interview lasted longer this time, was followed by another; and at the third meeting the ex-convict proposed a deal. He and a confederate would stage a fake hold-up; Robbins was to submit after a fake battle; and the loot would be split three ways. Since he was carrying some sixty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds at the moment, the project looked good; but he turned it down at once.

"Noth-ing do-ing," he said with emphasis. "Get me right, now; that goes. If anybody tries any funny business with me, I'll shoot first and inquire afterward."

"Don't try the high and mighty on me!" retorted Gurney. "I know some things you don't want printed."

"Think anybody'd believe you if you spilled 'em?" sneered Robbins. "I tell you, nothing doing. What's more, I don't want you hanging around me. I'm off you for life!"

Gurney's answer was wholly unprintable, but though he raged and stalked away in a fury, he did not believe Robbins would be as good as his word. When it became clear that the salesman had said nothing of the approach to the police, Gurney felt sure that the warning was all a bluff. With two companions, he tried to hold up Robbins in the lobby of one of the upper floors of an office building. They did not know that he had been aware of their shadowing for half an hour, that he had taught himself to shoot with his left hand, and that the light overcoat draped so carelessly over his left arm concealed an ugly bulldog revolver. The foremost bandit dropped with a bullet in his heart, and the others fled. They were picked up by the police, but Robbins refused to identify them.

"That one,"—pointing to the stranger,—"may have been one, or may not. I can't say. This man,"—pointing to Gurney—"wasn't there. I knew him when I first went to Columbus; we used to tear around together—that was before he got into trouble—and I guess I was as wild as he was till I saw where it was taking me. I've seen him since, too. I'd have known him in a second, and he wasn't there."

This gentlemanly lying made Robbins feel better satisfied with himself, and spiked for all time any chance of his one "job" being brought up against him. It also gives a pretty good map of his character. He

was nervy, quick-witted, resourceful—able to turn apparently damaging circumstances to good account. He had a strong personal loyalty, and would not cheat his employers. But of respect for the rights of property in general, he had none. It is a common attitude; and when joined to dull wits, lively caution and a sheltered life, carries millions of men from cradle to grave without any breach of law; but for a man like Robbins, it was a slender tether.

OF course the episode set him on a pedestal in his own house, and made Junior somewhat unhappy. The lad could not understand why he was so different from his father—it was the mother who raised the question. Junior's predatory streak, larger than that of most boys, kept getting him into scrapes, and he finally came to the settled conviction that he was born a bad boy. It did not worry his conscience much—that would come later; but he was sorry, because it worried his parents.

As the years went by, Junior, somewhat to his own surprise, appeared to be outgrowing his sins. Then, in his first high-school year, he fell sick. After a long, expensive illness, he recovered, and then it was his mother's turn. She was in hospital most of the time for months, and when she came out, the doctor prescribed absolute quiet and freedom from household cares for a long period. This meant that Junior must go to a boarding school. Robbins, with his scant savings used up and his credit heavily pledged by this run of bad luck, came in from a business trip to find that the firm he worked for had merged with another, and that he was out of a job.

The experience would be unpleasant for any man; for Robbins, it was infuriating. He knew himself to be a better salesman than the one who was to take his place; but that man, Rimsky by name, had married into one of the combining firms, and held his position by the pull thus given. Robbins kept a poker face and congratulated his supplanter, but he swore then and there to take it out of Rimsky in some fashion at the first chance.

That chance came quickly. Buerger, vice president of the firm which had employed Robbins, and holding the same position in the enlarged concern, was one of those men whose muddling kindliness is always trying to bring together people who ought to be forbidden to live on the same continent. He invited Robbins, the Rimskys and some other friends to dinner at his home. Robbins, inclined at first to beg off, accepted as soon as he learned that his successor would be there. He had not thought of himself in the rôle of a thief for years, but now he pictured the situation as vividly as if his lifetime had been spent in preying on the careless rich. There would be card-playing after dinner; Mrs. Rimsky always wore too many rings and always took them off when she sat down to play. She might not leave them within his reach, but he would be ready if she did.

Everything played into his hands. The Buergers occupied an old-fashioned but comfortable flat on the second floor. The door below, controlled by a buzzer, opened directly on the stairs. At the top of these was a little front hall, from which doors opened into the back hall, the front parlor, and a small bedroom or den off that parlor. The ladies put their wraps in that bedroom, as usual, and Robbins satisfied himself that the door opening into it from the hall was unlocked. He bore Mrs. Rimsky's half-concealed triumph without seeming to notice it, said he expected to make a connection soon which would yield a good income, and generally appeared rather grave and preoccupied but entirely without malice.

Dinner over, two card-tables were set out in the back parlor; Mrs. Rimsky went to the front bedroom and came back without her rings. Robbins sat by through the first few hands, and then rose to go. While putting on his overcoat in the back bedroom, he contrived to drop his emerald stickpin in an out of the way corner, and as he called good night to his hosts from the lower door, he snapped the catch so that it could be opened from without. He waited in the vestibule a minute, stole noiselessly up the stairs—his stickpin a perfect excuse if anyone came upon him in the hall, listened till certain that all present were at the cards, and slipped into the front bedroom. One quick move gave him the rings, which were spiked to a pincushion, another rumpled the wraps as if in a hurried search for valuables, a third unfastened the catch of the window which opened on a small balcony. In two minutes, he was out of the house, the door locked behind him; and in ten, he was phoning from the station to say that he had lost his pin, and would Buerger bring it to the office next day if found. In all the vast surplus of language that was spilled

because of the theft, there was no word of suspicion directed toward Robbins.

AT almost the moment that he entered his hotel that night—so shamelessly does history repeat itself—Junior was reckoning up his card-debts at fully forty dollars, wondering how long it would take him to save the sum out of his allowance, and speculating as to whether the governor would stand a touch.

Do not hang haloes above Robbins' furrowed brow, and say that he resorted to crime for love of his family. Thousands of men who love their families just as much go through worse trials without even thinking of crookedness. Vanity and temper had at least as much to do with his action as economic pressure and family affection; and for all his long years of law-abiding, his real nature remained the same. His motto was that of the Black Douglas, "Thou shalt want ere I want," and he chuckled at the success of his foray.

He first secured a roving commission from a diamond broker of rather shady reputation. This gave him a legitimate reason for being on the road with jewels in his possession. That done, he turned immediately to a jeweler whom he knew in a moderate-sized town about sixty miles from where Junior was at school.

"Brad," he said, for the two were on good terms, "I'm doing a little broking business myself, now, and I've got a bargain in diamonds that I suspect never paid duty."

"I've heard that story before," said Brad.

"I know damned well you have," retorted Robbins. "You heard it just five months ago, and made money out of it. That's why I'm telling you now." Their eyes met, and Bradley was first to look away.

"Let's see 'em," he said.

In ten minutes the transaction was finished, to the satisfaction of both parties. Generally speaking, a jewel-thief may count himself lucky if he gets one-third the wholesale value of his diamond plunder; the settings bring him nothing at all. In this case Robbins and Bradley agreed on the worth of the stones, and divided fifty-fifty.

These things happened in the fall. Junior was delighted to receive an extra check which, with the savings he had been able to effect, enabled him to square his card-debts. Part of these were to his schoolmates, but about twenty dollars was owing to a middle-aged man named Gurney whom Junior had met, quite by accident, sometime before, and engaged disastrously at poker. Gurney was almost surly about taking the money.

"I told you there wasn't any hurry about that," he said crossly.

"I know," said Junior, "but I'd better pay up while I've got it."

"Old man kick in?" asked Gurney.

"All by himself," said Junior. "I didn't ask him at all. He's—he's an awful good scout. Wish I was more like him."

"Humph!" said Gurney. He had thought himself very artistic in arranging that debt of twenty dollars. It was big enough to worry a kid, and not big enough to look bad for the man if the matter became public; and Gurney much desired some information which an unsophisticated youngster could secure for him. But the quarry, thus delivered from his clutches came back to them very soon. Junior and two other boys hired an auto one evening, drove ten miles to a roadhouse which they were forbidden to visit, and on the way back, ran the machine into a ditch. The owner demanded payment; two of the boys settled in cash; but Junior, less bountifully supplied, was persuaded to sign a note. The moment he had done so, he realized how he was caught, but it was too late. Pestered by the owner of the auto, threatened with exposure which he believed would cost him his home as well as his school, Junior was a picture of woe when he met Gurney a little later, and a few questions put the crook in possession of the whole story.

"Hum!" he said, thoughtfully. "Maybe I can put you in the way of earning that money."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Junior. "How?"

Gurney did not appear to hear the question. He looked thoughtfully out at the landscape, occasionally darting quick glances at his young companion. Finally he spoke.

"Beats hell, the way things go," he said. "Here you are, a decent kid. You get into a little bad luck, and you're likely to be expelled and disgraced so folks wouldn't look at you any more. There's old Murdock—I can see his greenhouse from here—fifty-seven kinds of a thief, and everybody kowtows to him."

"I didn't know he was a thief," said Junior, with little interest.

"Stole every dollar he's got, and most of what he's spent," said Gurney vigorously. "Robbed the railroad when he was contracting. Got a lease on some coal land from a farmer, and robbed him. Robbed the city, and wound up by robbing his partners. I bet they raise a fund to build him a monument when he croaks."

"But what—" began Junior. Gurney interrupted:

"Murdock's away. Do you know who's left in the house?"

"No," said Junior, wondering.

"Find out. I want to know some things about the dump, and if you'll help me, I'll help you. I'll fix you up with one of these magazine subscription deals, and you go canvassing in the neighborhood—"

"But I don't know how," said Junior.

"It's easy; I'll give you the dope," said Gurney. "You go to the house next door. Make your spiel, and while you're talking, ask about the Murdock place. They'll tell you the family's away for a spell. You want to know how long, and whether there isn't some one there who might take a subscription to help a poor boy through college. See?"

MUCH more the crook said, contriving every few words to mention the dark disgrace which hung over the boy; and at last Junior consented to perform the strange errand. He could not help knowing that some queer work was in the wind, but he was in deep trouble; and Murdock, so Gurney said, was a thief, anyway. He turned in a report that would have won a word of praise from most city editors, and Gurney gave him on the spot about half the money he needed to settle his note.

Two nights later the Murdock home was entered, the two servants tied up, and the place regularly cleaned out. Rugs, furs, pictures, plate—the thieves missed nothing. Murdock was something of a collector of Oriental rugs, and the haul was the biggest made in that part of the country for years.

Junior spent wretched days following the burglary. He knew that he had helped prepare it, and for all his predatory streak, he was shocked and alarmed. He would have given back the money received for spying, but had already paid it to the owner of the wrecked auto. That, of course, was the object of letting him have it so early; Gurney was craftily securing himself and his pals against a squeal. Barred from going to his mother by her physical condition, or to his father by his belief in that parent's Puritanical probity, the boy was fairly caught.

He did not see Gurney for a week, although that shrewd crook had not left town. At the end of that time, seeing that the police were still running round in circles, he deemed it safe to approach the youth. They met, apparently by accident.

"Hello, kid," said Gurney. "Come to my room; I've got something to tell you." Junior followed, tongue-tied and perturbed. Gurney closed the door behind them, and faced the boy with a crooked grin.

"Well," he queried, "what do you think about tricks now?"

"I—I didn't know—" began Junior weakly.

"Like hell you didn't!" answered Gurney roughly. "You aint a fool. You may not have known anything—you don't know anything you can tell, now—but you had a damn good guess!"

There was truth enough in that statement to close the boy's lips. Gurney watched him, cynically.

"Well," he said, "what you going to do about it?"

Junior shook his head. "It would kill my mother," he said. "And I think my father would kill me, if he knew."

Gurney stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, and let go a thunderous laugh.

"That's good!" he gasped. "Oh, my Gawd, that's good! Say, kid, don't be the death of me!" He stopped abruptly, and fixed the youngster with a scowling glance:

"The only thing that'd make your dad cross is for you to get caught! He's damn particular about that! I'll tell the world he is!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Junior, his voice husky with anger and a growing fear that he would not acknowledge. Gurney stepped closer and shook his finger under the boy's nose.

"I mean your dad's a thief!" he said. "He's a crook, just like me. We were pals till he threw me down!"

A fist, hard though light, spatted against Gurney's jaw, and he staggered. Junior leaped after him, fairly frothing; but the struggle was too one-sided to last. Gurney was in the prime of life, with a good fifty pounds the advantage in weight. He warded off the next blow, caught the boy's wrist, got a grip on his collar, and flung him on the bed.

"Damn you!" he exclaimed in a furious undertone. "What did you do that for? Quiet, now; I don't want to hurt you, but I will if you make a racket! Will you be quiet if I let you up?"

Junior did not answer, but he ceased struggling. Gurney took this for agreement, released his hold and stepped back, rubbing his jaw. Junior rose and started for the door. Gurney waved him back, took a chair, and motioned the lad to another.

"Look here, kid," he said. "You're the only fellow that ever landed on me without getting it, right. See? Well, I'm going to overlook it. I aint going to touch you. I didn't think how you'd take it, but it's true!"

Junior shook his head obstinately. Gurney went on:

"Yes, it is. I could prove it by having you ask him some questions. The first job we were in together was at Lackland's place, at Columbus—funny that I remember the name, but I do. Your dad did the scouting for that, just like you did on this Murdock job. We got all there was, which wa'n't much, and we did several other jobs, too. Then I got pinched in Chicago. I never squealed, just took my rap alone; and he never lifted a finger for me, neither then nor afterward. I met him, accidental, when he was on the road, and he treated me like dirt. He was pulling jobs right then, too; I had it straight, and I know."

He was silent for a space. Junior felt instinctively that part of the story was true. He sat on the bed, too wretched for words. Gurney spoke again:

"You see, he's got no kick coming. He can't reproach you with anything—unless you fall down and get caught—and that'll never happen while you're with me. I've taken a fancy to you, kid. At first, I didn't like you, on account of your father, but I do, now. We're going to have some swell times together. You tell your dad you're going to get subscriptions through vacation —he'll like that. You'll get 'em, too, but there'll be other things."

JUNIOR stumbled down the stairs. It was Saturday; he did not have to be at the school till evening, and he took the least frequented street for the woods, where he would be alone. He was numb to everything but misery, and his brain could hold but one idea. His father was a thief, a thief, a thief. He was the son of a crook. That was why he was bad. That was why he committed crimes, almost in the cradle —stole cookies, stole apples, stole Sunday-school money. His father was a thief, and he was a thief. Like father, like son. There was no escape, he was foredoomed.

It is needless to follow in close detail the career of Junior and his treacherous seducer in the next few months. The lad had no further adventures in burglarly till the end of the school year—Murdock's was the only place in town that was worth a clean-up; but Gurney saw him at short intervals, and by the time vacation came, the boy was broken to crook's harness. He announced that instead of going to a camp, he would like to canvass for subscriptions. His father welcomed this evidence of enterprise, and agreed. Whether a born thief or not, Junior was a born salesman and had excellent success, but his chief business was to scout for the gang. He marked down several places that summer, three of which were raided by the gang.

In September, just before time to start back to school, Junior was called on for still another service. Gurney had some valuable jewels; whether he had helped steal them, or received them to pass on, his novice never knew. For some reason the crook was under suspicion at that time; he had been searched once when the loot was not on his person, and feared that he would be nabbed if he tried to deliver it. Junior was in one of the suburbs, canvassing for subscriptions. Gurney managed without much trouble to transfer the diamonds and give instructions; and with his first real thrill at the game, the boy carried them to the fence.

IN the under world as in the upper, organization is the key to success. In diamond-thieving, thanks to the small size and unidentifiable character of the loot, independent operators like Robbins and Gurney have a fair chance; but the organization does most of the work and collects most of the profits, even there. The actual thief passes his plunder to an intermediary, who passes it to a fence, who gives it to the man higher up, though sometimes the fence is one of the higher-ups himself.

It was so with Blackman, né Schwartzburg, the fence whom Junior was to see. He kept a second-hand and curio shop in a Midwestern city which shall be nameless; his political pull was strong, his underworld connections international; he was al-

together a man to be feared. Junior walked carelessly into his place, looked around, examined several articles and priced a few till he got a chance to speak to the proprietor with no one in earshot.

"I have a message from Gurney," said the boy.

"So?" said Blackman. He lifted an ivory elephant and held it up admiringly. "Here is a little thing, now, that's a reg'lar jewel, an' cheap, too."

"Jewel it is," said Junior, grinning. This was something like—almost equal to crime in the movies. "It's several jewels."

"On hand?" asked the fence, in a low tone, still admiring the toy.

"Pretty close."

"The Cleveland lot?"

"All right." Junior passed the little packet, which was concealed at once in a big palm. Blackman spoke louder:

"You should see the one in my private office. It is bigger, but no besser."

Still carrying the ivory elephant, he led Junior to a room at the rear. It opened from the store, and was about twelve feet square. There was one window, near which stood a roll-top desk, and half concealed behind the open door was a safe, which Junior already was wise enough to know could be looted by any competent yegg with a can-opener. Blackman poured out the diamonds, and looked them over.

"Fair—notting to brag of," he pronounced. "Vy didn't Gurney come?"

"Didn't think it best," said Junior, repeating instructions.

"Vatched, I suppose. All right; I settle as usual. Here is something for yourself."

He gave the boy a ten-dollar bill, which barely paid his railroad fare, and the little ivory elephant. The boy figured the last would make a good Christmas present for his mother. He went back and reported. Gurney grunted scornfully.

"The old tightwad!" he said. "He ought to come across with a century note on a deal like that. There's the trouble with this game; you got to give it all to the crowd behind. I'd like to get into that store just after he gets a cargo to handle."

"Why, that—why, we're dealing with him; he trusts us!" protested Junior, who was like his father in more ways than one, not to mention an honest inheritance from the other side of the house.

"Trusts us? Not on your life. We got to trust him, and get stung for it. We get two bits out of every dollar, and Blackman and the higher-ups get all the rest."

Junior pondered this view of the situation, and decided there might be something in it. A practical detail occurred to him.

"Where do you suppose he keeps that stuff?" asked the boy. "That tin can in his office is no good."

"Good enough, with his pull to back it," said Gurney. "He don't hold goods long. But I've known him to have over a hundred grand in that shop at once, just in ice. If I could get at the safe with that in it—oh, baby!"

HE was lying at least fifty per cent, but even so, the prospect was alluring. Junior went back to school—his father insisted on that—wondering if sometime he and Gurney would raid Blackman's place, and make a haul like that.

He was not the only one who had an eye on the Blackman "dump." The big fence had been immune so long that he had grown careless. He paid too little attention to his half-witted slavey—people of defective intellect are sometimes keen observers. Not long after Junior went back to school, his father and Bradley were holding a conference on ways and means, and one of them, at least, was much better informed than Gurney.

"I'll handle this for you, Jim, but don't ask me to take any more for at least six months," Bradley was saying. "My trade wont warrant it, and the big fellows will get suspicious. I'd like to get out of the game, anyway."

"That's all right for you, Brad," returned Robbins gloomily. "But what about me? You've got a good business to live on. I'd like to quit, too, but how'd I care for my family?"

"Listen," said Bradley. "I've watched you. You're on the make, but you aint a double-crosser. That goes with me, too. I know a dandy place out West that we can get, an' it'd make us both rich. I can't swing it alone, but you're a salesman and I'm a workman, and together, we could do it easy. What say?"

"How much?" asked Robbins. Bradley told, and the other man shook his head.

"I haven't got the money," he said.

"You can raise it, I guess," said Bradley. "Anyway," he added, as Robbins shook his head again, "if you pinch anything in the next half year, don't bother me with it. Take it to Blackman."

"That fat hog!" exclaimed Robbins. "He'd cheat me out of the fillings in my teeth. I'd sooner rob him."

"I can tell you how to do that, too," said Bradley calmly.

"Yes, you can—not!" scoffed Robbins.

"I sure can," insisted Bradley. "Remember Jerry the Goat, that went out with T. B. last year? He got onto it, told me, and wanted me to stake him. I'd have done it, too, but he had a hemorrhage before he could get to the job."

"I don't need any stake, but what's the dope?" demanded Robbins. "And what do you want out of it?"

"I'll take diamonds enough to pay half the price of that store at twenty-five per cent under wholesale," said Bradley, after a minute's thought. "Anything over that, I'll give you cash or allowance of twenty-five per cent, and we'll put it in stock and split profits fifty-fifty. I want you with me, Jim, and if you come, we're going to cut out the crooked business." He spoke with no thought of irony.

"That goes," said Robbins. "Shoot the dope."

"Here's Blackman's store," said Bradley, sketching rapidly. "Here, at the back, just in front of his workroom, he keeps a big grandfather clock. He says it's for sale, but the price is high enough that he don't sell it. The left-hand weight's hollow; the opening's at the back, big enough to hold sparklers worth a hundred grand, easily. That safe aint much more'n a blind—I suppose he keeps small stuff in it, though."

ROBBINS went to Blackman's town immediately, scouted the place himself, laid his plans, and then settled to wait till he could feel sure that the crook had just received a consignment of diamonds. He proposed to work alone; it was less dangerous, on the whole, than taking in a partner, especially as he meant this to be his last coup. He had not long to wait. A big jewel robbery pulled in Pittsburgh had all the marks of the gang of which Blackman was a part. Robbins came back to the town, and after two days of careful watching, saw a man whom he felt sure was the thieves' messenger enter the store. It was already afternoon, and that evening was Hallowe'en.

Junior had received a telegram the day before, signed with his father's name, and asking him to come to Cleveland for the week-end. It was from Gurney, of course, and meant that the boy was to come to the town where Blackman kept his shop. The boy reached the rendezvous, to find the crook limping about with a cane, in a state of high excitement.

"You've got to be the main guy this time, kid," he said. "Blackie's got the Pittsburgh swag. I had the straight tip it was coming to him, and it's there now. I've got the combination out of that nit-wit slavey of his, and fixed it with her to leave the lavatory window unfastened. It's a pipe—and here I am laid up with this knee. You'll have to go in."

"All right," said Junior, with a thrill, half pleasant, half fearful at the idea. "Who's doing lookout?"

"I'll have to do that myself, though it'll most kill me," returned Gurney. "Damn this knee!" He meant it. If the kid did the inside work, he probably would expect an even split, while Gurney, if he did the actual stealing, could hold out most or the swag himself.

AT eleven that night, Robbins senior slipped into the alley back of Blackman's. It was early for burglary, but with half the cops watching boisterous kids in the residence district, an early hour seemed best. The lavatory window gave under his jimmy with unexpected ease, and in a moment, he was inside. The store was dark, there was not a sound, yet he felt uneasy. After waiting five minutes with no results, he told himself he was a fool, found the clock with a cautious use of his flash, found the hollow weight and a paper-wrapped package inside, thrust it into his shirt to drop and be held by his belt, and tiptoed toward his point of entry. At the second step, a pencil of light came through the darkness to rest on the pit of his stomach, and a hoarse whisper with something familiar about it commanded:

"Stick 'em up!"

Robbins lived five years in one sickening second, and it was not the punishment that appalled him, but the disgrace, and the fact that his wife and son would know him for a thief. He put up his hands, mechanically. "Turn round," said the same hoarse voice—where had he heard that hauntingly familiar note?—and hope surged up anew. This was a brother-crook, and with such a one, he had a chance.

"Might have known it!" The voice was not natural yet, but Robbins whirled with entire indifference to pistols.

"Junior!" he said in a gasping whisper.

"Yep," returned the young man with a flippant effort to disguise his real feelings. "Quite a family party, aint it. Like father, like son! I'm starting early too."

"Gurney, by God!" exclaimed Robbins. "I'll kill him for this. Let's get out."

"You let Gurney alone," returned Junior. "You worked with him all right till he got into trouble, and then you threw him down."

"Listen, Junior," said his father desperately. "That's a lie. I helped him on one trick, the Lackland place; he coached me, and I was scout and lookout. That's the only time I ever was with him. He went to Chicago and got pinched, and I quit, and stayed straight till I lost my job after your mother got sick. I've turned three tricks since then; but Junior, I'll never turn another if you'll come with me now. That's the truth!"

SOMEHOW Junior knew it was the truth. "All right," he whispered. "Wait." He hurried to the private office, Robbins on his heels. "What are you doing?" asked the older man.

"Putting back his money—I didn't get his sparklers," answered the youth. "We'll start square. Now—"

A whistle, like and yet unlike the regular Hallowe'en noise, came from the street. "That's Gurney!" exclaimed Junior.

"Go, quick; I'll hold 'em!" whispered his father fiercely. "I wont!" returned Junior in the same tone. "Go!" repeated Robbins. "Oh, God!" For the door at the front of the store swung open, and they heard Blackman's voice:

"It's all right, Officer. I yust come down with a friend to get some papers." There was an inarticulate reply, then the door shut and the lock grated.

"Here!" exclaimed Robbins. "Do just as I tell you. We'll get out yet!" He forced his son down behind the safe, and squatted there himself. Heavy steps came down the aisle to the private room, came inside, there was the snap of a switch and the room sprang into light. Robbins rose from his ambush, face covered by a Hallowe'en mask, automatic leveled in a steady grip.

"Don't move, Fatty," he said; and no man not bent on committing suicide would have disobeyed him. "Keep your hands right where they are. You,"—to the other man,—"close that door. Good! Now put 'em up. Turn round. Tom, take their guns."

Tom, alias Junior, collected the artillery. The two men were laid face down on the floor, bound and gagged; and there was nothing amateurish about that tying. Then Robbins turned to the safe. He threw on the floor the package of bills which Junior had taken and put back. He did the same with a quantity of stamps, the result of a raid on a country post office. He looked through the papers in the safe, chuckled at some of them, and put these in his pocket.

"Listen, Fatty," he said. "You haven't lost anything. But if you try to frame anyone for this, these papers go to Uncle Sam."

He switched out the light, closed and refastened the window by which they had entered, and after assuring himself that the coast was clear, went out the front way, locked the door, and motioned the boy into Blackman's auto. Junior obeyed, but whispered anxiously as his father took the wheel:

"You wont—steal it, will you, Dad?"

"No," said Robbins. "Just want it out of the way, so the cops wont go exploring too soon."

"What—what do you think he'll say?" asked Junior.

"Who? Blackman? He'll be too busy explaining those stamps to say anything else," returned Robbins.

"That's so." Junior chuckled. "Besides, he hasn't lost a thing." Robbins kept a discreet silence. "Dad," said Junior, after a pause, "we're going to quit, aren't we? We'll never take anything that doesn't belong to us again?"

Robbins stopped the car and got out. They were beyond the city limits, now, and the car which he had driven in was not far away. He held out his hand to his son.

"Jimmy," he said, "we're not going to quit; we have quit. I quit when I saw you in that store. We're going West— I wont leave you in school where Gurney can get at you. And I've got a chance to go in partnership with a clever chap in a store. I'll never steal another cent's worth as long as I live, and I know you wont."

They shook hands on the bargain, and kept it. But Robbins thought it unnecessary to say that his resolve to reform came after he had secured the Pittsburgh diamonds, still safely ensconced inside his shirt.

Le Sport de Golf

The man who wrote those gay examples of golfomania yclept "Stymied Kisses" and "Bunkered on Bai-o-hae" here offers a bit of Gallic-flavored golf that has the joyous quality of Daudet's famous "Tartarin" stories.

By ELMER BROWN MASON

THE sun shone down on Burgundy. Especially did it smile upon the Department of Côte d'Or, and its brightest and tenderest rays were for the little town of Avison.

Indeed, so superlative was the day that even Cæsar, the *garçon,* was conscious of the sunshine as he stumped about the sidewalk beneath the awning in front of the Café de la Ville. His wooden leg tapping a military accompaniment, he hummed "Quant on est en Permission," as he laid two nearly new decks of cards on the most desirably situated of the tables. This duty accomplished, he advanced one pace, stood at ease, and glanced expectantly up L'Avenue Pershang—most French towns have an Avenue Pershang now. Then he looked at his watch. It was exactly three minutes to three. Could it be that they would be late! But no, there was Monsieur le Colonel. Behind him came Monsieur le Maire of Avison. From the other direction hurried the notary, Monsieur Bijoux, arm in arm with Monsieur de la Barrière, the owner of many vineyards.

The four elderly men converged on the table beneath the awning. Cæsar stiffened to attention and saluted the Colonel magnificently. The Colonel returned the salute with an absentminded wave of his hand.

"*Bon jour, mon enfant,*" he said abstractedly.

All who had been of his regiment, all who were left of his regiment, were his children, and he so addressed them.

Next arrived the Mayor, then the others. They all shook hands formally before seating themselves. The Colonel dealt the pack of cards that Monsieur de la Barrière cut. Running over his hand, he announced, "*Sans épique.*" No one raised the no trump; the game was on.

For three silent, tense rubbers the struggle continued. Then the notary added up the score. The Mayor and Monsieur de la Barrière had triumphed by six hundred points. The Colonel and Monsieur Bijoux each counted out three francs on the table, since the stakes had been fifty centimes a hundred.

Cæsar took the orders. The players relaxed. The Colonel spoke:

"My friends, I am greatly worried."

"Your son, André?" Monsieur de la Barrière asked quickly.

"But yes."

"Ah!" ejaculated Bijoux.

The Mayor shook his head gravely.

"I thought," the Colonel continued sadly, "that the war might have changed him, but it is not so. Yet he was a brave soldier."

"Médaille militaire, croix de guerre with five palms, *officier* of the Legion of Honor," Monsieur de la Barrière detailed, and added as an afterthought: "Three times wounded."

"It is so," agreed the Colonel. "Yet he has not changed. Far from it. He is still—still eccentric."

"He has not, perhaps, learned to drink le wheesky from the English?" De la Barrière asked anxiously.

"But no."

"Ah! Ah!" suddenly exploded the notary. "I have it! It is as before the war. He is again interested in the so charming Gi-Gi, l'Hirondelle."

"It is never eccentric to be interested in a beautiful woman," the Colonel said testily. "And I have informed you that André is eccentric."

MONSIEUR BIJOUX, glanced at his friend's angry face; then he beckoned to Cæsar:

"Bring thou us a bottle of Gouttes d'Or —and carry it with care," he directed.

The three other old men relaxed. Indeed, when the Drops of Gold—that wine half sunshine, half nectar—slid smoothly into the four glasses, they even smiled at one another. Sipping the amber liquid appreciatively, they replaced the glasses on the table and leaned their heads closer together.

"It is this way, my friends," the Colonel explained, "and especially you, my old friend De la Barrière. You know well that it has always been understood that André should marry mademoiselle your daughter, when he arranged himself. But he does not so arrange himself."

"What is it—since it is not Gi-Gi—which so disturbs you in the conduct of André, your son?" interrogated the notary.

"All his time he spends at Le Club Sportique at Beaune. He returns home only to sleep."

"But are not all our young men of good family, especially since the war, interested in le sport?" objected the Mayor.

"True, but this interest is an obsession. He returns home to sleep, as I said; but mark you well, my friends, he sleeps at nine of the clock, rises at seven and returns to Beaune. Is this natural, I ask you?"

"To sleep at nine for the young! Indeed it is *not* natural," stated De la Barrière.

"But what does he do all day at Le Club Sportique?" demanded the notary, his legal mind boring toward the heart of the matter.

"He is absorbed in a new sport."

"And what *is* this new sport?"

"Le sport de golf."

"De golf!" repeated De la Barrière.

"I do not know it," commented the Mayor in much the tone he might have used in denying an accusation of crime.

"It will bear careful investigation," stated the notary, moving his head up and down in grave acquiescence.

IT was the hour of "le five o'clock" at Le Club Sportique. Around a small table loaded with French patisserie and embellished with a huge teapot sat Mademoiselle Antoinette de la Barrière, Miss Burke-Jones, André Leconte and his friend Jacques Villiers.

All wore sport clothes; all were tanned; all were happy and extremely hungry, as the rapidly fading pile of cakes testified.

"It makes fifty-two holes in the ground which we have made," Jacques announced with great satisfaction. "An' Mees Burke-Jones, wiz my poorly aidings, has make a gain of t'ee francs from you an' Mademoiselle."

"Righto," agreed André, his mouth full of *gâteau.*

"Tomorrow!" threatened Antoinette de la Barrière.

"Vous êtes sûr," Miss Burke-Jones gave a literal version of "You're on" in French, which she insisted on speaking, though the Frenchmen, since golf was a British sport, always spoke English in connection with it.

"I may not be here in the afternoon," André said. "I really should check up on the pater, don't y'know. I haven't altogether good reports of him."

André had learned his English in London and spoke it perfectly.

"Too bloody bad," sympathized Jacques. *He'd* picked up his English in the trenches.

Miss Burke-Jones gave him a horrified glance, then concealed her embarrassment in speech.

"Ce n'est pas legitime de parler de son père ainsi en Angleterre."

Mademoiselle de la Barrière in turn gave *her* a horrified glance. *"Pas legitime"* was *not legitimate; not legitimate* was *illegitimate.* Nothing illegitimate should be mentioned before a French maiden. She too hid her embarrassment with words:

"Your fa-ther wiz my fa-ther has been much together, André. Should I perhaps be of a worrydness?"

"I'm sure they're both quite all right," hastily reassured André. "Only—well, there are four of them that gamble a bit together every afternoon. So it has been reported to me at, any rate."

"It is terrible for the figure, gambling," Jacques said reminiscently. "Before the war I do it. I get fat."

"Antoinette, why do we not bring our respective fathers out to Le Club Sportique tomorrow afternoon for a few hours of normal, healthy enjoyment?" suggested André.

"IT will be so much better for you, *mon père,* to be out in the sunshine of the *bon Dieu* than to sit in a café—no matter of how great a respectability," Antoinette concluded.

"I do not understand," Monsieur de la Barrière answered, gazing round-eyed at his daughter. "Where, I ask you, is the sunshine better than in front of the Café de la Ville? And one is protected from it by an awning also. But that is neither here nor there. Dost thou tell me, *ma fille,* that thou walkest miles *alone* with André Leconte over wild fields?"

"But no, *mon père,"* the girl objected. "We play a foursome: Mees Burke-Jones, Jacques Villiers, André and I."

"But is there no chaperon, no older person with you?"

"Madame Burke-Jones sits always on the veranda of the clubhouse."

"How long is this field of golf, I ask you?" Monsieur de la Barrière demanded.

"Oh, several kilometers."

"France has come to this!" the owner of vineyards wailed. "France has come to this! Young people unchaperoned walk kilometers together alone! Oh, the accursed war that has made such things possible!"

"But it is a sport of the utmost innocence," objected Antoinette.

"Ma fille!" Monsieur de la Barrière's voice was stern. "Thou shouldst know nothing of innocence. . . . . That is to say," he corrected himself hurriedly: "To thee all should be innocent; therefore thou shouldst not know there is aught else; hence innocence should mean nothing to you. I explain myself badly, but what I mean is— *Enfin,* I will go with you and look upon this sport."

"BUT I have no wish to learn a sport; what has a sport to do with me at my age?" the Colonel demanded unhappily.

"It will increase your enjoyment of life, indeed prolong it," insisted André. "Antoinette de la Barrière, who was once as frail as a flower of the wind, is now as strong as the ox."

"My enjoyment of life is perfect already," objected the Colonel. "Besides, what has Mademoiselle de la Barrière's physical condition, to which you refer with a lack of delicacy, to do with it. Le sport is not for women."

"This sport is," André said positively. "Do come to Le Club Sportique for just this afternoon!"

"I will not." The Colonel spoke with finality. "I will not endanger my health by walking about in the so hot sun. I shall go to the Café de la Ville for my *partie de cartes* with De la Barrière, Bijoux and the Mayor as usual. Speak no more of it."

"But Monsieur de la Barrière goes with Antoinette to Le Club Sportique this very day." André played his trump card.

THE little knot of people gathered at the first tee of Le Club Sportique were typical of both the old and the new France. The Colonel wore the undress uniform of the *chasseurs.* Monsieur de la Barrière presented somewhat of an anomaly. His trousers were of the striped conventional type worn by elderly Frenchmen in the afternoon; but the upper part of his plump body was swathed in an ample gray sweater. On the other hand, Monsieur Bijoux and the Mayor were ultra-conventional in frock coats and tall hats. Antoinette and Miss Burke-Jones wore sport-suits and gay sweaters; André and Jacques were in the most correct of knickerbockers.

"The object is this," explained André. "The small ball is to be struck over the landscape in as few strokes as possible to the little hole you see marked by the red indicator in the distance; then it is to be struck into that hole."

"Ah!" commented Monsieur de la Barrière.

"Is it permitted to throw the small ball instead of hitting it with the club?" the Colonel asked curiously.

"Of an assuredness *not!*" André's voice was horrified. "Indeed, it would be no advantage, *mon père.* The ball is too light for throwing. It will go farther when hit."

"I will hit it, then," the Colonel conceded good-humoredly. "Step back, all, and I will show you how a soldier can perform." He brought up the driver André had put in his hands, brought it down in a vicious swing—and missed the ball entirely.

"May I ask a question?" De la Barrière queried politely. "Does the counting begin from the time one hits the ball or does it include attempts to hit the ball also, even when entirely without success."

"Attempts also, *mon père,*" Antoinette enlightened him.

"Then the score now stands one attempt in my favor," the owner of vineyards said —and corrected himself as the Colonel made a second futile swing: "Pardon, two attempts."

"I should so have been informed," the Colonel stated a trifle snappishly. "I will now hit it."

He did, scattering sand in every direction. The ball soared high in air and came to rest fifty yards up the fairway.

"I could have thrown it much farther than that," was his disgusted comment.

De la Barriere accepted the driver from his daughter, gazed at the ball tenderly, took a half swing and sent it a hundred yards straight down the fairway.

"Very good indeed, sir," André praised him.

"You will do much better, *mon colonel,* next time," Antoinette encouraged.

"Huh!" ejaculated the Colonel.

André half drew a brassie from the bag, then shoved it back and substituted a midiron. He demonstrated the swing before handing the club to his father. The Colonel fixed the ball with an angry eye, brought the midiron down in a vicious swipe and landed a hundred and fifty yards away in the bunker protecting the green.

"Bravo pour l' armée!" De la Barrière shouted to him, and topped his brassie shot so that it rolled a bare sixty yards. His next, however, was a beautiful high mashie which made the green, then ran off it, since it lacked back-spin.

"This is a shot of some difficulty, *mon père,*" André explained. "Watch me closely." And he showed the proper manner in which to spoon the ball over the bunker.

"It would be much easier to toss it out," his father commented. "I even think I could put it directly in the little hole—as one threw a bomb during the war. However, since it is le sport to beat at it with a stick—"

He proceeded to beat at it. The eleventh attempt cleared the bunker, the ball rolling within four inches of the hole; the spoon the Colonel threw after it, hitting the marker with a metallic clang.

"Allons, mon ami, du calme!" De la Barrière suggested good-naturedly, and putted from one side of the green to the other. He finally went down in nine. The Colonel had taken eighteen strokes when his ball at last dribbled into the hole.

Antoinette's father won eight of the nine holes played. On the third he lost his ball.

"But it is really astounding, your skill," André said to Monsieur de la Barrière as they all gathered around a large tea-table on the club veranda. "It is hard to believe that you have not a previous knowledge of this sport."

"I marvel at my own adroitness," the wealthy owner of many vineyards answered modestly. "It may result that I have played another English sport in my youth, namely le sport de croquet."

"You will make my father of a conceit unendurable," protested Antoinette. "It was luck alone, I assure myself, that gave him victory over Monsieur le Colonel."

"Le sport de golf is not of a clearness to me as to the victor," Monsieur Bijoux said in puzzled tones. *"Mon ami le Colonel* is first in the little hole at the end. Why is he not the winner?"

"He is behind at the commencement, so that it takes him two strokes to catch Monsieur de la Barrière," André explained kindly. "Then again he is behind another stroke after Monsieur de la Barrière plays. When my father makes the very excellent stroke that causes the ball to fall within the hole, he is still three strokes more than his opponent, who puts the ball within the hole with his next stroke. Do I make myself clear, Monsieur le Maire?"

"Perfectly, perfectly—if such are the rules," Monsieur Bijoux conceded, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders that disclaimed all responsibility for them. "But

is it not much like saying a certain race-horse wins because he is ahead at the beginning and at the middle though not at the end? Are you not of my opinion, *mon Colonel?"*

"I shall do much better next time," André's father answered. "It is not fitting that *un militaire* should be beaten by a civilian." He laughed, but there was a trace of chagrin in his voice.

"The day of the *militaire* is over," De la Barrière retorted promptly. "In this so charming sport of peace I do excel. Is it not so, *mon ami?"*

"For the day, yes," the Colonel agreed; "but one victory does not win a war. I am quite sure I should win next time—even though I am not allowed to throw the ball," he concluded regretfully.

"Shall we play this sport again tomorrow?" De la Barrière asked eagerly.

"I accept your challenge," the Colonel answered formally.

The conversation became general. Under cover of it Jacques Villiers leaned to Miss Burke-Jones and whispered:

"I sink perhaps in teaching thees sport de golf to ze olds, André has bit off more than, as you say it, his stomach can chew."

"Quelle horreur!" Miss Burke-Jones answered reprovingly.

THE four balls lay almost together as the players came up the hill that masked the seventh green.

"André is ze hind end, I sink," Jacques said, after studying the lies. "Mee Burke-Jones an' me play t'ee; you play four. Is it not so?"

"It is not so," André answered promptly. "I'm playing three; so too is Antoine—"

"Name of a name, of a name, of a *name!"* came a furious voice from the green they were approaching. "A single blade of thrice-accursed grass deflects this ball of misfortune so it but hangs on the lip of the cup, then goes far beyond."

"Then you too are now playing fourteen?" The Colonel's voice was full of triumph.

"I am," acknowledged Monsieur de la Barrière.

"I will make a putt," the Colonel stated.

Followed the click as a club-face connected with the ball, another sighter sound, then a cry from the owner of vineyards:

"Your ball knocks mine within the hole so that I win it. You now play fifteen while *I* am in the hole."

"Idiocy of the deepest!" the Colonel shouted. "Take thy ball from out the hole and beat it therein thyself. What *I* do to thy ball does not count."

"Why shouldn't it count, wilt thou tell me? Am I not within the hole?"

"Kind of a camel, I—"

"Ah! Ah! Thou callest me a camel!"

"I do—camel!"

"I tell thee 'tis thou who art a camel, and furthermore—" The furious voices died away as the contestants left the green and walked toward the next tee.

"Did I not so told you?" Jacques addressed Miss Burke-Jones. "Are they not most bloody awful?"

"S'h!" the girl warned. "Antoinette is crying. Come and look at that pretty flower over there."

"I see no flower."

"You—come—with—me!" Miss Burke-Jones fixed him with a murderous eye.

"Antoinette, *chérie,* how absurd to cry!" André said unhappily. "Why, they were just two old men quarreling."

"It is terrible," sobbed the girl. *"Mon père,* he was the kindest of men. He had a good word for everyone. Patience of the most saintly. Now—"

"He will forget his anger as soon as he leaves the course," André soothed.

"He will *not,"* Antoinette contradicted. "This sport de golf has changed him completely. His temper is beyond words; he speaks not kindly to me; he no longer sits in his great chair and caresses the cat of an evening—no, no, the cat is desolate. Instead my father practises continually shots in the garden. He has cruelly emptied out the very goldfish from their bowl into the fountain, that he may try to chip into the bowl as though it were a hole. He speaks unkindly of all, of your father, his most ancient friend. And—and it is all your fault! It was you who insisted that he learn." She broke down, sobbing bitterly.

"It is true," André acknowledged sadly. "I had no idea a mere sport could so affect the characters of two so worthy men. Even my father, who spoke only good of your father in the past, now—but no matter."

"Home is no longer bearable," Antoinette said, lifting a tear-stained face.

There was a pause. André looked down at the face. It was a very pretty face. He remembered suddenly that he had always meant to marry Antoinette, that his

father had always meant him to marry Antoinette. Why had he delayed?

"Chérie," he whispered softly, "let *me* make a home for you, a happy home. I will arrange that my father call upon your father this very evening."

"Camel!" came floating faintly from far away on the course; and, like an echo, "Camel yourself!"

THE Colonel and De la Barrière played their round every morning at Beaune and then motored back to Avison for lunch. Hence there was no change in their afternoon habits. At three o'clock, exactly as they had done every day since the end of the war, they met with Bijoux and the Mayor at the Café de la Ville for bridge. And just as De la Barrière always won at golf, the Colonel, with the notary for partner, had been for a month invariably successful at cards.

But the atmosphere was not the same—oh, not by a great deal! In the past none of them resented the Colonel's irrascibilities, accepted them as a natural phenomenon like the occasional splash of rain that served only to accentuate the usual sunshine. Now, however, all was different.

"Well, well, four hundred points; that makes two francs," De la Barrière remarked easily. "It leaves me but fifty centimes ahead on the five holes I beat you this morning."

"The devil's own luck was yours, you will at least acknowledge," the Colonel bristled.

"Luck! Had I not been careless on the sixth hole—"

"Twice, accursed vegetables of trees kept you on the course, and—"

"Did you not roll out of the bunker as though the fairies were pushing your ball?"

"It was the way I so played my stroke."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Kind of a camel, wouldst thou laugh at me?"

"Messieurs, messieurs," the notary interrupted. "Let us be more peaceful, less serious about trifles. This sport de golf, it is but an amusement, *hein?"*

Peace was restored, but the departures were very formal. De la Barrière trotted home to practice chip-shots into the former home of his daughter's goldfish, the Colonel to fume and shoot balls over the fig-tree in his garden in an attempt to master that principle of back-spin that always eluded him on the course.

André did not wait for another round, that afternoon, but drove his low racing car swiftly over the seven miles from Beaune to Avison. He parked by the gate and went through the house toward the garden where a servant told him he would find his father. For a moment he paused to kick aside some splinters of glass from a broken window, and then stepped outside beneath the fig-tree. A ball dropped at his feet, rolled a yard and stopped a foot from an empty caviare-tin sunk in the ground. Another ball followed it, stopping even nearer the improvised hole.

"Bravo, mon père," André called as he crossed the lawn to where the Colonel was addressing a third ball. "Such accuracy is rare indeed."

"Over the fig-tree I make the shots to perfection," his father informed him moodily; "but on the course, no. It is the fig-tree, perhaps, that accounts for it. Your sainted mother thought a great deal of fig-trees. Were there a fig-tree by every green, I should show that—that animal of a De la Barrière something."

"Of him, in a way, have I come to speak," André suggested.

"Any other subject of conversation would be more agreeable to me," the Colonel snapped.

"Mon père, I have decided to arrange myself," André continued earnestly. "I become of a certain age. It is right that I, the last of the Lecontes, should marry."

"Huh!" was the Colonel's ungracious comment.

"And like all Lecontes, I do not brook delay. Will you, *mon père,* call upon the worthy Monsieur de la Barrière and ask him for the hand of his daughter for me, your son?"

The Colonel dropped his mashie and sat down suddenly on a garden seat. He took out his handkerchief and removed imaginary beads of prespiration from his brow. At last he spoke:

"I regret it much, *mon fils.* What you ask is impossible, quite impossible."

"But—but," André stuttered in his astonishment, "but I thought that it was always understood that I should marry Antoinette! I have for her a deep and abiding affection—and she plays a very sound game of golf. What can have happened, *mon père?"*

"I will tell you what has happened! Yes, indeed, I shall tell you," fumed the old soldier. "Rather would I be shot from

the mouth of a cannon, yes, many cannons, than ask anything of that—that animal. A week from today we play nine holes, to see which of us is the best. If I win, I will make your request—if I do not, there must be an end to all thoughts of an alliance between the two families—I forbid it.

"But I shall beat him in spite of his so-unbelievable luck. When a camel of a civilian—"

"*Mon père, mon père,* calm yourself," André pleaded. "Do you not realize that my happiness is at stake, that I desire to arrange myself for life?"

"*That* for your happiness unless I win!" the old soldier exclaimed furiously, and catching up a mashie, sent the third ball over the fig-tree so that it struck a statue of Pan full in the stomach and glanced off obliquely through the window of the Colonel's own study.

"SO, you see, I sha'n't be able to play for a week," André finished his recital. "I shall spend every minute coaching my father. He must win. Our happiness depends upon it."

"My father, also, is worried over the match," Antoinette said miserably. "He has asked me to play with him each day so as to keep him in practice. He confides to me that Monsieur, *votre père,* improves greatly with every round, indeed that he would win were it not for a certain, what shall I say, unevenness of temper."

"Say, rather, the disposition of an angry cow thwarted in love and beaten with many whips," André answered morosely, then suddenly brightened. "Listen, Antoinette, listen! Our happiness is in your hands. Can you not teach your father to play very badly, make his game worse even than it is, so that my father may win?"

"How can you ask such a thing?" the girl cried. "It would be a betrayal of the most contemptible."

"But do you not love me? Does my happiness mean nothing to you?"

"Is it proper for a young man to ask a maiden such questions when not even formally engaged?"

"But do you, does it?"

"Yes," Antoinette answered, looking up bravely into his face, her own mantled with blushes, "I do, it does, I will."

There could be no question as to the seriousness of the moment. Indeed, the great match had much the same setting as that of a duel. Monsieur de la Barrière raised his silk hat to the Colonel, before handing it to the Mayor and slipping his gray sweater over his head. The Colonel, in full uniform and wearing all his decorations, returned the bow with a formal military salute, unbuckled his sword and handed it to Bijoux. André tossed a golden louis into the air, and De la Barrière called "Heads." Heads it proved to be, and he elected to drive. There was a breathless pause after Antoinette had handed him the club. The rich owner of many fine vineyards glanced at the sky as though for inspiration, then fixed his eyes on the ball. Up went his driver, then down in a half swing, and the little white sphere shot a hundred and twenty yards straight down the middle of the fairway.

"*Allons, marchons!*" the Colonel said brusquely; he took his stance and connected with a furious swing that left his ball on the very edge of the bunker.

De la Barrière's midiron found the green and rolled close to the hole. The Colonel chipped over the bunker to within a yard of the pin. Both missed their putts and halved in four.

"I do not like zis; it is of too great a seriousness," Jacques whispered to Miss Burke-Jones as they followed to the second tee.

"One should take golf seriously," the English girl reproved. "Anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well."

"Nossing is worth doing well that asks so much of a seriousness," Jacques retorted promptly. "It makes me feel like funerals."

The contestants both got off fair drives on the next hole, and the gallery trailed after them. André edged over to Antoinette, who was very pale.

"All goes well, *chérie,*" he whispered encouragingly.

"To this point, yes," the girl answered fearfully, "but I do not like it. For the last three days *mon père* has suspected me and played with the professional. He is of an obstinacy to win; he will stop at nothing."

"And mine is also of an obstinacy," André said uncomfortably. "If only he can keep his temper!"

The second hole also was halved, and then the luck broke. The Colonel went into a trap, playing four. De la Barrière's fifth caught a tree on the side of the fairway and bounced obliquely onto the green. The Colonel was there with the sixth, but

lost the hole seven to eight. The fourth hole proved even more exasperating. De la Barrière's approach hit a worm-cast and ran into the hole forty yards away, making him two up with five to play.

"The luck is much against you, *mon ami,*" the owner of vineyards conceded graciously as they left the green.

"*Magnifique* your last shot," the Colonel answered promptly. "The least of worms could say no less."

"But it was a worm-cast that nearly deflected me from the hole," De la Barrière's voice held suspicion.

The Colonel's face reddened but he restrained himself and took out his resentment in his drive. The ball was squarely hit and soared far up the course.

De la Barrière was short, then dubbed his second. The hole went to his opponent in an easy seven. The next was halved in eleven strokes. Then the Colonel squared the match—and won the eighth!

THERE was not a sound as André's father drove from the last tee. The ball fell a hundred yards away, close to the rough. De la Barrière stepped forward and took his stance, his face showing the strain. If he lost, or even halved that hole, the match went to his opponent. And he dubbed his drive! His second, however, was a beautiful hundred-and-fifty-yard brassie that shot straight along the edge of the rough. The Colonel was too old a soldier to take a chance. He played a midiron seventy-five yards up the course, then pitched to the edge of the green with a mashie.

For a long time De la Barrière studied his lie. It was a long mashie shot, and he used a full three-quarter swing. There was a sharp crack as the club connected with the ball, then another as it hit an oak tree on the edge of the fairway and bounded fifty yards back along the course. Without a word the old man jerked a midiron from his bag and pursued it. He put his whole body into the stroke, and the ball shot diagonally across into the opposite rough, struck another tree and came back to nearly the exact spot it had lain. For a long moment De la Barrière looked at it, then deliberately leaned down and picked it up. Turning to the right, he flung it far off into the woods and walked toward the Colonel, his hand extended.

"*Mon ami,* you have won, and fairly," he said, forcing a smile to his lips.

The Colonel gazed earnestly into his friend's face. Suddenly his expression changed, and he dropped his putter on the ground.

"Name of a name, of a name!" he exclaimed furiously, "Shall I, *un militaire,* so humiliate a friend! No, by all the gods! Where is that accursed white ball of misfortune? There!" And the toe of his army boot kicked the little sphere far off into a bunker.

De la Barrière's jaw dropped; then he took a step forward, his arms wide open:

"*Mon ami,* you shame me. Let there be an end to contesting. To the devil with this imbecile sport de golf! We play it no more!"

"And end to it, as you say!" The Colonel released himself from the other's embrace. "Let us be Frenchmen, following the customs of our ancestors and borrowing no sport from others. And let us, above all, unite our affections still more closely through our children. I ask you for the hand of your daughter, Antoinette, for Andrè, my son."

"Granted with all my heart," De la Barrière agreed happily. "And now let us begone from this so large and so useless field of le sport de golf."

IT was exactly two minutes to three of the same day in the little town of Avison. Down the sunlit length of the Avenue Pershang came Colonel Leconte and Monsieur de la Barrière, arm in arm. And as they walked, they talked happily.

"It must be that there is some poison in that sport," the Colonel continued. "When you won a hole from me, *mon ami,* I hated you. When I won one from you, I felt an unholy triumph."

"So it was with me," agreed De la Barrière. "I wished to see you humbled to the dust; I prayed that the very elements would conspire to spoil every effort you made."

"*Allons,* let us speak of it no more, since we shall have no more to do with it. It is not, indeed a sport *Français.* Never, no, never, can it gain a real foothold in our so noble a land. —*Comment ça va, Caesar, mon enfant?* Where are Messieurs le Maire *et le bon Bijoux?*"

"They passed by an hour hence, *mon Colonel,*" Cæsar answered as he saluted, "and left word that you were not to expect them this afternoon. They go to Beaune to exercise themselves at le sport de golf."

THE FLORIDA

(What Has Already Happened:)

THOMAS CARLTON had been left an orphan, with a little place in Florida, a two years' war experience and a splendid physique as his assets. For a time he lived quietly, unambitiously, supporting himself by taking visiting sportsmen on deep-sea fishing trips. And then discontent came over him and he set out, aimlessly, to seek his fortune.

Thus it was that young Carlton became, for a time, a tramp. For the lure of greener fields beyond continually tolled him away from any steady employment or regular mode of life; and in company with his chum little Dake, he presently found himself drifting about the country, one of that curious gypsy crew, the modern hobo.

Hearing of a Legion reunion in a near-by city, the Florida Kid, as Carlton had become known to his tramp associates, made his way thither, and for a day or two enjoyed the companionship of his former comrades-in-arms and the forgotten pride of respectability. And so it came about that he met Helen Proctor, who owned a chicken farm in California and who introduced herself to him while doing her bit to entertain the city's guests. After that, life was not the same again for Carlton; he promised to visit Helen soon in California.

Carlton found a job—with the gang building a concrete road in an Oklahoma town. For some weeks he stuck at the heavy labor, little Dake with him. Then Christmas came, and—tragedy.

For Dake obtained liquor from a bootlegger relative of one of the town policemen, and became boisterous—"happy drunk." Another officer arrested him; but poor fuddled Dake, believing himself immune because the source of his jag was protected, supposed that the policeman was joking and dodged away a few steps down the station platform. The officer drew his revolver, covered Dake, ordered him to halt and—accidentally pressed the trigger.

Afterward, at the police-station, the officer claimed that Dake and Carlton had been armed and that he had fired in self-defense; and a gun was "planted" at the scene of the shooting to support the assertion. But—Dake was dead; and Carlton, after being jailed, was ordered out of town. And despite Carlton's effort to clear Dake's memory and his own name, he had to obey; for experience and the advice of his friend Peters the newspaper man showed him all

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KID *The Chronicle of a Hobo's Career*

By CHARLES HORN

too clearly that the police were all-powerful in that town and would "frame him" if he defied them further. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT night, nearing twelve o'clock, a flivver drew up before a cottage at the edge of the town. Peters climbed out.

"Pretty slick, eh?" he grinned, shivering with the chill that was in him. "Fooled all those dicks pretty slick, didn't we?"

Carlton climbed out and followed the reporter through a small gate and up a path.

"This is our shack," Peters said. "McCabe and I rent this and keep bachelors' hall. He's one of the men on the desk on the *Mercury*. Have a darky that comes in to clean up and cook our dinner. Whole lot cheaper than boarding."

While Carlton shivered in the middle of the floor, Peters lighted a small gas-stove, pulled forth a chair, then bustled into a rear room.

"Sit down. Warm up. I'll heat some water for coffee. Hungry?"

"Not at all, thank you."

"Well, I've got a little emptiness. I'll make some coffee and fry a couple of eggs. And by the way, I put a big pan of water on the stove. We've got a bathtub but no water-heater. Clean up when you've warmed up. Now,"—he lifted a hand as Carlton groped for words,—"keep your trap shut. I've been up against it myself. Perhaps will be again, too. Besides, I received three or four checks for special stuff, this month. Ever think you could write, big boy?"

Carlton shook his head.

"Well, that proves you're the man in a million, all right," Peters said cheerfully. "Everybody's at it. It's tough graft, all right, but when a fellow puts over two or three, he sure feels like hurrahing about it. Made about a hundred and fifty, this month, on the side. The things I got for you—only cost a little bit, anyhow. Say, big boy, ever been overseas?"

"Sergeant," Carlton replied.

"I knew it. Well, I was there too, and we buddies must stick by each other. So many other people trying to give us hell. If we don't stick together, we're bumped, right."

From the kitchen he called:

"Come and get this big pan. It's boiling. Get into that tub and you'll feel better."

CLEANSED, refreshed, his body clad in a soft gray shirt, dark corduroy breeches and with heavy, serviceable shoes on his feet, Carlton sat at the little table beside Peters, drinking his coffee and eating his egg and toast.

"Midnight." Peters snapped shut the case of his watch. "McCabe wont be home for three hours. Now, what's your idea—going to stay here and buck the police and sheriff's office? Going back with Dake's father and learn to be a printer?"

"No. That offer was made out of the kindness of his heart," Carlton mused. "It'd set him crazy—watching me and thinking about Dake, you know."

"I think so too."

"And if I believed I could do any good by staying, I'd stay. But old man Dake has that statement of mine. I'll keep in touch with him, and with you, if you'll allow me; and if I'm needed, I'll come back."

"Where are you headed?"

"California."

Peters grunted. "Just like all of 'em. The farthest-away place, of course. With winter on you, too."

"I started there, and I'm going on. It's—it's—well, everything will be setting pretty when I get there."

"Why?" Peters questioned. "Folks?"

"No. Just a hunch."

Peters snorted, then studied the red-haired man, with the smoke from his cigar drifting to the ceiling and filling the little room with a blue-gray cloud.

"Carlton," at last narrowly, "you're good material—good man-material and good other material. But you're on the wrong track, as a man. You're lining yourself up with the national liabilities."

Carlton's gaze was steady on the flame in the little stove.

"You're one of the six or seven hundred thousand national liabilities that should be converted into national assets," Peters went on. "You're one of the great economic losses. God only knows how great is the actual loss, either. Among you fellows may be one who could—yet who will not—turn the world of commerce or music, or art or literature, upside down."

Carlton was silent, skeptical.

"You're average men," Peters defended his statement. "In any bunch of six or seven hundred thousand average men you'll find the average run of mentalities. Until a genius displays his genius, he's the average man. It's the law; it's irrevocable. You represent a unit in a great economic loss—in a country noted for its great economic losses, you fellows are perhaps the greatest actually and potentially. Statistics, I have found, tell me that in average times there are half a million men idle. Estimating this at the wage for an average man, it shows an annual loss of more than ten hundred million dollars.

"And there's the potential loss, the investment the people have put in you to educate you, protect you, make a producer of you. God only knows what that loss is—what it represents, year after year."

"Who's to blame?" Carlton asked. "Some of these things have come to me, especially in the last few months, but I haven't been able to handle them."

"They're too big for me too," Peters acknowledged. "I'm telling you of the condition as it exists. The remedy will have to be worked out by authorities wiser than I. But this I know: when a market as great as the market in which you are a unit exists, wise minds are usually at work toward the solution. Another thing I know: if there were as many female hoboes as there are male, all the luncheon-clubs and civic organizations and women's clubs of the world would be at work on the situation."

"That's a new angle," Carlton acknowledged.

"It is. Those organizations would be at work doping out a campaign of education the like of which the world had never before seen. It would be greater than the propaganda and united effort that won the war. They'd be preaching, holding meetings, having three-minute talks—and do you know what the message of all this would be?"

"What?" curiously, from Carlton.

"Ideals, nothing in the world but ideals. The ideal of motherhood, of the home, of cleanliness, of being producers, of love—all that sort of thing. And it would win. Hands down, and with the united effort of the thing, it'd win."

"It certainly would," Carlton conceded.

"Without a doubt. And with the men, going after them in the same way, I believe the battle would be won with even

greater ease. Success of the idealistic sort is as attractive to men as to women. Men are as great, or greater, idealists than the women. In fact, it's following the mistaken ideal of adventure, I think, that brings the itching foot to men.

"I'll make this prophecy: within the next five years the principal reclamation work of the luncheon clubs and other reclamative agencies will be the building of ideals into drifters. Then they'll find sense enough to start the work in the schools—building ideals into the lads at their most impressionable age."

"Let's hope so," Carlton said devoutly. "Lord, it'd be a great movement!"

"The greatest in the world: the making of men."

FOLLOWED minutes of silence again, while the gray smoke from the two cigars rolled to the ceiling.

"Another thing I wish to ask you," Peters said out of the silence, "and that is: could you or could you not get a job tomorrow, if you went after it?"

"I don't know." Carlton was hesitant.

"Let me put it another way. Have you ever seen the time when you couldn't get a job—work of some sort—when you were determined to get it, or when it was absolutely necessary that you have it?"

"Well, there was a time last winter," Carlton replied slowly, "when I hunted work five days before I landed on a coal car, shoveling. That lasted two weeks."

"What did you do then?"

"I left the town."

"Could you have gotten other work by staying there?"

"Yes. A packing-house offered me a job driving a truck."

"All right. Now, have you ever seen the time when you couldn't get a job—leaving aside all questions on the sort of work you desired or liked—just a job, we'll say?"

"I have never seen the time when I couldn't find a job," Carlton acknowledged, with all of a man's pride in the statement.

"And had you carried into that coal-shoveling job an ideal, we'll say? Had you seen visions of owning your own coal-yard, or your own coal-delivering business, or something of that sort? Would you have stayed with the job?"

"I don't know."

"Well, it's an extreme case, I know. But men are so constructed that they *can* become interested in those things. They can build ideals out of flimsy cloth, and are amazed, sometimes, when the ideals materialize. What I was getting at, though, is this: have you ever seen the time when the bulk of men of your acquaintance—drifters you have met—couldn't have gotten work if they had stopped and made up their minds to go after it?"

"Yes, I have seen those conditions. The few months following the war, for instance. Then there are times when a bunch of men will unload on a town—a dozen men and probably not five jobs in the town."

"But jobs are at other places, aren't they?" Peters insisted.

"I suppose so. One of my outfit used to say that where we wasn't was where it is."

"That's my idea. That's the basis the country will have to work on—or some agency will have to take up. The building of ideals into the entire race of manhood, and the coördinating of the idle men and the waiting jobs. The ideal end of the business comes first, I think."

Peters snapped the case of his watch. "Midnight," he said, "and a half-hour past. This is what I wish to get to you, Carlton: view these things from your angle."

"I've been doing that for months," Carlton acknowledged.

"That's good. Look at it from the angle of your life—your possible home, a wife, children, friends, the satisfaction of making good. God, man, isn't success any object to you?"

"You don't understand, exactly," Carlton began.

"I understand exactly! You're on your way, you think, but you'll never get there. Or if you do, you'll be dissatisfied, and will turn around and come back."

"I don't know," Carlton worried. He paced the room, back and forth. "Oh, hell, man!" he burst forth. "You don't understand. It's just a matter of proving something. Working like the devil and proving something. I don't like to talk about those things."

"I know," Peters said shrewdly. "None of us do. Sometimes it's necessary to get right down to brass tacks, though, to get the right angle on the question. . . . . Well, I see how you stand. You're in better shape than most of the poor devils. I'd like to set you on your way, right."

"No," Carlton said quietly. "You've done enough. It's more than I can ever repay."

"Fighting along on your own, eh? Well, I hope she's worth it. You're a great damn' fool, in a way, but I rather like you for it."

Peters clapped Carlton heartily on the shoulder.

"Let's go," he said. "I feel like taking a long ride, tonight. Lizzie's champing at the bit outside, and if we don't crank her up, she'll freeze. I'm all lit up, man! There's a dozen stories in you. I can see checks rolling in from material you've furnished. I feel like riding. West, you say? Come on!"

Turning off the fire in the little stove, he went to the kitchen.

"You'll find an overcoat in that other room," he called. "On that bed. It's my old service coat I had dyed last year. I've got so many checks in the last few months that I bought myself a real shawl. You'll—"

"You're sure a right guy. I can't take all this stuff."

"Buy it on time, then. Send me a check when you've made good. Buddies must stick by buddies, you know."

Peters grinned as he watched Carlton bundling into the enveloping garment.

DAYLIGHT was painting the east when Peters turned the nose of the little car into a broad street and coasted down a long hill. Milk trucks lumbered over the uneven paving; carrier boys on bicycles and motors tossed newspapers into yards and areaways; street-cars rumbled past, the steam on the windows giving blurred outlines of the few passengers within. The nostrils of the men in the automobile seemed adhesive with the chill of the thin air; their bodies were shaking; crouched in the seat, Peters gripping the wheel, they sped down into the city.

Dim bulk of mountains, snow-capped, lay in front of them, seemingly coming down into the very street through which the car sped. Yet the mountains were many miles to the west. One's lungs drew in twice as much of the thinned air as it did in other places, Carlton thought. He breathed deeply and straightened his cramped shoulders. The wind whipped around the shield and drew tears from his eyes. Yet after the lung-filling draughts of air, he imagined his blood moved less sluggishly.

Peters turned the car into the curb before a shop from the windows of which the steam rose heavily. Dim forms of black-clad women could be seen hurrying about inside the place.

"Coffee and rolls and something else hot wont be so bad, now, eh?" he chattered, his body shaking as he clambered out stiffly beside Carlton. "Lord, my feet pain me! Red hot, from that engine. Feel like they're frying on this frosty pavement."

Peters yawned heavily as they seated themselves at the counter.

"I'll have the wind at my back, going back," he said. "Hope I don't go to sleep and get ditched."

"You've certainly been white to me—" Carlton began, choosing his words uncomfortably. "You've—"

"Forget it. I've had a roaring time. I get burned out, sometimes. It's just occasions like this that makes my life worth while. I'm an eternal seeker, you know."

"Seeker?"

"Yes. After stories, now—material. I don't know what it'll be later. I'm learning so darned much about life—you know, how people live, and all that stuff—that I don't know just what I'll be seeking later. . . . . I was raised in a private school, you know. Didn't have much chance to brush up against things. It's great!"

Outside again, Peters held out his hand.

"Good-by, buddy," he said heartily, and there was no mistaking the light in his eyes. "I've enjoyed talking with you. Now, stick here and make good. Let me hear from you. If you leave,—which you say you will,—keep in touch with me. And remember that old stuff about opportunity knocking but once is all bunk. Opportunity is wherever you stop and go after it. Keep in touch with me, Carlton."

Grasping Carlton's hand firmly, holding on, Peters climbed into the little car, stepped on the starter, and gave the hand a final shake.

"Good-by. And thanks for what you've given me."

Lizzie clattered off. Carlton watched as it rounded the corner, watched as Peters waved, finally.

NEARING noon, Carlton was seated in the great waiting-room of a Union Station, whither he had gone to escape the increasing cold. And filled with the remembrance of Peters' presence, Peters'

enthusiasm, Peters' belief in the ability of the submerged million to find itself, Carlton was finding himself analyzing and synthesizing the situation of life, as applied in his own existence. Something like this he summed it up:

He was a national liability, as Peters had said. He was an inactive unit—rather, a consuming unit in the wealth of the nation, a parasite. Other men possessed family and home; he had neither. Other men worked steadily; he worked spasmodically or not at all. Other men were able proudly to demand certain protections at the hands of the law, certain inalienable rights guaranteed by their manhood. He could demand nothing, could expect nothing, possessed absolutely no identity as a citizen.

One of the values of these other men was the ease with which the world could determine each man's worth, as reflected in the eyes of his neighbor, friend, acquaintances. So far as he knew, he possessed absolutely no friends except those few he had left in Hilltop, and who knew nothing of him now, these and—but this thought he put away.

These other men were planning into a future, be this planning ever so little, planning to continue producing, increasing their kind and their wealth, and thus increasing the wealth and manhood of their nation. He was doing nothing. He had not even the negative virtue of being static. He was a drifter, a worm gnawing at the heart of the land.

And into his vision now came the Road. It had been gone for weeks, but it loomed again, bright as a beacon, unceasing in its call, in its beckoning fingers. Whipped back by the quick changing of the days that had passed, it came again now, with the new spirit Peters had built into the red-haired man. Full and clear it came, calling to him, calling and calling. Ragged Robin roses bordered it; the odor of flowers hung about it; the sound of a woman's voice pulsed over it. It drifted down into a valley, as before, and lifted back against a hill, straight and broad and clear. And at the hill's end he now saw a house, a home, a white little place, a clean little place of windows and doors and porches. All the marks of a home. The ideal to fight for, to make come true!

And thus, suddenly, came the knowledge of his ideal. Thus, suddenly, in a crowded station, surrounded by the clatter of passing humanity, by voices, by noises of the hurrying world, Carlton found himself. It is thus, sometimes, knowledge comes to a man; and coming thus, it lingers. It is no passing thought quickly to be forgotten, but it becomes a part of his soul, a thread in his web of life.

And it is thus that a hand stretched out of the unknown, as had stretched the hands of the girl and of Peters, may call back the soul of a man, the drifting, useless soul.

A HAND fell heavily on Carlton's shoulder. Hard, truculent eyes bore down on him. The hand and eyes were the possessions of a fat-bodied man, clad in blue, with a peaked cap on his head.

"What you loafin' here for?" a hard voice crisped.

"Waiting for a train," Carlton replied recklessly.

"What train? You've been here two hours now."

Straightening suddenly to his feet, Carlton glowered upon the station policeman, browbeating him, overawing him.

"Listen, you!" he snapped in the manner of the old Sergeant Carlton. "What do you mean coming around here botherin' the railroads' customers? I'm waiting for the train to Salt Lake. Isn't this station open to the traveling public?"

"Aw, you—"

"You know what I've got a notion of doing?" Carlton rasped. "I've got a notion to turn you in to your boss." His gaze roamed over the broad room, lighting on a door above which were the words: *"Station Master."*

"That's just what I'll do," Carlton decided. "I'm getting tired of being bothered, this way."

"Aw, you—" Carlton lost the rest in the babbling of the crowd. Hurrying in the general direction of the door, he looked back cautiously, saw the station policeman swallowed up in the throng, and slipped around a corner and into the street.

Outside, striding along, grinning, he decided it was the clean clothing that had brought the sudden bravery, the power to overawe. Or was it the new objective?

CHAPTER XVII

A HUNCHBACK entered the door of the employment agency, stamped the wet snow from arctics that covered his feet and

legs, threw back the collar of his coat and shook the wet snow from his shoulders, took off his ear-tabbed cap and beat the wet snow from it. When this de-snowing operation was finished, the making of a good-sized pool of water lay in the middle of the floor. The sallow young man, seated at a littered desk in a corner of the room while the hunchback removed from his person the traces of the storm, now sprang to his feet, snarled "Cheest!" and, glowering upon the hunchback, hurried back of the partition, into a rear room. Returning with the stump of a broom, the sallow man furiously brushed the snow toward the door, growling, from time to time, "Cheest! Cheest!" Suddenly emboldened, he muttered: "Damn these farmers. They aint got no sense!" Then he glanced fearfully toward the hunchback until, satisfied that if the farmer heard, he gave no heed, the sallow one went on with the furious brushing, went on with his muttering, went on with the peevish growling. The sallow one was a lunger who had come to the high altitude either to recover or to die. And that was strictly a fifty-fifty proposition.

Moving slowly down the line of the dozen or more men who were seated on two bare pine benches or who loitered about the stove, the hunchback looked them over carefully. It was apparent he sought a man of unusual strength, unusual physical development, for he lingered weighingly before the two or three big fellows and hesitated not at all before the smaller ones.

He was a specimen of peculiar appearance, this hunchback, his feet clad in the arctics that were greatly too large for him, his upper body enveloped in the sheepskin jacket that came to his knees and bulged out at the shoulders, his head covered with the fur cap that came well below the turned collar of the jacket. His eyes were black, little and never at rest; his high breast-bone, seen between the lapels of the opened jacket, stuck up against a blue hickory shirt. He bore greatly the appearance of a boy masquerading in a man's garments. He paused before Carlton.

"Stand up, an' let me look ye over," the hunchback commanded.

CARLTON obeyed, and the little man inspected him closely, squinting through the piglike eyes, tilting his neck stiffly backward, peering upward. His clawlike fingers grasped Carlton's arms, feeling the biceps; slipped down to the legs, clutching at the hard muscles.

" 'Bout a hunderd an' ninety-eight, eh?" he hazarded, squinting shrewdly.

"About," Carlton agreed. "Maybe a pound or two less."

"You'll not go much less." The hunchback waggled his head sagely. "You'll easy go a hunderd an' ninety-eight. Mebbe a half a pound more."

His tone was exactly that of the buyer who peers into a pen at a display of food on the hoof.

"You sound?" he asked narrowly.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Aint got no secrut diseases, have ye?"

"No. . . . . Want to look at my teeth?" Carlton grinned, but the little man apparently possessed no sense of humor.

"Nope. 'Taint necessary. You're about twenty-five. Ever do any ranch work?"

"Some—" Carlton began when there came an interruption. A slight figure that had been seated at the end of one of the benches, his body bending forward with eagerness, now sprang to his feet, ran to the hunchback and grasped an arm, half-whirling him about in the onrush.

"Listen, meester," the man cried. "I'm the man you vant. Listen! I know all about ranch vork. I'm jus' come from Arizona, an' I vorked on a dairy ranch, down there. I—"

"I don't want no dairy hand." The hunchback turned again to Carlton.

"Listen, Meester," the foreigner pleaded. "I'll do anything. I need the vork, Meester. I'll vork cheap. I drove a milk vagon, down there—"

"How cheap?" the hunchback queried.

"Meester, I'll tell you vat—let's figger this thing. I vork like hell, Meester. All hours of the day an' night I vork. I'll tell you vat I'll do, Meester—"

The hunchback threw off the detaining, pleading fingers, snarled his decision at the slender applicant who stood a moment, his hands outspread in supplication, then slunk wearily back to his seat at the end of the bench. But he found it usurped. A large Irishman, with his legs spreadeagled over the end of the bench, looked coldly, meaningly up into the slender man's eyes.

"You'll *vork* cheap, eh, ye dirty sucker?" the Irishman hissed. "You *vill, vill* ye? Butt in an' try an' git a feller's job, *vill* ye? Stand up, then, ye damn' Polack!"

Others on the bench chuckling and rasp-

ing their accord with the Irishman, the unfortunate slunk to the door, blotted a translucent place in the wet steam of the pane and looked outside. After a minute, turning, he threw a withering curse toward the bench, tore open the door and sprinted outside as three men started up toward him.

"Cheest, you fellers!" the lunger croaked. "Cut out the noise an' shut that door! Either set down an' be quiet or git the hell outa here!"

HUNCHBACK went on with his examination of Carlton, then drew him aside, out of earshot of the others.

"I need a man," he said. "I don't like little fellers. I've got eight or nine hunderd tons of alfalfy that has to be moved right away—while the market's up. You drive a truck?"

"Yes," Carlton told him. "Any truck that's built."

"You take care of a truck?"

"Yes."

"I live twelve miles out, south. I pay forty-five dollars a month. I want a man that'll stay till the hay is all hauled an' then I might have somethin' else f'r him." He looked up questioningly.

Carlton sniffed in disdain at the pittance offered, turned to the row of eager, waiting faces, saw the acceptance of the terms—of any terms, since the snow had started to fly—written in the eyes of those others, and nodded in quick agreement.

"I'll take you," he said.

"All right. Got anything to take with ye? No? I thut so. What's yer name?"

Carlton gave the desired information.

"My name's Nelms," the hunchback said. "Harvey Nelms. Truck's aroun' the corner. We gotta git home in time to milk."

With the envious eyes of the other men following him, Carlton moved with the hunchback toward the door.

"Don't forgit to say a good word f'r the house," the sallow man called jocularly. "If you see another feller that wants a job, send him around."

"Look out for the little Polack," the big Irishman advised. "Oi think 'e's gone out to wreck ye as ye pass. Good luck to ye."

Carlton waved acknowledgment of the wishes and warning.

AS they left the city streets, a whipping wind tore down from the snow-capped peaks and out of snow-laden cañons, biting into their faces. Fighting against this, Carlton attempted to hold the truck approximately in the middle of the road; on the corners the rear wheels raced and slipped and skidded; on the straightaways, jolting out of the ruts, the car sashayed forward, with the rear end trying to overtake the front wheels. Slips into the gullies that lined the road were twice averted by Carton's careful, quick hand; six attempts were necessary before the machine negotiated one slippery hill.

"You need chains," Carlton said after this.

"Chains cost money," Nelms reminded him. "They wear out quick. There's a lotta ol' ropes at home that you c'n use when you're haulin'. Then you c'n make it."

"I should think ropes would cost more than chains, in the long run," Carlton ventured.

"Nawp. They don't cost nothin'—long run or short run. You jus' pick up every piece o' rope yuh see. I gotta whole stack at home, that way."

"How many tons do you load on this truck?" Carlton asked.

"Oh, two or four—accordin' to the weather an' road. She'll hold it. She's a good truck. I got 'er secondhanded, last spring. She's needin' a little work, now. We'll tear 'er down an' go into her innards, t'morra. Fix up the gaskets an' things, an' she'll be good 's new."

Carlton was beginning to admire the hunchback's careful attention to the detail of the dollar. He had hired a man at forty-five dollars a month, plus board and sleeping place, and in this first operation of overhauling the truck he stood to be returned approximately the cost of the first month's wage, viewing it by the repair-shop's standard of charging.

"Whoa," Nelms called suddenly. "Turn up this lane. This my place."

IT was a weatherbeaten house, standing in a grove of cottonwoods; a weatherbeaten fence, falling in places, rounded the house; a weatherbeaten barn, leaning at one corner, was behind the house and to the left; two weatherbeaten sheds, one toppling against the two-by-fours that propped it, loomed to the right. And peering from a window, the weatherbeaten features of a woman greeted the advent of the new man.

With the wheels slipping and skidding

in the mud of the lane, Carlton brought the truck to a whining halt at the back door. An assortment of children, stair-stepping in height and with their bodies clad in nondescript garments, piled out of the door, gathered silently about the machine, gaping up at Carlton. They said nothing; they asked for nothing; apparently they had expected nothing; and the coming of Carlton had dumfounded them.

In the moment in which he remained in the seat, pulling up the emergency brake, with his gaze roaming over the vista, Carlton found nothing of attraction to his eyes or senses—nothing beyond the mark of the thin smoke rising from a chimney and the light of a fire seen dimly through the steam-covered windows. The thought came: here, perhaps, he would make his start; here, perhaps, he would be assured of steady employment; here, perhaps, he would build the basis of a home. Nothing in the surroundings gave to this thought even a tang of romantic vision; yet, he reflected, out of the apparently impossible often came the fulfillment. He climbed stiffly from the machine.

"Where do we keep it?" he asked.

"Leave 'er right where she is. Drain the engine. I been aimin' to build a shed but aint never got aroun' to it. Cover 'er with thet tarp. We'll go milk."

CARLTON found his bed, that night, in a tumbling shed that bulged from the side of the house, just off the kitchen-dining-room-living-room; and on the bed he found a striped tick filled with straw—a tick that evidently had held much straw at various and sundry times. Spots on the tick he at first believed were bedbugs, but a closer inspection proved them merely spots of rust. The straw within the tick apparently had felt the weight of many bodies for a short time or one body over an extremely long period, for it was beaten down in the middle, a striped cañon between two striped mountains. Endeavoring to soften the sleeping place, and shaking the mountains into the cañon, Carlton was overcome with the cloud of dust that arose and that sent him to the outside, choking.

Coming back, after allowing the air of the room to purify itself with gusts from the outside, he inspected the rest of his sleeping equipment and found a gray cotton blanket and a comforter, the latter padded on the outside with tailor's samples, sewn end to end in various designs. Another, smaller straw-filled tick, he found, was his pillow.

Grinning, he undressed, blew out the kerosene lamp and crawled into his bed. From an adjoining room came the sound of a whining, querulous voice, a woman's voice, a complaining voice. From another room, where slept four of the five children, came sounds of a quarrel over the property rights in certain bed-coverings.

"Maw! Make Harry Homer quit pullin' the covers offa me!" It was the voice of the eldest girl.

"I aint pullin' no cover, Maw," Harry Homer defended his actions. "I guess I gotta have my part of it, aint I? It's Florence Is'bel that's pullin', Maw. I aint pullin'. She's jes'—"

"If I hafta come in there to you kids, you'll wish I hadn't!" The voice of the father cut into the proceedings. "Shut up, now. You hear me?"

A cessation of the taking of testimony.

Carlton slid his body gingerly down between the cold surfaces, pulled the blanket and comforter up about his neck, was nauseated at the odor, and slipped them down about his body, keeping an arm outside. Oh, well—he was exceedingly sleepy. Anyway, he would air thoroughly the room and its sleeping equipment on the morrow, he promised himself.

As sleep approached he found himself wondering how long would he continue at this employment. And estimating its probable length, he weighed the possibility of its continuing long enough to enable him to acquire, say, one hundred and fifty dollars. Would Dake have been content with this employment? Dake. . . . . And in thinking of Dake, sleep touched Carlton's eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE had slept barely an hour, he believed, when a voice shook him from his slumbers, pulled him out upon the cold, bare floor.

"Roll outa that," Nelms growled. "It's four o'clock. We gotta milk."

Barely above the ground, a lantern bobbed its way to the stables, lighting up a pair of legs that scissored grotesquely in shadows. Shivering, buttoning his coat about him as he ran, Carlton hurried after

the lantern. The bodies of the cows were gratefully warm; Carlton's fingers were stiff at the unaccustomed task of stripping the udders. The hunchback watched narrowly, glowering under his brows, and milked three cows to the one Carlton managed.

The hunchback was a driver who kept eternally at Carlton's heels, urging him constantly to renewed efforts, seeking constantly to acquire for his forty-five dollars a month the utmost in energy. And yet he drove himself fully as hard. Again, it was not alone Carlton and himself that he drove, but also his wife and those of his brood who were fitted by age or physical development to assist in the chores about the place.

Nelms hired Carlton on Tuesday evening, and on each of the mornings of that week, until Sunday, the family rose at four o'clock, with Nelms always the first out of bed. (On Sunday morning the family rose at five o'clock.) On each of these mornings Carlton hurried with Nelms to the barn, aided in the milking, fed three horses and looked after the welfare of the hogs in four pens. This while the housewife prepared the breakfast and while two or three of the children chopped wood, carried in water and carried out ashes.

Breakfast over, on each of the weekday mornings Nelms assisted Carlton with the loading of the hay and was amazed at the hunchback's strength, amazed at the ease with which the little man pulled and arranged and balanced the bales on the truck. Carlton's whole body was aching, on these first mornings; yet Nelms would always hurry away, when the truck was loaded, his knees outthrowing in his quick, nervous gait, hurriedly seeking yet more labor.

Carlton marveled at Nelms' willingness and ability to stand the continual punishment, at his eagerness for work and yet more work; and out of this marveling came a knowledge that aided Carlton materially in his attempts to find himself. Work was Nelms' god; it was his ideal, the means and end of his existence. The very fanaticism of the hunchback in his religiosity of work carried a message to Carlton. At first the red-haired man was contemptuous of the hunchback's sincerity; no man, he argued, could hold labor in such veneration. Yet after days he grew out of this; he began to fall somewhat into acknowledgment of Nelms' plan of life that carried up even above its grossness, its unvarying scheme of days, its deplorable lack of brightness. Acknowledging the spirit in the work, Carlton began to pit himself against the hunchback, striving to outdo him, stroke for stroke, labor for labor. Seeing it, Nelms unbent out of his usual taciturnity; he began to tell of the things of his life.

NELMS spoke but little except on this subject of work, work to come or that had been done; and of his advancement as a rancher, of his ability to keep and pay for the ranch. When this was the subject he became almost voluble.

"Two hunderd acres," he said one day as they milked. "I've had 'er four years an' I've paid nearly half. They can't take it away from me now. They can't take it away—they can't take it away! I've built it up. It's mine!"

There was a fierceness in this last, and his piglike eyes turned to Carlton, as though daring him to challenge the words.

"It's work," he went on. "Work! It's work. That's what it is. I come out here from Ioway, an' the old woman was sick. She's allus ailin'. She's a good woman, but she's allus ailin'."

Lingering on this thought, he tore it to pieces, apparently found it good, apparently found he could not improve on the force of the words, and repeated them.

"She's allus ailin'. Nothin' much wrong, but she's been weak. Weak. Weak, she's been. We been married ten years, an' she aint had a real well spell since the fust year. It's been mighty tough sleddin', sometimes."

Thinking of the stair-stepped brood of five, with another on the way,—the housewife was again heavy with motherhood,—and of the shapeless, colorless, almost bodiless and spiritless woman, Carlton marveled not at her "ailin'." Nelms carried his stool to another cow, carried it quickly.

"They laughed at me out here, fust," he went on, "—laughed 'cause I was a humpback. Everybody said I was stung with this place—how could a humpback, with a brood o' young uns an' a ailin' wife, make this run-down place go? Eh? I showed 'em. It's work! That's what it is—it's work! Hard work! Damned hard work! That's what it is. That's what it is. That's what it is!"

Carlton had ceased to be amused at this nervous habit of Nelms that made him repeat his words, when excited or

deeply engrossed in his speech. Peeping around the side of the cow at which he worked, Carlton now saw the hunchback pulling at the teats of his cows, fiercely stripping them, squeezing them, clenching them as though they were the necks of those who had derided him.

"You can't git somethin' for nothin'. That's what I knowed. So I worked. Now I've got this place half paid f'r. I've got my tractor an' my truck. I've got my hosses an' my hawgs. They're mine—they're mine. They're mine! Everybody else can go to hell. That's what they can do—go to hell! Go to hell. I laugh at them, now, when they come aroun' an' pester me to join their damn' bureaus an' sich-like."

Carlton could not admire the man; yet from Nelms he was receiving something definite in the way of knowledge of the value of concentrated effort, the definite winning to an objective. True, Carlton acknowledged to himself he could not be content merely to strive, with the bare sense of possession that alone had been Nelms' spur. Something would have to be found that would light a brighter spark, a more pulling force, an ideal more tinged with the ideal. Yet the roads to the different ends were greatly the same. It was the willingness to stand up under the punishment, the ability to fight to the last ditch, that brought success.

"You can't git somethin' for nothin'," Nelms said, time after time. Apparently it was his favorite expression, with the thought upon work. Delectably he rolled it around on his tongue. "You can't git somethin' for nothin'. It's gittin' y'r hands on it, fust, that counts. It's gittin' it. Then yuh hafta fight like hell to hold it—to keep some other feller from stealin' it. Jus' fight, fight, fight! All the time. All the time. All the time!"

Sometimes, in these repititions of his words, his voice shrilled, rang out.

ON Sunday the Nelmses had a party. Carlton crept gratefully into his bed Saturday night at nine o'clock—the Nelms household kept this as the closing hour. "No use burnin' wood an' coal for nothin'," the hunchback gave as his opinion. It was eight-fifteen when he expressed this opinion, and Florence Isabel was preparing to lay another stick of wood on the fire.

"Put down thet stick o' wood," her father shrilled. "There's enough fire to last till bedtime."

Carlton crept gratefully into his bed in the out-bulging room and found no disgust with the odors of the coverings. His nose had accustomed itself, apparently. Daylight was not yet streaking the east when Nelms called to him, and Carlton was at work beside a cow before he remembered it was Sunday.

"Any hauling today?" Carlton asked.

"Nawp. There's nothin' open in town," Nelms growled. "They all close up, Sundays. We'll have to work aroun' the place, this mornin'. Grease the truck an' do some other little things. It'll take us to noon. The old woman's havin' a passel of her folks here to dinner. Damn a wife's folks, anyhow! I aint got nobuddy in the world to bother me, but she's got a whole passel of kin thet pile in an' eat a feller out o' house an' home. Damn sich a tribe, I say! They aint no good. They aint no good!"

A sudden chuckle broke his speech.

"One thing, though," he croaked, "they can't allus come to my house. Sometimes I go to theirs. They hafta kinda spread it around, like. Then's when I git back at 'em. I take that passel o' kids o' mine, an' we all eat like hongry dawgs. Then's when I git back at 'em! I git back at 'em then. I sure git back at 'em."

There came an afterthought that embittered his tones: "But thet breaks up my whole day, jus' goin' there an' comin' back. Jus' ruins a whole day. . . . . Damn a wife's folks! They aint no good anyhow. They aint nothin' anyhow."

THE company began to arrive at about the hour of eleven. Unc' Bill, a pugnacious-appearing man with drooping mustaches, narrow eyes, and a slight limp, was first on the scene, with Aunt Mabe, Peter Jackson and Gwendolyn. Rolling up to the house in a Ford of ancient vintage, Unc' Bill drew the car to a stuttering halt, laboriously climbed over the two youngsters in the front seat and strolled down to the barn, where Carlton and Nelms were at work. Following his exit from the car, his family unloaded itself, the mother clutching the latest addition to her bosom. Unc' Bill looked Carlton over critically, and spat liberally to one side.

"Howdy," Nelms grunted. "How're ye?"

"Purty good for an' old man." And he went on with his critical inspection of Carlton.

"Whatsamatter?" Nelms asked. "Got a flat wheel?"

"Nawp," Unc' Bill grunted. "Sore on it."

Others of the party continued to arrive. Unc' Walter, with his wife and daughter Gertrude, were the next on the scene. Unc' Walter strolled to the barn as the women alighted from the car, looked Carlton over and lighted his pipe.

"Howdy," Nelms greeted him. "How're ye?"

"Purty good for an old man," Unc' Walter believed. Then, to Unc' Bill:

"Whatsamatter—got a flat wheel?"

"Nawp. Sore on it."

A roadster and a truck drew into the yard, the truck forging ahead of the smaller machine. On the rear of the truck, sitting on boards laid from side to side, was an array of women and children who, Carlton learned from grunting comments of Unc' Bill and Unc' Walter, were Unc' Peter, Mrs. Nelms' oldest brother, and his family. The roadster, he also learned from the same sources, carried Little Jim Follansbee and his bride. Also that Little Jim—so called because his father was named Big Jim—was employed in a garage in the city.

While Jim handed his bride out of the car, Unc' Peter came toward the barn.

"Howdy!" came from Nelms. "How're ye?"

"Purty good for an old man," Unc' Peter replied.

Then, Unc' Peter to Unc' Bill:

"Whatsamatter—got a flat wheel?"

"Nawp. Got a sore on it."

CHAPTER XIX

UNC' BILL pushed his chair back from the table, balanced it on the rear legs and opened his vest. He sat for a moment, hands at his sides, sucking the food, with a squashing, whistling sound, from between his teeth. He grunted explosively:

"Phoo-o! I've et too much."

Aunt Mabe sighed reflectively, also much possessed with the food she had eaten.

"Ressy allus puts too much stuff on her table," she said, and smiled winningly upon Mrs. Nelms. The hunchback squirmed in his chair; his lips worked and twisted.

By little and little the men drifted into the kitchen, while the women, after profuse offers to "clear away these dirty dishes," which offers were sturdidly refused by Mrs. Nelms, formed a circle around the table, pushing their chairs back against the wall; folding their hands across their stomachs, smoothing out the wrinkles in their black or gray dresses. Co-ed gatherings were not in the scheme of things in their sphere of living. Male and female, they ate together and slept together; and at sundry other times, such as trips into town in the same conveyance, they were forced into each other's company. But in the hours of their visiting they strictly kept to the line of demarcation.

Carlton followed the men from the table to the kitchen, stood about uncomfortably for a minute, saw the suspicious eyes that greeted his mingling, saw Unc' Bill's piglike eyes rest upon his searchingly as Unc' Bill bit a generous chew from a cake of tobacco before stuffing it again into his pocket. Carlton went outside. Squatting on the porch in the sunlight, voices of the women came through the thin walls.

"Where'd you git the new man?" Aunt Mabe asked. Aunt Mabe was a fish-mouthed woman, aggressive in her movements, determined in her speech and opinions, unceasing in her eternal digging into other people's business. Little Peter Follansbee once had said, "She's fat an' sassy," and the term had stuck to her. When Aunt Mabe heard it, she was not rebuffed. "You bet I am!" she had said.

"Where'd Harve git the new hand?" she asked again, lifting her voice determinedly.

"In town, 'tother day," Mrs. Nelms answered.

"Where's he from?" Aunt Mabe pursued the probing.

"I don't know," Mrs. Nelms acknowledged.

"Huh! Huh! Jes go in an' pick him up?"

"I guess so."

"Huh! Huh! Well, I'll tell you one thing, an' thet aint two: they's never no pick-up man a-comin' to my place, to live with me, jes like folks. I'll tell you thet!"

"He seems a nice sorter feller," Mrs. Nelms temporized. "He sleeps in the shed, back o' the kitchen. But I tol' Harve he should be keerful about what he brung home. Harve's mighty close, though, an' he gits a good man cheap."

"How cheap?" Aunt Mabe shot the question, relentlessly pushing the inquiry.

"I don' know jus' what he does pay him.

A lot cheaper'n he could git a man he knowed, though. I know thet."

"Huh! Well! Huh! Well, it wont be cheap ef he ups an' kills you all, some night. Why, I never heerd o' sich a thing!" Suddenly she waxed ferocious in her denunciations of Harve's acumen and caution. "The very idee! Jes pickin' up anything he finds an' bringin' it home—right in the house! Sleepin' with you people. You'll wake up in yer beds, some morning, slaughtered—jus' like hawgs! Slaughtered!"

Commiserating clucking of tongues followed this picture. A little silence. "I tol' Harve I was scared," Mrs. Nelms acknowledged. "But the new man seems nice an' quiet. He don't bother nothin'. Jus' gits up in the mornin' an' works with Harve an' goes to town with hay. He *seems* quiet."

"You can't tell nothin' about them quiet fellers," was Aunt Mabe's opinion. "I'd ruther have a rip-roarer aroun' me, any time, than one o' these quiet, easy fellers. You can't *tell* about 'em. Still water runs deep, yuh know."

AT that point in the conversation Carlton left the porch, walked around the house and seated himself at a corner, beside the bulging shed. Voices of the men in the kitchen were mercifully deadened by the walls, and Carlton sat in the thin sunshine, whittling at a stick and trying to fathom the situation of life as it presented itself to him, now—growing and gathering itself by little and little, day by day and hour by hour.

Harvey Nelms and his people, now: what was it in their lives that made living of value to themselves? Acknowledging that their accumulations, their labors, their earning abilities were of value to the nation, in just what way did it aid in their own plan of life—in their own happiness, for instance? And should not their individual happiness count above other extraneous obligations? Carlton did not know, was not sure, but believed happiness was a great boon to be achieved.

Were these people content—could they be content—to follow merely a plan of existence that led them unceasingly and in ignorance to the grave? Could it be that milestones in their lives were unseen by others, yet were upstanding to their own vision? Did these people have by chance ideals of a sort? Ideals of unceasing labor, say, that carried them on, spurred them on, drove them on? Could there be, by any stretch of imagination, an urge in that which they did, a compelling power, or was it mere brute habit? Did they know a satisfaction in their achievements, a lasting satisfaction, or were they driven from one task to the next—relentlessly driven, with no leisure to loiter by the wayside of life, to weigh their achievements, to ponder them, to taste them?

Carlton stirred uneasily. The question was too big for him. He only knew that on one side he himself was arrayed, a drifter, waster, a nonproducer, yet a thinker; and on the other side were arrayed these people who were drivers of themselves and others, unceasing toilers, uncomplaining slaves.

LATE in the afternoon, from his place of vantage in the barn, Carlton saw the visitors leaving. Aunt Mabe stopped on the porch, bundling her body aggressively in a long cloak, grasping angrily at the buttons, lifting her determined chin pugnaciously. The snapping of her tones came to Carlton.

"I'd set my foot right down!" she was telling Mrs. Nelms, who was standing, bent, her body shaking with the cold and her hands washing themselves in the chilly air, ceaselessly, nervously washing themselves.

"I'd cert'ny let Harve know who was boss in my own house. That's what I'd do! He'd bring no strange hobo to *my* house, to murder us in our beds!"

Distractedly, Mrs. Nelms was nodding.

Later in the evening, beneath the kerosene lamp in his room, and with his fingers stiffening in the chill, Carlton contrived a letter to Helen Proctor. The opening words were vague, troubled, questioning; but as he got into it, as he felt the Vision again filling him, the letter began to pulse with life; the pictures he drew lived and had their being on the pages beneath his hand.

This letter covered thirteen pages.

Also he wrote to Peters, telling of his new work, of his surroundings and of his ambitions, the vagueness of which surprised him when he attempted to set them down on paper. But he tried to tell of the goal to which he was fighting—though sometimes it seemed, as he wrote, that he knew not the goal or what it contained or consisted of. . . . .

That night, through the thin partition that divided the bulging shed from the sleeping-room of the hunchback and his wife, Carlton heard her querulous tones.

"I jes wont stand it," she whined. "He'll murder us all in our beds—jes like hawgs, slaughtered. You wont save no money then, will ye? You've jes gotta git red of him. I wont stand—"

"Oh, shet up an' go to sleep," Nelms growled.

"Well, you've jes gotta make other plans. He's too quiet. You jes can't tell nothin' about them quiet fellers. Still water runs deep. He'll kill us an' rob—"

"Thet damn' meddlin' sister of yours has been lippin' in ag'in."

"I don' hafta have no sister tell me what's what," the whining voice went on. "He's too quiet. He's—"

Ducking his head beneath the coverings, Carlton endeavored to lose the sound of the whimpering tones. After a time, and despite the stench of the bedding, he slept.

CHAPTER XX

IN the next week came a letter from Peters. It was awaiting Carlton on his return from the city, holding the place of honor on the kitchen mantel, propped in front of the alarm clock.

"You got a letter," Florence Isabel informed him as he stepped in at the door.

"You've gotta letter," Harry Homer echoed. "Le's see what's in it."

"There's a letter for you," Mrs. Nelms said. "Up there." With the fork in her hand, she pointed to the mantel.

With the first forthcoming of the information, Carlton's heart had leaped at the thought that Helen had written; then, as he saw the postmark, his spirits definitely ebbed. However, it was a letter; counting the one from Helen, more than two months since, it was the second missive to come to him in more than two years. Stuffing this one into his overcoat pocket, he stepped behind the stove, warming his body.

"Aint yuh gonto read it to us?" Harry Homer asked, expectantly.

"Not right away," Carlton temporized.

"Shucks! I wisht I'd of opened it, now."

"Harry Homer!"—from the boy's mother.

"Well, what's wrong about that, I'd like to know. We read all your letters, don't we? What's—"

"That's different," Mrs. Nelms explained

"Shucks. I don't see how it's different. How's it different, Maw? I don' see no difference."

"It ain't nice to read other people's letters."

Carlton was hurrying from behind the stove, going outside to aid Nelms. As he passed, Harry Homer looked up, stuck forth his tongue, and whispered:

"Got a gal—got a gal—got a gal!"

At the supper-table Harry Homer and Florence Isabel continually were convulsed with giggling, threw knowing glances toward Carlton. Later, in the seclusion of his shed room, the man read the letter:

> You've fallen on hard ways, buddy. It's apparent from your letter. Yet, you're working, and that is something to be thankful for, especially in this time of ice and snow.
>
> Keep this in your mind: the people for whom you are working are not typical of the farmers. Not by a million miles! They are no more typical of the farmer than the occasional family of low intelligence is typical of the laboring man in other lines. It is true that the great trouble with the farmer, as a whole, is that people have called him "hick" during such a length of time, and so many times, that he has fallen into a way of believing he is a hick. Regards himself as one not fitted intellectually to cope with men of other business, and holding himself thus, he's prone to fall back on his ignorance in many emergencies.
>
> But by and large the farmer is not the type you have shown your employer to be. So don't degrade the class by the standard of the individual, or several individuals. I'll venture to say your employer's friends and associates are about on a par with himself. However, don't use these as measuring sticks.
>
> Keep this before you, Carlton: regard any employment, unless it is that which you have chosen definitely, merely as a stepping-stone to something farther along the road. Keep your eyes to the front, and remember, no matter how smooth the road may appear, if you keep with it long enough you'll come to bogholes. You'll find miry places. Then it's up to you to find bottom, stand on it, look about you and say: "I'll be out of this quickly!" That, and seeing your next step, is what counts. Especially the next step. Don't jump foolishly.

It was a cheersome letter. Peters told of Dake's father.

> Old man Dake decided the task of trying to punish these crooks was too hopeless. Had to give it up. He went back, heartbroken, vowing he would give them the biggest slice of publicity he could get in some Eastern papers. However, that wont touch them, here, I'm believing.

A SHOCK it is that gives pause to one, brings thoughtfulness, pulls forth tendrils, unknown before, in our being—urges to some definite, or indefinite, course of action; upsets one, wholly and completely. A shock it is, often, that brings sudden courage, sudden revelation, sudden decision. So it was with Carlton.

The shock came with the letter from Helen Proctor—came in it, to be exact, and in the newspaper clipping inclosed.

> I have been wondering whether you were dead, alive or merely had forgotten me. I care greatly for your letters. . . . . But aren't you a terrifically long time in getting to California? It's a hard life, harder than I believed anything could be. . . . . And I'm trying to not get into the habit of carelessness, the carelessness that comes with solitude. . . . . I'm out here, you know, with two Mexican women and their husbands. . . . . And I have a meal served, actually served, each evening. Flowers and the music-machine playing. And I dress up.
>
> Really, it's funny, if it were not so darned pathetic. Just that I don't want to get hardened, careless, thoughtless of appearance. So I sit in state, with the lights above me—I get power from the overland line—covered with little red flowerlike things that I bought in a ten-cent store. All dressed up! Sometimes that's the hardest of all, the dressing, after a day of work outside. But I stick with it.
>
> I'm as lonesome as the very deuce. Sometimes some of the people I know come out to see me, and I can feel they regard me somewhat as a freak. "It must be terrible, out here alone," or, "How spiffy!" or some such brainless words over the fact that I'm trying to make my living in the way that appealed to me. Yet, does it now appeal? I sometimes wonder. It's all so terribly different from my expectations, different from the visions I had of it. I saw freedom, the outside, scenery, the mountains. I merely watched Father, I know now—watched his efforts from afar. I am finding this labor neither scenery nor freedom.

Carlton turned the page, seeking the end, seeking the words with which she closed this missive. What would she write, at the end? Just "Yours truly," perhaps? He riffled the pages hastily. And then, on the last page, the words leaped out at him.

> And so, I had to kill the man. He was a Mexican, trying to get into the house. I called to him, called Ramón, the husband of one of my women. Then I had to shoot. But the clipping will tell of it. I can't write it.
>
> There was the inquest. That was terrific. Yet the congratulations of the men, officers and attendants at the inquest, were even more terrific. Imagine congratulating one for the taking of a life!

Then, at the end, she signed: *"Yours, Helen."*

The newspaper clipping fluttered to the floor while he stood, his body and soul permeating with these two words, his heart bounding with their sweetness: *"Yours, Helen."* Stumbling against the bed, he fell to it, sat there, with the stench of the kerosene lamp filling his nostrils. Holding the letter before him, smoothing and fingering the clipping he had found on the floor, he sat, rereading the letter. *"Yours, Helen."*

Aye, girl! Yours—Helen's! Always, forever and ever.

OUT of the night, across the distance, flying over the miles and mountains and desert that lay between, he heard the cry of her heart, felt the terrific loneliness that was with her, against which she battled. His heart ached at the coming of the picture of her evenings, alone in the house, seated at her table with its brave display, beneath the softened glow that came through the little tinted shades—the cheap little shades. Prettying up the place, playing at dignity, fighting to keep away the tearing down of her body, her impulses, her finer thoughts. Fighting, it came to him, even as he fought, to retain an ideal.

And she had killed! A cry was wrung from his lips. He leaped to his feet, striding into the room where sat the Nelms family. Harry Homer leered up at him.

"Goin' to read us yer letter?" the boy greeted.

"Harry Homer!" his mother warned. "I'll put yuh to bed, another word outa yuh!"

"I'd like to borrow a few sheets of paper and an envelope," Carlton asked, "—until I go to town, tomorrow."

Ungraciously she went into the sleeping-room, opened a drawer of the bureau, handed out five sheets of paper and one envelope, counting them carefully.

"That'll be enough, I guess," she said, and promptly closed the drawer, locked it.

Back in his room, stopping at times to rub the blood back into the veins of his hand, Carlton wrote to Helen, poured out his heart to her, attempted to cheer her, told of his deepest longings.

And when he had finished the letter, while he hesitated at the proper ending of it, it seemed easier, much easier, to write: "Good-by for a little time, my dearest."

CHAPTER XXI

IN the end Mrs. Nelms and Aunt Mabe got him. The almost nightly bickerings of the hunchback and his wife went on, the woman bewailing the possibility of their being "murdered in their beds, like hawgs," and the man cursing Aunt Mabe for her meddling. The specter had become almost a mania with Mrs. Nelms; her days were palpitant with the manufacturing of the terror, her nights terrific with the quailing, the anticipation of the creeping, slaughtering man. Then, to add to it, came a dog outside the Nelms house, on three nights, a dog that sat beside the barn and howled to the moon, presaging certain death.

On an afternoon when the roads were impassable, the hunchback set Carlton to the task of sharpening the ax. From the kitchen window, Mrs. Nelms watched. Once, pausing at his labor, Carlton gazed toward the kitchen while he stood, aimlessly trying the edge of the ax with wetted finger. A vagrant thought brought a smile to his lips and eyes. He was looking directly into the window, the trembling woman believed, gazing directly into her eyes, sending his message to her, forewarning her of the coming of death—gloating over the coming of death! He stood through minutes, then, sighing, leaned again above the grindstone.

The spell broken, the woman screamed, lurched and would have fallen except for the chair she found beneath her. Long she sat, nerveless, distraught, body shaking.

That night, awake until well past midnight, tossing on the bed, she cowered—hearkening to the snapping of the boards of the house as the frost entered them, imagining, drawing visions. Clearly she saw the man, now, creeping, creeping, creeping in at the door, sliding his muffled feet. Clearly she saw the Thing draw near, nearer; saw it stand above their bed, saw the blade in its hands rise slowly. A more than usually terrific cracking came to the boards of the wall.

For an instant she lost consciousness. Then, screaming, she leaped from the bed, found herself on the floor, praying, imploring, beseeching—kneeling to this terrific Something, her arms upraised, hands clasped. The sleezy nightgown fell back from her sunken, caved-in breast.

Cursing, Nelms drove her back to the bed.

Knowing himself the cause of it, feeling the torture he was bringing to her hours,—her eyes lifted tremblingly to his, next morning,—Carlton gave up the thought of trying to stay. For days he had been torn between the desire to stay until spring, until he had accumulated the stake he had set for himself, and the urge to leave the woman in peace. He spoke to Nelms, that morning.

"I'm going to leave," he said.

The hunchback straightened up from the cow he was milking.

"Yeah? Where you goin'?"

"Away. Hunt another job. Know of anything around here?"

"No!"—shortly. Then, frankly: "It's that damn' sister o' hern. She's got her filled with foolishness. Damn a wife's folks, anyhow. They aint no good. They aint no good!"

His voice lifted into a screech. Rising from the stool, he kicked the cow viciously—held to its back and kicked and kicked. His flare of temper was terrific, amazing. Running to the walls of the shed, he beat upon them, kicked them, mouthed curses.

"Tearin' up a man's home!" he screamed. "Buttin' into a man's private affairs—a man's business—a man's family! Damn the whole bunch of 'em! They wont let me alone! They wont let me alone! They—wont—let—me—alone."

The last came slowly, his voice trembling with the anger that possessed him. He sat again before the frightened cow, found that milk would not come now, attempted to soothe her, apparently was ashamed of his outburst.

"So-boss! So-boss! I wisht it was thet sister. She's a cow—a cow," he gulped. "A reg'lar cow." His voice was whining, trembling.

"I don't know of nothin', right now," he said after a long silence. "You stay today. Take thet load o' hay intuh town. I think Bert Peale, over by the Wash, wants a man to look after his hoss ranch. He'll be over this mornin' to look after some hay. I'll talk to him."

CHAPTER XXII

IN many ways, in the job at Bert Peale's ranch, Carlton found a sinecure. His place of abode was a shack, the latest tenant of which had been a temperamental Swede, a university man who had been, to

judge by the stacks of magazines, books and pamphlets piled in all the corners and shelves in the shack, an omnivorous reader —a reader highly interested in religions, philosophy, metaphysics, faith-cures, memory-training courses (Carlton found two of these), will-power builders, and all accounts of things strange and bizarre. After Bert Peale had left, turning the shack and its contents over to the new man, Carlton dived greedily into the piles of reading material. He saw his hours filled beyond loneliness.

The house was located at the mouth of a cañon, above the line of spring freshets from the cañon stream. Several hundred acres of range land lay in this tract, with a corral and feeding shed wherein the horses —sixty-one of them—were kept in times of heavy storms. The job paid ten dollars less to the month than had the work at the hunchback's ranch, but it was work, it assured an income, and above even this, it promised to give hours and hours in which he could read, study, pass the time in glamourous imaginings.

Almost daily he wrote to Helen Proctor; and he received after the first week almost daily answers. He became emboldened, after a little time, to pour out his heart in the letters, and received heart-pouring missives in answer. Once, after reading one of the pamphlets that had to do with the wonders of a combination of telepathy and will-powering, he found himself standing, body tensed, gazing out over the peaks that lay to the west—eyes beating (he could *feel* their beating) out toward the girl. More marvelous than this, he had known her presence, believed she was close to him, heard the sound of her voice in his ears, knew the warmth of her nearness.

Sitting down at his table in the first flush of this spell, after a fashion he contrived to write to her of this strange occurrence.

"May there be something," he wrote, "that carried your thoughts to me, dear? Some telepathy, perhaps?" And so on, along this line of reasoning. Afterward, two or three letters afterward, in response to a half-jocular suggestion from the girl, they arranged their "speaking hour" wherein each would call to the other.

This is the way she put it:

> Lonesome, dear. I am so lonesome, at times, at many times. Seems, too, I see you as I remember you that night, when I left you standing at the station gate. Seems, too, I can hear you, hear the tones of your voice, the short little laugh that is yours.
>
> Lonesome, those times. Waiting for you, dear. And perhaps this telepathy thing may have something in it. Perhaps we may be able, even if miles and miles apart, to be with each other, in some way, for a moment.
>
> I'll try it, in the evening, next Friday evening. This letter will have reached you by that time. At four o'clock, just as the sunset strikes on Old Grayback, I'll stand and turn and call to you. Watch for it, listen. And on every evening, after that. We'll see what we'll see.
>
> I'm lonesome, dear. It's so hard to make things go. Different, greatly, from my expectations of the place.

She had begun, now, to sign the letters: *"Yours, lovingly, most lovingly."*

Day after day, as they wrote to each other, they recounted the marvelousness of their communicating in the "speaking hour," as they stood, waited and spoke, each at the same time. They told of the calls they had heard, of the presences they had felt, of the terrific gripping of the golden moments.

Yet they had neglected to allow for the difference of an hour in the time from east to west.

THREE hours a day covered Carlton's actual time of labor. In the other hours he read, tramped over the snow-clad hills in order that he might remain in perfect physical condition, wrote letters, dreamed dreams.

He read, read and read—books of adventure, books of science, books of religion, books of philosophy, and just books. The thirst that had been within him for reading, for thought, for dreams, fully was being satisfied. Came a colt to a mare in the corral, and the hours of his labor increased by perhaps ten per cent, after the first day. Carefully he watched over the little animal, vying with its mother in his attention. It was such an appealing little animal, a mare mule-colt. In it was represented the wonderful mystery of creation.

Bert Peale he saw but twice in the two months, as February drew into March and passed toward April. With May, Carlton believed, he would leave the place. Peale had offered continued employment, on the home ranch, with the opening of the season. Carlton had hesitated, but knew he would refuse. With the coming of May he would have his stake, and with this aid to fortune, he would go on—on to California, find his employment near the tall girl, make good. And then? More dreams,

then, but fulfillment closer, the glimpse of the rosy light of success—fighting, determining, achieving.

But, as usual, the clutching fingers crept forth, darted forth, stayed him, tore up his plans; threatened total disruption of the plans.

CHAPTER XXIII

THREE o'clock in the morning. Almost a blizzard, the last storm of the winter, had swept the city in the earlier hours of the night. Little eddies of ice-pellets, wind-blown, still hung against the edges of buildings, along the sidewalk lines, in the corner of store doors, along the lower frame of windows. The wind cut with the pain of a burn.

Three o'clock in the morning. One light gleamed out into the cold street, one light that gave evidence of life behind it. This came from a restaurant, one of the two all-night places of refreshment in this city. Two men, bodies shaking with the chill, hands clenched in their pockets, overcoat collars pulled up about their ears, hurried down the street toward this light. Newspaper men, they were. Their paper had been put to bed; newsboys waited in the alley, ready to carry forth the news of the world to the sleepy breakfaster, ready to awaken him with screaming headlines that told of murder and sudden death. The two men—telegraph editor and late-trick man—were off now to their beds, and before sleeping they would eat of waffles and drink of coffee in this place of the lighted window.

Three o'clock in the morning. A policeman came from the restaurant, stood against the closed door, picking his teeth. Hearing the advancing footsteps, he turned.

"Hi, Mack. Hello, Aubrey," he called greeting.

Chattering, running, shivering, the men gave answer.

The policeman stepped aside, that they might enter the eating-place, and as he made the movement, there came to his ears the sound of a thrashing body—almost the sounds made by a fish, thrown out on the sands of a beach, before death comes. Groans, whimpers accompanied the thrashing. The policeman turned quickly, peered into a dark areaway.

"What the devil!" he cried. "What the—"

HE clipped back the words and bent above the body of a man—a man who lay in a twisted heap against the door of a clothing store, the back of his head drawn close against his shoulders, almost—his hands gripped, clenched across his forehead, shielding, protecting a place above his right eye.

"What the devil!" the policeman said again. "Soused—soused as a mackerel!"

Grunting, he stooped above the body, tore away the clutching fingers which struggled in his hard grasp, struggled to place themselves again protectingly above the eye. A great blue bruise, shaped somewhat after the fashion of a tiny crescent, was above the eye. Three fingers of the man's clawing hands were bandaged. His hair, scattered above his forehead, was red. His cap had fallen off.

Three o'clock in the morning. And since half after one Carlton had lain in that doorway, crouched, twisted, his body tortured—half-delirious with the pain that began in the place over the right eye and carried down through every vein, every muscle, every nerve of his body. Prior to that, from midnight to the moment when he fell, he had roamed aimlessly over the city, weak, half-blinded, seeking a place in the city's strangeness wherein he might, with warmth, drive away the biting pain. That evening at seven o'clock he had been discharged from a hospital, cured, as the interne and superintendent of nurses had informed him. Cured! After three days on a bed, following the amputation of the first two fingers of his left hand, to the first joint, he had been discharged as cured!

Kneeling, the policeman lowered his nostrils close to Carlton's mouth. Puzzled, he turned to the two newspaper men.

"Smells funny," he announced, "but not like hootch. Not quite like. He's soused, though. That's sure. What you suppose he's been drinking?"

The telegraph editor dropped beside the policeman, studied the man on the cold cement; pulling away the fingers that persisted in clutching at the forehead, he saw the scar.

"Soused, nothing," he gave opinion. "He's a sick man. Looks like spinal meningitis, the way his head's drawn back. That's catching as hell." Hurriedly he lifted to his feet, stood undecided. "Something has hit him," he guessed. "Been in a wreck, maybe. Hobo in a wreck. Why don't you call the wagon, Ben?" he asked.

"Reckon I'd better," Ben grumbled. "Keep an eye on him a minute." He entered the restaurant.

THE wagon came, backed up, with one policeman dropping from the rear and another from the driver's seat. With Ben they leaned above the man who lay on the sidewalk. Half-conscious, Carlton was now —knew of the coming of the wagon as a movement from a great distance, heard the sound of voices over leagues and centuries of space, felt the rough hands, touching him, turning him over. But the pain—that ripping, tearing, devilish thing that bit at his brain, tore at the big cord in the back of his neck, that ran through his twisted body, pulling his head back, choking him, suffocating him—this was the most alive element in all of his consciousness.

"Found a souse?" Rear Policeman asked.

"Found a souse?" Front Policeman echoed.

"He's pickled, all right," Ben believed. "But I smelt his breath and I can't figger out what he's been drinkin'. Some awful stuff, though, the way he's twisted up. Reckon he'll croak, all right."

So they stood, looking down on him, discussing him, while the wind whipped and whined, coursed and stung. Those who discussed him shivered in their heavy garments. Carlton struggled, moaned, beat at the torturing spot above his eye. Rear Policeman stooped suddenly.

"Ho-ho!" he cried. "What's this? See this?" And he pointed to the scar.

Ben grunted. "Been in a scrap," he said. "Young feller, too, aint he?"

Rear Policeman was judicial. "Can't tell much about him, the way he's twisted up. Well, what'll we do with him? Want to put a charge against him, Ben?"

"Put him in the wagon," Ben directed. "Book him as a drunk—no, better vag him. Mebbe he aint drunk, after all. Mebbe he's sick or something. He's a hobo, all right, an' we can hold him on the vag charge. No, make it investigation. That'll cover it. Put him in the wagon an' come on in an' get a cuppa coffee. Might as well, while you're up here."

AS directed, they put him into the wagon, tossed him in on a long seat exactly as a bag of sand is tossed. This seat ran the length of the automobile body, was one of a pair and was covered with a leather composition that was cold and slick. In a moment, writhing with the torture in his body, Carlton slipped from the seat, rolled to the floor and lay wedged in, flat on his face, his body at the hips hanging outside, his toes dragging on the rear step.

Inside the restaurant, Rear Policeman joked with his brother officers, and the newspaper men as all quaffed their warming coffee. The late-trick man, who also covered police headquarters, called back as he left with the telegraph editor:

"Tell Pat" (Pat was the night desk sergeant) "to get everything he can on this story, write it on a tab and put it away for me. I'll get it tomorrow night."

"What story?"

"That fellow you found outside. There may be a nice little yarn in it."

"Oh, that fellow. You wont find much in that. He's nothing but a hobo." Then, to Front Policeman: "Come on, Sam. That bird'll freeze to death if we don't hurry. So long, fellers."

Rear Policeman climbed up beside Front Policeman, forgetting to look in at the back of the wagon, and Carlton rode to the station in the position in which he had rolled, his twisted body jammed in between the two seats, his hands beating at his head, his legs and feet dragging out over the back steps. In turning the corners, which was at top speed, his body scraped and bumped against the boards.

NEXT evening, the late-trick newspaper man sought out Rear Policeman. Nothing had been carried in the evening paper touching upon the early morning find.

"Nothing much to it," R. P. said. "He was a hobo, as I told you. A wild story he told to the day force, so they tell me. A little nutty, the bird is, I think."

"Wild story?"—hopefully.

"Wild as the devil, some of it. Not drunk, though, we found. Just a kinda pleurisy in his head, coming from that hurt place, with the wind and cold on it. After two-three hours he was all right, the day force said."

"But the wild story?" Late Trick persisted.

"Well, not so wild, either. Just kinda nutty. Here's how he said it, according to what the day force told me. He's working for Bert Peale, on a horse-ranch, out about sixteen miles. A mare had a colt, two-three days ago, he says. Mule colt and mean mare, according to this nutty guy. Well, three-four days ago—this is

what *he* says, y'understand. I don't know nothing about it, myself." (A careful man, a man of cautious tongue, accustomed to speaking before judges, was Rear Policeman.) "I'm just telling you what this bird tells the day force, as they tells me."

"Where is he now?" Late Trick interrupted.

"Turned him a-loose today. This bird, he says—"

"But," Late Trick objected, "if he was crazy, why did they turn him loose?"

"Oh, hell, he wasn't crazy, y'understand. Just a little nutty, mebbe. From that place on his head, mebbe. The pain and everything, y'understand. Well, he says he was going to the corral, one morning, three-four days ago, like I tell you. Went in to get that colt out—hosses fighting or something. Pat tried to tell me, but he was mixed up. Mebbe I was mixed up. Anyhow, this bird went to the corral, collared the colt and was leading it out when the mean mare jumped him.

"She knocks him down with the first kick—there's a place on the bird's shoulders, they say, where her feet hit him. Then the other hosses started raising hell, fighting. One hoss reared and come down on this bird's hand—the fingers was bandaged, you remember.

"He was laying there—y'understand, this is how I got it—flat on his back, with that big hoss just come down on his fingers. Close to the corral fence, he says. The mare rears, comes down with her front feet. He tries to pull away, but his fingers, y'understand, is caught under that big hoss' hoof—smashed. He tries to pull away. He can only get a little ways away, can only pull his head just a little ways away, just enough to get that place on his forehead—a glancing lick. Hosses is fighting all over the damned corral, they say he tells 'em.

"That colt is whinnying and running around, and that mare is crazy on account of that colt raising the devil. Hosses' hoofs is all around this bird. He says he is half-blinded, laying on his back, close to the fence. The big hoss aint stepped off of his hand, yet. The mare rears again, and this bird sees her coming. Pulls his fingers away, tries to pull them away—jerks and pulls, quick, while that mare lifts her forefeet, ready to brain him. Jerks and pulls, pulls—and leaves the ends of his fingers under that big hoss' hoof. Rolls out under the fence. The forefeet of that mare comes down just where his head has been. That's the way he tells it."

LATE TRICK mused. "Quite a story, if I can make it timely. What does he—"

"Let me get you told the rest of it," R. P. interrupted. "This bird climbs a hoss—can't hardly see, he says, but manages to get a saddle and bridle on it—and manages to get to town.

"Says he hangs down over the hoss, grabbing him around the neck, hanging on, holding on, with that place on his forehead close to the hoss, right up against the hoss. Says the heat didn't make it hurt so bad, that way. Got to a hospital and was there three-four days. They cut off some of his fingers and dressed that place on his head and turned him loose. Says he didn't have no money—seems like Bert Peale's been out of town, and he's been keeping this bird's money, what aint in a bank, here. And they let him out of hospital too late for him to get in the bank.

"Says he was hunting for a room, and it got so cold he went into a picture-show place, trying to warm up. Went to sleep in there—warm and nice, you know. They put him out when the show closed, and he started out to find a room, he says. Soon as he got out in the cold, that pleurisy hit him again, blinded him and he went down and out. Says he can dimly see a light—mebbe that restaurant where we found him, but can't make it. That's all he knows."

"But, this—this Bert Peale, is it?"

"What do you mean—what about him?"

"Doesn't he do something for the fellow?"

"He's gone, I tell you. Just come back today. Come in and saw this bird, the day man said, and offered him a job, after he gets well. It aint his fault if a man gets all kicked up by a hoss, is it? What more could a guy do? Bert Peale aint keeping no sick men. Well ones is too plentiful."

"Sure," Late Trick agreed absently. "Where did this fellow go?"

"Pulled his freight, the day sergeant says. Went down to the bank and pulled his freight, after he got his money. Now, that's all. Can you get a story outa that?"

"H'm-m! Don't know. Rather thin, isn't it? Nothing heroic or anything of that kind, is there? Just an ordinary sort of a dub. Things like that are happening every day. He isn't by any chance an ex-service man, is he?"

"Dunno. Day force didn't say."

"Well." Late Trick weighed the possibilities. "We might cook up something. We might make him an ex-service man, anyway. Shell-shocked, maybe?" he inquired hopefully.

"Dunno. Told you all I know."

"Well, we'll shell-shock him—just a little. One of these wandering ones, like we see so much. Not bad—just a little touched. Trying to get home to his mother." (Late Trick's eyes were narrowed in the fervor of creating.) "Is sapped by a bunch of hoboes and rolled for his wad. Stumbles through the streets, falls, blinded. You men find him, take him in, care for him. A purse is made up—policemen and newspaper men. He is sent on his way. How's that?"

R. P. sniffed. "Fair, I'd say."

"She wont be much of a story," Late Trick said airily. "Ex-service men aint worth much space now. The people are getting tired of them. About three sticks, this story—a filler. What's the fellow's name? Did you book him?"

"You'll find that on the blotter."

Late Trick inspected the big book and found the name, "John Howland," the first name that had occurred to Carlton, after coming out of the daze of pain.

"Sure he's left town, eh?" Late Trick inquired.

"That's what they say. Took a train for the east, early this afternoon. Why? Afraid he'll queer that story you've cooked up?"

"No." Late Trick grinned. "He wouldn't recognize it, anyway, when I've finished it."

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was the evening of the fifth day, and Carlton sat with other wanderers in the Sunshine Mission. In the last five days he had rested, keeping to a room he had rented, sleeping and giving to his injuries the opportunity to heal. In these quiet hours he had meditated greatly, digesting certain elements of the composition that is called life—fighting certain silent battles within himself, reaching a certain decision. Not the decision of a quitter, Carlton felt, but one from one who realized, definitely, his final goal; from one who believed he had settled upon, at last, the niche he best could fill.

Having made this one decision, a lesser one also found birth within him. A trifling one, this, compared with the magnitude of the greater, yet when it should have been fulfilled, this lesser one would bring its great content, a fullness of satisfaction, the knowledge that he had encompassed a definite mission that heretofore had been overlooked, or passed by thoughtlessly.

Definite. That was the word that was beating at his brain, and singing at his heart. Definite goal, something to be achieved.

In the early evening of the night in which he sat in the Sunshine Mission he had walked to the post office and had been handed a letter from the girl. (His mail he had ordered forwarded before leaving the city of the hospital.) It was in the reading of this letter, somehow, that his great decision was crystallized. And this was strange, as one views the contents of the letter, for they told of dire happenings, failure, disappointment, the wreck of the ranch in the mountains. "It's gone," she had written. "I've seen it go a-glimmering. Too much I undertook, I reckon, what with taxes, interest, fowls lost to animals, to thieves, to disease and all the rest of the loss. Perhaps I was not cut out for a lady rancher. Perhaps—but I'm tired of it all, in a way. I'm seeking only happiness, quiet happiness, the kind that watches the world go by. And so, dear, when you come, we'll both be hunting our jobs, if mine is not found first."

Bravery he found all through the lines. The sort of bravery that smiles into the eyes of an advancing devil.

His fingers were upon the letter now as he sat in his tipped-back chair, his thoughts upon it as he hearkened to the prayer from the man in the pulpit. A lamed man, this, a smiling, happy fellow—one who had been down in the dregs of life, they told of him, and who gave now of his life in return for that which had come to him. Carlton smiled knowingly, felt great attraction for the lamed man. Carlton was filling with a wide tolerance for all the world.

This wide tolerance did not abate when a tall, very slender man, one who had the eyes and hair and manner of a fanatic, rose quickly in his seat and cried out, in a high, cracked voice against the teachings of the lamed man. Carlton continued to smile as the fellow arose, smiled as the voice flung out over the hall.

"I rise to differ with the reverend," he shrilled in what Carlton was sure was his best argumentative, most impressive manner. "I rise to give proof of circumstances that prove the reverend's words may not be false but not based on experience. The reverend speaks of love of humanity, dwells on the love of God for man and man for man, tells us we must love our fellow-man. Why? *Why?"*

His voice leaped, rang against the thin roof. Heads turned quickly; gazes fixed themselves on the shrieking man. The lamed one in the pulpit waited, his hands outspread on the Book, quietly waited.

"I ask you why? Why this foolishness of love for humanity? What does the world know of it—care for it? How does the world practice it? Let me tell you. Let me tell you!"

Reaching its highest point, his voice cracked, trembled, ceased. He gulped; his body shook. The room was tensed, waiting —except the lamed man, who stood, hands reverently upon the Book; except Carlton, who sat in his tipped-back chair, watching incuriously.

"I'll tell you," the voice went on. "I have been in a prison camp—months in a prison camp. Through the love of my fellow-man for me!" High, mirthless he laughed; his voice broke again. His body was doubled in a sudden spasm of coughing. "Let me tell you how this came about," he went on, after the pause. "I was in a town in a near-by State. That was months ago. I went to this town to hunt work. The marshals were paid on the fee system for getting hoboes, vags—so much for each one they landed. That is the way it was explained to me. I stood on a street-corner, watching to find a job. Two marshals came up, talked with me, questioned me, arrested me—took me before a justice of the peace and charged me with loitering. I tried to explain; they told me a drive was on against idle men. God in heaven!" His voice rang high, again. "I was not idle from choice. I tried to explain; they grinned at me. I had sixteen dollars, and I was fined sixteen dollars for loitering. I paid it and was told to get out of town.

"Now, this is the brotherly love," he sneered. "I met one of the marshals as I left their damned city hall, and asked him directions for getting away quick. He told me of an oil town, seven miles away. I started out, walking, broke.

"Now, here's the brotherly love!" he shrieked. "That same marshal met me at the limits of the town, arrested me as a vag and took me back before that same justice. A dollar that marshal made out of it, they told me afterward. I was broke; therefore I was a vag. I was fined twenty-five dollars, with three months in a prison camp.

"There's your fellow-man!" he cried. "Wait!"—as the lamed one attempted to speak. "Wait! Three months, I said. Well, I did five. I was forced to work three days for each rainy one, and rainy days were frequent. This is your world of brotherly love! To hell with it all! You feed us on weak religion and weak soup and weak prayers! You ask us to pray. We'll pray! Give us something to pray about. Go out and ask those others to pray! Watch 'em laugh at you—deride you! They don't need saving, they'll tell you. Their souls are all right. So is mine! It's my body that's going to hell! Pah!"

Spitting, mouthing, he waved his hands aloft, flung his arms about him, his fingers working convulsively—ran to the door, jerked it open, passed out into the night.

Silence in the little room; then the creaking of chairs, expulsion of tight breaths, the voice of the lamed one from the pulpit, calm, emotionless. A man seated next to Carlton leaned over, whispered to the red-haired man.

"That happened five years ago or more, to that fellow," the leaning man explained. "His wife and one baby died while he was in stir. It made him nutty. I've heard him bring it up two or three times. He's getting worse about it, though."

Carlton thought over this problem of the touched one, the man who railed at the world. As for himself, Carlton, he felt he had solved the questions of this world, in so far as they touched upon himself and those immediately dear to him.

"We'll pray," the calm voice came from the pulpit, "for the poor fellow who has just left us."

THIS is the way of Carlton's fulfilling the decision of minor importance that had come to him:

Dropping off the night train at the little station where Dake had been killed, months before, Carlton stood upon the platform, watching the red light at the rear of the train go into the blackness. Silence around him; no other passenger had alighted. The

face of the agent peered momentarily from the little bay window set in the middle of the station, then vanished.

Carlton turned up the graveled space in front of the station, lingered at a corner; turned back, walked the length of the space, lingered again. From the station came the sounds of the agent closing his business for the day. Carlton walked back to the door, entered the waiting-room and took a seat well back in a corner, pulling his cap over his eyes. The agent opened the door, backed into the room, locked the door and turned. When he saw the dark figure slouching in the seat, he hesitated, then went outside. Carlton grinned. The agent would tell the first officer he met of the presence of the lingering hobo. That was Carlton's plan. That officer, he hoped, would be Smiley Calkins, the man who had murdered Dake.

The red-haired man walked to the window, peering out into the night. If Calkins came, he must be prepared; if another officer came, likewise he must be prepared—quickly he must leave. Watching, waiting, minutes passed. A form turned a corner by the lumber-yard; the face of the advancing man stood out momentarily in the glow of a street lamp. Calkins came.

When the advancing man was yet five feet from the door, Carlton opened it quickly, stepped forth, closed it and stood waiting.

"Hello," he greeted. Calkins said nothing—peered, halted. "Hello, Calkins," Carlton called again cheerily—walked close to the wondering man. "How's things, old top?" he pursued his cheerful inquiry.

"Who are you?"

"Don't know me, eh? Well, think a little bit. Remember the fellow you killed, months ago, outside this station? The laughing little fellow? Well, I'm his ghost." Carlton laughed grimly. "Come back to haunt you, Calkins. Come back to—get—you!"

The last was spat forth. Trembling at the strangeness of the man before him, Calkins reached for his gun, lifted the tail of his coat for the weapon. Almost his fingers touched it—almost—as Carlton leaped, struck—one-two, both hands, quick and true.

MINUTES later Carlton straightened to his feet and surveyed his handiwork, on the ground before him. Calkins breathed, but his body was stilled, outstretched. The gun lay at his finger-tips, where his struggles had pushed it. Bending, Carlton picked up the weapon, held it a moment, then laid it on the breast of the man at his feet and turned away.

Striding through the streets of the town, he found the highway, turned south and swung along it, chest out, body erect, falling into the swing of the marching hours in France. He had finished the task—the first task of his rejuvenation.

At midnight he swung wide the gate before a little house in a town eight miles away. A light burned through the window. Tapping on the door, waiting, it was opened.

"Well, what do you know about this!" Peters cried out, after the moment of careful scrutiny. "Come in, old man. Come in! Lord, you've been through a cyclone, haven't you? What's that over your eye? Come in!"

"Accident," Carlton said gayly, smiling. "Several accidents. Thanks. I'll rest a little."

CHAPTER XXV

THIS is the way Peters, the reporter, explained Carlton to his father, the lawyer. Peters had left the paper on the day of Carlton's arrival at the bachelor cabin, and was now preparing to write his book. Endeavoring to shield the red-haired man from the pursuit that resounded through the lanes and highways, Peters had brought him to the home of his parents, in a city eighty miles away. There the two had remained secluded.

"You see, Dad," Peters explained, "there's something to the lad. He's lovable. He has backbone to spare. He's a thinker—adrift, that's all, but believes he has found himself. I kept him here during the two weeks you and Mother were gone, studying him, trying to get him. Trying to get him in a book I've started.

"I wish you could have seen him, Dad. You'd have cared for him, I know. Nothing out of the ordinary—there's ten million others exactly, or greatly, as he is. And that was his summing up: background, he called himself. One of the crowd. An ordinary dub, he said.

"This is the way he figured it out, one night when I had been writing for hours, and he had been reading. I leaned back from the old mill, resting, and Carlton

dropped his book, looked over to me, and grinned. One of the most fetching grins in the world, Dad—seemed to grin with his whole body. Even with his spirit, or soul, or whatever you call it!

"'Peters,' he said, 'I've been a terrific damned fool. For years and years—since I left home, out on this wandering thing. I've been hearkening to strange voices, dreaming plain dreams and believing them wonderful, feeling the call of the most ordinary urge, and believing it sublime. My feet and body and brain among the clods, where they belong, and my thoughts among the gods—trying to be, thinking they were, among the gods.'

"Oh, he has the gift of gab, of making you see things, Dad.

"'I've been following false gods,' he went on. 'Been having the thoughts of supermen—no, that's wrong. I've been striving at the thoughts of supermen, kidding myself with it. I'm a dub; not a genius. I'm one of the hundred million, not the one in the million. I'm merely a man with ordinary capabilities, not a master mind or anything like that. I'm one-hundred-per-cent, Simon-pure stuff that makes up the *hoi polloi*.'

"I tried to talk him out of it, Dad, thought he was in the dumps, before I heard him out. You see, there's a girl—"

"Let me get this straight," Dad Peters interrupted. "Remember, I've never seen the man. Now, as I get it, he had been struggling with something. What was he—but, never mind that, either. I am to believe he had been fighting to some objective, filling himself with the belief he was capable of ascending to peaks of greatness. Is that it?"

"Not exactly. It's this way." And Peters told of Carlton as he had known him. Then: "We talked long into the morning, Carlton sitting quietly before the fire or pacing the room—just grinning, talking easily, speaking as speaks the man of breeding, culture of a sort. He has stuff back of him, Carlton has. Then, after midnight, he asked me for some writing material. Sat at the desk and wrote a letter, a devilish long thing. Took more than an hour to it."

CARLTON had straightened up from the desk, that night of which Peters told, folded the sheets, put them in the envelope, sealed and addressed it.

"I'm putting it plain," he turned to Peters when he had finished. "I can't put it as plainly as I would tell her, but I've given her the outline of it."

For minutes he was gone, out mailing the letter. Back in the pleasant room again, smoking, the two talked together, Carlton firm, Peters arguing—just a little of argumentation in his tones, at first.

"I've written a girl," Carlton said, "more sensibly than I've ever written to her in the months I've known her. She's been a beacon. I've been fighting to get to her. Down in California, trying to run a ranch—chicken and stock. Went busted. Virtually alone, out in the mountains, or up a cañon or something. Been dreaming dreams—working like the devil and dreaming dreams. All bunk.

"Now, here's what I've found and what I've told her—written to her," he went on. "I'm one of the hundred million dubs in this land; I'm young; my whole life lies before me. Either I can boil around in the days of my young manhood, boiling the life out of myself, striving, fighting, battling against everything that comes up—or I can merely simmer through life, with most of my simmerings directed exclusively toward the end of happiness for myself and for those whom I care for. Not bothering with the happiness of any other damned person in this world, except myself and my family! Making myself and my family my world, solving the questions of this little world as best I can—so long as it makes for their happiness.

"That's the way I have it lined up. I can make the world small, in so far as it concerns me and mine, and having it small, I can, after a fashion, look after it.

"I've been through hell for the last five years, and it's been a hell of my own making. I've seen other youngsters going through this same turmoil, fighting out at the law, learning to hate the world, to believe the world was crooked with them. Nice youngsters, most of these fellows, boys with guts, dreaming boys, most of them, who believed they were seeking adventure—boys that would have been good, quiet, solid, ordinary citizens back in their home towns, in some ordinary job they could have filled.

"I've fought out at the men of the law, and they fought back at me. Why? Because I was an undesirable, a potential menace. I was the makings of a crook, a Red. I've had these men fight at me, curse at me, treat me as though I were not

human. I've also had them feed me, care for me, furnish me a place to sleep, out of the storms. One fellow, a Dago policeman, found me almost frozen, one night—took me to the station house, thawed me out, gave me four bits, next morning, with a lecture against tramping. . . . . Good fellows and bad fellows, these men of the law. Just the run of the world, all of them.

"I've been through this hell, but it's all over. I was all cooked up with the steam from the kettle of discontent that boiled around me, and I imagined I was capable, in some way, of putting down the boiling of this pot. Now I'm through. I'll not bother my head with anything in this world except the question of happiness—for myself and my family, if I'm lucky enough to get the family I want."

"A selfish course," Peters cut in.

"As the world views it," Carlton amended. "But I've found the world is wrong with lots of these things that pertain to kids—boys and girls. I've found the parents are nearly right about them. I've found a great desire, a wrong desire and yet backed by the best motives, but mistaken motives, to make geniuses out of first-class ditch-diggers, and the ditch-diggers would have been happy at their task. There's an element that's so filled with the thought to uplift the poor man—God help him—that they are pulling him out of his track and setting him on a wild course, a course that'll take him through hells of suffering, that'll tear open his heart, that'll make him curse his birth. Discontent, it'll bring him. Damn it, man, can't you see what I'm driving at?

"Happiness—that's the only goal to seek. And happiness lies in living your life as best you may, within your limitations. It lies in finding those limitations."

"Well-l," Peters said again.

"Oh, you'll get it, some day," Carlton hurried on. "You'll know your limits. You're trying to write a book. You want it to be the great book. But—you'll find, some day, that the best you can give is the best you have in you. That's all. You'll be happy in giving that. Some critics may say, 'Well, he's not as good as old Buncombe. He lacks this and that and the other.' But if you've found yourself, you'll just grin and think, 'Well, the best old Buncombe could do was the best he had in him. I'm making some few folks happy, anyway.'

"That's the way it'll come, Peters."

"Have you no ambition?" Peters cut in.

"Not as you view it. I don't believe I could ever accumulate a fortune, for it takes a peculiar sort of brain to make money. I don't believe I could paint a great picture, write a great book, compose a great song. Anything I'd do in that line would be the work of a dub.

"There was an old negress, when I was a kid, who used to purse up her lips and pull off an old maxim. *'Through a clear pane one sees truly,'* she'd say, *'but strange glass brings strange shapes.'* The pane has cleared for me; I've been looking through strange glasses in the last five years. I'm a workman, I tell you. One of the common people, and I know my limits. Here's what I believe I can do, better than anything else in the world: I can try—mind you, *try*—to keep my own little world, my wife and two or three children that'll come, happy and contented by giving to them of a great regard, by spending my hours to their comfort in my own small way, by putting them first in all things, by having time only for the questions that bother them and their welfare. Mind you, I can *try* this. It's a big undertaking, but by giving my time to it I may be successful in it."

"Hum-m," Peters mused. "The world wouldn't get on—"

"I don't know about that, either," Carlton interrupted. "As near as I can figure it out, the great advances in the world have come from those individuals who studied, fought, and burned the midnight candle in their garrets. It hasn't been due to any reforming by the mob. And these individuals gained happiness in their struggles. Happiness. That's all that counts."

RISING, he paced the floor thoughtfully, slowly, yet with a grin at his eyes and lips.

"Something I've read or heard," he said, as Peters watched him narrowly, "seems to describe it best. 'Captain of my soul.' Hasn't that a peach of a ring? Isn't it the most descriptive sentence you ever heard? I'm going to be captain of my soul—mine, not the souls of other people. Mine and the souls of my family, in so far as I can make them happy.

"That's what I've written the girl," Carlton said as he seated himself again. "That, and more! I've told her just the sort of a loafing, idle dub she'll find in me, if she accepts the offer. If she doesn't—well,

it'll be as tough as hell, that! I've written her that the house is in Florida, waiting for us, that not much work lies in keeping the house and the Crimson Ramblers and the garden straight and as they should be. I've told her that the nights are long and star-filled, that the days are ablaze with the sun, with the song of birds, with the whole world about you loafing, resting, taking life as it comes.

"I've written her that our one big boat, and several little ones are waiting for us, that our house is in order; that the gulf and lakes around our bay are filled with fish, put there by our God, for us to catch —waiting for us to come and get 'em. I've told her that our income will be five dollars, maybe one, maybe three, a day.

"I haven't told her of other little things that might sway her, might sway the average woman. I've not told her of the little club among the women of the camp, meeting each Tuesday, playing cards and chewing the fat—because she might not care for these women, after she gets there. I haven't told her of the dancing on the pier, where the boat from Pensacola and from the upper bay comes in, once each day—because she might not care for dancing. I haven't told her that the people in the camp are pretty good sort of folks, with a little love for each other, and a heap of understanding. I've just told her of the life I could bring to her—the only life I can bring, too. A lot of loafing, if we care to loaf, or working when we care to work.

"I don't know how she'll take it. I—I hope she sees it as I see it, but she may have a whole lot of ambitions for the man she ties to. But I'd a heap rather let her know just what sort of a dub I am, and not fill her years with disappointments. That would be hell.

"I've told her I'd meet her halfway—that we'd save time and money, that way. To wire me, and I'd meet her halfway, on a train. And that I'd do the same all through life, if she can see it as I do: always meet her halfway. Try to adjust things to our ideas of happiness, and not another adjustment in the whole damned world. Not to worry ourselves one bit with the great urges, the tremendous pulls, the unconquerable drives and all that sort of thing.

"Leave all that to the master minds," Carlton went on, after a little silence, "to the supermen, those fellows who load their shoulders with the burdens of the world and go romping down the highways of life with them."

DAD PETERS mused, long, when his son had finished the telling of this.

"A rather unusual young man," Dad Peters said at last. "Quite unusual, for a young man. Realizing his capabilities and all that sort of thing, you know. In the long run, I believe, this state of mind comes to most of us—but to one so young, amounts almost to genius. A genius, I'd call him. I—"

"I think so," his son said. "I hope I can get him, as is, in the book I'm trying."

"But the girl?" Dad Peters asked again. "What did—how did she take it?"

Peters went to the mantel, felt behind the red clock, pulled forth a yellow slip.

"Carlton forgot this, I think. Dropped it on the floor of his room. I'll read it." He read:

" 'I'm coming. Not halfway, but all the way. Meet me.' "

Dad Peters ticked off the words on his fingers.

"Sensible girl," he commented. "Careful girl. Just ten words to answer his big question. They left?"

"Carlton wrote home for money. Seems he had about three years' rent coming to him from that house he owns. The girl had nearly the same amount, nearly six hundred dollars, between them. They bought a secondhand flivver, filled it with plunder and started out. Happiest two people I ever saw!

"One of those glad-eyed girls, Dad. Eyes that light and glow, when she speaks or when she's interested. Eyes like Mother's used to be, when I was a kid and came down on Christmas morning to my tree. Beautiful girl, wonderful girl—big, almost as big as Carlton."

"Rather unusual couple," Dad Peters commented again; he twisted his cigar thoughtfully in his fingers, sighed deeply, gazed steadily into the grate fire, picked up his newspaper and sighed again. Fell to reading.

PETERS had stayed close to the two, that last day as they packed the little car with the tent and camping plunder. Helen was radiant, palpitant, eagerly facing the new life. Carlton had again become his quiet, thoughtful self. Once the girl lifted the glad eyes to Peters.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she laughed, half-

cried, turning to watch Carlton as he folded a tarpaulin. The new husband was out of earshot. "Isn't it wonderful? Imagine a life of just loafing, with water and flowers and sunshine, and a great, great man, always! Do you think it will—do you think it *can* come true? All this?"

Peters regarded her thoughtfully.

"I wonder if you want it to come true, as he has it arranged?" he asked slowly. "With none of the urges, with none of the—"

"Why?" she interrupted. "Why do you question it?"

"Well, I'm wondering; that's all. The things a girl wants. The pleasures, the pretty things—"

"LISTEN," she interrupted again. "Months ago, when I first met Tom," —she looked around again, glowing at the mention of his name,—"I sat for hours with him, walked with him, built great castles with him—the castles every girl builds, at times, with some man, I reckon. Success, hinting at riches, all that sort of thing, you know. Nothing new in anything I said; there wasn't even the inkling of a new thought in the thousands of words I babbled to him, or in those he babbled to me in return. Just the usual chatter—you know, it was indefinite, then. We didn't know we cared. At least, Tom didn't, I reckon. But we told each other all these things by inference, of how we were to follow the old paths of effort, winning along, striving along—only, of course, we were to quickly be successful, make lots of money, have a modern bungalow of eight rooms, and a car.

"And all that time, while we talked and dreamed, I wasn't thinking of the future in the way Tom was thinking of it. Not at all! The thoughts that came to me were of the hours when I would be with him, watching him, being near to him—I'm telling you this because I know how you care a little for him, and because I believe you understand what I'm trying to say; and I think that's the way every woman, right down in her heart, thinks of her man.

"I sometimes think the average woman stands aside and watches the struggle of her man," the girl said slowly, weighingly, "and wonders what it's all about—wonders what he finds in it to make it really worth while. I believe she takes pleasure in his successes, but if she's an iceman's wife, that success may be the lifting of a huge cake of ice; if he's a lawyer, it may be in his winning a case; if a fisherman, in his catching a great fish.

"But with the woman, nothing matters greatly except the happiness that—"

"But the mismated couples," Peters objected. "The love of finery, pleasure, jewels, wealth, selling her soul for a rich man's baubles, and all that?"

"Largely bunk, as Tom would say," the girl believed. "Largely bunk in the average woman. Why, man, look around you! Look at the change that comes to them, the average ones, when they've married. See how they give up the things they had before—the average one, you understand. Not the baby of fortune or the subnormal pleasure-mad thing. See how they become content, happy, striving along with their man, following him, living in a tent with him, if he desires to live that way. It's their man they love—they follow and care for and fight for, if they must, and they love, too, the things he cares for, the little happenings of life that bring him happiness.

"I think most women, the average ones, regard paradise as just having their man with them in every hour of the day—if he'll just keep on loving them and being nice to them. That's why, sometimes—oh, well, every woman wants to be a sweetheart, always. It's when this dies away that things become tiresome and quarrelly."

"Well," Peters said at last. "It may be—"

"It will! If Tom will just continue to think as he now thinks, everything will be all right."

"His ideas are so indefinite," Peters objected.

"Why, the idea! Definite, rather," she corrected. "Just as definite! Just living and loving—living and being happy. Nothing could be more definite. But will it come true? *Can* it come true?"

Peters smiled into the eyes she lifted to him.

"I shouldn't worry," he said gravely. "I think he'll make it come true."

Laughing, the tall girl gazed upon her man—ran to him, helping him to lift the heavy tarpaulin and to carry it to the flivver, already helping him to bear his burdens.

THE END.

The Marsdon Manor Tragedy

The active "little gray cells" of that astute detective Hercule Poirot here encounter a difficult problem —and work their way to the unexpected answer.

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

I HAD been called away from town for a few days, and on my return found Poirot in the act of strapping up his small valise.

"It is well, Hastings. I feared you would not have returned in time to accompany me. The Northern Union Insurance Company ask me to investigate the death of a Mr. Maltravers, who a few weeks ago insured his life with them for the large sum of fifty thousand pounds."

"Yes?" I said.

"There was, of course, the usual suicide-clause in the policy. In the event of his committing suicide within a year, the premiums would be forfeited. Mr. Maltravers was duly examined by the Company's doctor, and passed as being sound. However, the day before yesterday, the body of Mr. Maltravers was found in the grounds of his house in Essex, Marsdon Manor, and the cause of his death is described as some kind of internal hemorrhage. That in itself would be nothing remarkable, but sinister rumors as to Mr. Maltravers' financial position have been in the air of late, and the Northern Union have ascertained beyond any possible doubt that the deceased gentleman stood upon the verge of bankruptcy. Now, that alters matters considerably. Maltravers had a beautiful young wife, and it is suggested that he got together all the ready money he could for the purpose of paying the premiums on a life insurance for his wife's benefit, and then committed suicide.

"Such a thing is not uncommon. In any case, my friend Alfred Wright, who is a director of the Northern Union, has asked me to investigate the facts of the case, but, as I told him, I am not very hopeful of success. Still, we can but make some necessary inquiries. Five minutes to pack your bag, Hastings, and we will be on our way."

ABOUT an hour later, we alighted from a Great Eastern train at the little station of Marsdon Leigh.

"What is our plan of campaign?" I asked as we walked up the main street.

"First I will call upon the doctor. I have ascertained that there is only one doctor in Marsdon Leigh, Doctor Ralph Bernard. Ah, here we are at his house."

We proved to be fortunate in our call; it was Doctor Bernard's consulting hour, but for the moment there were no patients waiting for him. The Doctor was an elderly man, high-shouldered and stooping, with a pleasant manner.

Poirot introduced himself and explained the purpose of our visit, adding that insurance companies were bound to investigate fully in a case of this kind.

"Of course, of course," said Dr. Bernard vaguely. "I suppose as he was such a rich man, his life was insured for a big sum."

"You consider him a rich man, Doctor?"

The Doctor looked rather surprised.

"Was he not? He kept two cars, you know, and Marsdon Manor is a pretty big place to keep up, although I believe he bought it very cheap."

"I understand that he had had considerable losses of late," said Poirot, watching the physician narrowly. The latter however, merely shook his head sadly.

"Is that so? Indeed. It is fortunate for his wife, then, that there is this life insurance. A very beautiful and charming young creature, but terribly unstrung by this sad catastrophe. A mass of nerves, poor thing! I have tried to spare her all I can, but of course the shock was bound to be considerable."

"You had been attending Mr. Maltravers recently?"

"My dear sir, I never attended him."

"What?"

"I understand Mr. Maltravers was a Christian Scientist—or something of that kind."

"But you examined the body?"

"Certainly. I was fetched by one of the under-gardeners."

"And the cause of death was clear?"

"Absolutely. There was blood on the lips, but most of the bleeding must have been internal."

"Was he still lying where he had been found?"

"Yes, the body had not been touched. He was lying at the edge of a small plantation. He had evidently been out shooting rooks—a small rook rifle lay beside him. The hemorrhage must have occurred quite suddenly. Gastric ulcer, probably."

"No question of his having been shot, eh?"

"My dear sir!"

"I demand pardon," said Poirot humbly. "But if my memory is not at fault, in the case of a recent murder, the doctor first gave a verdict of heart-failure—altering it when the local constable pointed out that there was a bullet wound through the head!"

"You will not find any bullet wounds on the body of Mr. Maltravers," said Dr. Bernard dryly. "Now, gentlemen, if there is nothing further—"

We took the hint.

"Good morning, and many thanks to you, Doctor, for so kindly answering our questions. By the way, you saw no need for an autopsy?"

"Certainly not!" The Doctor became almost apoplectic. "The cause of death was clear, and in my profession we see no need to distress unduly the relatives of a dead patient."

Turning, the Doctor slammed the door sharply in our faces.

"And what do you think of Dr. Bernard, Hastings?" inquired Poirot, as we proceeded on our way to the Manor.

"Rather an old ass."

"Exactly. Your judgments of character are always profound, my friend—when there is no question of a beautiful woman!"

I looked at him coldly.

ON our arrival at the manor-house, Poirot handed the parlor-maid his card, and a letter from the insurance company for Mrs. Maltravers. She showed us into a small morning room, and retired to tell her mistress. Ten minutes later a slender figure in widow's weeds appeared.

"M. Poirot?" she faltered.

"Madame!" Poirot sprang gallantly to his feet and hastened toward her. "I cannot tell you how I regret to derange you in this way. But what will you? *Les affaires*—they know no mercy."

Mrs. Maltravers permitted him to lead her to a chair. Her eyes were red with weeping, but the temporary disfigurement could not conceal her extraordinary beauty. She was about twenty-seven, and very fair, with large blue eyes and a pretty pouting mouth.

"It is something about my husband's insurance, is it not? But must I be bothered *now*—so soon?"

"Courage, my dear madame. Courage! You see, your late husband insured his life for rather a large sum, and in such a case, the Company always has to satisfy itself as to a few details. Will you recount to me briefly the sad events of Wednesday?"

"I was changing for tea when my maid came up—one of the gardeners had just run to the house. He had found—"

HER voice trailed away. Poirot pressed her hand sympathetically.

"I comprehend. Enough! You had seen your husband earlier in the afternoon?"

"Not since lunch. I had walked down to the village for some stamps, and I believe he was pottering about the grounds."

"Shooting rooks, eh?"

"Yes, he usually took his little rook rifle with him, and I heard one or two shots in the distance."

"Where is this little rook rifle now?"

"In the hall, I think."

She led the way out of the room and found and handed the little weapon to Poirot, who examined it cursorily.

"Two shots fired, I see," he observed, as he handed it back. "And now, madame, if I might see—"

He paused delicately.

"The servants shall take you—" she murmured, averting her head.

The parlor-maid, summoned, led Poirot upstairs. I remained, conversing desultorily with the lovely and unfortunate woman until Poirot rejoined us.

"I thank you for all your courtesy, malame. I do not think you need be troubled any further with this matter. By the way, do you know anything of your husband's financial position?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing whatever. I am very stupid over business things."

"I see. Then you can give us no clue as to why he suddenly decided to insure his life? He had not done so previously, I understand."

"Well, we had only been married a little over a year. But as to why he insured his life, it was because he had absolutely made up his mind that he would not live long. He had a strong premonition of his own death. I gather that he had had one hemorrhage already, and that he knew that another one would prove fatal. I tried to dispel these gloomy fears of his, but without avail. Alas, he was only too right."

TEARS in her eyes, she bade us a dignified farewell. Poirot made a characteristic gesture as we walked down the drive together.

"*Eh bien*, that is that! Back to London, my friend; there appears to be no mouse in this mouse-hole. And yet—"

"Yet what?"

"A slight discrepancy; that is all! You noticed it? You did not? Still, life is full of discrepancies, and assuredly the man cannot have taken his own life—there is no poison that would fill his mouth with blood. No, no, I must resign myself to the fact that all here is clear and aboveboard— But who is this?"

A tall young man was striding up the drive toward us. He passed us without making any sign, but Poirot seemed interested and spoke to a gardener who worked near by.

"Tell me, I pray you, who is that gentleman? Do you know him?"

"I don't remember his name, sir, though I did hear it. He was staying down here last week for a night. Tuesday, it was."

"Quick, *mon ami*, let us follow him."

We hastened up the drive after the tall young man. A glimpse of a black-robed figure on the terrace at the side of the house, and our quarry swerved and we after him, so that we were witnesses of the meeting.

Mrs. Maltravers staggered slightly, and her hand crept to her side.

"You!" she gasped. "I thought you were on the sea—on your way to East Africa."

"I got some news from my lawyers that detained me," explained the young man. "My old uncle in Scotland died unexpectedly and left me some money. Under the circumstances I thought it better to cancel my passage. Then I saw this bad news in the paper, and I came down to see if there was anything I could do. You'll want some one to look after things for you a bit, perhaps?"

At that moment they became aware of our presence. Poirot stepped forward, and with many apologies explained that he had left his stick in the hall. Rather reluctantly, it seemed to me, Mrs. Maltravers made the necessary introduction.

"M. Poirot, Captain Black."

A FEW minutes' chat ensued, in the course of which Poirot elicited the fact that Captain Black was putting up at the

Anchor Inn. The missing stick not having been discovered (which was not surprising), Poirot apologized, and we withdrew.

We returned to the village, and Poirot made a bee line for the Anchor Inn.

"Here we establish ourselves until our friend the Captain returns," he explained. "You notice that I emphasized the point that we were returning to London by the first train? Possibly you thought I meant it. You observed Mrs. Maltravers' face when she caught sight of this young Black? She was clearly taken aback, and he—*eh bien,* he was very devoted, did you not think so? And he was here on Tuesday night—the day before Mr. Maltravers died. We must investigate the doings of Captain Black, Hastings."

In about half an hour we espied our quarry approaching the Inn. Poirot went out and accosted him and presently brought him up to the room we had engaged.

"I have been telling Captain Black of the mission which brings us here," he explained. "You can understand, M. le Capitaine, that I am anxious to arrive at Mr. Maltravers' state of mind immediately before his death, and that at the same time I do not wish to distress Mrs. Maltravers unduly by asking her painful questions. Now, you were here just before the occurrence, and can give us equally valuable information."

"I'll do anything I can to help you, I'm sure," replied the young soldier, "but I'm afraid I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. You see, although Maltravers was an old friend of my people, I didn't know him very well myself."

"You came down—when?"

"Tuesday afternoon. I went up to town early Wednesday morning, as my boat sailed from Tilbury about twelve o'clock. But some news I got made me alter my plans, as I dare say you heard me explain to Mrs. Maltravers."

"You were returning to East Africa?"

"Yes. I've been out there ever since the war—a great country."

"Exactly. Now, what was the talk about at dinner on Tuesday night?"

"Oh, I don't know. The usual odd topics. Maltravers asked after my people, and then we discussed the question of German reparations, and then Mrs. Maltravers asked a lot of questions about East Africa, and I told them one or two yarns; that's about all, I think."

POIROT was silent for a moment; then he said gently:

"With your permission, I should like to try a little experiment. You have told us all that your conscious self knows; I want now to question your subconscious self."

"Psycho-analysis, what?" said Black, with visible alarm.

"Oh, no," said Poirot reassuringly. "You see, it is like this: I give you a word; you answer with another, and so on. Any word, the first one you think of."

"All right," said Black uneasily.

"Note down the words, please, Hastings," said Poirot. Then he took from his pocket his big turnip-faced watch and laid it on the table beside him. "We will commence. Day."

There was a moment's pause, and then Black replied: *"Night."* As Poirot proceeded, his answers came quicker.

"Name," said Poirot.
"Place," replied Captain Black.
"Bernard!"
"Shaw."
"Tuesday."
"Dinner."
"Journey."
"Ship."
"Country."
"Uganda."
"Story."
"Lions."
"Rook rifle."
"Farm."
"Shot."
"Suicide."
"Elephant."
"Tusks."
"Money."
"Lawyers."

"Thank you, Captain Black. Perhaps you could spare me a few minutes in about half an hour's time."

"Certainly." The young soldier looked at him curiously and wiped his brow as he got up.

"AND now, Hastings," said Poirot, smiling at me as the door closed behind him, "you see it all, do you not?"*

"I don't know what you mean."

"Does that list of words tell you nothing?"

I was forced to shake my head.

*It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—*The Editors.*

"I will assist you. To begin with, Black answered well within the normal time-limit, with no pauses; so we can take it that he himself has no guilty knowledge to conceal. 'Day' to 'Night' and 'Place' to 'Name' are normal associations. I began work with 'Bernard,' which might have suggested the local doctor had he come across him at all. Evidently he had not. After our recent conversation, he gave 'Dinner' to my 'Tuesday,' but 'Journey' and 'Country' were answered by 'Ship' and 'Uganda,' showing clearly that it was his journey abroad that was important to him and not the one which brought him down here. 'Story' recalls to him one of the 'Lion' stories he told at dinner.

"I proceed to 'Rook rifle,' and he answers with the totally unexpected word 'Farm.' When I say 'Shot,' he answers at once: 'Suicide.' The association seems clear. A man he knows committed suicide with a rook rifle on a farm somewhere. Remember, too, that his mind is still on the stories he told at dinner, and I think you will agree that I shall not be far from the truth if I recall Captain Black and ask him to repeat the particular suicide story which he told at dinner on Tuesday."

BLACK, when we recalled him, was straightforward enough over the matter.

"Yes, I did tell them that story, now that I come to think of it. Chap shot himself on a farm out there. Did it with a rook rifle through the roof of the mouth; bullet lodged in the brain. Doctors were no end puzzled over it—there was nothing to show except a little blood on the lips. But what—"

"What has it got to do with Mr. Maltravers? You did not know, I see, that he was found with a rook rifle by his side."

"You mean my story suggested to him—oh, but that is awful!"

"Do not distress yourself—it would have been one way or another. Well, I must get on the telephone to London."

Poirot had a lengthy conversation over the wire, and came back thoughtful. He went off by himself in the afternoon, and it was not till seven o'clock that he announced that he could put it off no longer, but must break the news to the young widow. My sympathy had already gone out to her unreservedly. To be left penniless, and with the knowledge that her husband had killed himself to try to assure her future, was a hard burden for any woman to bear. I cherished a secret hope, however, that young Black might prove capable of consoling her after her first grief had passed.

Our interview with the lady was painful. She refused vehemently to believe the facts that Poirot advanced, and when she was at last convinced, broke down.

An examination of the body turned our suspicions into certainty. Poirot was very sorry for the poor lady, but after all, he was employed by the insurance company, and what could he do? He was preparing to leave and said gently to Mrs. Maltravers:

"Madame, you of all people should know that there are no dead!"

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"Have you never taken part in any spiritualistic séances? You are mediumistic, you know."

"I have been told so. But you do not believe in spiritualism, surely?"

"Madame, I have seen some strange things. You know that they say in the village that this house is haunted?"

She nodded, and at that moment the parlor-maid announced dinner.

"Wont you just stay and have something to eat?"

We accepted gratefully, and I felt that our presence could not but help distract her a little from her own griefs.

SUDDENLY there was a scream outside the door, and the sound of breaking crockery. We jumped up. The parlor-maid appeared, her hand to her heart.

"It was a man—standing in the passage."

Poirot rushed out, returning quickly.

"There is no one there."

"Isn't there, sir?" said the parlor-maid weakly. "Oh, it did give me a start!"

"But why?"

She dropped her voice to a whisper.

"I thought—I thought it was the master—it looked like 'im."

I saw Mrs. Maltravers give a terrified start, and my mind flew to the old superstition that a suicide cannot rest. She thought of it too, I am sure; for a minute later, she caught Poirot's arm with a scream.

"Didn't you hear that? Those three taps on the window? That's how *he* always used to tap when he passed round the house."

"The ivy," I cried. "It was the ivy against the pane."

But a sort of terror was gaining on us

all; and when the meal was over, Mrs. Maltravers besought Poirot not to go at once. We sat in the little morning room. The wind was getting up, and moaning round the house in an eerie fashion. Twice the door of the room came unlatched, and the door slowly opened, and each time she clung to me with a terrified gasp.

"Ah, but this door, it is bewitched!" cried Poirot angrily at last. He got up and shut it once more, then turned the key in the lock. "I shall lock it, so!"

"Don't do that," she gasped. "If it should come open now—"

Even as she spoke, the impossible happened. The locked door swung slowly open. I could not see into the passage from where I sat, but she and Poirot were facing it. She gave one long shriek.

"You saw him—there in the passage?"

He was staring down at her with a puzzled face, then shook his head.

"I *saw* him—my husband—you must have seen him too?"

"Madame—I saw nothing. You are not well—unstrung—"

"I am perfectly well, I— *Oh, God!*"

Suddenly, without any warning, the lights quivered and went out. Out of the darkness came three loud raps. I could hear Mrs. Maltravers moaning.

And then—I saw!

THE man I had seen on the bed upstairs stood there facing us, gleaming with a faint ghostly light. There was blood on his lips, and he held his right hand out pointing. Suddenly a brilliant light seemed to proceed from it. It passed over Poirot and me, and fell on Mrs. Maltravers. I saw her terrified face, and something else!

"My God, Poirot!" I cried. "Look at her hand, her right hand! It's all red!"

Her own eyes fell on it, and she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Blood!" she cried hysterically. "Yes, it's blood! I killed him! I did it! He was showing me, and then I put my hand over his and pressed. Save me from him—save me! He's come back!"

Her voice died away in a gurgle.

"Lights," said Poirot briskly.

The lights went on as if by magic.

"That's it!" he continued. "You heard, Hastings? And you, Everett? Oh, by the way, this is Mr. Everett—rather a fine member of the theatrical profession. I phoned to him this afternoon. His make-up is good, isn't it? Quite like the dead man, and with a pocket torch and the necessary phosphorescence, he made the proper impression. I shouldn't touch her right hand if I were you, Hastings. Red paint marks so. When the lights went out, I clasped her hand, you see. By the way, we mustn't miss our train. Inspector Japp is outside the window. A bad night—but he has been able to while away the time by tapping on the window now and then!"

"YOU see," continued Poirot, as we walked briskly through the wind and rain, "there was a little discrepancy. The Doctor seemed to think the deceased was a Christian Scientist, and who could have given him that impression but Mrs. Maltravers? But to us she represented him as being in a grave state of apprehension about his own health. Again, why was she so taken aback by the reappearance of young Black? And lastly, although I know that convention decrees that a woman must make a decent pretense of mourning for her husband, I do not care for such heavily rouged eyelids.

"Well, there it was. There were the two possibilities. Did Black's story suggest an ingenious method of committing suicide to Mr. Maltravers, or did his other listener, the wife, see an equally ingenious method of committing murder? It was a slender chance, and one had to revise all one's ideas of the case. It is now not the husband who seeks to take refuge in oblivion, while leaving his wife provided for, but a shrewd and scheming woman who, knowing her husband's financial debacle, and tired of the elderly mate she has only married for his money, induces him to insure his life for a large sum and then seeks for the means to accomplish her purpose. An accident gives her that—the young soldier's strange story.

"The next afternoon, when M. le Capitaine, as she thinks, is on the high seas, she and her husband are strolling round the grounds. 'What a curious story that was last night!' she observes. 'Could a man shoot himself in such a way? Do show me if it's possible?' The poor fool, he shows her. 'Like that?' she says and then laughs. 'Supposing I pull the trigger?' she says saucily.

"And then—she pulls it!"

"The Million Dollar Robbery," another exploit of Hercule Poirot, will be described in our next issue.

The Fate of Old Points

A vivid story of wild life and the forest, by the author of those well-liked stories about Rex the sheep-dog.

By AUSTIN HALL

THE old man clutched his ancient single-shot rifle and watched the furred side of the mountain. In an instant he had become tense, vibrant, rigid —every muscle taut and each nerve fiber standing at end. For an instant! Then he crouched and half ran, half crawled, through the chaparral, until he came to the sandy madrone-crowned point that jutted straight out toward the opposite mountain. Then he sat down and waited, his old denim-clad body hidden by the dense growth of manzanita, and his heavy weapon pointed out of an opening that gave him a complete sweep of the opposite side of the gulch.

It was afternoon. From the bosom of the forest, far flung, and running down to the ocean, came the myriad and harmonic rhythm of the summer's day. Blue-jays chattered and jeered in the tree-tops; gray squirrels gave their mating call; and the red-headed woodpeckers, high up, played their *rat-a-tat-tat* against the ancient tree-top, while from the bottom of the gulch, where the graceful alders nodded over the stream, came the murmuring gurgle of falling waters. An eagle soared on its wide pinions, poised for an instant to investigate the man and the mountain, and then, for reasons of its own, disappeared into the deep blue of the far horizon.

An hour passed, an hour of tense suspense, high-pitched, silent. The old man, crouched in his hiding-place, moved neither hand nor muscle. Always he watched, alert, ready, analyzing each sound intuitively, but never conscious of any sound but the one for which he waited. The silence was intensified by the thousand and one inconsequent trivialities of the forest world, a leaf falling, a limb rasping against another and sending up a squeak that persisted with devilish reiteration, or a wren hopping *pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat* upon the carpet of dry leaves. Tiny red ants, nipper-armed, came up a path out of nowhere and began an inquisitive and impudent investigation of the hunter's body. Still he did not move. Always he waited and watched the wide bosom of the mountain, ready for the fleck of color that would set his steady nerves into action and trip his trigger-finger into the snap that

never failed. Twice he lifted perceptibly to locate the sound of a breaking twig, only to draw back to his former tenseness. Another hour passed, and then another, until at last the sun had dropped to the far horizon. Then the old man stood up.

FROM under his slouch hat he looked out of clear blue eyes; his hair was sandy; and his heavy mustache, in the fashion of eighteen eighty, still held to its original color—a Missourian of the old "show me" type. He spoke to something on the opposite mountain.

"By Gee Mantlys! Old Points! You and me has watched out many a day together! And I s'pose we'll watch out many a day yet! But I'll get you. Old Points, by cracky!"

The last words died down to a drawl; for a moment the old man lingered, his trained eye running over the forested mountain.

"Old Points! Oh, I know you're there! Foxy Old Points!"

John Karver shouldered his deadly antique and took the back-trail that led over the ridge to his cabin, where, after a supper of pink beans and cottontail stew, he took the cat upon his lap, lighted his pipe, and sat down in the doorway to devise the means of ensnaring and circumventing the foxy Old Points.

And while he was doing it Old Points—he of the magnificent antlers—was leading his harem of pretty does down the mountain-side to browse upon the tender foliage of the Karver apple-trees. That was the way of Old Points. Always he was on the trail of the old man. Tonight there was no moon, and because there was none, he could gambol in the orchard. Had there been a moon, the old man would have been out in the orchard, perched behind a stump; and Old Points would have been up in the brush. But he would have been close by, for all that.

That was the irony of it! The old man knew! Wherever he went, he was sure to see tracks of the old deer; and the tracks were always fresh. That very afternoon the old man had followed him down the ridge to the chaparral point where the trail led over the mountain; and there he had waited, knowing very well that while he was doing so, the crafty old deer was standing in some secluded nook wagging his ears to the pesky deer-flies. The game was always played in silence, with the deer never moving, and the old man always waiting. And it was a great game—for the deer! There was merit to the old man's admiration. It takes a smart deer, nowadays, to grow to the age and wisdom of eight points. But Old Points was just such a deer.

EIGHT years before this, Points, then a fawn in spots, trotting beside a fond mother, had made his first raid upon the Karver orchard. It was not his fault that the said orchard was set up in the mountains, where it was easy to trip down out of the birch-brush and spend a night browsing upon the tender succulence of young apple-twigs. In those nights he had learned from his father that there is nothing like stolen fruit, learned how to steal down the mountain, cautiously, sniffing the breeze as it drifted up the cañon, waiting through the evening hours, until the lights in the house went out and there was safety in the orchard. He came to know that apple-twigs were forbidden and only to be eaten at night and on rare occasions. Being a buck, he had the inheritance of caution and early picked up the habit of hanging with the outer fringe of trees, where escape would be easy. And it was well that he did so, because when he was but four months old some one hidden among the trees had taken a shot at him that just about scared him out of his appetite. That shot did not mean much to John Karver, but it meant a whole lot to the little Points, because of its educational value.

That was the first part of his education. The second part had come during the late summer, when the old man went up to the mountains to get his quota of venison and had picked up the father of the little fawn. The fawn had watched the whole startling scene, had seen his antlered father leaping, horns back, for the cover of the underbrush, just as he was overtaken by the roar of the gun—had seen him knocked zigzag down the mountain, keeping his feet at first, leaping in spasmodic bounds, then rolling over and over. From the opposite ridge there had come a flash of blue; then a shout had drifted over the cañon, and the blue had materialized into a form that ran along the ridge—a man. Points had never forgotten.

He had fled along the ridge, bounding beside his mother, hugging close, until they came to a post hidden among some fir

trees, where the old doe, wise in experience, ran her muzzle over his coat and tried to tell him that such was the fate of all buck deer. Through an opening in the thicket, he had watched the man struggling with his burden up the side of the mountain. The man was tired and stopped often to rest, and as often as he stopped, the fawn saw his face—the face of John Karver. But the hue of the man's coat had interested him most of all; thereafter he had come to associate all things terrible with the color of blue.

THROUGHOUT the remainder of that season he had wandered over the ridges with the bereaved does, through the buck brush, under the firs and the sugar pines, and down by the streams, where he played with the other fawns upon the sands of the river-banks. In the fall when the warnings of winter came in the highlands, a new buck, scenting the rutting season, came into his life. The new buck began crowding into the affections of his mother and was the cause of his first heartache. Wherefore he took a subtle interest when another buck, challenging the first, showed up and did battle in the moonlight—a battle fought on the summit of a mountain and lasting all night long, a battle that was full of tangled antlers and clipping hoofs, with the does looking on and ready to accept the victor. In the morning the newcomer, whipped and bleeding, had been driven from the herd, where he remained hanging on and waiting a more favorable opportunity.

Then the head buck had led them down to the lowlands and, much to Points' delight, had made a raid upon the orchards. But the raid was fatal, because the old man, nursing a ten-gauge loaded with buckshot, resented the visit. So the other buck had come in, had taken the leadership, and had led them back to the safety of the manzanita chaparral.

By this time Points had grown an itching knob on the top of his little head—a knob that filled him with pride and a notion for fighting; also, as spring came on, he learned the use of scent and the secrets of the forest. By the time the knob had split into a velvet spike, he felt himself to be quite a deer, a beautiful one, tawny of coat, legs stockinged, and his tail underlined with white—the markings of *Odocoili Virginiani.* And he derived a wicked delight from rubbing his pretty horns against the bark of the Karver apple-trees, removing the velvet,—but at the same time skinning the tree,—a delight and a vanity to the little Points, but a provocation to the old man. This provocation, however, worried the young imp not at all, because, by the time the man was examining the bark, he was always far up the mountain-side, wagging his pretty white-lined ears while he slept through the intermittent attacks of the savage deer-flies.

That summer Points lost his mother—through a panther death, and in a way that taught him his greatest lesson. He never forgot the great cat's swoop out of the night, the whistle of the head buck, and the agony of his mother. He had fled with frightened leaps along the mountain cliffs, with the burden of the panther-smell sticking in his nostrils. That night marked the beginning of a new life. When morning came, he tripped down to the mountain stream, had his fill of fresh water and returned to the safety of a clump of wild lilacs, knowing that henceforth he must lead the life of a lone buck.

BUT it happened that this was the first day of the open season, and that, while the young buck slept, John Karver was climbing over the mountain in pursuit of a fine four-pointer. The deer slumbered obliviously, until a warning tingle in his nostrils awoke him. Simultaneously a rifle-shot shattered the stillness, causing him to leap, and then, as suddenly, to draw back to the shelter of the lilacs. On the opposite ridge the blue-coated one was racing through the brush in pursuit of a dying buck which was leaping as the other had done, and coming to the same end. Points saw the man draw his knife and stoop over, and an hour later he watched him shoulder his burden and disappear into the umber sunset.

Points was interested. All his life he had been curious over the doings of the blue-coated one—and now he had come again. For a while he peered out of the brush, munching a leaf, and considering the ways of the mysterious, his heart stirring with the curiosity that was to make him the greatest deer of the mountains. Something—play, curiosity, or perversity, bade him follow.

So he zigzagged down the hill, stealing through the lilacs and scenting the breeze to make sure that the way was clear, never showing himself, until he came to the

rippling stream that murmured and splashed among the bowlders of the cañon. Then he drank, luxuriously and daintily, watching his reflection amid the startled scurry of trout, and listening to the soft sounds of the mountain evening. Twice he reached up and plucked an alder leaf to ease the burden of his reflection—a reflection that had to do with orchards and apple-leaves; and twice he looked up at the heights above him. Then he splashed through the water, playfully, passed through the wet sands along the bank and trotted—his stub tail wagging—up the deer-path that led over the mountain. That night he dined on young apple-sprouts. The Nemesis had come to John Karver!

But John Karver did not know it then, albeit, when he got up next morning from a feast of venison stew and went out into his young orchard, he found the telltale tracks scattered hither and yon among the ruined trees—tracks that gave no clue as to the present whereabouts of the marauder, but which spoke aplenty. The old man swore softly and looked up, vacantly, at the ridge.

"Well by cracky! That does beat you! Here I goes off after deer, and while I'm gone, some young spurt of a buck comes and gets my young apple-trees." He chuckled. "That's what I calls pert!"

And had he known it, the very clump of second growth that was under his eyes as he spoke, was that moment harboring an impudent young spike, who had taken an inquisitive fancy to his blue shirt and the reason of mankind in general. He did not know it then; but next morning, when he found five more young trees stripped and the same telltale little tracks, he conceded that the war was on. That night, when the moon came up, he took his position behind the stump and waited the despoiler.

But he might have saved his pains, because, by the time he had picked his position, the young buck—his belly already full—had decamped to a neighboring thicket. In fact, Points, distrustful and cautious always, had come down while the night was still dark and had had his fill—keeping his eyes always on the place where dwelt John Karver, enjoying himself, until—he saw the door open and the man come out. Then he skipped out and took up his stand in a clump of brush to the leeward, where with the scent of the man coming toward him, he could keep him under surveillance. And so they held out all night long, the man keeping watch, and the spike not fifty yards away, dozing in the filtered light of the moon and enjoying himself immensely. When morning came, the buck opened one eye and watched the man climb out of the stump and go down to breakfast; whereupon he shifted his lookout, working around the ridge to a point directly above the house.

When Karver visited his orchard that day and found the tracks and the additional trees, he scratched his head:

"A right pert buck, that. And cute, too! But I'll get him yet."

BUT get him he did not. Points had not visited the orchards and watched the bucks go down for nothing. He was altogether too wise for that; besides, he had come from a great father. He had learned the lesson of scent and a thousand other things; and he was learning every day. But he never forgot that the man would kill him on sight if he caught him; so he was always ready. It was a great game of watch, in which the deer learned early that whenever the man entered the house there was nothing to fear, and that then, even a deer like himself could go to sleep.

But it was a different matter when the man came out and, gun in hand, made the rounds. Points learned to watch that gun. It was a terrible thing, loaded with death. Many times that summer he heard it go off, and each time some living thing rolled over in its death-agony. Points learned that the man's power lurked in his gun. Likewise he came to know that the man without his gun had a different scent. The gun smelled of death, but the man, unarmed, sent out a different odor. As soon as Points learned to distinguish the difference, he began showing himself to the unweaponed Karver. It was bad enough for Karver to lose a whole acre of young apple-trees, but when the impudent young vandal came out openly and taunted him, it was going altogether too far. Nevertheless the old man had a broad streak of humor, and so one evening when, unarmed, he met the buck face to face in the path, he caught the situation.

"By Gee Mantlys!" said the old fellow, lighting his pipe. "Looks like somebody kinda wants to get acquainted. You young rascal, you! If I had a gun—no, I wouldn't either—you're too durn pretty. An' me growing apple-trees fer you! And

here you've got a whole million acres of wild woods to run in. You young rascal!"

The young buck had pricked up his ears at the sound and disappeared into the glowing sunset. The million acres were not near as sweet as the cultivated ones of John Karver. The destruction of the apple-trees went on as before, but more than once that summer he had the chance of standing near and hearing the strange sounds of the blue-coated one. It was sheer play and deviltry to Points—so much so that, sometimes, out of very exuberance, he retreated over the ridge and spent the whole moonlit night in a wild gambol up and down the mountain.

AT last came the rutting season, and with it a reprieve for the Karver orchard. Points retreated to the forest, and, convinced that he was now deer enough to care for a family, came to conclusions with a buck two years older than himself. Once again there was a battle on the mountain-top—only this time Points received the licking—a licking that did him a world of good in spite of the humiliation. For a while he lingered on, chastened, but learning always in the ways of the deer. Then one day, as spring came on and the sprouts began to bud, he remembered John Karver.

And on that day he found the old man pruning among his trees. Sheer deviltry led Points down to the orchard, where, with ears bobbing and with the assurance of a bishop, he showed himself to Karver. He was quite a deer now, and he got quite a welcome. The old fellow stopped his work and shook his shears.

"You young devil! So you've come again! And jest as pretty and cute as ever. And I s'pose that all summer I'll have you nesting up there in the brush, laughing. Foxy little cuss! By cracky, Points, I've got five acres of new orchard planted, and if you eat more than two of them, I'll get your liver." He stopped suddenly and scratched his head: "I wonder if the little cuss is married? First thing I know, he'll be bringing in a harem; and if they gets educated like him, I'll have to go out of business."

That very night Points tested the quality of the new orchard and decided in his innocent way that there was nothing in the wild woods that quite measured up to the pungency of apple-sprouts; he remained in the orchard, until the house lights went out and he caught the scent of the old man coming toward him among the trees. Then, with his mouth full of sprouts, he skipped away to the old thicket.

Throughout the summer he hung on, following the man, tagging his steps, but never showing himself when there was a scent of powder. Slowly the orchard diminished, until it began to look as though Points was going to get more than the alloted two acres.

Points' fame began to travel afar. One day the old man journeyed to town and told his troubles—of this deer who knew the ways of men and was too foxy to be worthy of anything but a jerk-meat fate—and with the tale he extended an invitation to his fellow woodsmen.

But it came to no purpose, because Points, superwise and crafty, decamped to the high mountains. Each year the buck returned and made a stamping-ground of the Karver orchard; and each year he grew craftier and more beautiful. Men began to talk of the phantom buck up on the Karver ridge; and more than one hunt was organized and carried to an unsuccessful conclusion. In his fifth year Points brought in a harem of soft-eyed does—won on top of the mountain—and deliberately showed them to John Karver. Thereafter the duel grew apace, and had the old man not been a true sportsman, Points might have learned his lesson. However, old John, whatever his loss, would not kill a doe.

But Points' beauty and his antlers were destined to lead him to his end. Men listened to the tale of the old fellow's pranks and repeated it with embellishment. The tale was carried to the cities, where more than one sportsman hearkened to the story and hankered for the trophy. Points was only saved by his habitat and its inaccessibility. But Fate was working against him.

One day as he led his harem over a high mountain, he came across an army of men cutting through the hills and making a trail the like of which he had never seen; and he had watched them from a thicket high up on the heights, little knowing that this was the highway that was to bring the sportsmen who coveted his antlers. Neither did he know that far away in a big city another body of men was framing a new law that would make his death easy for the men who hunted. He had lived a long life and a wise one, and he knew how

men hunted. But he knew nothing about hounds. He did not know that the laws of the State had been closed against dogs, and that he had been living, so far, in an era of still-hunting. Had things been different, he might have fooled the dogs as he did John Karver.

POINTS was nine years old now, the greatest deer of the mountains and possessed of a beauty that was just as great as his wisdom. But he was just as playful as ever, for all his years, and he had this very day, for the thousandth time, played the old trick of tag with John Karver. And for the thousandth time he had this night come down to gambol in the orchard and fill his mischievous old hide with apple-sprouts. Life had been good to him, and he had no thought but that the future would be just as kind. When the moon had come up and it was time to go, he remembered the rippling waters where the river splashed down the cañon back of the mountain. It was his favorite trip after every raid—to play along the ridges, leading his pretty does, nibbling the hazels and the buckthorns, and to bring up, just at daylight, down among the alders where the scooting trout were pecking the pools for their morning meal.

But Fate had at last taken notice of Old Points. There were visitors in the mountains—visitors of a kind to give him a hunt such as he had never had during his long and playful lifetime. They had come the evening before, perched in the corners of automobiles, each one straining at his leash and whining for the glorious run that would come with the morrow—imported, all of them, bred out of a thousand generations of hunters, and trained under the watchful eye of an expert. At the wheel of the auto was one of the men who had been instrumental for the new law. This man had heard of Points and had come to get him. Likewise he had heard of John Karver—and he had laughed! With his hounds—they had come a thousand miles and had cost him a thousand dollars—this man would show the woodsman how a real man hunted! Already he had picked out a conspicuous place in his den, where he proposed to mount the head of the famous buck. And now he had come.

And so Points tripped down the mountain, and around the bluff that led to the river, little knowing that at that very moment two men were pointing out his tracks to a pair of spotted hounds. The hounds had thrust their noses along the ground, and with a flurry of wagging tails, had disappeared into the underbrush. Then the men had gathered their guns and made their way to the top of the ridge. One of them held the leash of two more hounds.

"We'll relay him," said this one. "That's the buck we're after. If the first don't bring him around, we'll turn these loose and give him all he wants."

Points did not know. This morning was like a thousand others that had come and gone; the air was sweet and cool, the river murmuring its song, and the birds, freshly awakened, warbling among the alders. Proudly he splashed into the stream,—his pretty does trotting behind him,—holding aloft his antlered head and sniffing the air that drifted down the cañon. Then he thrust his dainty old nose to the water and sipped judiciously as became one of his years and wisdom. The does spread out contentedly; and out on a sand bar two buck fawns began practicing for the inevitable battle on the mountain. Surely the world was good!

Then came the warning.

Up on the mountain's crest the two hounds, whimpering with eagerness, had crossed over and were coming down the cañon. Of a sudden Points held up his head and sniffed of the air and its message. He was a specialist on scents. This one was like that of the wolf, only different—more like that of a dog. He had been run by dogs many times, but as they had been mere pets, he had found them easy to elude. But this scent was different. It was fearful, ominous, and boded trouble. Up to his hocks in the water, he waited, antlers lifted, reading that message. Then, as if to confirm the worst, strange sounds drifted over the forest.

"A—oooooou! A—oooooooou!"

POINTS had never heard sounds just like that. The does were frightened; and the fawns, in a sudden scurry of fright, took to the underbrush. But Points waited, his curiosity for once getting the better of his wisdom. Neither wolf nor dog—sounds that, during his lifetime, had been alien to the forest! But when the sounds were repeated, Points got a relapse of caution and darted into the brush to take shelter up on the mountain-side, where he could watch the river-bed and wag his ears as the creatures rushed by him.

He did not have to wait long. Up on the ridge the whimpering ones had come to the point where the old trail had been crossed by the new one, and were running, full cry, for the river, heading for the bluff, noses down, howling delight—coming straight on! Still Points did not worry, because, as he now saw, they were, after all, only dogs. He had had to do with such creatures before. Perhaps they would go on down the river.

But that is just what they did not do. Instead, Points watched them hesitate at the current, scurrying along the bank where he had entered the water, then swimming across, picking up the trail and coming at full bay, straight up the mountain. So he decided on another hiding-place. But the hounds saw him and came on, triumphant, clamoring close at his heels. And at that moment the men on the ridge nodded wisely and spoke:

"They've jumped him, all right. Now if we can only get a shot. Let's spread out. This is going to be easy."

But it was not as easy as they thought, because Points learned in the next few minutes that these dogs were not to be fooled with. They stuck to his trail, and in spite of the fact that he easily outdistanced them, jumped him almost as soon as he took to cover. Three times Points was jumped, and on the third time he wisely took to the river, where instinct taught him to stay with the current, holding it for a mile, and then leaping out on a log that had fallen from the bluff to the middle of the stream. For an hour thereafter, he watched the hounds scurrying along the banks and swimming across the river in a futile search for the lost trail. And during that hour of silence Points wagged his ears, and for the last time laughed at his enemies. So far he had enjoyed it.

DOWN by the river the dogs were scouring the sides of the stream, always working toward the log where Points had made the bank. Had they been ordinary dogs, or even ordinary hounds, they would have passed it; but as they were not, one of them mounted the bluff and picked up the trail. Then again Points knew that he would have to move. The trick had worked successfully once; so he would try it again. It was easy to keep ahead of the dogs. This time he made a wide detour over the ridge, coming to the river fully a mile above the log. He intended to work upstream, leap out, and then loaf in one of his favorite thickets, while they were picking up the scent. But just as he came into the clearing above the river-bed one of the men hidden on the opposite side of the gulch let loose with a high-power rifle, clipping the twigs above him and tumbling him, with a shot across the withers, down into the river. Poor Old Points thought his time had come. He leaped headlong at the shot, turned over and landed on his back in a deep pool. His leap and the man's buck-fever saved him. The next moment was charged with a thousand surgings of wild terror, during which he instinctively righted himself and swam to the protecting alders that girded the bank. Then he fled limply up the mountain. Henceforth he would have a hard time keeping ahead of the hounds!

During the next few hours Points had a taste of the new hunting. He was wounded sorely and barely able to limp along, but nevertheless he kept going with the dogs a few jumps to the rear, working over the ridges, and trying every trick that he could think of to outwit the vigilance of his pursuers. Twice he hit for the river, but each time he was greeted by a storm of wild shots. The woods seemed full of men and dogs and creatures who sought his life. Behind him came the merciless hounds, filling the woods with their baying and warning him that he was only a moment ahead of a sudden death. Wounded and limping, he tore up the mountain and along the ridge. The dogs were behind him, howling death, and proclaiming their whereabouts to their masters. Up on the ridge he ran full into the man who had come after his antlers, and strange to say, those same antlers were the things that saved him. The man had never seen such a deer in his life, and in a frenzy of excitement, let loose a volley of wild buck-fever shots that zipped harmlessly into the brush. Old Points was so close that he almost knocked the man over. Everywhere there were men and dogs! In sheer terror Points took again to the river.

But he was almost gone now. Wounded and bleeding, he was barely able to keep ahead; it was midday in the peak of summer, and his tongue was lolling out in the last throes of exhaustion. At the river the dogs caught him, and up to his knees in the water, he turned to fight. Cornered and desperate, he was a terrible antagonist.

The dogs rushed him. Backed into the stream, battling for his life, Points caught the rush on his spreading antlers. He bore one of the hounds under the water and gored him against the rocks. Then he turned just in time to avoid the other leaping for his throat. Very wisely the other dog retreated to the bank and bayed him. But just then Points caught the flash of color up on the ridge that he knew for a man; so once again he took to the mountain. He was half way up the ridge when he heard other dogs on his trail, the fresh ones coming at full cry to bear him down. He was all in now. This was the manzanita ridge where he had played with John Karver. Down that ridge, bleeding, ready to drop, went Old Points.

JOHN KARVER was getting out his winter's wood. At the very moment when the dogs had jumped Old Points, the old man had gone out with ax and crosscut and pitched into a live oak that was to keep him warm when the snow came. And he had reflected, as he gazed up into the branches, that with the wood, he should have a plentiful supply of jerk-meat. And of course, the jerk-meat made him think of Old Points; and as he thought, he caught the coincident baying of hounds on the other side of the mountain. He scratched his head in thought.

"By cracky!" he exclaimed. "If they aint hunting with hounds! That's so—the law's open on dogs now. I'd clean fergot. And I'll bet they're after Old Points!" He laughed. "Old Points will learn something if they get after him with real hounds! By cracky! Wouldn't he have to jump! Durn his old hide, anyway! I'll get him yet!"

Then came the sounds of shooting—a whole volley, followed by more baying. The baying told him that the shots had been futile. But it told him, also, that the dogs had brought up something to shoot at. The old man could not resist reaching out and sighting along the barrel of his single-shot antique. He himself never shot but once. The whole volley worried him—and a volley that had been wasted, at that! He would have to cross over the ridge and show them!

But the baying still continued, punctuated by rifle-shots, proving, either that their quarry had eluded them, or that they were killing half the deer in the mountains. John Karver, pulling his crosscut, snorted with disgust. Along toward noon he had the tree down and half limbed, and began making preparations for his dinner. By this time the shots were coming closer, so close that, scenting the kill, he reached for his gun and made ready to climb the hill and give somebody a lesson in shooting. And if it should be Old Points! Well, they might claim the deer, but he could certainly prove his right! The old fellow chuckled at the thought of his single-shot bringing down the quarry that they had blazed away at all morning. He had not a single doubt as to what was going on. It was Old Points beyond a peradventure; and Points was coming his way! He could hear the hounds baying along the ridge. There was no question now; they were right upon him! In one more minute—Carefully he nursed his old antique! Closer, closer! *Kaplump! Kaplump! Kaplump!* Brush crashing, and the blood-curdling gurgle of the hounds closing in! John raised his gun. But just then the thicket opened, and a picture of tawny beauty and spreading antlers broke into the open. Points was just one jump ahead of his pursuers! Karver sighted his gun—but he did not shoot!

John Karver was a man. At that moment he spotted a tragedy that comes to many men of the woods. In the lapse of that second he knew that Points, rascal that he was, had come to him for protection. He knew the ways of deer. Many times, before the law had been closed on dogs, had he had does and even bucks come to him under the stress of pursuit; but he had never thought to see Old Points. The buck crashed into the fallen tree-top, whirled, and lowered his broad antlers against the eager hounds. The saliva from his dripping tongue whipped a streak of foam across the old man's face. Old Points was gone, tongue out, knees knocking, eyes bulging! But in those eyes was a look that cut the old man into action and set him with a roar after the dogs. When he had driven them off, he turned to the deer, walked to him, and to his great surprise, put his hands on the cherished antlers. Never had he dreamed of this! The old buck quivered and looked out of pleading eyes; then he looked at the dogs. John Karver understood.

"By cracky, Points! They aint goin' to hurt ye. They aint nothin' in these woods thet's goin' to touch ye. So you come to old John! You old rascal. By cracky!"

But just then came a voice from the hill above him:

"Get away from that deer, you old hayseed, or I'll put a hole right through you!"

John Karver looked up and saw a man in trim khaki with a red bandana about his neck, coming out of the brush. The man, all excitement, leveled his gun:

"Come now! I told you once; and I'm not going to speak again. That's my deer!"

But he did not know John Karver. The old man squared his body in front of Points. The fellow on the hillside was in a frenzy of excitement. Karver was very close to a sudden death. But he never quavered.

"By cracky!" he drawled. "Don't let a little thing like me stop you! I aint no bloomin' armor! If you want Old Points that bad, go ahead and shoot!" And therewith he began to fill his pipe.

With a splutter of curses, the man on the hill lowered his gun and stomped toward him.

"Hey!" he shouted.

John Karver lit a match. "Sit down sonny," he said, "and let's have a little talk. You're kinda excited."

The man, as it happened, was the one who had come after the antlers of Old Points. He was a great man among his own kind, and one unaccustomed to being crossed; wherefore the coolness of the old man was all the more disconcerting. He stopped when he saw the old fellow pick up his rifle and place it over his knee. Behind John Karver was the panting Points. Ranged about, the blood-thirsting hounds were whining their eagerness. The man took it all in.

"Well!" he demanded.

"Just this," spoke the old man. "You're one of these city fellers, I take it—one of these here brokers, or mebbe a banker, or a durn smart lawyer, or mebbe a poet, an' you've come fer this deer; and old John is sitting here and telling you thet you aint goin' to get him. Now! Now! Don't get excited! Jest you sit there, an' I'll tell you a story!"

And John Karver did. When he was through, the newcomer stood up:

"That's all right, old fellow," he said. "And it's very pretty sentiment. But it is not a going to get you anything. I did not come after sentiment. I came after that deer."

"All right!" said John. "If them's your opinions, you're welcome. It's up to you now, to shoot the deer! Only, while you're shooting him, I'll be plugging the poorest sportsman thet ever come into these mountains." He shifted his gun.

"Come, come!" spoke the other. "Don't get excited, old fellow. Just listen to reason. Suppose you do save him today? Tomorrow is another day, and some one is sure to get him when he goes out on the mountain. I came after him. And I'm entitled to him. He is sure to be run down sooner or later."

"Well," said old John, "I'll take a chance on that. Besides, Points an' me is goin' into pardnership. We been thinking about it fer a long while! I'll raise apple-trees, an' Points will eat them. But thet's my own business! After all, I aint got nobody to look after, but him. I got a hundred and sixty acres in this place, an' it begins at the top of this ridge! I'm jest tellin' you, because you're on my land!"

"Oh! No offense!" exclaimed the other.

"None at all!" said old John.

"Feed 'Em Buckskin"

CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG, explorer, soldier and artist, and a recognized authority on the manners and customs of the old West, has turned his accomplished hand to fiction and produced some of the most fascinating stories of the West you have ever read. The first of these, "Feed 'Em Buckskin," along with many specially worth-while contributions by Henry C. Rowland, Freeman Tilden, Clarence Herbert New, Lemuel L. De Bra, Culpeper Zandtt, Agatha Christie and other noted writers, will appear in the forthcoming April issue of *The Blue Book Magazine.*

Deep-Water Men

"A Piratical Expedition" includes many exciting things—a renewed search for a secret South Seas platinum mine, the abduction of a young woman, and an attack by cannibals. Don't miss this one.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

CAPTAIN WAITE, of the personal staff, happened at the moment to be looking down from a window of the Governor's office upon the spacious harbor—with its fringe of Chinese houseboats alongshore from the naval station to Kennedy Town, and its motley assemblage of deep-water craft from every maritime nation on the globe. Coming slowly around the west end of the island—from Macao, or possibly Manila, as he casually noticed—there was a low-lying craft of disreputable appearance which had, none the less, an air of having seen better days. Sweeping across the western entrance from the Canton River, his glance rested appreciatively upon a P. & O. boat in her clean fresh paint, when something instinctive made him look back again at the smaller, dingier steamer—at the vaguely familiar arrangement of her deckhouses and big funnel.

"Deuce take it! One *should* know that boat, I fancy! Has the appearance of an old yacht which has seen better days—"

Picking up a pair of prism-binoculars from a near-by table, he focused them upon the slowly moving relic and presently thought he recognized certain details of her lines and rig—the absence of name on her bow or wheelhouse indicating her type as having been formerly a yacht, whatever she might be now. Taking down Lloyd's "Register of Yachts" from a shelf against the wall, he thumbed over the pages until he found a name which had come into his mind—the description tallied very closely, as far as he could see, with the old craft limping in.

"I say, Freddy!"—to a brother subaltern who was writing at a desk near that of His Excellency's. "You're the shippin'-man of the staff—take a squint at that old tub comin' in the West Passage, an' see what you make of her!"

Merrifield took a long, steady look through the binoculars, grunted once or twice—and went back to his letters.

"That, my boy, was formerly the twin-screw, deep-sea yacht *Aralene,* belonging to Banning, the American plunger who went smash two years ago and was sold

out. She was built to do twenty-eight knots with forced draught, but chewed up coal so fast that she was a bally expensive toy. Sold for a fifth of her cost to some chap who had her converted to an oil-burner—I fancy she's been smuggling rum into the States, but that would be a bit diffic'lt to prove. Haven't the slightest idea who owns her at this moment—but there was a rumor along Queens Road, yesterday, that she was chartered a month ago by Foo Kee, the rich curio-dealer. There's talk of his havin' her refitted, over yon at Kowloon, for some bally scientific expedition he's backing."

"*Scientific* expedition! *Foo Kee?* Oh, I say, Freddy—you're havin' me on! What? What the deuce has our plump friend to do with science! Eh? Pearlin', now—eh? Something more in his line—what?"

"If you know no more than that concernin' Foo Kee, old chap, it might be instructive to look him up. He graduated at Cornell—engineerin' course—for one thing. From our own Governm'nt he's taken honors for his ethnographic papers—Civil Service side. An expert in jewels, I grant you; but his record is absolutely clean, from all the reports on file in this office. Dare say he'd lift his bit of shell with the rest of us if he was in some hidden cove with nobody lookin'—or put an enemy out of the way with as little bobbery as he'd squash a mosquito, upon occasion. Yet he's never been caught breakin' the laws—an' we know, here in Governm'nt House, that his activities are pretty widely extended. *How* widely, is pure speculation. The man is quite possibly worth half a million taels—or two millions."

"Has he complied with all the Governm'nt regulations upon fitting out an expedition of that sort?"

"All which cover such a proposition—aye! But, practically, they'll be under yachtin' papers. About all that's required by *our* governm'nt is a bill of health an' receipts for their last port charges. The Dutch are a dev'lish sight more particular, though—because they want no strangers on their coasts. Yet Foo appears to have influence enough at Batavia to get a blanket permit which lets his expedition go practically anywhere. Only other person I know ever to get anything like it out of the Dutch is Captain Jim Medford, with his little motorship *Bandarwallah!*"

DOWN on Queens Road, about the same time, people strolling along the arcades glanced rather curiously at a man going up west in a rikisha. A deeply sunburned face is too common a sight in Hongkong to draw attention—but one who has walked a steamer's bridge as a matter of daily habit in all weathers and all climates acquires a rich bronze which goes down through the under-skin, and deeply etched crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes. By such tokens the man in the rikisha was a sailor—presumably an officer. By his glad regalia he was a sailor with shore-leave, plenty of money, some taste for personal effect and with some more or less festive occasion in mind. His white linen suit was spotless and crisp, Belfast linen of the heavier sort; his white buckskin shoes were freshly clayed and of stylish shape. A Monte Cristo Panama of the sort which rarely sells for less than a hundred sucres in Guayaquil topped the *ensemble.* He was smoking an expensive cigar, and his manner was expansive—even if a trifle nervous, as his rikisha-coolie stopped before the curio-shop of Foo Kee. Dismissing him with a liberal tip, the sailor went in a leisurely manner through the shop, nodding to the blandly smiling clerks—through a narrow sandalwood passage and into a secluded rear room with a massive table in the center. Here, when he had clapped his hands, another coolie fetched him a bottle of iced champagne—and presently the proprietor silently appeared, seating himself at the other side of the table.

Apparently, Foo Kee didn't even notice the marked change in the mate's appearance since their last meeting. He deliberately charged and lighted a silver water-pipe, poured himself a cup of tea from the steaming pot which a coolie had immediately placed before him and produced three or four papers which he unfolded and laid upon the table. Yet, with all this busying himself in trivial details, he missed no item of Tompkins' outfit—estimated to within a Mexican dollar the amount he had blown in on dolling himself up. Ordinarily such expenditure would have been a matter of no interest to the astute Chinese merchant—what the mate chose to spend upon clothes was his own affair. In fact, the Celestial even beat him at the game, as a point of what he considered good business policy. (Taste and richness in dress gave him "face.") But by the

terms of a certain three-cornered agreement previously entered upon in this same room, he was hiring Tompkins to command a boat about to be used in a supposed scientific expedition—had advanced him a sum for initial personal expenses, and had an idea that he could name the lady whom the glad raiment was intended to impress.

Nothing in all this, even, would have seemed worth a second thought in the Chinaman's mind had the lady been merely some Hongkong acquaintance who had produced a strong impression upon the seafaring man—but Foo Kee scented a combination which might or might not have some bearing upon the success of his expedition. This, however, the deep-water bucko never guessed. He was prepared for some remark or joke upon his evident extravagance—ready, defensively, to intimate that anything of that sort was entirely his own business—but was forced to the conclusion that his tentative employer hadn't considered it worth noticing. Chinks were like that—they minded their own affairs.

IN a moment or two, Foo Kee started in on a résumé of the understanding between them: "There seems hardly a chance of anything cropping up which we haven't already covered, Tompkins—but I'll run over the main features, as far as we've gone, to see if there is any other slant to it, as they say in the States. All through Pacific and Asiatic waters, it is known that, somewhere in the Eastern Archipelago, the richest mine of platinum-matrix ever discovered is being worked by some mysterious owner—that cargoes of this ore have been taken to reducing-plants in Sydney and elsewhere by Captain Joe Allen in his cargo-boat *Wyanomah,* the charterer of which is a Miss Claire Avery, who usually accompanies him but was recently abducted in San Francisco by men who thought they could force the secret of the mine from her, but failed to do so—it being generally supposed that she is merely a supercargo for the real charterer and owner.

"You came to me with a statement that you had worked out several detours which Allen could have made, considering the unknown margin of speed in his boat—and asked me to back you with an expedition to find this mine, on the basis that the present operator evidently has no legal mining-rights to the land which can be protected—that the mine belongs to anyone who can take and hold it. I somewhat concurred with you in that supposition, but not entirely—enough so, however, to back an expedition with a little more definite information to go upon. We put it up to Miss Chandos—who was finally won over to our belief that we have as much right to the mine as anybody, if we can find it; and she succeeded in getting for us, through her acquaintance with Allen for that purpose, a private chart which had been concealed in his cabin and had been marked, during three different visits, in such a way as seems to indicate the location of the mine.

"From the place where she found it, after drugging Allen, and the evident use to which that chart had been put, she thinks there is no question as to its being the one I sent her after; yet her experience with Allen has been of the sort which makes her now regret that she deceived him to get it. Even the very respectable sum which will come to her if we find the mine doesn't lessen that regret—because it's the first crooked thing she probably ever did in her life. If she had it to do over again, I think she'd balk. Well—we have the chart. I'm not absolutely sure we can depend upon it—but I've no grounds for doubt. I really decided to have a try for that mine when you first came to me over a month ago—chartered a good-sized deep-sea yacht with considerably more speed than she appears to have. She's just coming into the harbor now—will be refitted over at Kowloon, at once. But I'm not going to spruce her up, noticeably—her present disreputable looks will give color to the 'scientific expedition' idea, and the green-gray paint makes her practically invisible a few miles away. We'll have to put aboard diving-suits, instruments and specimen-cases for her saloon-laboratory to give the right impression—but we'll rig up berths for sixty men in the forehold—"

"Going to let me pick the men, aren't you?"

"No. You couldn't ship sixty men, alongshore, without causing talk which would spread. Altogether too many for a scientific expedition. Aside from that, you couldn't control them in any sort of rough work. If you actually found the mine, they'd cut your throat, take the boat and the mine for themselves after they'd killed a few and found who was strong enough to master them, as leader—on a share-and-share basis. The sixty will be Chinese who

think I am able to have their ancestors tortured by devils if they betray me in any way—and they'll be men who will fight with better teamwork than your beachcombers. I will also have one of my compradors on board—Lo Sing."

"Hell! I fancied I was goin' to command the boat!"

"You are—in everything pertaining to the navigation and the general control of the expedition. But you're going direct to the east coast of Borneo. You have Dutch papers covering scientific work, only. Suppose one of the deputy Residents drops down on you when you're taking ore out of that mine—or, possibly, doing a little pearling in some unfrequented cove if you happen to send down a diver who comes across a promising lot of shell? Lo Sing is competent to handle a situation like that—has had some practice in various complications. Without him, you'd simply be sent to Batavia and the yacht confiscated. Lo will mind his own business and not interfere with you as long as he isn't needed—might call him a supercargo-at-large."

"Hmph! You don't trust me a hell of a lot, do you, Foo!"

"As much as I would trust most men in such a position. I'm putting up considerable money—have advanced you and Miss Chandos quite a bit in cash—on a proposition which is simply a gamble. I've no idea that you'd deliberately welsh on me if you found the mine, but circumstances might be too strong for you. It's but ordinary business caution that I take measures not only to meet complications which may arise, but also to know exactly what happens before your return. Lo Sing has an abbreviated code in which he can safely communicate with me by cable or radio in case you are in doubt at any time as to your best and safest course. I will give you another one for yourself—just on the chance that something may happen to either of you."

"When do you fancy the yacht an' crew'll be ready to leave?"

"A week from today. If the work were being done for English or Americans, it would take possibly a month—but in the yard where I'm having her overhauled, they'll do it for me in a quarter the time. I've already assembled everything which is going into her, and—I happen to own some of the company's shares. Her clearance and other papers are already filled out, ready for signing on the day she leaves."

AFTER leaving Foo Kee, Tompkins hailed a rikisha-coolie and was trotted along to the lower station of the Peak tram; in half an hour, he was swinging along one of the steeper side-roads at the top, and presently came to the attractive bungalow overlooking the harbor, which Miss Chandos had fitted up for herself and a genteel housekeeper nearly a year before. Afternoon tea was being served as he stepped into the big low-ceiled living-room —much to his disgust, as he had counted upon finding the lady alone. The four ladies and two men, as it happened, were Government people whom Nina Chandos was more than pleased to entertain. She had left her home in London rather suddenly to avoid being dragged into a scandal which, through a spontaneous act of kind-heartedness, might have unjustly smirched her good name. By sheer luck and her being actually upon deep water, eastward-bound, at the moment a certain woman claimed she was in her London apartment, she had escaped being implicated in the affair altogether. But as a return home during the next few years might arouse comment and bring up renewed discussion of the matter, she preferred a temporary residence in the Orient. As the funds with which she started out couldn't last indefinitely, she had ventured upon one or two cautious speculations which had been so successful that she occasionally went into other equally promising ones as the opportunity came up.

Without this speculative experience, she never would have dared—would have felt no temptation—to join Foo Kee and Tompkins in their attempt to locate and get possession of the mysterious platinum mine which had been one of the chief items of gossip throughout the Orient for two or three months. But the share promised her, if they were successful, would mean independence for life—and on a strictly ethical basis, she couldn't see why, if the unknown operator had no legal title to the mine,—as seemed morally certain from the secrecy of his ore-shipments,—she and the two men hadn't an equally good right to it, provided they were smart enough to locate it and get possession. Her part in the proposition had been to cultivate an acquaintance with Captain Joe Allen of the *Wyanomah,* contrive an

opportunity for searching his ship and obtain, if possible, some chart with his navigating memoranda upon the three occasions when he was known to have obtained part-cargoes of ore from some unknown spot. This sort of thing savored of deception quite repulsive to her—at first, she refused to attempt anything of the sort, but the magnitude of her possible share from the undertaking was too great to be refused. She had actually succeeded in obtaining a chart which seemed to be the one they were after without much question, and though by no means as positive as the other two about it, Foo Kee had advanced her a thousand pounds for what she had accomplished. This, with what she already had on deposit with the Hongkong & Shanghai, would keep her in very comfortable circumstances for several years at least. But after banking it, she morbidly regretted her part in the affair. Captain Joe Allen had proved so much her beau-ideal as a man that his eventually suspecting her of the theft, as he was almost certain to do, rankled—tormented her. Which made the visit of the Government ladies doubly satisfying—and Tompkins' arrival quite the other thing.

ALONE in the Orient, "on her own," Nina Chandos had maintained herself respectably—had won friends and a quite general liking among the English residents at the Peak. Everybody knew that she occasionally speculated in tin, rubber, silks—things which offered a big profit at some risk—and had been lucky at that sort of thing. But she was supposed to have independent means, and to be on the staff of some London or New York magazine for which she was doing a bit of Oriental research. Tompkins was known as a former P. & O. officer—which is some recommendation in itself, as the Company always has been particular about its personnel—who had held a mate's ticket for sail and could pass his master's examination any time he cared to go up for it. Owing to instinctive caution about what he said in public, and the self-assured bearing one gets from contact with his passengers on a big liner during heavy weather, the man easily gave an impression of being more reliable, more of a courteous gentleman, than he really was. His appearance was attractive; most women considered him quite handsome, especially in the new outfit which he had just purchased. In fact, the Government ladies were quite impressed—which sent a shiver of apprehension through Miss Chandos when she noticed it. She had come out on the same ship with the man, knew him to be completely unscrupulous, hard as steel about committing any act which he thought advisable at the moment, even to the extent of coolly shooting a man whom he considered dangerous. And though aware that he managed to convey a very good surface impression, she feared some glance of his eye, some involuntary gesture, some unnecessary, cold-blooded remark, might betray him for what he was.

She hoped—as her Government friends showed a disposition to chat and prolong their call—that Tompkins would get tired of waiting and be the first to go. But he so evidently was there to stay that they presently scented a romance and started to leave. This aroused their hostess' combativeness so thoroughly that she determined to give the man a lesson. Ordinarily she would have received him as an old steamer acquaintance—and found opportunity to suggest that, in view of their partnership in the mine proposition, it would be merely prudent that they did not see each other except by appointment in Foo Kee's back room. In the man's admiration for her she recognized something dangerous in more ways than one. It had been sufficiently repulsive when they met in Foo Kee's shop for the first time since she came out from England; after her experience with Captain Joe Allen, it seemed more so than ever. She had determined to see as little as possible of the ex-mate beyond what might be necessary in the mine-affair,—her part of which was now finished,—and to make him understand, as pleasantly as might be, that she preferred not to continue the acquaintance. So, when her friends got up to leave, Miss Chandos asked if she might accompany two of them as far as the Governor's Lodge and look up something in his library —which might or might not have anything to do with the literary work supposed to be her real errand in the East. With this idea in mind, they immediately suggested that she dine with His Excellency in order that she might put in the whole evening among his books if she wished. Tompkins, of course, was not included in the invitation—there was quite evidently no object in asking up a seafaring man for an evening of research. So he was obliged to

leave the party at the bungalow-gate, as pleasantly as if he had been expecting to do just that—and go back to the lower part of the city in his expensive new clothes, which seemed at the moment rather a waste of money. But her side-stepping of a tête-à-tête with him was the one little touch needed to start a succession of occurrences which Nina Chandos could not have foreseen and wouldn't have thought possible if she had.

IN a mood of silent, ugly reflection, Tompkins hailed a rikisha-coolie at the lower tram-station and was trotted off to an unsavory quarter at the eastern end of the city, not far from Happy Valley—a section in which the Chinese boat-population, alongshore, had overflowed into various dives and squalid dwellings on the more solid land. Here he stepped into a resort where seafaring men often spent or lost the wages of a long voyage in a few hours, and occasionally were taken out, feet-first, to be unceremoniously dumped into the harbor—a place where one might please his fancy with a number of Foo Chow dancing-girls chosen according to Caucasian ideas of beauty, risk money at fan-tan, mongling or other games of chance, and drink arrack, or champagne of fair quality, according to the price he cared to pay.

As the ex-mate had expected, he found two men he knew at a secluded corner-table, sipping brandy—apparently within a few days of being "on the beach," or signing on with the first disreputable master of a cargo-boat who needed an extra hand or so. There seemed to have been some hint dropped by Tompkins at a previous meeting, for with no pretense at finesse, they immediately asked if he'd found any sort of berth for them. The mate wasn't fool enough even to hint at the real object of the cruise he was starting upon. Instead, he went into some detail as to scientific research planned for the former yacht, described his employer as a good-natured university "bug" who was rather "balmy" on his professional work and willing to pay top prices for an easy cruise in tropical waters—first-class "chow" and "allowances." He further let it be understood that if they obtained for the "professor" certain specimens he was anxious to get, it would mean an extra bonus for all hands—particularly, as they would be expected to fight if the expedition got into any mix-up with the Dutch or natives.

After they had gotten some idea of the cruise and the pay, he said:

"I've the picking of just three men. The Professor has been out here so long that he's more taken with the Chinks than a white man usually is—knows a lot whom he swears he can trust under any circumst'nces. Possibly he's right. I happen to know they all fancy he can put a proper curse upon their ancestors if they try spoofin' or deceivin' him. At all events, he's shipped a Chink crew on me, with a lot of coolies to do the diggin' an' divin' an' jungle-huntin' for him. He's sendin' a Chink supercargo along—insisted upon givin' the engineer I'd picked a jolly close overhaulin'! Said he'd take a chance on my choice for mate an' assistant engineer. I can ship Mullins for assistant—an' you, Murphy, as mate—if the two of you care about doing a little job for me before we get to sea. Eh? Are you on?"

"From your description, Tompkins, it sounds like a bloody soft berth! Not much work, plenty grub, plenty rum when a chap feels ill or thirsty—an' rather toppin' screw. What? I'm down to my last twenty-cent bit. Course, I know a Chink or two that'll feed me awhile on his house-boat for the few spare clothes I've got in my dunnage, but I'd have to sleep on over-populated matting, with chickens an' pigs all over the deck, an' the women too damn ugly to look at. I'd deuced near burgle some house f'r the sort of a soft cruise you're talkin' about—an' I'll come as near lettin' daylight into you, fellah-me-lad, if I find you've shipped me in the fo'c'stle o' some filthy cargo-boat! What's the job—an' what do we do?"

"Get into a bungalow at the Peak, the night we sail—only two women an' a Chink-boy in it. Chloroform 'em, tie up the Chink an' the other woman, pack the younger one into a twelve-cylinder car, bring her down the road to the south side of the island an' along the shore to the place where you'll have concealed your boat. Then leave the car there and come aboard with her. If you were the ord'n'ry type of cargo-bargees, prob'ly you'd not get away with it—but you've both sufficient education to bluff one of the Sikh police as a couple of toffs out for a joy-ride with the lady, if he stops you. Could give a sufficiently respectable impression to gain admission to the bungalow with any plausible story, for a few minutes, in the evening. I'll run you up there in a car,

tonight—point out the bungalow—lay out all the details. Fetch that girl aboard the night we sail, and you sign on as mate an' assistant engineer—with a hundred dollars, gold, for each. Of course, there's to be no talk of this anywhere. You bring the girl aboard uninjured—no fooling with her in any way. If anything like that happens, I shoot you both! You've sailed with me—and know that's a promise! Are you on?"

Murphy laughed—softly.

"Rather! What's a skirt, more or less, to us! We'll handle her as if she were a basket of eggs! Er—as to the Chink? Do we scrag him—if he makes bobbery?"

"Rather *not!* The other woman'll be screeching before half an hour! You're to be careful about overdoin' the chloroform, you know. If there's a dead Chink to account for, they'll be telephonin' all over the place—prob'ly stop the car before you get down to the shore."

THE details of certain happenings on a dark night, up in the Peak district of Hongkong, have been sufficiently indicated without further elaboration. They were as unexpected to Miss Chandos and her housekeeper as an earthquake that sunk the whole island under water would have been. Hongkong is really quite well policed. An occurrence even slightly out of the ordinary would have drawn fairly prompt investigation. But when two well-dressed men stop an expensive car before a bungalow upon one of the darker side-roads and proceed to investigate "engine-trouble," who questions their actions? When, after sneaking around to the rear of the bungalow and putting the Chinese house-boy out of business, they come to the front-door requesting a pail of water for their radiator and the few moments' loan of an electric flash-lamp, who sees anything suspicious in such a request? Who stops a six-thousand-dollar car with three upper-class people in it merely because the lady appears to be sleepy or perhaps overstimulated, and is being held against his shoulder by the man in the tonneau? As British residents of the Peak district would say: "It simply isn't done! Rotten form—meddlin' in what doesn't concern one!"

When Nina Chandos woke in the morning, feeling heady,—as if there had been an all-night party, somewhere,—she had no difficulty in recognizing the inside fittings of a comfortable stateroom, or in being perfectly aware that she was afloat on water which by no possibility was that of Hongkong harbor. In fact, she was a sufficiently experienced sailor to know that she was a good many miles from land. In a corner of the stateroom were her own familiar suitcases with their plastering of steamer-labels—on the hooks were her rain-coat, steamer-cap and heavy deck-jacket. (Mullins had been nervous—anxious to get away as quickly as possible. But Murphy sized up the job, from his acquaintance with Tompkins, as requiring all provision for the lady's bodily comfort which seemed possible in the circumstances—wouldn't leave until he had searched her closets and bureau, and carefully packed her suitcases. Incidentally, this forethought netted him an extra fifty dollars he hadn't expected to get.)

THE whole situation was so ridiculously impossible that Miss Chandos was preparing to go out and investigate when there came a couple of light raps upon her door; she had barely time to notice that it hadn't been fastened on the inside when it opened to admit a pretty Chinese girl of twenty, who talked fairly good mission-school English mixed with understandable "pidgin," and who beckoned in another, somewhat older one, before she bolted the door against further intrusion.

"Missee Chandos su'plised when she wake up? Yaes?"

"*Rather!* What boat is this? Where bound? Who shanghaied me aboard of her? Why? What's it all about? I'll make it rather hot for some one—when I get ashore!"

"Missee Chandos pleass listen—not talk so much until we explaining howcome to her. Cap'n Tom'kins-man buy 'spensive new clo's. You savvy lat man's 'spensive new clo's? Yaes?"

"Oh, yes—I savvy his new clothes perfectly! He came up to show me them, last week! What have *they* to do with this outrage?"

"Got muchee do, Missee Chandos! Cap'n Tom'kins-man go see Foo Kee in lem 'spensive new clo's when he find out 'bout thees ship—when sailing. Foo Kee not talk-talk—he listen. He savvy 'spensive new clo's—but not make bobbery 'bout lem. Look like he not even see. He know some lady was cause of lem 'spensive clo's—he t'ink he know what lady. He t'ink lat lady no muchee like Cap'n

Tom'kins-man—not let him go her side an' talk-talk all alone. Foo Kee t'ink mebbe Cap'n Tom'kins-man get mad—not makee bobbery—just bad-bad inside. He t'ink mebbe Tom'kins-man steal Missee an' bling her this side if can do. Foo Kee t'ink mebbe—so can do—an' he no like. All this inside Foo Kee—he just smoke mandalin pipe—an' dlink tea—an' talk-talk 'bout skintiffick espedishun. Not talk-talk 'bout Missee a-tall. Bimeby—he say crew of boat mus' be China boys—'cause he know he can tlust lem. He say fightin'-men mus' be China-boys too. He say he send along this side one comprador, Lo Sing—for because if Tom'kins-man makee bobbery weeth Dutch Residen', lat side, he lose boat an' go arrest'd to Batavia 'long Dutch p'lice, but if Lo Sing on boat, he fixee bobbery with Dutch Residen', chop-chop. Lo Sing can do! A'so—Lo Sing catchee code for talk-talk ladio with Foo Kee if ev'lything not a'light. Lo Sing, he catchee place on boat allee samee supel-cargo."

"H-m-m—I fancy I'm beginning to understand exactly what happened, now. Foo Kee is what the Yankees call a good guesser—and he seems to have been quite well aware of the sort Tompkins really is, though I didn't fancy he'd attempt anything of *this* sort! It's a prison offense, if he but realized it! I say! Where do you girls come into this? How do you happen aboard?"

"Lo Sing tell Foo Kee English an' Melicans t'ink velly bad for one nize Missee be alone on boat with muchee men—not safe poseetion—makee lotta talk-talk ashore when people know. Foo Kee nod head—up an' down—up an' down. 'Yaes—yaes!' So he put Moo Fow this side fo' stlewa'-dess—an' Fan Toy, an' Sin Toy, for wait on Missee—catchee hair-blush—catchee put on clo's—catchee chow, all day. This Fan Toy—I Sin Toy. Our honorable father allee same Ming Fu—velly nize man—China merchant. He like fo' us to catchee flends with English lady like Missee Chandos—so nobody makee talk-talk 'bout her."

"My word! I'm under obligations to Foo Kee and Lo Sing! No question as to that! But why didn't Foo Kee warn me to be on my guard against being carried off? I could easily have taken precautions against anything of the sort!"

"Foo Kee t'ink lat not so easy, Missee—because no can tell how Tom'kins-man try do! With China-boys, Foo Kee cally you off, himself, any time—daytime, if he so like—as he 'splain to you one time. Mebbe-so Tom'kins-man not do! Len you catchee lotta bobbery 'bout notheeng a-tall. Foo Kee not sure what Tom'kins-man got in hees mind. 'Sides—Foo Kee t'ink, if happen, lat Missee an' Lo Sing watchee out for his side espedishun, an' sure do like he talk-talk by ladio."

"Hmph! There's something in that! It's not the sort of a pleasure-cruise I'd have cared about if I'd been given anything to say in the matter—but in the circumst'nces, with you girls aboard, perhaps my being along may give a better chance for getting what the expedition is after, and seeing fair play all round. If I understand the situation properly, Lo Sing will back me in any decision I make—controls the crew in any conflict of authority. There's one thing I wish—at once! When they chloroformed me last night, I had an automatic pistol concealed in my skirt—it seems to have been taken from me. You tell Lo Sing I want that pistol back—or another one equally serviceable!"

Sin Toy smilingly drew Miss Chandos' own gun from somewhere inside her embroidered jacket, and handed it over.

"Man-man lat bling Missee abloard, las' night, givee this Tom'kins-man—an' he put on tlansom in hees room. Lo Sing catchee when Cap'n man below one time—givee me fo' bling Missee."

Nina impulsively hugged the pretty little Canton girl, and kissed her. "Sin Toy! You and Lo Sing are good friends to have about one! I'll thank him, presently. Now—I don't much care what that fool Tompkins tries to do! I warned him over a month ago that I'd shoot him if he took any unfair advantage of me—by force. May have to do it, yet!"

FOR all Tompkins' cold unscrupulousness and nerve, he was uneasy when he heard the mess-gong that morning. He didn't know whether Miss Chandos was feeling up to putting in an appearance, or too much upset to leave her berth—didn't even know whether she had figured out where she was or what had happened during the night. Moo Fow, the stewardess, he had seen in the mess-saloon the previous evening, but he had scarcely noticed her. One Chinese woman, more or less, among a Chink crew, was an everyday occurrence to be expected. But the two Canton girls had concealed

themselves, and he didn't yet know they were aboard. Lo Sing was sufficiently a man of substance and education to eat with the officers even if, as Foo Kee's representative, it would not have been dangerous to slight him in any way. All things considered, Tompkins delayed going below until Murphy came up to take the bridge and told him the young woman was eating in the mess-saloon as though she felt none the worse for her night's experience. Then—he was still undecided whether to admit that her abduction was entirely his doing, or try to bluff it off as an act of Foo Kee's. To his amazement, she nodded unconcernedly to him over her coffee-cup, as he sat down, and spoke as if nothing unusual had happened—though with an air of condescending superiority which made him determined to take some of it out of her before the day was over.

"Good morning, Tompkins! Couldn't ask better weather for our run down to Borneo, could we?"

"Hmph! Weather's good enough, Nina! What are *you* doing on board?" He decided on the instant to put the whole thing on Foo Kee—a fool mistake that he wouldn't have made after a moment's reflection.

"I was going to ask *you* that question—but it doesn't matter. I'm here—and I mean to see that each member of the 'company' gets fair play. Aside from that, I've known you to be impulsive—to do ill-advised things from impatience and ignorance. Possibly I may have a restraining influence at some critical moment."

"So? I happen to be in command of this boat, you know! Fancy you're likely to find that my orders will be carried out—regardless of what they may happen to be. Don't get fool notions in your head, Nina! And don't try to start anything. Maritime law upholds me in anything I do outside the three-mile limit!"

"I say, Tompkins! Aren't you a little balmy this morning? Neither maritime nor any other law sanctions the abduction of a white woman by force! It's a prison offense! A radio was sent to Foo Kee half an hour ago, telling him that I was chloroformed in my bungalow, last night, and fetched aboard of this boat unconscious. Do you realize, man, that you can't stick the nose of this yacht into any port on the globe without producing me in good health and condition? With testimony from others aboard that I've been treated with the utmost respect from the moment we left Hongkong Island? Just think that over until you catch the full force of it! Aside from that, my pistol has been returned to me—doubtless you remember what I said would happen if ever you lost your head with me! Now let's stop discussing my position, aboard, and get down to rational planning if we can! How quickly can we make the run to that cove on the east coast of Borneo?"

Tompkins was rather stunned at the news that a report of her abduction had actually gone back to Hongkong. He understood perfectly what that meant if she received further ill treatment of any sort—knew that the tables had been completely turned upon him and that he was in her power rather than she in his. But he played poker upon occasion—his face rarely showed what was in his mind.

"I timed the boat as we came around the West Head, yesterday afternoon, at full speed. In fair weather, her turbines will do better than twenty-eight—hour after hour. Even with the long swell that's running, now, she'll do close to that. From the Ladrones to that position on the Bornese coast, I figure it'll be approximately fourteen hundred miles, or a bit under that—fifty hours' run if we push her. But it's dangerous navigation around the lower end of Palawan—we'll call it under three days—though nobody in Hongkong will dream of our making it in that time."

"Are there any Dutch trading-stations near the place?"

"There's one about fifty miles north, and another seventy-five miles south of it—each under a deputy Resident, according to the Admiralty 'Sailing Directions.' They'll do a bit of patrolling in their power-launches, I fancy—but mostly around the mouths of rivers which run back into the territory of upcountry rajahs. Little chance of their wastin' time around such a cove as is shown on the chart you got."

WHEN Tompkins returned to the bridge, he remarked to his mate that the girl, below, had been dev'lish uppish in her manner, needed taking down a bit, and that he meant to give her a lesson before the day was over—let her understand where she stood on board. But to his amazement this produced insubordination from an unexpected quarter—with the effect of a sudden blow in the face. Murphy was lighting his pipe as he spoke—but the eyes

which glanced over the bowl were like quicksilver.

"Bringing the lady aboard, Cap'n, was a trade we made with you for our berths—we carried out our agreement to the letter, and fetched along her dunnage in the bargain. But that girl's straight, decent, and she has the sort of nerve I'm bound to say I jolly well admire. So—I fancy she'll do about as she pleases, aboard. If you lay a finger on her, you'll have Mullins an' me to reckon with!

"We three an' the engineer are in a bloody tight place on this hooker—if you ask *me!* With a Chink crew an' sixty coolies up for'ard,—for just why they're aboard, I don't know,—we're sewed up if they want to start a bobbery any time! Even with our guns, they'd rush us in two or three minutes. As near as I can savvy the play, that Lo Sing chap has 'em all under his control—absolutely—which is bloody good luck for *us*. It'll not be any ord'n'ry relation of mere employer, either; they're afraid of him—every man jack! Very likely he belongs to the Great Tong one hears of occasionally out in these waters. If we start in running such an outfit as we would a crew of white fo'c'stle-scum, we'll be just askin' for trouble—that's all! You told us this was a soft berth, aboard—which was the truth as far as work an' p'y are concerned. But the whole bally proposition is a new game to me—I've the feelin' that I don't know what's comin' next!"

Miss Chandos had a strong suspicion that Murphy had been one of the men who chloroformed her the night before, but as it had been pitch dark when she was carried up the accommodation-ladder, even the Chinese quartermasters could scarcely have sworn to the men in the boat which fetched her out. There seemed no point in putting the accusation up to him until she had more definite proof. As he, with the engineer and assistant, appeared to be gentlemanly fellows with more or less education, she chatted and played deck-games with them during the day, played the piano in the mess-saloon when in the mood, and saw that the two Canton girls were treated as high-caste, which they had every appearance of being. Altogether, the general status on board the *Aralene* during the sixty-five-hour run was so entirely different from what Tompkins had planned that it made him dizzy to puzzle it out. His orders as master were promptly and efficiently carried out—but he was convinced that if he changed the yacht's course on some theory of his own, he simply couldn't get away with it, and it gave him the cheap feeling of being a ridiculous figurehead. When Foo Kee had consented to back him with a fully equipped expedition to search for and take the mysterious platinum mine, Tompkins saw himself as more or less of a buccaneer—sailing the seas at the head of his pirate crew, making the mysterious mine-owner walk the plank, spending pleasant hours in the gilded cabin of his "long, low, rakish craft."

And now—he found himself in merely nominal command of a strictly business proposition, surrounded by all the safeguards under which such an undertaking would have been figured out, ashore!

BEFORE they realized how quickly the time had passed, the coast of Borneo was sighted; there appeared to be no sign of human activity in the neighborhood of the hidden cove, and the yacht, which drew but ten feet with her tanks empty, was conned in through the twisting channel until entirely hidden from sight of any passing vessel by a spit of land covered with trees and bushes. For another two days a painstaking search was made of every jungle path and clearing within a five-mile radius. The Chinese ran across a few small Dyak villages and managed enough patchwork dialect communication with the men to convince them not only that no steamer of the *Wyanomah's* size had ever visited the cove, but also that no white men had ever dug up any of the ground in that vicinity or searched the jungle for any object, scientific or otherwise. This, they described to Lo Sing in detail when they were back on board—and he gave Tompkins the gist of it with the suggestion that they set a course for the Banda Sea at once, and discuss further plans at dinner that evening. Tompkins knew that it would be useless for him to raise any objections if he felt like it—and was himself satisfied by this time that no mine of any sort had been worked in that locality. When they were in the mess-saloon for dinner, Lo Sing told them he'd been talking by radio with Foo Kee.

"You see, Captain,—and Miss Chandos,—Foo Kee had very little faith in that stolen chart from the moment he examined it."

"Why hadn't he? I've made exactly

that sort of penciled memoranda upon hundreds of charts showing limited areas in detail—marked the exact positions of my anchorages with the same sort of little crosses! I can't see a thing about that chart which looks irregular!"

"No? Is it your invariable custom, Captain, also to pencil the dates of each visit on such charts? It was those dates which looked suspicious to Foo Kee. They had nothing whatever to do with the navigation—and a master who had every reason for secrecy concerning his visits to such a place as that mysterious mine would never have penciled the dates on his chart. He could make blind entries in his log which would show them much better. Beyond these considerations was the figuring out what a master like Allen would do if he thought attempts to steal any of his charts possible or even probable—and our good friend in Hongkong decided that one of his first precautions would be to plant a fake chart somewhere that would seem to be a carefully thought-out place of concealment. Well—that was his conviction.

"On the other hand, it might easily prove that Captain Allen hadn't quite the forethought credited to him. In that case, the chart might be genuine, after all. There was enough possibility in that line to make the search, here, worth its cost. Meanwhile, Foo Kee has been drawing upon other sources of information—his junk-masters, agents in other ports, correspondents here and there. And he has turned up the fact that Allen proceeded down the Yangtse from Hankow with the *Wyanomah* and then down to Singapore, where he loaded for Melbourne—and took a part-cargo supposed to be house-furnishings and agricultural implements for John Standish Hopkins, the white Rajah of Lajoe Koera—off the northwest coast of Papua—to be dropped there on his way to Melbourne—"

UP to this point, Tompkins had seemed bored by the supercargo's explanation of Foo-Kee's mental processes, but at the last remark, he came to life with a start—leaned across the table in unfeigned astonishment.

"No'thwes' coast of Papua! Why—that's within the radius of a detour I figured out on the basis of the *Wyanomah's* unknown reserve speed!"

"Ah—yaes. That is what Foo Kee told me. He said it was quite possible for Captain Allen to have spent a day at Lajoe Koera upon each one of those voyages to and from Australian ports during which he turned up in Sydney with part-cargoes of that wonderfully rich ore—and suggests that we search that neighborhood within a twenty-mile radius."

"My word! How much of a force do you fancy this white Rajah Johnny has at his disposal on that island?"

"Well—our junks trade occasionally in the Banda Islands—headquarters of the Dutch Resident through whom Hopkins purchased his island—and the people, there, say he lives in a rather wonderful house cut out of the solid cliff-rocks, with two women as housekeepers. On the island, he employs a dozen or more Tonga Kanakas to cultivate small patches, here and there, get out occasional small shipments of the more valuable woods, and work about the island generally. They say, also,—which may be a more serious matter,—that his jurisdiction as Rajah of Lajoe Koera extends among the cannibal tribes for something over a twenty-mile radius on the Papuan coast. There are stories of his going with half a dozen Kanakas to some of their incantation-clearings in the jungle when a hundred of them were having a feast of 'long pig,' and deliberately shooting some who had killed one or two of his own men—an act recognized as just, by them."

"Any gossip in Banda about his doing any digging on the island?"

"Nothing beyond road-embankments and sea-walls around his little harbor on the narrow strait between him and the main coast.

ON the second day following, the *Aralene* was running down the passage between Ceram and the N. W. end of Papua, at reduced speed—as Tompkins thought best to edge in close to Lajoe Koera just after sunset. His sailing directions had a silhouette engraving of the little mountain and general appearance of the coastline, with bearings marked so that it was a simple matter to recognize them during a starlit night. Since coming out to the East, Nina Chandos had done enough deep-water cruising on various liners to have some knowledge of barometer-readings and a smattering of navigating detail; so, after studying the glass in the wheelhouse, she had come out to lean over the bridge-rail near Phil Murphy and examine the coastline through a pair of night binoculars.

"Of course I might be more easily mistaken than you, Mr. Murphy—but I fancy that little peak over yonder should be Lajoe Koera! How close do you propose running in?"

"That's what I'm trying to judge from the distance at which I can make out the surf alongshore. I can prob'ly see that through the glass at least two miles farther away than anyone on the island can make out our boat, with its gray-green paint against the blackness of the water."

"We'll have rain or fog within two hours, judging by the way the glass is slowly falling—it doesn't act in the least like a typhoon, but the dampness is increasing perceptibly. Were you thinking of sending a boat up that strait at the back, if you locate the passage in the reefs?"

"Aye! The electric launch—which makes no noise an' will carry fifty men, at a pinch."

"Why the crowd—until you find out whether there's anything worth fighting for? Can you possibly keep that many quiet?"

"Chinks—aye—if they get their orders from Lo Sing. With beachcombers of our own sort, it would be another matter. It's Tompkins' idea—an' I fancy he may be right. He figures we may get a fighting crowd in back there, now, when nobody's sighted us an' we have the advantage of surprise. By tomorrow night we're likely to have been seen—they'll be on their guard—no way of knowing what defenses they may have. According to my calculations, the *Wyanomah* is very likely to be there now, discharging the stuff she fetched down for the Rajah. If it happens to have been his ore they've been taking out, the opportunity for another shipment would be too good to lose—the ore'll be lying about, ready to put aboard of her. On the other hand, if there's nothing of the sort in sight, it's almost proof that the mine isn't here at all—located in some entirely diff'rent place. Well, d'ye see, our fifty men, if your promised rain or fog happens along, will be able to stalk everything goin' on about the island. If they discover nothing, they'll possibly get back to our boat without bein' seen at all; if the mine is here, there'll be enough of 'em, with the advantage of darkness and surprise, to get possession of the whole place or conceal themselves until the *Wyanomah* has pulled out, an' then make a sure thing of it."

"Are you going with them?"

"No—I'm left in command of the yacht. Tompkins is going, himself—with Mullins to run the motor and a Number One boy of Lo Sing's to handle the Chinks by some sort of a silent touch-system."

For a moment or two, the girl said nothing—then shivered a little. "B-r-r-r! I fancy it must be getting damper—cooler! Do you know, somehow, I can't get it out of my head that Tompkins wont come back!"

NOW, early that morning, twelve hours before the *Aralene* was anywhere near the island, certain things had been going on at the Rajah's home in the solid rock of the cliff on the ocean side. Captain Joe Allen and his pretty supercargo Claire Avery had climbed the steep jungle path from the little harbor at the back of the island to breakfast with him. During the meal, his housekeeper, Katie Williamson, went into the farther rock-cut room of the suite after something—while her sister, Henrietta Coles, looked after their wants. As all three of them had formed the habit when in that room—devoted to radio and the current-generators for the whole island—of slipping on a head-frame to see if, by chance, anybody was calling in their secret code, she did this automatically—and tuning up to twenty-five hundred meters, got a rather faint call which seemed to come from some quite distant point in a general northwesterly direction. Acknowledging, she got a signature which sent her hurrying for the Rajah:

"Cap'n James Medford is calling, sir—either from Keppel Harbor or somewhere at the lower end of the China Sea!"

In less than a minute Hopkins was at the radio-bench with the heavy door closed—adjusting his sixteen-tube receiving-set. When sufficiently amplified, he got Medford's voice quite clearly and switched on a ten kw. current for his transmitting set. To anyone listening at twenty-five hundred,—not a wave in common use,—the conversation would have been meaningless, as both were using a code simple enough when thoroughly memorized, but not so easy to grasp without practice. After preliminaries, Medford got down to the meat of his communication, which, decoded, was:

"Three different expeditions said to be following your boat. Two of them way off the track—negligible. The other, backed by Foo Kee of Hongkong as a scientific expedition with general cruising papers,

under nominal command of an ex-mate, Tompkins—actually in control of Foo's comprador, Lo Sing—with Chink crew and sixty coolies as scrappers, fully armed. Started out on basis of chart which Foo had stolen from you in Hongkong, possibly by one of his coolies while the *Wyanomah* was coaling—that point is immaterial, as Cap'n Joe says it was a fake chart. They searched the position on Bornese coast—found they'd been fooled. Then one of my Chinese friends told me that Allen had been watched in Singapore and that the consignment of heavy-case stuff for you had been communicated to Foo Kee by one of his agents there. Two days ago, Pauline picked up some Chinese talk in code between Hongkong and some point on the east coast of Borneo—most probably the old yacht *Aralene* which Foo chartered for his expedition.

"Pauline talks Cantonese very well for a Caucasian, but of course the coding was too much for her—she *did* get, however, the name 'Lajoe Koera'—unmistakably. So there's little doubt that Tompkins started then for your neighborhood. A boat answering the *Aralene's* description was sighted off Ternate, yesterday afternoon—and that old-timer does a steady twenty-eight in average weather since she was converted to an oil-burner. She ought to happen along your way about sunset this evening.

"One thing more: Hongkong is pretty well stirred up over the abduction of an English girl, a Miss Chandos, from her bungalow on the Peak. An abandoned motorcar was found on the south shore near a spot from which a boat was seen pulling off to some craft further out. The man Tompkins is said to have been very much gone over her, but she had no use for him. There's an impression that she may be on his boat now."

"By thunder, Cap'n Jim! We're sure under obligations to you and Pauline! Give her my very best! I reckon we can be ready to let that crowd nose around, some, if they really want to—by night. If they *ask* for trouble, perhaps we can accommodate them. I don't really want anybody messing about, here, until my plant is built in the old crater, where it can't be seen, and the smoke will look like the old volcano waking up a bit—but I've got matters fixed at Manila at last, so the only thing any surprise-party *can* do is, possibly, to wipe us out."

THIS radio conversation explains the activities which began on the island within the next half-hour. None of the *Wyanomah* crew ever had been permitted to explore the little narrow-gauge track from the steamer-wharf after it entered the jungle. They had been feasted and wined in the big living-room of the overseer's bungalow near the wharf—permitted to wander over the south end of the island, to bathe, fish, enjoy themselves any way they pleased, within the limits of certain barbed-wire entanglements, so that they had no reason to complain. But not one of them had an idea where the little track led to or how far it went.

Under the direction of Harry Bradford, the mate, they were kept at work unloading the Rajah's cases of machinery, so that the *Wyanomah* was ready to leave by four in the afternoon, and was hull down on the horizon before the *Aralene* sighted the island at all. Meanwhile, the Rajah's Kanakas worked like beavers tearing up tracks, sleepers and every vestige of anything which might indicate that a railway ever had been there. The planking of the wharf and near-by store-houses was sluiced and scrubbed down with chemicals which removed every trace of the ore-stain. Across the track right-of-way through the jungle, logs were hauled—thorn-bushes trained across from side to side, and dead brush thrown in carelessly for good measure. The entrance to the mine and the dump outside of it were completely hidden behind a mass of tropical undergrowth—vines, creepers and the like. When it began to get dark, the Kanakas concealed themselves in the jungle along the rear shore of the island with deadly fish-spears and bows and arrows—weapons with which they had acquired much proficiency.

More by luck than any deliberate navigation in the dark, Tompkins got his electric launch through the reef-passage without grazing the coral more than once or twice—and silently spied along the rear side of Lajoe Koera. Had it not been for the arc-lights along the wharf, he would have missed the little concealed harbor altogether; but, landing with three men on the strip which separated it from the strait, he got a clear view of the heavy cases from the *Wyanomah* piled under the sheds at the head of the wharf—the overseer's bungalow and the Kanaka shacks. There seemed to be nobody in sight—no particular reason for there being anybody there

except possible watchmen in the bungalow. Apparently everyone had gone across to the other side of the island—and neither Tompkins nor his Chinks relished the idea of trying to force their way up through the jungle in the pitchy blackness of tropical undergrowth. There was no indication whatever that any sort of mining had been carried on in the neighborhood, no sign of the deep ore-stain which had been mentioned in the stories from Sydney. The little wharf and the shacks were obviously for the reception and handling of whatever provisions and supplies were shipped in for the Rajah's use.

The silence, the apparent absence of every living thing, began to get on the marauders' nerves. Tompkins began to suspect a trap of some sort—a man of the Rajah's reputation was pretty sure to have scientific and deadly means of defense whenever it was needed. Altogether, the ex-mate felt that he and his men would be safer off the island until they had a chance to examine the neighborhood more thoroughly by daylight. So the launch was run up to the head of a wide inlet which opened from the little strait behind the island. Here, in a cove from which they knew it couldn't be seen, they built a good-sized fire, cooked a meal, smoked awhile—and then stretched out on the sand to sleep.

IT was only an hour afterward that Tompkins, Mullins and three Chinese who hadn't been killed before they woke, were marched along jungle-trails, prodded by spears, to a clearing surrounded by hideous Papuan idols. And during the next twelve hours, the diminishing survivors watched in speechless horror one comrade after another swung around by the heels until his head squashed like an orange upon a sacrificial stone. The launch-party had ceased to exist. When the hidden Kanakas saw the launch heading up the inlet, they telephoned to the Rajah—who almost ordered them to shout warnings after it. But if the piratical crowd of armed, unscrupulous men turned back, there would almost certainly have been a fight in which several of his decent and valuable Kanakas would have been killed. At the moment when the launch-party were cooking their meal in the cove, the radio-operator on the *Aralene* heard a pleasant voice in the receivers at his ears:

"Yacht *Aralene!* This is the Rajah of Lajoe Koera speaking. Do you get me clearly? Good! A launch party which I suppose was from your boat came in through my inlet two hours ago without permission and landed four men at my harbor, around the other side. I could have destroyed them at any moment—it has been necessary for me to use scientific means of defense in a place like this, with cannibal tribes just across the strait, you understand. But they did no harm and presently went off up the inlet, much to my regret. Had there been any way of making them listen to reason without a fight—and casualties—I should have ordered them back to the yacht. As it is, probably you will never see them again. No use sending in a rescue-party at night—they'd be killed before they saw anything to shoot at. In the morning, it will be too late, of course. Er—the United States Cruiser *Ramapo,* from Manila, will anchor off the island within an hour. The British Cruiser *Narcissus,* Commander Henshaw, will be here an hour later. You have, aboard of you, a Miss Chandos who was recently abducted in Hongkong. You can send her ashore as my guest, at once—or take the chance of being unable to enter any port on the globe without the immediate arrest of everybody on board. As I understand it, you are cruising as a scientific expedition—so it is possible that none of you but the man Tompkins had anything to do with this outrage. However—your action during the next half-hour will settle it."

MISS CHANDOS and her two Cantonese girls were promptly sent ashore by Lo Sing in a power-launch—and he accompanied them to assure the Rajah that Tompkins alone was responsible for her abduction. In the morning they were all shown over as much of the island as their legs and wind permitted—accompanied by young officers from both cruisers. There was no evidence whatever, that either Lo Sing or Miss Chandos could see, to indicate the existence of any mine on the island or in the neighborhood—but a remark of Commander Henshaw's would have removed any further interest of theirs in the matter, anyhow. He said that Hopkins had duly registered Lajoe Koera with the Philippine Government as United States territory—the private property of an American citizen—entitled to full protection from any U. S. warship in those waters—the Dutch Government at Batavia concurring.

Nerve

The wild, wild tale of an American gob's hectic adventures in Mexican waters and points north, while in search of the variegated excitement which his eager young soul craved.

By REX VANCIL BIXBY

"NERVE," said T. Magruder Cameron, "is a good bit like religion. Every man likes to think he has a smattering of it, but nobody knows just what it is. I'm reminded of a story. Sit down."

I promptly closed the door through which I was on the point of leaving the cubbyhole office of the Morning *Journal's* managing editor, and slipped into the big chair beside his paper-littered desk. The big paper, the largest on the Coast, had been put safely to bed, and the night herds of reporters had slipped away to their midnight snacks and well-deserved rest.

The "stories" of the Big Boss were listed as classics in my to-bed-to-eat-to-work-to-eat-to-bed circumscribed existence. But there's no gulf under the starry heavens that is wider than that between green reporter and managing editor, and so I thanked my patron saint, or whatever it is that newspaper men thank, for the chance that had come my way that day. I had been crossing Broadway at Sixth that afternoon, following a small assignment from Pat Harper, the city editor. His official monaker was Patterson J. Harper, and while it looked imposing on his letterheads, it was a lot too formal for the use of the staff, every member of which would have jumped through hoops and turned handsprings, if necessary, to please him. He was young for such a position, but he was a bear for work and had the best nose for news in the city.

Pat was married and had the dearest wife and baby son that ever made a hard-shelled young bachelor sigh for connubial bliss. I was out to their house nearly every week-end, and all in all, I guess he was the best friend I had in the city. It was only natural, then, that when the rumor got around that he had been offered a position in another city—quite a promotion, so the boys said—I should be a bit blue.

Just as I had reached Sixth and was plowing along through the crowd, darned if

a runaway street-car didn't choose that identical time to come tearing down Broadway, out of control and banging along like the well-known Juggernaut. The air-connection had broken, and the motorman, in his excitement, had swung his controller so hard that it jammed, leaving the full power on. Of course, the hand-brake was useless against both the pull of the motors and the momentum of the packed car on the down grade, and there was nothing to prevent the big wagon smashing past traffic-signals and through the streams of motors and pedestrians at the five-intersections before the track started on the upgrade again.

Luckily the shouting of the crowds sounded enough warning to clear the Sixth Street crossing, but it looked like heavy-duty hospital work if the car ever got to Seventh, one of the three main cross-town arteries. Only one thing to do, of course, and since nobody seemed to think of it just then, it was up to me to do my stuff. Simple thing, too. When the car whizzed by, I jumped the rear fender—just as in the old kid days when we hooked freight-cars—and jerked the trolley off the wire. With the power off, it was easy enough to stop the runaway with the hand-brake. A few women fainted, but no one was injured.

I tried to get on about my business, but the crowd seemed to think I was the original little white-haired boy, a national hero or something, and a self-appointed committee bundled me into a sedan and came down to tell the whole story to Harper. It finally got the ear of T. Magruder Cameron himself, and about ten o'clock that night he had called me into his *sanctum sanctorum* and presented me with his appreciation, which I couldn't use, and a ten-dollar raise, which I could. He called the stunt a good many things, but "nerve" was the word that seemed mostly on his mind. For nearly an hour he had kept me there while he alternately shot a few words at me and attended to the details of getting the *Journal* on the press. I had finally started for the door so that he could call it a day, when he broke out again and hinted at a story.

"Webster says that nerve is 'strength' or 'manliness.' That may have been the only interpretation in his day, but a lot of mighty liberal ones have been hooked to the word in these hectic times." A slow chuckle played a chromatic scale up and down the front of T. Magruder Cameron's expansive blue vest. Reaching for the tobacco pouch from which I had just filled my faithful pipe, he carefully tamped a generous helping into the stubby briar without which few of his friends would have recognized him, and fixed me with a benevolent smile that warmed me from cowlick to carpet.

"Noah's definition still holds good, of course," he resumed between puffs which made his pipe crackle like an open pine fire and threw twining coils of dense smoke around the single green-shaded light that hung above the battle-scarred desk, "but this generation has made it stand for something entirely different. They say you showed nerve this afternoon. You did, but the lad I'm reminded of exhibited the greatest stock of copper-hooped nerve, using the word in its common colloquial sense, that I've ever come across in fifty-seven years of newspaper work."

THIS young cub Joe was in the Navy, (said Cameron). It was a year after the Armistice, but he had the travel bug and was doing another three-year hitch. You'd have figured he had enough, seeing as how he had come close to the Pearly Gates during a brush between the destroyer he was on and a German sub. He did get a concussion of the brain that put him on the shelf in the hospital for six months. The itching foot hits some young fellows pretty hard, though, and he went right back again, this time on a warship of the Atlantic Fleet.

You know that sign on the recruiting stands, "Join the Navy and See the World?" Well, this lad Joe was seeing the world, all right, but it was mainly at the business end of a mop, swabbing down decks. At least, that's his story, and he's a right truthful chap—now. Anyway, he got tired of the routine, and one fine afternoon when the ship was lying off Vera Cruz, and half the crew getting ready to take shore-leave, he decided to go them one better and take French leave.

He wasn't one of the lucky ones. It seems that he had to gild the funnels or polish the fighting top—anyhow it was, so far as Joe was concerned, the last straw. He raves a good deal about the way he felt a sort of call from Orizaba—which is, incidentally, about as pretty a mountain as we have on this hemisphere. Even when Joe was acting the nerviest, or the most

devilish, as you choose, there was a good deal of the poet about the young sprout, and the solitary grandeur of that peak looked so attractive after the monotony of the ship that he got desperate. Also, as he says, it was hotter than the hinges of Tophet on the big boat, and the cool white top of Orizaba pulled him like a magnet. The ship had been in port for three days, and he hadn't set foot on land. Minor escapades, for which he seemed to have a natural bent, had him penalized until he had no shore-leave due for some three months. There were just two possible chances. He could go A. W. O. L. or take the liberty card from one of the luckier ones. He did the latter. You did a hitch yourself, so you know it takes what they call nerve, eh?

Well sir, Joe took the card from the pocket of a shipmate who was taking a pre-departure bath, and when the launch landed its exuberant passengers at the wharf, Joe was with them, all rigged out in his finest glad-rags.

It seems that the infraction of minor rules which had tied Joe to the ship had also tied up his pay for several months in advance, and he landed without a sou markee in his jeans. There's more nerve. On shore by virtue of a stolen pass, and dead broke! It didn't seem to worry Joe, however. He hied himself to the Hotel Diligencias, the best caravansary in the city and gave them as pretty a line of stuff as a spiggoty hotel-clerk ever cocked an ear to.

"I'm the Captain's orderly," said Joe, "and I want the best suite of rooms you have for him. He is feeling indisposed and will be here to occupy the rooms day after tomorrow night. I am to occupy them in the meantime and take care of any mail or telegrams for him."

THE clerk called his major-domo, and they chattered. Then they called the general factotum of the ménage, and the three of them chattered. It was unusual and quite beyond the rules of the house; and besides, did the *señor* have credentials? When the señor advised them that he wore his credentials on the ends of his arms, the racket, so Joe says, sounded a good deal like the family cookstove scampering up and down the cellar steps. He reminded them that he represented the captain of a United States warship and directed their attention to some incidents in 1916. They were devastated with sorrow, of course, but were still undecided. When Joe finally worked himself into a fine state of indignation, however, and banged the desk to the tune of American cussing mingled with a volley of pigeon-Mexican, and finally threatened to wire the Secretary of State unless his demands were immediately complied with, they gave in. Joe was soon ensconced in the best the hotel offered, and from what he says, it was pretty good.

After a hearty luncheon, for which he simply indorsed the check and charged it to the Captain's reservation, he sailed out to do the town. The average youth under the above conditions would have been hunting a hole to crawl into, or at best a quiet bull fight or baby revolution to watch. Not so Joe! He was made of sterner stuff.

The first place the lad headed for was one of the largest automobile firms, Terrazas and Dominguez. He went in with his chest cleaving the air like a bowsprit and an air of hauteur that would have turned a floorwalker green with envy. He acted like ready money, and by the sunshades of Solomon, they swallowed his talk, hook, line, reel and sinker. His story was a duplicate of the one that got him the hotel accommodations, with slight necessary changes.

"I am the personal representative of Captain Martin," he told them, "and I am commissioned to select a personal car for his use during our month's stay in these waters. The Captain is indisposed, but he has rooms at the Diligencia, and desires that I select the car, try it out and have it ready for him. The details of payment he will attend to as quickly as he can leave the hotel."

The fact that the Captain's name was not Martin, and the further fact that the warship was due to steam away on the third day following, did not detract from the air of gay abandon with which Joe laid down the law to that bunch of Mexicans. He even called the hotel for them and convinced them that the reservation of rooms was as he had told them.

Of course you realize, son, that not in one case out of a hundred could such a cock-and-bull story be made to stick, but Joe's self-confidence and his air of knowing exactly what he wanted took those yellow-skinned patriots off their feet so effectively that he was quickly ushered in to the general manager.

He again told his story, and again worked himself into a state of righteous anger at the dumbness of the assembled intellects. The chief spig wanted to please *"el Señor Capitán,"* all right, but it seemed that even in Mexico an automobile was an automobile. He bit his lips and chewed his mustachios in indecision until Joe finally arose and with considerable dignity informed him that he didn't 'low their particular old car was quite classy enough for an American warship captain, anyhow. That was rather hitting below the belt, of course, but it took the high panjandrum right in his pride, which was where he principally lived. The result was that in ten minutes Joe drove through the stuccoed exit-way in a shiny, smoothly purring coupé, while back in his office the chief chili-chaser chewed his mustache and gazed sadly at a receipt signed for a fictitious "Captain E. B. Martin," by an equally fictitious personal representative.

I THINK we'll not argue over the fact that Joe's nerve was certainly hitting on all twelve up to this point. Whatever the morals of his carryings-on, his methods were certainly the pure quill. The net results of his first four hours on shore were the best suite of rooms in town and a five-thousand-dollar go-fast. Nerve? I'd tell a man!

Well, even Joe figured he'd done right well, everything considered, but his ears were weary for the sound of coins jingling in his pockets. His assets were anything but liquid, being simply his shore uniform, three frazzled cigarettes and one handkerchief. The case called for more nerve. He parked his car in front of the hotel and went into executive session with himself. Funny thing, son, that when a man who is accustomed to more manual than mental labor sits down and indulges in original thought, he nearly always goes to sleep over the job. This was Joe's fix. For obvious reasons he had taken a seat in a secluded corner behind a big palm, or rubber plant, or whatever it is they seclude corners with. He knew he was stirring up a good deal of gravy and that it might begin getting thicker any time. Not that he was worried or scared—he simply wasn't inviting trouble!

The sedative effect of the luncheon plus the cool fragrance of the cloistered corner plus the unusual strain of intensive thought soon lulled Joe into a dreamless sleep. Nature in his case required a good deal of restoring, and the boy slept from four o'clock until nearly eleven. He maintains that his guardian angel woke him up. I incline to the opinion that it was the drone of voices on the other side of the foliage and not three feet from his head that turned the trick. Anyway, he came alive all of a sudden, and the first words he heard were, "Señor Borden." The next ones were *"Ochenta mil dolares."* The combination, the name of the rich American publisher of a big string of Mexican papers, with the sum of eighty thousand dollars, all coupled with the oily yet guttural insinuation in the tones of the speakers, made Joe pin his ears back in a hurry. He got a good bit of a thrill out of the premonition—he calls it a "hunch"—that came over him. I don't doubt it. He affirms that he knew there was a rivet loose somewhere just from the way the two *hombres* mentioned the name of Dick Borden.

Luckily for Joe, his dark blue uniform blended so well with the shadows of his corner that his presence had not been suspected. He says he didn't even draw a breath for the next thirty minutes, he was so set on finding out what sort of a kettle of fish they were cooking up. Don't misunderstand his motives. He didn't have any. He was simply in a financial frame of mind himself, and these waxed-faced gentry were evidently brewing a stew from which he might possibly get a little broth. On top of that, he didn't like their way of talking about his fellow-countryman.

WHILE he watched them through the heavy leaves, those two dapper Mexicans—he says they were both turned out like tan polished tailor's models—unfolded a plan by which they proposed to get away with a big handful of jewelry and eighty thousand dollars' worth of bearer bonds which Borden had locked in his library safe. It seems that one of Borden's servants was the third member of the gang, and that he had been planted in the household some two months previously for the one purpose of getting the lay of the land. The plan was simply for him to leave the front door open the following night so that the two others could slip in, following a chart of the house he had drawn for them, and calmly pick the grapes. The servant was then to stay on in his position for a month or so to disarm suspicions. Sounds like melodrama, eh?

After unfolding all the details of their plan, doing a sort of dress rehearsal, so to speak, the two rascals got calmly up and vanished through the front door of the lobby. Joe waited for another half-hour to do away with any suspicion on the part of the half-dozen people still lounging in the long, low room; then he walked out, drove his car into the hotel garage, ate a deliberate midnight supper which he charged to the rooms, and retired. He had a plan already hatched in his active young brain; and I make no doubt that the moon, if it happened to look into Joe's room, saw him smiling in the care-free fashion that only American youths, raising the devil, realizing it and enjoying it, understand.

THE next morning, after breakfasting in his rooms,—again at the expense of the hotel,—he indulged in several hours' joy-riding about the city, nodding to all the good-looking *señoritas* and taking a dozen or two riding. The escort of one of them lost his temper when his girl took a sudden preference for the dashing young sailor in the big car, and had to be cuffed into submission, but Joe avers that the rest of the morning was uneventful excepting for a couple of brushes with half-caste speed-cops.

The afternoon was rather full, however. He found a particularly buxom young lady, standing idly on a corner as though waiting for some one, and decided to take her to the matinée at the Teatro Hidalgo. She was willing enough, but he was, as you remember, stony broke. He girded up his loins or whatever it is that a young duck with that sort of nerve girds up, and sailed into that theater with an air of self-possession and affected dignity that the mother of a movie star might have envied. When the liveried ticket-taker touched him on the shoulder and suavely suggested the formal little pasteboards, Joe assumed an air of injured dignity and innocence which, as you young fellows say, knocked that oily-handed gentleman for a loop. He was not long in recovering, however, and calling the manager.

By the time that dignitary arrived, Joe and his lady were safely seated in two of the best chairs in the house. At the manager's touch, the young scamp turned around and told him in good United States talk to get the ruddy hell out of there and he would be around to the office to palaver after the show. You can imagine him trying to get away with anything of that sort in one of our theaters, son. But he made his bluff stick.

After the performance he stopped at the office long enough to tweak the manager's nose and give him a vivid verbal injunction to the effect that his family would probably enjoy his company longer, and his life insurance remain a non-negotiable asset for a much longer time, if in the future he exhibited greater courtesy to visiting American gobs.

Well, to get on with Joe's peregrinations: He made up his mind that his social duties were due to become too heavy for a coupé to handle. A larger car was necessary. He took the girl home and set sail for the largest automobile house in the city, the factory representatives of a famous twin-six company. He told them that the Captain desired a larger model, and while the present car was more than satisfactory in all respects, he had simply dropped in to look their line over. He gave them the impression that he was just on his way over to the other company to exchange the coupé for a sedan of the same model. Naturally, this got the twin-six people on the prod right off, and nothing would do but that Joe must take one of their big sedans over for the Captain's inspection.

He took the car for a drive out toward Orizaba—he'd been so busy since landing that the mountain had been compelled to wait. Returning in an hour, he told the salespeople that the Captain was delighted with the appearance of the car, and while he was too ill to leave the hotel to try it out personally for a couple of days, he had decided to purchase it. This was duck soup for the twin-six people, but it seems that even to them, an automobile was also an automobile, and the little formality of payment remained. Joe varied his tactics this time, and promised that he would bring the cash right back.

What does the young rapscallion do but hot-foot it to the hotel and call the twin-six people up, changing his voice to impersonate the Captain. He expressed his consuming sorrow that the banks had closed for the day and that he could not send the cash over at once by his orderly. More than that he, the Captain, while unable to leave his rooms, was having some friends in for a little informal evening and desired the big car to send after them.

Would they be so good as to oblige him by permitting his orderly, Joe, to bring the car over at once, and he would have the money over as quickly as the banks opened in the morning. It seems that the twin-six manager nearly choked to death expressing his delight at the opportunity of extending the courtesy to el Señor Capitán. It wasn't every day, you know, that they had the privilege of serving captains of American warships, and besides, getting ahead of the other company had put him in a rather expansive humor. The Señor Capitán would, of course leave the coupé as a matter of form in place of the sedan? The Captain would! Joe says it was like shooting fish. He thanked the manager as though the whole deal were simply a matter of course, and prepared to hang up. Then, as an afterthought, he explained that he, the Captain, needed a little ready change for the evening. Would the manager be so good as to cash the check, a little matter of three hundred American dollars, that his orderly, Joe, would bring over? The check would be drawn on the Banco Nacional. A little poker-game was in the offing. Did the manager understand? The manager did! Consequently, when Joe left the twin-six showrooms a half-hour later, he had the largest sedan in the place, and buttoned tightly in his hip pocket, three hundred dollars in crisp bills.

DINNER that evening was a good deal of an occasion. With plenty of money, as fine a car as the city boasted and a well-planned evening ahead, Joe unwound some of his native geniality, tipped lavishly and soon had all the waiters bowing and scraping for his favors. The young cub! Think of it, son! Less than thirty hours on shore, and his fever-chart showed a thirty-dollar-a-day hotel suite, two expensive automobiles, a theater-trip with a good-looking señorita, three hundred dollars cash money, one fight and the start of half a dozen others. Nerve? I'll tell Aunt Julia!

Dinner concluded, Joe proceeded to thicken the plot. In his rides that day he had located the Dick Borden mansion, and first browbeating a three-ball artist—a pawnbroker, son, not a billiard-player—into letting him have a heavy automatic on payment of a two-dollar deposit, with the promise of the balance in the morning, he set out for the place. His air of supreme confidence and the big car simply outbluffed the flapping hands and fevered expostulations of the loan-shark who, I imagine, is still wondering how it all happened.

Joe's story to Borden required a little more finesse, but what it needed he had, and the sedan backed up his statements to the effect that he was waiting for the Captain to come ashore from the ship in the morning and would then take him for a short tour up toward Tampico to enable him better to recover from his slight illness. His tale of the proposed robbery made Borden gasp a good deal, I guess, and Joe had difficulty in keeping him from telephoning for the police, the constabulary and the rebel army. He finally quieted down, however, and after an hour of persuasion acquiesced in Joe's plan, which was simply that he, Joe, wait in the library and act as host to the rascals.

Joe assured him that he had plenty of nerve and insisted that he was nearly perishing for lack of excitement. Can you feature that, son? That young rib of Satan craving excitement! Well, he carried his point—the blue of Uncle Sam's uniform and the businesslike gun ending the argument. Borden introduced him to the family. You remember I told you about Joe giving credit to his guardian angel for waking him up in time to hear that plot the night before. The last person to whom he was introduced was the reason for his certainty on that point. Doris Borden pretty nearly took his breath away, and from what he says, he was a good half-hour recovering his composure. Not that I blame him, either.

The first thing Joe did was to ask Doris to take a morning spin with him before he had to leave. He was, and is, a strikingly attractive young devil, and there was no difficulty on that score. The rest of the evening was spent in the various ways devised by two young things who are smitten by each other. Doris played the piano, and Joe told her tales of his experiences, making particular mention of his injury in the Service. Of course this made him look all the better to her. All this time Dick Borden puffed nervously about, trying to convince himself that he shouldn't agree to the plan of the young harum-scarum, and yet instinctively drawn to him as a fellow-countryman amply able to take care of himself and whatever was left in his charge.

THE family retired quite late, the valuables having been transferred upstairs at Joe's suggestion. Whether it was to remove temptation from himself or to make sure that even if the two spiggoties got him, they couldn't get the stuff, is a question for judicial determination. The point is that he waited in the library alone, with a court-martial, a civil sentence and what not hanging over him, and with only his love of a good fight as compensation for the risks he intended running. Ah, ha! So you see the milk in the coconut, do you, son? Sure you would. Yes, Doris was the reason for the quiet whistle with which he entertained himself during the nerve-racking wait.

About three o'clock, when he was beginning to get a bit drowsy, he heard the front door swing softly against a chair—a chair he had placed there for that particular reason, incidentally. He grinned at the sizzling Mexican oaths which hissed fervently in the dark hall. He had placed himself just inside the door connecting the library with the hall, with his hand on the light-switch, and the comforting bulk of the big automatic resting in his pocket.

Well, to make a long story short, when the two Mexicans slipped into the room, he snapped on the lights and let the fellows look into the muzzle of a gun that must have looked as big to them as a fourteen-inch mortar. Such a gun in the hands of an American bluejacket is a great persuader, and it didn't take Joe long to get their names. The chief seemed to be simply one Manuel Garcia, while the right bower labored under the weighty patronymic Ygnacio Luis y Arias. When it came to the matter of telling the name of their accomplice in the house, however, they maintained a stubborn silence.

Joe simply grinned and ordered Manuel to tie Ygnacio Luis. The style of the fastening was Joe's own idea and it worked admirably. He had the fellow's feet tied together, then his wrists, and then he ordered him to bend over until the wrist and foot lashings could be fastened together. When the job was done, the greaser looked like a boy playing leapfrog and waiting for the others to jump over him. As quickly as Manuel had finished his task, Joe proceeded to tie him in the same fashion. The idea didn't particularly appeal to the Mexican, and he started to get a bit unruly. Joe patted his ear with the automatic and then calmly tied him while he lay unconscious on the rug. He then propped them side by side with their heads against the wall and set a chair on each side to prevent their falling over.

The stage being set, the boy hunted the room over for a suitable shillelah, trying consecutively a piece of firewood, three books and a light ruler picked from the library desk. None of the cudgels suited him. He finally rustled a heavy cane from the hall, and proceeded to serious business.

THUS far everything had been quiet. He had threatened the two intruders into soft speech, because he did not wish to disturb the family until all was in readiness. By this time Manuel was again beginning to take an active interest in affairs, and Joe offered them ten seconds in which to tell the name of their fellow conspirator. I'm not sure that he waited the full ten seconds, but it is a matter of record that the noise as he brought the cane down on the prominent exposures of the rascal's anatomy were loud enough to wake the natives for three blocks in every direction.

Joe knew just where to lay his cane to get maximum results, and lay it he did. The results were all that could be asked in point of volume, and the racket brought Dick Borden and the family downstairs in record time. They found Joe calmly holding court. He was seated in a big armchair beside the two inverted and squirming Mexicans, and when Borden entered, the monologue was running about like this.

"Well, *amigo,* ready to tell yet? No?" *Whack!!* Chorus of yells.

"And how about you with the trick name, eh? No?" *Whack!!* Louder yells.

"All right, now both together. Sing the chorus in unison." *Whack!! Whack!!* "Sing louder, you yellow terriers." *Whack!! Whack!!*

Well sir, Dick Borden says that it was fifteen minutes before he could stop laughing long enough to let Joe know he was there and suggest that the punishment be suspended. When he did suggest it, Joe simply told him that he figured on hammering those chaps until morning, if necessary—at least long enough to get the name of the chap who was in cahoots with them. At this promise of renewed activity on areas already so painful that the next month loomed as a period limited to standing up or lying down, Manuel and Ygnacio called the turn.

They gargled their consonants so hard that it was several minutes before they made it clear that the butler was the guilty party. Joe shot up the back stairs just in time to catch that *hombre* preparing to leave the house by means of a knotted sheet from his window to the ground, and soon returned with the informally clad and thoroughly cowed chap. Getting the trio to the city *carcel* was a mere formality, attended to by Borden himself, while Doris indulged in some lionizing, with Joe as the willing victim.

OF course the family made a good deal of the affair, and I guess the rest of the night was devoted to a sort of a mutual admiration society. Joe hadn't been attempting to figure out the dividing line between his own buccaneering activities and those attempted by the three chaps who had just departed for jail. He'd been simply enjoying himself without really realizing what penalities might come his way when the final reckoning came. Whatever he thought, he was certainly flying down the home-stretch with the wind at his back, eh, son?

The sight of Doris Borden had jarred him back to a vague appreciation of the hornet's nest he had been agitating for the past two days, and it was a mighty thoughtful young man who sat at breakfast with the family and then started out for the long ride he had promised the lady. Dick Borden says the boy was so preoccupied that he couldn't help doing a bit of wondering about his story of the previous evening. Then he thought of the jewelry and the bearer bonds, and cussed himself for a suspicious old scoundrel.

Well, that automobile ride drew the strings tighter on the two youngsters, and so fast had the little chap with the arrows worked that it didn't require any headlines to announce to the family that they stood to lose a daughter and acquire a new son in the not far distant future. Nothing was said, of course, and the evidence was all circumstantial. Joe was too much concerned with the old adage that chickens come home to roost, and the fact that it would probably be a good many months before he could get out of durance vile. For when he left shortly before noon, he had made up his mind to go to all parties concerned and make a clean breast of the affair. Sort of throw himself upon the mercy of the court, so to speak. He had to wipe the slate clean and square his affairs in all quarters before he would be in position to pop any formal question to Doris Borden.

The fact that he was an impecunious sailor and she the daughter of half a dozen millions or so didn't occur to either the Bordens or to Joe. He knew that he loved her, and he felt confident that the feeling was mutual. Nothing else mattered. That's the American point of view, son.

Well, sir, Joe's good resolution held until he was within three blocks of the hotel. He recognized two fellow-sailors standing at the hotel corner, and something seemed to tell him that they were waiting for him to turn up. The sudden visions of courts-martial, irons and various other undesirable contingencies hit him so hard that Doris and his good resolutions were left at the barrier. Joe says that something just snapped in his brain, and that the only thought he had was that the more miles he placed between himself and Vera Cruz, the longer would he enjoy liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and possibly life—for Joe knew how temperamental Mexicans can be at times.

He realized that the whole police force was probably on the lookout for him and that the big car could be easily recognized and traced. Instinct made him head for the country club, calmly look over the various cars parked there, select a long, low, black roadster, and leaving the sedan parked in its place, turn its nose toward the open country and leave in a cloud of dust. Joe had broken a good many laws and knew it, but there was one, the law of self-preservation, that he was dead set on obeying. He figured that the coast route through Tuxpam and Tampico to Matamores, just across the border from Brownsville, was the best bet for him—principally because it was the shortest way to the dusty haven of Texas.

A FEW miles out of the city he overtook another car containing a young Mexican apparently on pleasure bent. Joe deliberately crowded him off the road, and after a short exchange of amenities, punctuated by intervals of bodily persuasion, compelled him to exchange clothes with him. Of course this meant more grief when he should be caught, because masquerading in civilian clothes is, as you know, a mighty serious thing in Uncle Sam's Navy. However, Joe wasn't figuring

on getting caught. Quite the opposite, in fact! The net result of the change was fine in two ways for Joe. The uniform would result in the other chap's being arrested, and his examination would hold up pursuit for several hours, probably; Joe, on the other hand, being now rigged out as a Mexican dandy, even if his clothes did fit him a bit too soon, figured on being forty miles farther away for every hour of that delay. There was little chance that he would be recognized as long as he maintained such a speed, and the way the big car had already responded made Joe determined that anyone interested in him would have to do a heap more than merely recognize him before he would be available for any trial or blood-sacrifice.

For obvious reasons, after changing clothes, he kept the same road long enough to throw the outraged young Mexican off the track, and then swung to the left for some twenty miles before again heading for the border. This road would take him through Jalapa and Monterrey, to Nuevo Laredo and its sister town, Laredo, Texas. San Antonio lay just a hundred and fifty miles on the other side, and the safe anchorage of the old Alamo Square looked powerfully attractive to him.

There were two results of this change of route. One was that when his pursuers—for by this time they were numerous, outraged and bent on many things, the least of which was probably murder—heard finally the story of the other chap, the one who had loaned Joe his clothes, they kept pounding right along up the coast and didn't come within miles of him. The second result was that the boy, not knowing the country, had selected the very mountain road used by the gang of *colorado-maduro* outlaws who were at that time giving the Mexican Government a lot of worry. The chief highbinder of this particular band of cutthroats was named Jesus Ortego, but there was precious little of the peacemaker about him, and he counted that day lost which didn't add at least a half-dozen kidnapings, ranch-house burnings or murders to the record of his outfit. Even if Joe's pursuers had figured he might consider that road, they would have given him credit for enough good sense to fight shy of it because of the danger. He might have, if he had known anything about it. But as I say, he didn't. Consequently, about four o'clock, as he was winging merrily along, whistling, and cocksure that the world was his oyster, he ran smack-dab right into the whole motley crew.

THE way Joe tells it, they looked a good deal like a badly sunburned comic-opera chorus drafted from Washington's army at Valley Forge, Napoleon's retreat from Moscow and "The Two Orphans," and the aroma of their camp was some three shades stronger than a camel-camp he had gotten on the down-wind side of in Cairo two years before. Of course they immediately took him for the high-caste Mexican he was dressed to impersonate, and but for the fact that the chief bully of the outfit wanted to save him as a sort of private sacrifice, I guess our friend Joe would have lasted about as long as the proverbial calico cat. As it was, about fifty of the crew hopped on the car, and with the chief himself beside him, Joe drove on for a mile or so to a quiet spot where the fun could take place without interruption.

Protestations that they had made a whale of a mistake seemed only to tickle the rascals, and Joe says he was beginning to get a bit madder than was healthy, by the time they reached the appointed place. Well, to cut it short, he finally had an inspiration and whipped his little identification disk from under his shirt and invited the big boss to read the official proof that he was an honest-to-God sailor from Uncle Sam's Navy, and this gave even that old saddle-leather scoundrel reason to pause and consider.

Seeing the old gargoyle hesitating, Joe proceeded to work up another inspiration. If these fellows were so at outs with the "ins," they would probably take some pleasure in the way he had outwitted the hated high castes for the past two days. It was the right note, and as soon as he saw its effect, he played it hard, loud and long.

When he told of his experience at the theater, the fifty outlaws doubled up with mirth. When he explained how he had gotten the three automobiles and three hundred dollars in cash, several of them found standing too much of a task and rolled upon the ground. When he came to the story of how he had changed clothes with one of the leisured scions of high-caste wealth, they crowded round him, wrung his hand until it nearly dropped off, and after profuse apologies that sounded a

good deal to Joe like a battery of steam cranes dumping coal into the bunkers of a ship, they ushered him to his car. Then they wished him Godspeed or *bon voyage* or whatever it is that spiggoty outlaws wish on their friends, and sent him on his way to the border. They even gave him a password to use in case any of their bloodthirsty fellow-brigands should stop him before he reached the river. Imagine that if you can, son. Nerve? By the great bull of Bashan, yes!

Well, sir, Joe had covered the remaining five hundred odd miles to the border all right about seven o'clock the next morning. He had met two other small gangs of bandits just north of Pachuca and had taken their best wishes right on with him, after he used the open sesame password he'd been given. Instead of swimming the river on his arrival, as he had planned, he found himself so much in love with the big black roadster that he decided to bluff his way past the guard at the Laredo bridge. More nerve, all right, but it cooked his goose as far as that particular journey was concerned.

He had his bluff pretty well under way with the supernumerary on guard and was ready to cross his palm with the remnants of his three hundred dollars and cross the bridge, when another guard came up with an official-looking telegram. Of course the description it recited was made to order for Joe, and he was promptly lodged in the community bastile. Joe says it's a long worm that wont turn around, but he realized that his was definitely on the backtrack.

THEY got him back to Vera Cruz three days later, and the whole town turned out to welcome him. Joe says the only drawback was that most of the crowd carried from one to four adobe bricks apiece. Well, there was a good deal of a struggle between the civil authorities and the Captain of the warship to see which should have first chance at him. Of course, the Captain took the trick. American warship captains usually hold trumps in such cases.

A court-martial was speedily arranged, and Joe was hauled before the bar of judgment. In this case judgment was not tempered with mercy. The more inflammatory elements wanted his life or at least that portion of him known vulgarly as his "hide." Well, sir, Nemesis took a new form when Joe was brought out on deck. You remember that he had taken the liberty card of another sailor? Also that he had gathered up a certain señorita and taken her to the theater? Well—Fate is a queer thing. It so happened that this sailor whose card he had taken was the one for whom the damsel was waiting. By Godfrey, he'd met her a couple of days before and fixed up a nice date for that afternoon. See the complications, son? It was bad enough for the boy to have his card stolen so that he had to stay on board ship instead of in his dusky señorita's company. But for the same chap who stole his card also to take his girl—that, son, was heaping the coals of fire too almighty high. The other sailor figured that too much was too much, and said as much to the Captain. The Captain agreed with him. Therefore, when the injured one demanded the privilege of venting his spleen on the hapless Joe before official measures put him out of his reach, the Captain, while appearing to demur for a time, was secretly delighted. That, he thought, would be a proper visitation of justice. Accordingly the afterdeck was turned into an impromptu prize-ring and Joe was put face to face with a vengeance that was at once swift, sure and extremely thorough.

Joe was a pretty husky youth himself, and it was not his intention to absorb any more punishment than was absolutely necessary. He gave a pretty good account of himself, I'm told, during the few minutes the hostilities lasted. The other chap, however, had plain Yankee anger on his side, as well as a ten-pound advantage. The lacing he gave poor Joe was the talk of the fleet for months afterward. Gloves were not used. The fight was a regular backwoods affair, I guess. The other fellow used good strategy and immediately set to work to close Joe's eyes. Naturally, even the best marksmen sometimes miss and several triphammer blows were landed on Joe's forehead. As you know, that's a fine place for a man to break his knuckles, but the other lad was too downright mad to care. The result was Joe's head was so thoroughly banged that he made easy sailing for the other. A straight right to the head was the blow that finished the mêlée and Joe hit the deck with a thud.

Instead of recovering in a few minutes, as most fighters do from such a trimming, he became wildly delirious, and the whole crew, from Captain to call-boy were on

the anxious seat, wondering whether he would pull through or not. The ship's surgeons made a swift examination, and after an X-ray exposure had been made, they set to work on a grim task. Remember me speaking of the concussion Joe had suffered during the War? Well, sir, it seems that it had never healed properly, and that the bone had been exerting a pressure on the delicate brain tissues. Just what nerves it affected I don't know, but the effect was plain—the pressure which had turned his normally healthy mind to the petty tricks on record, and resulted in his confinement to the ship. As it got worse, it had finally knocked him off his balance so far that he went through that three-day series of devil-may-care escapades without really realizing just what he was doing. His native intelligence made him canny about his methods, but the pressure had sort of short-circuited his moral sense so far as they concerned the ownership of anything which he wanted for himself. The sight of Doris Borden had shocked him so hard that it had cleared up his comprehension of right and wrong while he was with her, but as soon as he left her, he drifted back to the condition he had been in. The effect on him was strong enough, however, to make him realize that the water would soon be too warm for him in Vera Cruz, and to make him hike for the border.

The surgeons explained his predilection for devilment that way, and said it was fortunate it had been discovered before it had some really serious effect. They stated that another year of the pressure would probably have resulted in a sense of irresponsibility that could easily have led to murder. Think of it, son! Through no fault of his own, that old injury was quietly making the boy over into a criminal.

Well, sir, the surgeons performed a trepanning operation and relieved the pressure. The battering he had received had so weakened him, coming as it did right on top of that steady pressure against his brain, that it was better than two months before Joe was back on his feet again. Dick Borden tells me that without changing his general appearance a whit, it completely made the boy over. A certain furtiveness about the eyes was chased away, and a regular he-man sparkle took its place. Borden was drawn to the lad's case and insisted that he be left right there in his home to recuperate. After some wireless messages which permitted him to remain in port another three days so that Joe could be safely moved, the Captain consented. Borden pulled enough wires to get the young cub's discharge from the Navy and then conducted a quiet investigation that found the parents whom Joe's injury had made him completely forget. They had heard nothing from him since his discharge from the Navy hospital after his injury. They were quiet, substantial farmer folks near Atchison, Kansas—good stock, you know; and I guess the old homestead put on a regular old-fashioned celebration when the good news reached them. Altogether Dick made the sailing pretty smooth for Joe, and incidentally for Doris.

"IT'S getting on to two o'clock, son," concluded Cameron, "and so I'll make the rest of it snappy. Joe recovered in fine shape, and there's never been a sign of his old trouble. The doctors say that there never can be. That's that! He and Doris were married just a year from the day they first met—Joe wouldn't have it earlier because he wanted to make sure he was really cured; and little Joe is pretty nearly a year old now."

"I'd give a month's pay to meet this chap," I blurted out, unable to keep quiet any longer.

"Not necessary, son," returned T. Magruder Cameron benignly. "He doesn't mind the story any more, and he's leaving for Mexico tomorrow, anyway."

"Yes, but where can—" I almost stuttered in my eagerness.

"He's been right here on the *Journal*, son. Dick Borden and I played tag together when we were youngsters, and he turned the lad over to me to make into a newspaper man. He's made his mark here with a vengeance, too. He's gone up the ladder like a monkey on a string. I'm right glad, son, that you showed your nerve today. I want at least one nervy chap around this office, and the one I've just told you about leaves tomorrow to take charge of his daddy-in-law's big string of Mexican dailies. He—"

"Who—is—he!" I almost yelled, with more enthusiasm than manners.

"Patterson Joseph Harper," said T. Magruder Cameron with a smile.

Madame Glorious

A notably unusual story by a new writer who here demonstrates a very real gift in the art of fiction-writing.

By LOUIS M. HENOCH

A PLAIN brass plate with the inscription "*Madame Glorious, Psychic*" graced the door-panel. The house in West Sixty-eighth Street, of that old-fashioned, brownstone, English basement type, so common to the neighborhood, was tucked away inconspicuously in a row all of the same pattern, under the noisy shadow of the elevated. In the front room on the second floor a man and a woman were talking. The woman, Madame Glorious, herself, half reclined on a chaise longue, and during the discussion remained unmoved and apparently unemotional. She was a youngish woman, and very attractive. Her eyes were large, of a reddish dark brown, and in their depths gleamed a glint that suggested an electric spark.

Her companion, Henry Clifford, occasionally interrupted his restless feline pacing across the room, to give force to his words. He was a middle-aged man, dressed in what small-town fashion would call natty attire, and his appearance was indicative of middle-class prosperity. Deep lines gave strength to a smooth face, and the wrinkles about his eyes indicated that a kindly smile was habitual with him, albeit they might have been the marks of disguise which the poker-player wears.

He paused in his walk and pointed a forefinger for emphasis as he said: "Glory, you're slipping. Old man Marsh is lousy with money, and we aint getting chicken-feed."

There was a dreamy look in the woman's eyes. She did not seem to heed the speaker's words.

Clifford noticed her absent-mindedness, but chose to disregard it, as he continued: "I worked a long time to land this bird, and when I shill for you, you've got to come through."

Glory, still gazing into space, sought to gain time by the question: "Tell me, Harry, how did you come to get in touch with Mr. Marsh? Where did you meet him?"

THE pupils of his eyes narrowed and darkened for an instant, as he realized the obvious object of the question, but he answered her: "Well, somehow I heard that

the old gentleman was a widower, lived alone in the old-fashioned house in West End Avenue. He wasn't on any of the sucker lists, so I decided if we could land him, we'd have a whale—a retired banker, with no near relative to interfere, money in bundles and not tied up in a trust. I checked up his habits. He was alone a lot, and lonely. Seemed to be different—that sort welcomes a kindly friend. His housekeeper coddled him at home; the chauffeur was his nursemaid; and a Central Park bench at Seventy-second Street his country club. So one day I was on his bench when he came to the curb in his limousine. I started with the weather, eased in a bit about having been a banker in Canton, Ohio, then told of losing my wife a couple of years ago, and how lonely I had been. There was a look of joy in the old man's eyes when he learned that I was a companion in tribulation, and when I told him that in spite of my being a strict Presbyterian, I had found a way to commune with the spirit of my dear departed wife, he came to me like a hick to the circus. For a sucker, Glory, give me one of your hard-boiled bankers. Well, as he began to come on, I backed up and became conservative. Took my time—let days go by—kinda made him take it away from me—your address and all." Clifford hesitated a moment, and then added: "Now, you've given him the works, made him like it, and yet we aint even getting pin-feathers."

During the long speech, he had been watching Glory carefully. He had often found words useful for concealing thought, and her abstraction presented a problem, which was no nearer solution when she said: "Mr. Marsh is such a gentle, lovable man, Harry—class, all the time. Why, he is seventy odd years old and never lets down for a minute."

Clifford's face reddened and he exclaimed, "What the—" then checked himself and in a quieter tone went on: "We don't let the looks of our customers interfere with the way we wait on trade. You and I've been running this séance-shop like a five-and-ten-cent store—for cheap suckers. We've a live one at last, and you've got to land him."

THE distant tinkle of a bell came to them. Glory rose to her feet and murmured: "That's Mr. Marsh now. You wait downstairs in the parlor."

Clifford did not reply, but as he walked to the door, he glanced over his shoulder, and noticed that Glory's face wore a puzzled look.

A moment later, when she heard the visitor admitted, Glory called down: "Polly, if that is Mr. Marsh, please show him right up here."

Meantime she walked to the head of the stairs and awaited her guest with outstretched hand, allowing him to precede her into the front room. Mr. Marsh was quietly but meticulously attired. His garb conveyed the impression of being adapted to a younger man. He seemed feeble, and his bravely fixed smile radiated a warmth of love, though it failed to light the tired eyes. Glory solicitously conducted him to the chaise longue, which she had previously vacated, seating herself beside him.

He looked at her with his set smile, and in a low, whimsical tone, sighed: "I had another bad night. I didn't feel like calling for Mrs. Davis, my housekeeper. Lying awake, the hours seemed to drag so. Lonely old age is a terrible thing."

A look of tenderness softened Glory's face as she answered: "Don't talk like that, Joseph. Age is relative. It is mental."

There was a wistfulness in his faded eyes, as he explained: "You see, I have no life companion—no one I can reach for and hold on to, no one I can help. Possibly it is because there is no one to care or be cared for that I am so solitary."

It was a long speech for the old gentleman, and he unconsciously sighed as he finished it.

Glory protested: "You must not and shall not be lonely. Let us sit in the silence while I try to find my guide."

She reached over and took his hand. A long pause followed. He, feeling the comfort of the young woman's presence, was content. Glory became absorbed in her thoughts. It had suddenly come to her that she was not playing the game according to code. Her associates were expecting her to work on this old man's credulity, to get his money. If she delayed in intriguing Marsh, the gang would use rougher and surer methods. The gang! She was sick of them. The crooked, scheming, blackmailing business of theirs nauseated her.

This pathetic old man had come for comfort and solace. He trusted and appealed to her for help. Involuntarily she tightened her clasp on his dry, withered hand, her own warm and palpitating with vitality. The maternal instinct quickened

her desire to mother this lonely soul, and her consciousness was suddenly illuminated and flooded with the light of an inspiration which promised relief for them both. She would marry him and give him the care and comfort he wanted. Yes, and his position, coupled with her watchfulness, would offer ample protection against the menace of Clifford and his crowd.

When she thought of Clifford, her heart skipped a beat. Well, she would double-cross him. Subconsciously she had been wanting to break away from him—to get back to straight going, seeking a way out; and this was it. Best of all, it meant the luxury she craved and had never known.

She disengaged her hand and spoke incisively: "Joseph, my guide has answered. We have been drifting. Now we are going to correct this lonely condition. You too must ask the spirits for help."

Rising, she handed him a tablet of notepaper, and continued: "Write down on this just what is in your heart."

MARSH took a gold pencil from his pocket and with a shaky hand slowly inscribed a few words. Meantime, Glory crossed the room to a desk and from the top drawer extracted a folding slate—similar to those formerly in use in primary schools.

Pulling up a chair, she seated herself facing the old gentleman, and said: "Now, fold your paper and inclose it between the slates."

When this was done, she held the slate on the palms of her two hands, their backs resting in her lap; and following her directions, Marsh covered the top with his outspread hands, so that the two were holding the folded slate between them with the penciled note inside.

For a few moments there was quiet, broken only by the labored breathing of the man. Then a sound of scratching was heard, evidently proceeding from the interior of the slate. "You're so mediumistic," Glory exclaimed. "They are at work already. Why, sometimes it takes hours, and again often one can get nothing. Oh, Joseph, dear, they want to help you; and you too must help. Whatever they say to do, don't hesitate. It means so much."

The scratching continued. Then came a pause, then a sharp metallic rap. The medium raised the slate and opened it. On the lower inside surface appeared several lines written in a faint, angular hand.

Marsh excitedly sputtered: "It is Martha's writing. That is her name signed."

With difficulty they deciphered the message:

Joe, follow Madame's advice. She is our friend. I have tried so hard to come to you. I must speak to you. Ask Tecumseh to bring me. Martha.

Tears filled Marsh's eyes, and he asked in a low, awed voice: "Who is Tecumseh? How can I talk to Martha? I have so much to tell her."

In hushed tones she replied:

"Tecumseh is my Indian guide. He brings me messages from the spirit world. Martha has evidently met him and wants him to lead her to you."

"When, when can I see her?" the old man whispered.

"I will try to reach her at our circle tomorrow night. You must arrange to be here."

Glory rose to her feet as an intimation that the sitting was at an end. Marsh followed her example. As he started toward the door, he paused and whimpered like a small boy: "But Mrs. Davis does not want me to go out at night alone."

Glory took his hand, hesitated a moment, and then suggested: "You know Mr. Clifford. He often attends our séances. Why not telephone him to call for you, and you two come together." Without waiting for a reply, she continued: "Good-by, Joseph. Keep your mind constantly on this, and remember I shall expect you tomorrow evening."

THE street door had barely closed on the old gentleman when Clifford mounted the stairs and pushed into the room.

He affected an air of camaraderie as he smilingly asked: "Well, how about it, old dear?"

The woman tried to reply in the same spirit of banter: "We'll give your little playmate the third degree here tomorrow evening, at the circle, and he will phone you to call for him. Capping his own game, eh, Harry?"

Her voice trembled, and her heart beat fast. She wondered if the narrowed feline pupils of the man's eyes could search out the dark corners of her mind, if his astuteness could divine the twist she had given their plans.

As he turned to leave, his words were

reassuring. "That's fine, Glory. So long, then, till tomorrow—and we'll start running him ragged."

Clifford's musings would certainly have given Glory ample cause for alarm, for as he hurried toward the elevated, he made a violent gesture and muttered between set teeth: "So she's going to grab him! Well, I'm something of a grabber myself, and she may get the short end of his wishbone."

THE following evening a half-dozen guests were gathered in the front parlor of Madame Glorious' house. Two thin, bleak women, probably sisters, in dark, droopy gowns, were conferring together in undertones. A soft-voiced man with baggy trousers, evidently a regular attendant, wandered about speaking in a fraternal way with the other guests and discussing casually an engagement which he had to meet his Ella later in the evening, as though she were in the flesh. A pale-faced little lady in widow's weeds was trying to smother her broken sobs with a black-bordered handkerchief. A rheumy-eyed man with a nervous cough and a sniffle stood uncertainly in the center of the room, directly under the old-fashioned electric chandelier dependent from the ceiling, while to the right of the black velvet portières, which hung in the double doorway separating the front from the rear parlor, was seated a quiet, severe-looking woman in a tailored dress with a small brown fur neckpiece.

A little stir was occasioned when the white-aproned maid ushered in Clifford and Marsh. The former piloted his companion across the room, bowing distantly to some of the guests, with whom he evidently had a slight acquaintance.

Suddenly the room grew still, and Madame Glorious appeared between the curtains which filled the double doorway. The pallor of her face was accentuated by a black gown, unrelieved by any color.

In a low-pitched voice she said, "Will you please arrange the circle," and seated herself in a chair which the maid set directly in front of the portières facing the room.

Quickly the other chairs were placed so as to form a circle. The soft-voiced man with the baggy trousers found a position on Madame's right, while the seat to her left was taken by the severe-looking woman in the tailored dress. Clifford placed himself directly opposite Glory, with Marsh alongside of him.

Still in the same low, flat tone Madame Glorious directed: "The lights are to be extinguished, and we will all join hands. While we are waiting for a manifestation or a materialization, we will sing gently in unison." In an almost inaudible wail, she went on: "The spirits are all about us. The room is filled with them. I feel a strange premonition. Think of your dear ones. Help me. Help me!"

The electric lights were switched off, and the room was in darkness. Some one gasped. A moan was heard.

Then the man with the baggy trousers began to chant: "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave." The song was taken up and rendered with solemnity.

At its conclusion, there was a lull until a woman began in a high, falsetto voice: "We shall gather at the River."

There was a gruesomeness about the singing in the darkness, with sighs and groans punctuating its progress.

A startled shriek, "Some one touched me!" was followed by a man's voice asking, "Is that you, Bobby?" and continuing as though in conversation: "Are you happy? How is Edna?"

This was interrupted by a dominant bass guttural coming from the medium: "You call Tecumseh? He here—Paleface Squaw live in happy hunting-ground, she come too. Want to talk to Joseph."

CLIFFORD felt Marsh's hands grow wet with sweat as the old gentleman whispered: "My God, do you suppose that is Martha coming to me?"

Before Clifford could answer him, the heavy guttural voice called, "Joseph!" and was answered by the old man in a trembling quaver: "Yes, I am here."

The deep bass continued: "Joseph, take seat by camp-fire. Paleface Squaw Martha she make medicine with you."

Marsh instinctively stood up and started toward the medium. Some one moved his chair forward, and without effort on his part, he found himself seated. His hands were taken by the man and woman on either side of the medium, and a little inner circle of four was thus formed, with Marsh directly in front of and facing Madame Glorious. The darkness was impenetrable, but to his neighbors on either side, the old gentleman's nervousness and excitement were apparent.

Some woman in the outer circle gasped: "Oh, my heavens, look!"

Marsh saw a pale fluid splotch of amber light at his feet. It began to take form; and undulating, translucent, it grew to the height of a woman and stood weaving in front of him.

A cool breeze seemed to fill the air, and he sensed rather than heard the low murmur: "Joseph, I—am—so—weak."

He cried: "My girl, my little girl, I've missed you. I need you so."

Again the murmur, felt rather than heard: "So weak—no loneliness—your friend—hold to her—marry her—bond between us—"

Meantime, unable to gather what was being said, the outer circle was buzzing with low, awed exclamation: "It's a materialization." "Isn't she beautiful." "That's astraplasm."

A CHAIR was overturned with a startling crash. There followed a curse. Then a click, and the room was flooded with light as a man shouted from the rear: "Sit quietly where you are. The place is raided."

Instantly t h e r e was pandemonium. Everyone seemed to be milling about the center of the room. An officer stood at the hall door effectually barring egress. The soft-voiced man with baggy trousers darted through the portières, followed by others seeking escape through the rear.

Glory sat unmoved. She was fairly blinded by the hatred which blazed from her eyes as they rested on Clifford.

Mr. Marsh also remained in his seat directly opposite, still retaining his hold on the hand of the quiet, severe-looking woman in the tailored dress.

All the rest of the circle had fled.

Clifford, alone of the four, was standing, having taken a position directly back of the elderly man, with his hand protectingly on the other's shoulder. He seemed oblivious of everything but Glory, and his face wrinkled in a crooked smile.

Then walking over to the uniformed man, who had remained at the hall doorway, he whispered, "Fine business," and with an intimate wink, in a conciliatory tone said, aloud: "Officer, this gentleman and I are only visitors. We don't want any publicity."

The other answered, as he started to leave: "Very good, sir. I'll know where to find you two gentlemen if you are needed."

Clifford returned to his former position and ignoring the women, laughed: "My gracious, think of you and me being arrested with a fake medium. The papers would be full of it."

The crooked smile left his face when he saw Glory step forward, her eyes wide with bewilderment, as she gazed at the old gentleman. "What's the game?" he barked.

Her only answer was to point at their victim and his companion still seated, apparently unconscious of the surroundings, their positions unchanged.

Clifford quickly stepped to her side, sharply scrutinizing them. Then he too stiffened with amazement.

MARSH was leaning forward in his chair, silently fondling, with his faded eyes, the woman by his side. She seemed lost to all about her save the old gentleman, and sat tense and upright, as though expectantly waiting for him to speak.

The silence was broken by the half-whisper of his low-toned voice: "You heard her—she wants me to hold on to you—to marry you—you are a bond between us. Mrs. Davis, you have been divinely directed to come here tonight. Will you be my wife, my helpmate?"

Tears were rolling down the woman's cheeks. The severe expression had been replaced by the rapt look of one who sees a vision, as she answered: "Oh, Mr. Marsh, I do love you so, and I want to care for you and to wait on you and to protect you always."

Glory fell back helplessly into her seat and gasped: "Who is this woman?"

Marsh beamed on her as he replied: "Madame, this is Mrs. Davis, my housekeeper. She was afraid of my coming here tonight. She has been a skeptic right along. Now she knows how wonderful you are. We have been directed."

Mrs. Davis glowingly agreed: "You have been a good angel to us both. We shall never forget how splendid you are."

Glory's face was pinched and tired-looking. She arose, pushed aside one of the velvet portières, and said: "Thank you—It has been a trying evening. I know you will excuse me."

The network of wrinkles about Clifford's eyes might have indicated a kindly smile. He bowed quite formally as he declared, "You have most certainly been divinely directed," and with decided finality, he added, "Good night."

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

The ARIZONA

CHAPTER I

NELLY CALLAHAN was the only one to see just what happened. Everyone else in camp had gone down the island that day to get a count of the half-wild cattle among the blueberry swamps.

The wild drive of rain and low clouds to the westward hid Garden Island from sight and lowered all the horizon, until Lake Michigan seemed a small place. Beaver Island was clear vanished, and so was High Island with its colony of Israelites. Nothing was to be seen from this north end of Hog Island except the foaming shallows and the deeper water beyond, and the huge rollers bursting in from the Wisconsin shore—with two other things. One, as the keen blue eyes of the watching girl could make out, was or had been a boat; the other was a man.

She had heard shots, faint reports cracking down the wind, drawing her to the point of land to see what was happening out there toward Garden Island. For a long while there was nothing to see, until the boat came into sight. It was only a blotch, rising and then gone again, gradually sinking from sight altogether. Few would have seen it. Nelly Callahan, however, was an island girl, and her eye was instantly caught by anything outside the settled scheme of things. So she knew it for a boat, and after a time knew that it had gone down entirely.

Presently she made out the man. To her intense astonishment he was sitting in the stern of a canoe, and paddling. Canoes are rare things in the Beaver Islands these days; here in the center of Lake Michigan, with the nearest land little more than a mirage above the horizon, there are other and safer playthings, and life is too bitter hard to be lightly held.

Yet here was a canoe driving down the storm, a rag of sail on a stumpy mast forward, tarpaulins lashed over freight-rolls amidships, the man paddling in the stern. What connection was there between him and that sunken boat, and those shots behind the curtain of rain and mist?

That he was trying to get in under the curving line of exposed ledge and shoal that ran out from the point was obvious. If he missed, he would be carried on out to the open lake, for once around the point his chances of getting to land were slim. Nelly Callahan watched him admiringly as he fought, gaining inch by inch, now leaning

The same distinguished writer who gave you such thrilling stories of far places as "The Brazen Peacock" and "Lou-Lou" knows the odd corners of his own country too — as witness this exciting story of adventure among the untamed Beaver Islanders.

CALLAHAN

hard on his paddle, now stroking desperately as the gusty wind threw off the canoe's head. The odds were worse than he could realize, too; all along the point there were shoals, running only two to three feet of water, and his canoe evidently carried a centerboard.

SUDDENLY she saw the paddle snap in his hands. The canoe swayed wildly over, swayed back again, rose on a sweeping foam-crest and was flung forward. Another instant, and she would have been rolled over, but the man snatched out another paddle and dug it in. Again the stubborn, straining fight, but he had lost ground, and the current was setting out around the point of land.

Still, he had a good chance to win. He was closer, now; Nelly Callahan could see that his shirt was torn to ribbons, that his mouth was bleeding; and those things did not come from wind and rain alone. The canoe was a wide lake-cruiser, safe enough in any sea except for her heavy load—but this rock-studded shore water was safe for no craft. All the wide expanse around the Beavers is treacherous with rocks barely awash.

An invisible hand seemed to strike the man suddenly, knocking him forward on his face. The canoe staggered, lay over on one side—she had struck bottom. Frantically the man recovered, jerked up the centerboard, threw in the pin. But he was too late; he had lost the game. The bow, with its scrap of sail, bore off before the sweep of wind, and like an arrow the canoe darted out around the point and was gone.

For a moment Nelly Callahan stood motionless at the edge of the trees. Then she turned and started to cut across the base of the long point, to get a view of the north shore beyond. There was no trail, however. Nobody lived on Hog Island; the brush was heavy and almost impenetrable. Excited, breathless, the girl struggled on her way, but knew that she was too slow. However, she kept on. Presently she burst through the final barrier, her feet slipping and sliding on the ground-pine that trailed across the sand, and came out on the northern stretch of shore. Nothing was in sight.

For a little while she stood there, dismayed, agonized, incredulous. She had been a long while getting here, of course; yet some sign of man or canoe, even had the latter capsized, must have been within

sight. Here around the point the force of the rollers was lessened, too. Yet everything was empty. Man and canoe had vanished.

A SHOUT roused the girl. She glanced over her shoulder, fear flitting into her blue eyes; then she turned and retraced her steps.

When she stepped back into the clearing of the camp, the others had returned. She shrank within herself slightly, as always, as her eyes swept them; for though Nelly was a Beaver girl, she was also something more. Her mother had come from the mainland, and there was none of the closely interbred strain in Nelly Callahan.

"Where ye been?" called Matt Big Mary, her father, combing out his tangle of black beard with knotted fingers. "Get the coffee on, girl! It's needin' it we are, the day."

It was something of a tribute to Matt Callahan that he was not known by the usual island diminutive, though the peculiar system of nomenclature obtained to distinguish him from his cousin Matty Basset Callahan. He was a giant of a man, massive as an oak, in his deep eyes a brooding, glooming shadow that had lain there since his wife died.

The others were merry enough, however, for Hughie Dunlevy had fallen into the swamp and mired himself head over ears; small wonder that Jimmy Basset and Willy Tom Gallagher made sport at that, since Hughie Dunlevy was a great man on the island, holding a second mate's ticket, and strong as any two men except Matt Big Mary. He was fishing this summer, going partners with Matt, and had bought a half-interest in the Callahan cattle that ran here on Hog Island. Men said in St. James that he would make a good son-in-law to Matt, for it is always the wildest who settle down the best, and if he would but leave Jimmy Basset's moonshine liquor alone, he had a great future fronting him.

Here for a week they were, pulling the long stakes that had held pound-nets all the spring out at the edge of deep water where the great trout and whitefish ran, and working the north island shore with trap-nets and bloater lines. Here for a week were the four men, with Nelly Callahan to cook and mind camp. She and her father occupied the old shanty at the edge of the clearing; the other three slept in the brown tent near by.

Now, any other Beaver girl would have at once drawn general attention to the sunken boat, which would wash in and make salvage, and to the presumably drowned man and his canoe. But Nelly Callahan kept quiet. She had become a changed girl since getting home from her school-teaching this spring, and finding that her father had made a match with Hughie Dunlevy for her; much had happened; sorrowful things had transpired; and Nelly Callahan was biding her time.

Half an hour passed by, and the noon meal was over; and since the weather was too bad for work, there was naught to be done but sit and smoke. Then Matt Big Mary took Jimmy Basset and Willy Tom Gallagher with him, and a trap-net from the big launch dragged up under the trees, and set off down the shore. He gave Hughie Dunlevy a significant wink.

"We'll take the skiff down to Belmore Bay," said he, "and be setting a trap out beyond the old wreck, and maybe pick up a fifty-dollar box o' bass come Saturday. Hughie, me lad, keep your eye on the camp."

"Aye," said big Hughie, grinning all over his broad, good-natured face; and they filed off down the shore on their two-mile tramp to Belmore Bay. Nelly was keenly aware of the strategy, but made no comment. She was afraid of Hughie, as well she might be. A fine, strapping lad he was except when he was crossed, and good-humored while he had his own way and there was no liquor in him; yet he was one to be afraid of.

"There's more cattle down the island than we looked for, Nelly," said he, chewing at a cigar and watching the girl as she cleaned up. "The buyer will be over from East Jordan next week, and then there'll be doings. What's more, there's some big pine in yonder that's never been cut out. I'm thinkin' of raftin' it over to the mill."

"Good idea, if you owned it," said a strange voice. "But you don't."

HUGHIE DUNLEVY turned, stared, came to his feet with a leap. There at the edge of the trees, his approach unheard, stood the man whom Nelly Callahan had seen in the canoe. He wore nothing but his ragged shirt, the most essential half of a pair of overalls, and canvas shoes. Short, curly red hair crowned a face that was weather-hardened, humorous, strong-boned; one glimpsed sparkling gray eyes

that could either laugh or glitter, and a wide, generous mouth. Dripping wet as he was, the stranger showed bruises and a cut lip, and a red streak ran across his half-exposed chest.

"If you could spare me a bite to eat, young lady, I'd appreciate it!" exclaimed the stranger genially. "Did I scare you folks? Sorry! My boat went down, and I was washed ashore, saw the smoke of your fire, and came for it. Is that a fish mulligan I smell? Then if there's any left, have pity on a starving man!"

Nelly, with a smile at his laughing words, turned to the big pot. Hughie Dunlevy regarded the stranger with a frown on his wide features.

"Where'd ye come from? Who are ye?"

"Callahan's my name," said the stranger, coming forward.

"You're no island Callahan!" said Dunlevy promptly. The other laughed.

"No, I haven't that honor; but our ancestors were kings in Ireland at the same time. I don't go by that name either; mostly folks call me Hardrock."

"Hardrock Callahan, eh?" exclaimed the girl, not liking the general aspect of Hughie Dunlevy. "Well, I'm Nelly Callahan, and this is my father's camp, and you're welcome. Shake hands with Hughie Dunlevy and make yourself comfortable. I'll have this mulligan hot in a minute, and coffee's all ready."

Hardrock stepped forward and extended his hand. Dunlevy accepted it, though not with any marked warmth, and for an instant the two men measured each other.

"What was that you said when you showed up?" demanded Hughie. "About me not owning this timber?"

"Something like that, I guess." Hardrock Callahan laughed cheerfully. "I happen to own it myself. Oh, coffee ready? Thanks, Miss Callahan—or if I may say so, Miss Nelly! I hate to use the name of Callahan on the Beavers—too many other Callahans here already."

He sat down, turned his back to the scowling, indeterminate Hughie, and sipped the hot coffee. Nelly Callahan did not smile, however, as she put the mulligan pot in the embers. It had come to her that while she was crossing the point, this man must have worked his canoe in to the shore, have dragged it up, and have made camp. And what was this story of owning the timber?

"You and me will have a talk," said Hughie Dunlevy, "when you've had a bite to eat."

"Right," said Hardrock Callahan. "I've had one or two talks already this morning."

The girl looked at him, met his twinkling gray eyes, and smiled despite herself.

CHAPTER II

NELLY CALLAHAN saw that this man Hardrock was a stranger; and yet he was not a stranger. No one but a fool would have walked ashore on the Beavers and claimed ownership of land, unless he was known and accepted; for little good his law title would do him. Hardrock was certainly not a fool, however; and at the same time he had some knowledge of the islands. He had hidden his canoe and the stuff in it; and it was significant that Nelly did not look upon the story he told as a lie, but as justifiable precaution. Was it his motorboat that she had seen sinking?

"And did ye say," inquired Hughie, recalling the boat, "that your boat had gone down?"

"Motorboat," and Hardrock nodded in affirmation. "Hit a sunken rock out yonder and raked her bottom out."

"Where from?"

"St. James."

Hughie scowled at that, as well he might, since no one but an islander was from St. James; and this man was no islander. Set in the middle of Lake Michigan, inhabited by a hundred and fifty families, each related to the others, living by the loot of the lakes and woods, the islanders were a clannish lot who clung together and let the world go by. A few Indians lingered; a few outsiders had roamed in; a few tourists came and went; and over on High Island was the colony of Israelites—silent, wistful men with wide eyes and hairy lips. No law was on the Beavers, nor ever had been, save when King Strang established his brief Mormon kingdom at St. James. There was not an officer in the group, not a judge nor a lawyer nor a doctor, and one man was as good as another; and once when the revenue men came to pry around, with talk of the Eighteenth Amendment, there were dark tales of what happened by night—but no more revenue men came. As for game wardens they were not fools.

The Beavers were not out of touch with

the world, however. Scarce a large boat on the western lakes but had from one to ten islanders aboard, and the Beaver Gallaghers were known from Buffalo to Duluth; how many island men lay at the bottom of Whitefish Bay, it was hard to say. Some, who made money, spent the winters in Chicago or elsewhere; and Bowery Callahan, who swung the island vote, was State road-inspector and traveled up and down the land enjoying his ease.

NELLY looked at the two men by the fire, and felt a sudden hurt in the heart of her for the smiling stranger. He had no fear in his eye, and under his brown throat his skin was white like ivory, and his arms under their tattered sleeves were smooth as silk. At him as he ate glared Hughie Dunlevy, broad and dark like all the Dunlevys, rippling with great muscles, a man with strength to toss a box of fish like a toy; and many a tale was told of Hughie on the lake boats, and how he put the boots to any man who dared stand up to him.

Now Hardrock sighed, and smiled at Nelly, and thanked her for his meal.

"We'll have our talk," said he to Hughie, "and then I'll have a smoke."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Hughie. "What are ye doing here?"

"Resting on my own land, if you want to know. I bought this end of the island from Eddie John Macaulay in Charlevoix."

There was no parry between the two of them, no hesitation. Hardrock looked Hughie in the eye and gave him the news straight and direct.

"Buying isn't keeping," said Hughie. "We'll have a word about that matter. Eddie John told us to take the timber if we wanted it, and take it we will."

The gray eyes of Hardrock glittered for a moment.

"Take it you wont," said he bluntly.

Hughie laughed, and it was a laugh to reach under the skin and sting.

"Is that so, Mr. Callahan? It's sorry I'd be to hurt ye, and you washed ashore and out of luck; so keep a civil tongue in your head. Have no such talk around Matt Big Mary, I warn ye, for this is his camp and mine, and he's a bad man in his anger."

Hardrock's thin lips twitched. "So they said about Connie Dunlevy this morning in St. James. I hope he's not related to you? He came out on the dock to have a talk with me, and I think they're taking him over on the mailboat this afternoon to the hospital."

Hughie scrambled to his feet. "Glory be! What have ye done to my brother Connie, ye red-haired outlander?"

"Not a thing," said Hardrock, and chuckled. "Poor Connie fell off the dock. I think he broke a rib or two, and maybe his shoulder."

"Get up!" cried Hughie hoarsely, passion flaming in his face. "So that's who marked ye up, eh? Then I'll finish the job—"

Hardrock stretched himself and began to rise, lazily enough. Just then Nelly Callahan stepped forward.

"Don't, Hughie!" she exclaimed. "It isn't fair—you mustn't! He's all worn out—"

Hughie turned on her and shoved her aside. "Out o' this! Stand aside, and see—"

He never finished the sentence, for Hardrock was off the ground like a spring of steel, a billet of firewood in one hand, and the sound of the blow could be heard across the clearing. Struck behind the ear Hughie Dunlevy threw out his arms and went down in a heap. Hardrock looked at Nelly Callahan, and the glitter of his eyes changed to a smile.

"So that's that," he said coolly. "Too bad I had to use the stick, Miss Nelly, but you spoke the truth when you said I was done up. Don't worry about him—he'll come around after a bit. Do you suppose you could find me a bit of dry tobacco? Then we'll sit down and talk things over."

For a moment the girl looked at him. She was blue of eye and black of hair, and the color was high in her cheeks; and when she smiled there came a dimple on either side of her mouth, and her body held a spring of the foot and a supple grace of round lines that the school-teaching had not taken out of her. Suddenly a laugh broke in her eyes.

"Hughie had it coming, I think," said she, and turned. "I'll get you the tobacco."

She got him some, and sat down at the fire and watched him stuff it into his pipe and light it with an ember. Hughie Dunlevy lay where he had fallen.

"Father and the other boys will be back in an hour or sooner," she said. "I think you'd better go and get that canoe of yours, and be off while you have the chance."

Hardrock gave her a swift look, then chuckled.

"Oh! Saw me land, did you? No, I'm not going, thanks. I'm staying."

"Then you'll have trouble, I'm afraid."

He shrugged, and lay back on one elbow, smoking contentedly.

"Very likely. Eddie John Macaulay thought he worked a smooth trick when he sold me this end of the island, timber and all, but I'd been warned beforehand. I spent the night at St. James and went up to the dance and had a grand time. Connie Dunlevy had too much moonshine, though, and this morning he started to make trouble."

"Listen, please!" said the girl, an urgent note in her voice. "You can't take this seriously—but you must! You don't understand. You'll not be allowed to stay, after all that's happened. Who was shooting out in the channel? What boat was that I saw sinking?"

Hardrock took the pipe from his lips and regarded her for a moment.

"My dear Nelly," he said quietly, "I'm afraid you're the one who doesn't understand. Did you ever hear of Danny Gallagher?"

Her eyes opened at that. "Danny? Why of course! His father Vesty owns the sawmill down at the head of the island. But Danny has been away two years, in Arizona."

"And I've come from Arizona," said Hardrock. "That's where I got my nickname. I've been running a mine out there, and Danny has been working with me. He's a fine boy, Danny is! He told me so much about the islands that I came up here when I got a year off, and I'm going to settle down in a cabin here under the trees, and finish writing a mining book for engineers. Danny has written his father about me. I meant to look up Vesty, but haven't had a chance yet."

THE troubled comprehension in the blue eyes of the girl deepened at this.

"Why didn't you do it first?" she broke out. "If people knew that Danny had sent you here, and Vesty Gallagher would answer for you, there'd have been no trouble! Vesty is a big man on the island. A word from him—"

"My dear girl, I stand on my own feet," said Hardrock quietly. "The sunken boat you saw was mine. Two of Connie's friends got after me. I suppose they thought it was quite safe, for the rain was coming down in sheets and one could scarcely see three hundred yards. They ran me down before I knew what they were up to. Fortunately, I had time to cut the canoe loose and get into her, and then I opened up on the two rascals with my shotgun, and gave them plenty. Never fear! When I go over to St. James I'll know 'em again, and take a little punishment out of them for the loss of that motorboat. Satisfied, are you?"

Under his twinkling gray eyes, the girl laughed a little.

"Hold it!" he exclaimed. "Oh, no use—gone again."

"Eh?" Her gaze widened. "What?"

"Those dimples. How long is this camp to continue?"

"Until the first of the week." Nelly Callahan was disconcerted by his abrupt change of subject and forgot to resent the personality. "Father's rounding up some cattle and counting how many there are here."

"Good! Then I'll be over to the dance next Thursday night. May I take you?"

She was startled by his words. She was more startled a moment later when a crashing of brush sounded, and she leaped to her feet.

"Oh! Father's coming—"

"Answer the question," persisted Hardrock. "Quick!"

"Yes," she said, and then turned swiftly to him. "Go quickly—"

"Nonsense!" Hardrock puffed at his pipe. "Nothing to get excited about. I'm not going to start any trouble, I promise you. Great Scott! Is that your father?"

He stared at the huge figure of Matt Big Mary advancing upon him, with the other two men following. All three gaped at him. Matt, astonished, came to a halt.

"What's this!" he rumbled. "Hughie! Where's Hughie, lass? Who's yon man?"

"Hughie's gone to sleep," said Hardrock, and came easily to his feet. "My name's Callahan—"

"He's a friend of Danny Vesty Gallagher," broke in the girl swiftly. "From Arizona. And Danny had him buy this end of the island from Eddie John Macaulay, Father."

"Shipwrecked on my own land," said Hardrock, laughing. He held out his hand. "You're Matt Callahan—Matt Big Mary? Danny has told me about you. Glad to meet you."

Matt gave him a huge grip, between surprise and bewilderment.

"What's all this? Bought it off of Eddie John, ye did? And what d'ye mean by shipwrecked? There's been no boat—"

"My motorboat went down," said Hardrock. "I got ashore with my duffle, though. Got a camp down shore a piece. Came over from St. James this morning."

"Oh! And it's a friend o' Vesty Gallagher ye are, eh? What's the matter with Hughie?"

"Hughie made a mistake," Hardrock grinned cheerfully. "He didn't believe that I had bought this bit of the island. Somehow, Hughie and I didn't get along very well. He had some queer idea that I ought to walk home, and I didn't agree with him. So he went to sleep. I guess I'll be going. Drop over to my camp sometime. I'll likely run in and see you again. Thanks for the coffee, Miss Nelly."

And he was gone, with a wave of his hand, before the three astonished men knew what to say or do.

CHAPTER III

HARDROCK CALLAHAN passed along the narrow sand-strip that edged the north shore of Hog Island, until he found a slight opening among the trees that suited him. Then he came back to his pulled-up canoe and began to transport his load to the spot selected; the canoe itself he left hidden where it was.

The storm was not clearing off, but was turning and bringing down a new and colder drift of rain and wind from the north. Ax in hand, Hardrock attacked the tangle of dead and living trees that rimmed him in like a wall. For an hour he worked steadily, slowly driving back the growth and clearing the grassy sward that had attracted him; then he dragged the débris to the shore and was rid of it. This done, he sat down in the wet sand, stuffed some of his own tobacco into his pipe, and sighed comfortably.

"What a girl!" he observed. "And she's the same one Danny Gallagher showed me the picture of, too. That's a coincidence. Well, I'd better get a shelter up before I settle down to dream about her. Good thing the motorboat went down instead of my canoe! She's a grade above most of the islanders that I've seen—"

Whether he referred to canoe or girl was not determined.

He set to work methodically getting up the tent, which he now unlashed, and anchored it securely. His clearing opened on the shore to the north, and the trees fully protected him from the eternal west winds; since he was pitching the tent for all summer, he made a thorough job of it, and this took time. Then, opening up some of his bundles, he produced flannel shirt and corduroys and other garments, and clothed himself in decency. Having already collected some dry wood from the thicket, he now built up a cheerful blaze and watched the wispy smoke whirl away in gray shreds down the wind. The afternoon was waning, and he was considering opening up some grub when a huge figure came into his vista of the shore and Matt Big Mary was striding up to him.

"Greetings!" exclaimed Hardrock cordially. "Come in out of the rain and toast your shins."

The big man nodded solemnly, sat down beside Hardrock in the tent opening, produced a black pipe and blacker tobacco, and lighted up. He sat for a little in silence, staring over the fire at the gray lake with those deep-set, melancholy eyes of his. At length he removed the pipe from his lips and spoke.

"Hughie tells me ye've bought the timber."

"Yes. It went with the land, said Eddie John. I've no use for it, except this tall pine right back of here. If you want the rest, you can have it."

"I don't," said Matt. "You're none of the island Callahans?"

"No. New York State."

"So are we, out of County Tyrone. All the same stock." Matt puffed over that for a bit. "Ye done a bad day's work, fallin' foul of Hughie Dunlevy."

"That's as may be. Sooner him than you."

Matt turned and swept Hardrock with his slow gaze. "Why?"

"Because,"—and Hardrock stretched himself out more comfortably,—"because I expect to marry your daughter."

"I don't like jokes," said Matt Big Mary, after a moment. "Not that kind."

"I'm not joking," said Hardrock coolly. "Danny Gallagher showed me a picture of her, and that's why I came here, partly. Now that I've seen her and talked with her, I *know*. I'm fair with you. If she's in love with nobody else, and I can win her, I'll do it."

"Hot head, queer heart," said Matt, a gathering rumble in his tone.

Hardrock laughed. "I'm safe enough."

"She's promised."

"By herself or by you?"

"No matter. Hughie Dunlevy marries her."

"No."

Storm grew in Matt's eyes, and his big black beard bristled.

"Careful, me lad! The boys wanted to come over and have a talk with ye, but I set down me foot. I want no trouble, without ye force it on me. I'll have no man makin' light talk of my girl, more particular a stranger."

"It's not light talk, Matt; I mean every word of it," said Hardrock. "And I'm not a good one to bluff, either. You fellows on the Beavers, Matt, are all clannish, and you all stick together like burrs, and you throw a strong bluff. Why? Because you're all afraid of the big world. Let a better man walk in and whip one or two of you, and things are different. Besides, I have a friend or so if I want to call on 'em, and I'll be no outcast. So think twice, Matt, before you lay down the law."

Even while he spoke, Hardrock felt his words fruitless. Matt's mental horizon was too narrowed to comprehend him in the least.

"You take my advice," said Matt Big Mary after a moment. "Be out of here before tomorry night, me lad. Ye'll find a skiff on the shore down to the bay—"

"Want me to put you off my land, Matt?" said Hardrock quietly.

The other was so astonished that he turned his head and stared. What he saw in those hard, icy gray eyes held him silent. Hardrock continued:

"You seem to think, Matt, that I'm a boy to obey you. I'm not. I don't intend to put up a 'No Trespass' sign and keep folks off, but I'm not taking orders from you, and I'm not scared worth a damn. If you bring a fight to me, I'll meet you halfway every time. I've tried to be decent with you, because I want no trouble. Now, I have to be in St. James tomorrow morning, and I'll expect you to see that my camp here isn't disturbed while I'm gone; you're square enough to keep your men away from it. Think things over. When I come back, I'll see you. If you've made up your mind to avoid trouble and meet me halfway, I'll be glad. If not, we'll settle things in a hurry. What d'you say to that?"

Matt Big Mary laughed slowly.

"Aye," said he. "That's fair, Hardrock. But you'll not come back from the island, if what Hughie did be tellin' us is so. Connie Dunlevy will be waitin' for you, or his friends."

"So will Vesty Gallagher." Hardrock grinned cheerfully. "I'll be back tomorrow night or next day. Anything you want me to fetch with me—mail or grub?"

Matt stared at him a moment, then rose to his feet.

"Damned if I can make ye out," said he reflectively. "So long. I'll answer that the boys don't touch your camp."

He strode away and vanished along the shore.

WHEN daylight died, the storm was blown out and the rollers were already going down. Hardrock Callahan, after luxuriously dining on beans and biscuit and hot tea, smoked his pipe and watched the stars, then laid out his blankets and rolled up. He was asleep almost at once.

It was two in the morning when he wakened, as he had set himself to do. A glance at his watch confirmed the hour. He dressed, and went down to the shore. Everything was quiet, save for the wash of waves and the whisper of breeze in the trees overhead. Off to the northwest came the swift, clear flash of the Garden Shoal light, and farther west, the red flash from Squaw Island light glimmered over the horizon. Nodding, Hardrock returned to his tent, produced an electric torch and for ten minutes pored over an unrolled chart of the island group.

Then, satisfied, he laced up the tent-flap, turned to the shore, and went to where the wide lake-cruising canoe was laid up under the bushes. In ten minutes the light craft was standing out under the breeze, rounding the point and holding south for Beaver Island and St. James.

The dawn was breaking when he drew down toward the long and narrow harbor. Instead of holding for it, however, he went to the right of the unwinking red eye of the lighthouse, came to shore on the point amid the thick trees and half-ruined dwellings there, and drew up the canoe from sight. Hardrock Callahan was learning caution. He set out afoot, and presently came to the road that wound along the bay and was the artery of the straggling row of houses circling the bay-shore for a mile or more and forming the town of St. James.

The sun was rising upon a glorious day when he had passed down the length of the bay to the head, and reached the hotel and the restaurant adjoining. The hotel was not yet alive for the day, but the island itself was astir, and the restaurant was open. Hardrock went in and breakfasted leisurely by the help of Rose McCafferty, who was waitress, cook and proprietor. Finding himself taken for an early tourist from the hotel out for the morning's fishing, he let it go at that.

"Hear any more about the boys who were shot up?" he inquired casually, in the course of the meal. The response stupefied him.

"Glory be, and what more is there to hear, except the name o' the scoundrel that done it? Poor Marty Biddy Basset—a grand boy he was, and only yesterday morning he was settin' here before me! And Owen John will maybe get well, but the fever's on him and it's no talkin' he'll do this long while. The doctor at the hotel is wid him this blessed minute."

"Eh?" Hardrock stared at her. "One of them's dead, you say? I didn't know that—"

"Wasn't they picked up by the Danes and brought in last night, and poor Marty wid a bullet through him, and two through Owen, and the both of 'em all peppered wid birdshot as well, and the boat ruined wid bullets? There she lays down to the Booth dock this minute—"

Hardrock laid a coin on the counter and went out.

He stood staring down at the line of fish-sheds and wharves across the road, feeling numb and unable to believe what he had heard. Dead! Yet he had certainly used no bullets; he had neither rifle nor pistol. Mechanically he crossed the road and walked through the soft, deep sand to the fish-company's wharf. Red-haired Joe Boyle had just opened up the shed and was getting in some box-parts to knock together; he flung Hardrock a casual nod as the latter approached, and went on about his business.

The boat was not far to seek. She lay on the north side of the dock, and Hardrock stood gazing down at her. That she was the same which had run him down, he saw at a glance; not many of these boats were open craft; nearly all having a boxlike shelter for engines and lifters and men.

Across her weathered stern-sheets was a pool of dried, blackened blood, and the thwart by the engine carried another grim reminder. Fear clamped upon Hardrock—fear lest he be blamed for this affair. It seemed only too probable. Whoever had done the murder, too, must have done it shortly after he himself had peppered the two men with his shotgun. The swift impulse seized on him to run while he could.

Instead of running, however, he leaned over and jumped down into the boat. Up forward was a tangle of ropes and lines and life-belts, and a colored object there caught his notice. He picked it up. It was a small pennant-shaped bit of canvas, painted half white, half black, attached to a stick that had broken short off. Moved by some instinct, certainly by no obvious reason, he pocketed it and climbed back to the wharf.

"Morning," said a voice, and he looked up to see a gnarled, red-whiskered man surveying him with an air of appraisal. "Your name aint Callahan, by any chance?"

"Callahan it is. Otherwise, Hardrock."

"Good. I been lookin' for ye," said the other. "I'm Vesty Gallagher, Danny's dad. Let's you and me go somewheres, and go quick. Come on over to Dunlevy's shed. Good thing I seen ye, Hardrock—blamed good thing! Come on."

CHAPTER IV

IN the heavy, dank quiet of the shed where the big nets hung, Hardrock sat smoking his pipe. His brain listened mechanically to the words of Vesty Gallagher; yet other sounds were borne in upon him; the rattle of ice from the wharf, the slam of fish-boxes tossed about, the eternal creaking of the great net-frames as they swung and swung endlessly in the breeze and groaned futile protest.

"By luck I come to town last night for freight, and remained over," said Vesty, "and by luck I seen you this morning and knew ye for a stranger. I said a word or two last night, when there was talk about your scrap wi' Connie Dunlevy, after the two boys was brought in. Some said you had done it, d'ye see? Nobody knows what's happened out there in the fog and rain, but there's plenty that intend to know. Eleven families o' Bassets there are on the island, and Marty Biddy dead today. Not to mention Owen John, wi' two bullets through him and the fever bad on him, and he'll go over to the Charlevoix hospital on

the mailboat. By luck my boy Danny had been writin' me, and I was looking for ye."

Hardrock nodded and turned to the gnarled man beside him.

"It was more than luck that I met you this morning," he said quietly. "You don't know just how bad things look for me. Here's what happened."

He told what had taken place the preceding day, omitting no detail. "They were not close enough for the shotgun to do much damage," he concluded. "Where those bullets came from, I can't pretend to guess."

Vesty Gallagher bit his pipestem thoughtfully, watching Hardrock from screwed-up, sharp little eyes.

"You're straight," he said suddenly. "I'm with ye. So that's settled. Now hark ye here, me lad! I'll have a word wi' the priest, and he'll have a word wi' the boys, and they'll go slow. But if I was you, I'd come down to the sawmill with me and spend a while there."

Hardrock smiled. "Thanks, Vesty, but I can't do it. Surely there must be some way of telling who shot those two fellows?"

"There's many would ha' liked to do it," said old Gallagher. "The two of them was a bad lot—them and the Dunlevy boys hung together. Ye'll have trouble there. Connie Dunlevy and Hughie will guess that ye had a hand in the shootin', and they'll go for ye. Better ye come down home with me, lad."

"Can't. Promised Matt Callahan I'd come back to Hog Island and settle matters with him." The gray eyes of Hardrock twinkled. "I said I'd put him off my land if he wasn't reasonable, and I'll do it."

"Glory be! Have ye been fighting with Matt Big Mary? And I hear Hughie's over there—"

Hardrock related a version of his encounter on the island—a version which very tactfully omitted any mention of Nelly Callahan. Old Vesty chuckled and scratched his red whiskers and then chuckled again.

"Praise be, it's fine to hear of some one who's got the guts to stand up to them Callahans!" he exclaimed. "Betwixt 'em, the Callahans and Dunlevys have been runnin' too high a hand and drinkin' too much o' Jimmy Basset's moonshine. What came ye to town for?"

"To find who it was had run me down, and make 'em pay for my motorboat," said Hardrock. "But now I'll reconsider the program. It wont do to have everybody know what happened, or I'd be—"

"You'd be shot so damned quick ye'd never know what struck!" said Vesty promptly. "Word's been passed around that you're a revenuer, but I've put a stop to that. If Owen John does any talkin' before they take him to Charlevoix, he'll be able to tell what happened, but they say he's bad off."

"I suppose the sheriff will be over to investigate?"

VESTY sucked at his pipe a moment. "Maybe," he said slowly. "And maybe not. Depends on what story's told. This here is Beaver Island, me lad. Them fellys has had scraps with everybody—Injuns, Danes, Israelites and Washin'ton Island men. Last week they had a scrap with some fellys from Cheboygan that was robbin' some nets. A wild bunch, them Cheboygan lads, fishin' on other folks' ground and runnin' whisky in from Canady. What'll ye do now?"

"Go back to Hog Island," said Hardrock.

"Do it, and if ye have any regard for health, keep the peace with Matt Big Mary! I'll walk up the shore with ye—left your canoe on the north point, ye said? It'll do ye no harm to be seen walkin' with me."

They left the shed and swung up to the road, and there Vesty hailed a man and halted Hardrock to meet him.

"It's Tom Boyle Gallagher, me own cousin, and his boys run the freight-boat and he runs the store yonder. Hey, Tom! Shake hands with Hardrock Callahan. He's the felly who had the scrap with Connie Dunlevy yesterday mornin'. It's a friend of Danny's he is, and a friend of mine, and he's bought some land on Hog Island from Eddie John Macaulay."

Tom Gallagher grinned as he met Hardrock's grip. "Glad to meet ye. Another Callahan, eh? Glory be, but the fightin' Callahans are all over the world! I seen ye to the dance the other night. Hear ye knocked Connie clear off'n the dock, eh? Good for him."

"Sorry I had any trouble," said Hardrock. "I want to spend the summer up here, and it seems like I got off to a bad start."

"More like a good start," and Tom chuckled. "Drop in to the store any time. It's glad to see you I'll be. See ye later, Vesty!"

The two men walked up the road together, meeting not a few folk. To more than one of these Vesty spoke, introducing Hardrock with emphatic cordiality, stopping now for a word or two and again for a bit of talk, so that it was a good hour afterward when they approached the canoe.

Hardrock, who wanted to pick up a trout or whitefish on the way back, showed his trolling line to old Vesty, and had a word of advice as to tackle, and then Vesty gave him a word as to other things.

"Lay low, me lad. When news comes, I'll have Tom Boyle Gallagher's boy bring it to ye—Micky, his name is. There's a few Gallaghers left on the island yet, praise be, and any friend o' Danny's is goin' to have a square deal. Be off with ye now, and good luck."

Ten minutes later, with the canoe leaning over to the breeze as she drew out, Hardrock was steering north and exchanging a last wave of the hand with Vesty Gallagher. Under the latter's optimistic influence and quick friendship, his stunned depression had quite evaporated. He was himself again, no longer hesitant or doubting, ready for whatever might happen.

"Blamed lucky thing I met him!" he thought, as he let out his trolling line and settled down to steer for home. "And I sure hope that wounded chap will open up and talk before long. Well, by gosh, I feel a heap better than I did! I think I'll drop in on Matt's camp—ought to get there about noon. Going to marry Hughie Dunlevy, is she? Not if I know it! Not, that is, unless she wants to, and I'll gamble she doesn't."

WITH just the right amount of ballast to hold her head down, the canoe was a marvel for speed, and Hardrock Callahan, who had not spent all his life in Arizona, knew how to handle her. Thus it was not quite noon when he bore up for the north point on Hog Island.

In spite of the big whitefish that came to his line and set his knife to work and brought the gulls wheeling to pick up the offal, Hardrock had plenty of time to reflect on his situation. He was not particularly given to reflection, but just now there was need of it. One man was dead; another was badly wounded; by good fortune, no one knew of their encounter with Hardrock Callahan, but that story was bound to come out. If the wounded man did not recover, and could not give an account of the killing, investigation would probably fasten the blame on Hardrock, from circumstantial evidence. So far suspicion was not directed at him—but it would come.

"These are slow-thinking people, and the law is probably slower to reach up here," he mused. "So much the worse when the time for action comes! Looks like it's distinctly up to me to land the murderers, as a matter of self-protection; and a fat chance I have of doing it! Since there was no mention of Connie Dunlevy being taken to the hospital, he's probably not so badly hurt as I thought. That gang is against me, sure. Hm! Guess I'll take counsel with the young lady. She's got a level head."

He held in for the strip of shore before Matt Big Mary's camp, and perceived that the updrawn boat was gone. As his canoe scraped on the sand and he leaped ashore, Nelly Callahan appeared and waved her hand.

"Welcome back! Have you come for more coffee?"

"That and other things," responded Hardrock cheerfully, holding up the whitefish. "Anybody around?"

"They've all gone to finish pulling stakes and wont be back until late," said the girl. "Did you have any trouble in town?"

"No. I met Vesty Gallagher, and we had quite a talk. Got any nails around here? If you have, let's get this fish on a slab and we can discuss the weather while it's browning."

Searching the shore, he presently espied a slab of mill wood, nailed the opened fish to it, spilled plenty of seasoning over the firm white flesh, and got the slab in position beside the fire. Then he sat down and lighted his pipe and looked at Nelly Callahan, who sat on the end of a log and darned a thick stocking; and presently he told her all that he had learned this morning in St. James.

FOR a moment her face flashed white, and in the depths of her widened gaze he read alarm and swift fear and wild surmise. Then she was herself again, cool and steady, her blue eyes searching into him with unconcealed tenseness of interest, and only her breath coming a little swifter to denote the startled heart that was in her.

"It seems impossible!" she murmured. "Oh! And when everyone learns of how you used your shotgun on them—"

"Steady! Nobody knows that except you and Vesty," said Hardrock. "Who'd believe me? They'd say I had a pistol or rifle and dropped it overboard after shooting the two men. And how do you know I hadn't, Nelly? How do you know I'm not lying?"

She looked at him steadily for a moment, meeting his gaze squarely. Then:

"How did Vesty know it?" she said, and smiled a little. "Don't be silly. Did you see any other boat around, except theirs?"

Hardrock shook his head. "No, but that means nothing. I couldn't see far for the rain, and I was intent on them—they'd been following me, you know. If there's any clue to be gained, it's from you."

"From me? How?"

"The shots. You said you had heard shooting. Now, I let off both barrels of my shotgun, no more. I did think that I heard shots after that, but my sinking boat was making such a racket—the exhaust pipe was smashed when they ran me down—and I was so infernally busy handling that canoe, that I didn't notice them. You did. How many were there? You'd notice the difference between the bang of my shotgun and the crack of rifles, too."

The girl nodded, and lifting her eyes, stared out toward the blue mass of Garden Island on the horizon.

"There must have been five or six shots," she said slowly. "Now I think of it, I believe that two did come sometime earlier—that was what drew my attention. Yes, and the others were different. They sounded more like the deep crash of an automatic pistol than the sharp crack of a rifle. But how can that help you? I couldn't see what happened. I can't swear—"

"You're not expected to!" Hardrock responded, and felt through his pockets for a match. "The thing is, to make sure of what you heard. Somebody else was out there—a third boat—"

He broke off sharply. From his pocket he drew a strange object; then recognition came into his eyes as he stared at it. It was the pennant-shaped canvas he had taken from the boat at the Booth dock.

CHAPTER V

"THAT'S funny!" he exclaimed, staring at the scrap of canvas. The girl glanced at it, then gave him a puzzled look.

"Why?"

"You know what it is?"

"Of course. It's the little flag left flying from a fish-trap to show its position."

"Oh!" Hardrock laughed and tossed it aside. "I don't know what made me bring it—found it lying in that boat this morning, with a lot of other stuff."

To his surprise, the girl's eyes dilated suddenly, excitement leaped into her face.

"What boat?" she demanded. "Not—"

"Yes, the one that ran me down. Why?"

Dropping her work, Nelly Callahan pounced on the bit of canvas, and lifted blazing eyes.

"Don't you see! It explains everything! Can't you remember seeing that flag in the water just before they ran you down?"

Hardrock stared at her, his gray eyes narrowed and glittering.

"Hm! Blamed if I can see why it amounts to much—come to think of it, I believe I did notice such a flag. Ran close to it. Not the same one, probably."

"Of course it was the same one!" exclaimed the girl, excitedly. She was all animation. "Don't you see? This flag is painted to denote ownership, so each man will know his own traps! We don't use them much around here—don't need to. But the perch season is coming on, and fishermen from Charlevoix and Petoskey and even Cheboygan who work around here need to use marked traps. Now do you see? Hughie Dunlevy and his friends have been fighting the men from outside who come in on their grounds. Well, Marty Biddy Basset and Owen John, as soon as they ran you down, circled back to that fish-trap and probably started to rob it. They broke off this flag so the owners wouldn't find the trap again, and—"

Hardrock whistled. "And then the owners came along and opened fire! Upon my word, Nelly, I believe you've struck it! And nobody noticed this flag lying in the boat last night—"

They stared at each other, until suddenly the girl broke into a tremulous laugh.

"So all you have to do is to find who uses this flag!"

"Who does, then?"

"I don't know. Any of the men would know, probably."

"Hm! Vesty said that Hughie and his friends had fought last with some Cheboygan men. He mentioned whisky-running—"

"Yes!" The girl flashed up indignantly.

"And you know what they say about us over on the mainland—that everybody on the Beavers runs whisky from Canada! It's not so. None of us do that. Jimmy Basset, who's here with Father, makes whisky—that's true; but most of the time he's so crippled up with rheumatism that he can't fish and do any work, and it's the only way he has of supporting his family. So nobody else on Beaver makes whisky, and nobody runs it from Canada—it's those Cheboygan men who run it! And they hide up on one of the islands here until they can sneak it in to Ed Julot over at Harbor Springs for the summer resorters to buy—and then everybody blames the Beaver men! Look after that fish, or it'll burn—quick, it's in the fire! I'll get the coffee and bread."

The girl was up and gone for her supplies.

HARDROCK rescued the planked whitefish from the encroaching blaze, smiling to himself as he did so, over the utterance of the indignant Nelly. He could appreciate her point of view and could even sympathize with it. There was something whimsically just about one half-crippled man being allowed a monopoly on moonshine liquor, by common consent, for his support.

"Thank heaven I'm no prohibition-enforcer!" reflected Hardrock. "I expect she's hit it right, however, as regards the runners who supply the resort towns from Mackinac to Traverse with booze. These islands are ideally located for their purpose, and the pretense of being honest fishermen —hm! By hemlock, I've got the answer to the whole thing! But not a word of it to her. No wonder those fellows opened fire, and shot to kill, when they saw their fish-trap being robbed! But I'd better go mighty slow until I'm sure. There's nothing on which to hang any legal peg, so far."

Even though the girl's theory was right, even though he found the men who used this black-and-white flag, any accumulation of legal evidence as to the shooting was distinctly improbable. Hardrock recognized this clearly. At the same time, he felt confident that he had hit upon one solution of the whole enigma—a solution which promised to be highly interesting, even more so than writing a textbook for mining engineers.

Planked whitefish, fresh from the lake, and coffee, and thick bread; and over the bread, the rich juice of the eternal mulligan, made this time from the white small-mouth bass that swam around the wreck down the shore. Thus the two dined together, not gracefully but well, and by tacit consent avoided the matter of their early talk. Instead, Hardrock spoke of Danny Gallagher and Arizona, and the mines, and gradually fell silent and brought the girl to speak of herself and her life down State, where she had these two years taught school, and the world outside this narrow horizon of the Beavers. Two on an island together—and time was not.

"I stayed in St. James the other night for the dance," said Hardrock, filling his pipe for the third time, "hoping you were there. I knew you down in Arizona, you see."

"In Arizona?" Her level blue eyes searched his face, perplexed.

"Sure. Danny Gallagher had some pictures that were sent him. One was of you, standing on a wharf—"

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. "Why, Hughie took that last summer—"

"You haven't changed. How'd you like to see Arizona?"

She looked at him, met his gravely steady gaze—then sprang suddenly to her feet and stood looking out at the point. Hardrock caught the deliberate *thud-thud* of an exhaust, then saw the big launch turning the point. He rose.

"Father's not in her—yes, he's lying in the bow!" she exclaimed. Hughie Dunlevy, at the tiller of the launch, waved his hand to her and lifted his strong voice as the launch rounded in toward the sandy stretch.

"Come aboard, Nelly! Get anything you want to bring—come quick! Your dad's hurt."

The launch sputtered; her engine died; and she came to a halt with her nose on the sand a dozen feet from shore. The girl made a hesitant movement; then Hardrock caught her up in his arms and waded out to the launch. Dunlevy and the two other men took her from him. In the bow lay Matt Big Mary, eyes closed.

"Badly hurt?" asked Hardrock, as his eyes met the hard gaze of Hughie Dunlevy.

"No. Knee dislocated, I guess; we'll run him home. Got caught in a line and fell over the engine. You been to St. James already?"

"Yes." Hardrock's gray eyes narrowed. "You'll find news waiting for you. Two of

your friends shot up—one dead. Whisky-runners did it, some one said; nobody knows for sure, though."

Dunlevy looked startled, then waved his hand.

"All right. You been havin' a good time here, I see. So long. When I come back, you'll be singin' another tune."

"I'll expect you," said Hardrock, and smiled.

The engine sputtered into life; the launch was shoved out, circled in a wide arc, and headed south, with Nelly Callahan crouched over the figure of her father. Once she looked back, lifted an arm, waved it in farewell to the man on the shore, as though in token of an unquenched spirit.

"She's all right," said Hardrock to himself. "Independent—not afraid of 'em. No need to worry about her; real woman all through!"

He turned to the deserted camp, got the dishes attended to, left everything shipshape, kicked out the fire-embers, and then made his way through the brush along the point of land at this northwest tip of the island. Here, where the bushes thinned out and the land ran out in little islets, he sank down under cover of the greenery, filled and lighted his pipe, and lay motionless, watching the empty waters to north and west and south. Safely tucked away in his pocket was the little black-and-white pennant of painted canvas.

NOW, as he watched the sun glinting on the waves between the point and Garden Island, where his motorboat had gone down, he reconstructed in the light of his present knowledge what had taken place there yesterday morning. He was quite certain, now, that he recalled seeing that little pennant of canvas sticking out from the water. Those two recklessly pursuing men from St. James must have seen it also, as they drove down upon him. Then, when he had vanished in the rain to leeward, when after his two shots they probably thought him dead or drowning, they had put back for that fish-trap flag. Why? Not because it marked a fish-trap alone, but because it marked something else of which they knew. And, drawing down upon that little flag, had been a third craft, unsuspected in the obscurity.

"They broke off the flag, were probably fishing up the trap, when the other chaps appeared and opened fire. Then what? The chances are a thousand to one that the murderers didn't wait to get what they had come for. One doesn't shoot down a couple of men and then stick around long. Besides, the flag was gone, and there were heavy rollers running, and the sheets of rain obscured everything. They couldn't hope to find the trap again in all that muck; they'd have to go away and come back in good weather, when they might locate the spot by means of landmarks and bearings from shore. Therefore, if my theory is correct, if they're really whisky-runners and that little flag marked a stock of whisky as well as a fish-trap—all I have to do is to wait. No boat has been up this way all morning. Either I'd have seen it, or Nelly would have seen it and remembered about it."

Conviction grew upon him that he had the right steer by the tail. Fishermen would not be apt to open deadly fire, even if they caught other men robbing their traps; but liquor-runners take no chances. Again he was impressed with the absolutely ideal situation of the islands—many, like that on which he now lay, uninhabited. East-coast fishermen could bring in the stuff from the Canadian side and plant it, and go away again. Other fishermen from the adjacent mainland, from the upper peninsula, from the Wisconsin shore, could come and get it. Who would suspect? And if anyone did suspect, as Nelly Callahan had said, the island men would get the blame. The Beavers had a reputation for turbulency which was less justified than forced upon them.

The afternoon hours waned, and the sun sank, and nothing happened. Nothing broke the horizon save the big green-and-white fishboat belonging to the three Danes, coming in from the north and heading for the settlement on Garden Island, with a swarm of gulls wheeling and trailing behind her to tell of fish being gutted and nets being washed. She vanished, and Hardrock rose stiffly, went to his canoe, shoved out and paddled around the point.

He sought his own camp and found it undisturbed. As he rolled up in his blankets that evening, it came to him that he had not yet settled matters with Matt Big Mary.

"Good thing!" he murmured. "But I wonder—was he worse hurt than they said? That yarn didn't sound very plausible about his falling over the engine—hm! Should have thought of that before. I don't like that fellow Hughie Dunlevy. No mat-

ter. Tomorrow's Sunday, and I'll keep quiet—and watch. Good night, Nelly Callahan, and pleasant dreams!"

He fell asleep, smiling.

CHAPTER VI

SUNDAY on Beaver Island was theoretically a day of devotion. Not even the mailboat came over from Charlevoix, since there were no fish-boxes to be transported. It was a day for visiting, for going to the church down the highway three miles from St. James, for eating and drinking and talking. The only man on the island who went his way regardless was old Cap'n Fallows, who was a socialist and proud of it; but as the old skipper had been here thirty years and was by this time related to everyone else, he was regarded with unusual tolerance—a shining bad example of a godless old man, happy in his iniquity and glorying in his lonesome politics. Also, the Cap'n was something of a doctor, after a fashion.

He was in demand this Sunday. Marty Biddy Basset was dead and buried that day, and Owen John had gone to Charlevoix on the mailboat, talking in his fever but talking no sense; but down the island by the old Russian baron's farm lay Matt Big Mary Callahan, with a hurt leg and a hurt head. Matt had been struck by a big pile and had fallen over the engine of the boat, and would not walk again for two days, so he had gone home to the farm and Cap'n Fallows was doctoring him with liniment and talk on the rights of man.

There was much to talk about, and there was a gathering at the store all day long, while out at Jimmy Basset's farm the keg of white liquor grew lower every hour. The Bassets and Dunlevys were taking counsel here and there, the older heads advising patience, the younger heads listening to Hughie Dunlevy and his brother Connie, who was badly bruised but not seriously hurt. Connie was two years younger than Hughie, and if not so strong, was just about as hard to kill.

It was true enough that Vesty Gallagher spoke a word to the priest; and the priest, who was the only man obeyed by other men on Beaver Island, passed along the word. Thus it came about that Hardrock Callahan was accepted as neither a revenue man nor an enemy, and his affair with the Dunlevy brothers was taken for what it was—a private matter. Hughie Dunlevy heard of this, and moved cautiously and spoke softly; but with his brother Connie and four other lads he was neither cautious nor soft. He and they gathered in Jimmy Basset's kitchen that evening and went into the affair at length.

Among the six of them it was not hard to guess close to the truth. Connie Dunlevy knew that Marty Biddy and Owen John had gone out in the launch to catch Hardrock; nobody else knew this, but he knew it, for he had sent them. And he knew that they, like himself, had been up and raising deviltry all that Thursday night, and like himself had been in liquor.

"They had no guns," he swore solemnly to Hughie and the other four. "What would they be havin' guns for, now? It was this felly Hardrock that had a shotgun anyhow, and likely carried a pistol."

"He told me," said Hughie, stirring his hot one, "that it was whisky-runners had shot up the lads."

"How'd he know that?" demanded Jimmy Basset. "If they sunk his boat and he shot 'em, it's hangin' he needs. He told ye the tale of whisky-runners, Hughie, for a blind."

"Most like he did," agreed Hughie. "We'll have no outlanders comin' in here and murderin' poor helpless lads like them! What story was told on the mainland about it?"

A cousin of the dead man spoke up, his face black and gloomy.

"It was told they had put a box of cartridges into the stove by mistake. Irene Dunlevy is a nurse in the hospital yonder, and Owen John's father did go over wid him, so there'd be no chance of Owen's talkin' to outside ears."

"Then the matter's up to us to settle?"

"It is that. There'll be no officers pokin' their heads into the island."

Hughie sipped his hot one reflectively. They looked to him for leadership, and he was not backward in accepting the guidon; at the same time, he was not going to rush headlong into trouble. There had been altogether too much trouble of late, and any rash actions that would compel the law to make an investigation would make everybody on the islands irritated with Hughie Dunlevy.

"We'll 'tend to him," said Hughie. "We'll give him a dose that'll send him away where he come from. I got a little score of my own to be settlin' wid him."

"So I hear," said one, and there was a snicker. "What'd he hit ye wid, Hughie?"

"Blessed if I know, but he'll not do it again! You felleys go easy wid your talk, now. We got other things to mind besides him. I'm goin' to cut loose every fish-trap up and down the shores that aint ours, and if we meet them Cheboygan or Manistique lads, we'll make 'em like it."

"That's the stuff, Hughie!" came the chorus of affirmation.

Now Jimmy Basset spoke up, as he limped over to the stove and refilled the kettle.

"After church this mornin' I was talkin' a bit wid Matz Larsen. Ye know that little point where his wharf and fish-sheds are, on the Garden Island shore up beyond his place? He was tellin' me that on Thursday mornin' at the break o' the storm, him and his boys were mendin' nets when they seen a strange boat off the island, cruisin' about."

"Eh?" Hughie's eyes narrowed. "What sort o' boat was it?"

"Green wid a red stripe around the house. A stranger. Up from Ludington, maybe, or one o' them ports. It was no Cheboygan boat; that's certain."

"Well,"—and Hughie stood up,—"it's time I was off, for I've a date. We'll go over to Hog Island tomorry night and attend to the lad from Arizona. We'll take my big open boat that the resorters use for fishin'-parties. Jimmy, fetch a quart along to cheer us up. I'll have the boat ready as soon as it's dark."

"Then put lights aboard her," said Connie Dunlevy, "for the coast-guard has been raisin' hell wid the lads for carryin' no lights."

Hughie laughed at that, and swung away. It was little he cared for the coast-guard.

SO, with all this keeping the island busy, and no boats putting out that Sunday, and the wind in the east so the tourists could make up no fishing-parties, there was none to notice the small launch that came drifting up the channel toward sunset, past the length of the island, with a man standing in her and waving his shirt as a signal for help. The coast-guard might have seen her, but it was dark before she came within sight of the point, and then the channel current carried her out and on past Pismire Island. So she went on drifting up between Garden and Hog, and no lights on her, and not a soul knew of her being around. It was well they did not, for if they had seen her and had seen the man who was aboard her, there would have been some tall talk.

It was Hardrock Callahan who heard the man yell. Hardrock had been down the island shore in his canoe that afternoon, having grown tired of waiting for boats that did not come, and had been pulling bass from around the wreck in Belmore Bay. He kept nothing under three pounds, and he had sixteen on his string when night came, and stayed to make it twenty. He was paddling up for the end of the island in the darkness when he heard a long shout and then another one coming from the water, and started out to see who was there. When he sang out and got answered, he paddled up toward the launch.

"Engine's broke down and my gas has leaked out," called the man in the launch. "I left Charlevoix this morning and have been drifting up the channel all afternoon. Can you give me a lift?"

"You bet," said Hardrock, coming alongside. "No oars aboard?"

"Nary a sign. What you got there, a canoe? You can't pull the launch with that."

"You climb aboard and take my other paddle," said Hardrock, "and save your breath to work with. Got any grub? No? Then we'll get around to my camp and fry some of these bass, and in about an hour you wont give a cuss whether you get home tonight or not."

The other laughed, transferred skillfully to the canoe, and after making fast a line to the launch, they set out. Neither man spoke as they slowly worked the dragging launch ahead, got her around the point, and then down the north shore to Hardrock's camp.

"Here we are," said Hardrock as he headed in. "You might get some of those bass cleaned while I get the fire started and the skillet hot. Coffee, too. We can attend to your launch afterward. Better pull her up out of sight."

"Why?" queried the other man.

"Tell you later."

THE two men observed a mutual reticence until, half an hour afterward, they were sitting down to their meal. Then the stranger, who was a grizzled, roughly dressed man with a pair of keen eyes above a draggled mustache, grinned across the fire and put out his hand.

"My name's Fulsom, and I sure owe you a heap o' thanks."

"Callahan's mine—Hardrock Callahan."

As they gripped, Hardrock noticed that Fulsom looked startled, but no comment was exchanged. Both men were too hungry to indulge in needless talk. Not until the last scrap of bass was cleaned up and the coffee-pot was empty, and pipes were lighted, did Hardrock learn who his visitor was. Then Fulsom, puffing soberly, eyed him for a moment and spoke.

"Hardrock, I'm mighty sorry 'bout all this. Looks to me like luck was playing hard for both of us. You don't know what I come over here for?"

"I'm not a mind-reader," Hardrock chuckled. Fulsom threw back his vest to show a badge pinned to his shirt.

"I'm the Sheriff o' this county, and the main reason I come over here today was to sort of pry around a bit. You aint an island man—I know 'em all. I've knowed 'em for twenty year more or less. Reckon you've heard of the killing the other day?"

Hardrock nodded reflectively. He liked this sheriff—read the man for straight and square and unafraid. None the less, in the keen probing of those eyes he read danger.

"Yes. Heard about it yesterday in St. James."

FULSOM puffed, spat into the fire, and asked a question.

"Know anything about it?"

Despite the careless tone, despite the off-hand manner of the speaker, Hardrock sensed something beneath the surface. He was astonished by the manner in which he had met Fulsom; yet he was not astonished that the sheriff had appeared. Fiction to the contrary, every abnormal detail of life in civilized communities involves a consequence; for what we call civilization is simply the ways of men set in a groove, and any departure from that groove brings investigation.

With this intangible flash of mind to mind, with this singular "feel" that something unsaid lay behind that question, Hardrock considered briefly and then answered it in utmost frankness.

"Sheriff, if I told you all I knew or thought about it, the chances are that you'd arrest me."

Fulsom gave him a glance, and grinned.

"I'd have a hell of a job doin' it, wouldn't I—not to mention gettin' you off to jail?"

Hardrock broke into a laugh. "Good for you! Here's what I know."

And he told what had happened to him since arriving on Beaver Island.

SHERIFF FULSOM listened to the story without a word, puffing as methodically after his pipe had smoked out as before; he sat like an image of bronze, giving no sign of what was passing in his mind. With such a man Hardrock was at his ease, for he knew now that he might expect some measure of justice, and not hasty jumping at conclusions for the sake of political prestige.

"You got your nerve to tell me all this," said Fulsom, when he had finished.

Hardrock knocked out his pipe and filled it anew. "No witnesses present. Besides, I figure you as square."

"That's the hell of it—I got to be square all around. You're under arrest for that shootin', Hardrock Callahan."

"Eh?" Hardrock stared, for the Sheriff had not moved an inch. "You're in earnest?"

"Yep, so far as it goes." Fulsom wiped his mustache and chuckled. "Got to do it. I been nosing around the hospital, and heard that wounded man talkin' in his fever. Mentioned your name. Now, I'm right well acquainted with the Beavers—too durned well acquainted to come over here on business without a posse, unless I come alone. These lads over here may have their faults, but they're men clear through. If I come over alone, I get a square deal. If I come with a posse, I'm liable to get most anything. Well, now, I come over to look you up and see what I could learn. And, from hearin' your story, looks like it's my duty to arrest you. Any law officer would have to do it on the evidence."

"All right," said Hardrock whimsically. "Then what? You can't prove my story."

"Nope. All I figure on is doin' my duty and breakin' square with all concerned. Now, you're arrested, and charged with murder. You're in my custody. You and me understand each other, I guess. I don't believe for a minute that things aint exactly as you've told 'em to me, and I figure to stay right here a spell and help you work 'em out. Let's see that there fish-flag."

Hardrock dived into the tent and looked up the bit of canvas. In his heart he felt a queer sense of relief, a dropping away of all oppression. This officer was not to be

feared. He was under arrest, and if nothing turned up, he would have to stand trial, and the evidence was bound to be bad—yet Fulsom was square, and this counted for everything.

"I'm mighty glad we met up," he said as he came back to the fire. "And I reckon we do understand each other, Sheriff. Here's the flag. Know it?"

The Sheriff gave it a glance, then laid it down.

"Yep. Belongs to Johnson Brothers of Ludington. But they aint fished up around these parts—aint fished at all since last year. Sold out, lock stock an' barrel, to some fellows from Escanaba, I heard, who were carrying on the business. Now, either those fellows are running nets up this way, which I don't hardly think is so, or else it's like you say—they're running something else for bigger money. S'pose you and me go out early in your canoe and look for that fish-trap. Eh?"

"You're on," said Hardrock cheerfully.

CHAPTER VII

THE boats went out Monday morning, went out early. They went out from the St. James harbor and from the scattered holdings on the other islands, boats of Indians and white men, out to the fishing grounds where lacy gill-nets and hidden trap-nets and long bloater lines and other legal and illegal methods of obtaining the finny prey were put into effect. Boats bobbed here and there against the horizon of island or sea or reef, and engines whirred as the lifters brought the nets aboard, while trout and whitefish and perch went tumbling down into the tubs. There was heavy work to be done, since the fish must be all cleaned and boxed and in to St. James to make that afternoon's mailboat.

All that morning Hardrock's canoe bobbed here and there off the end of Hog Island, with a drag out from bow and stern, countering back and forth. It was too shallow hereabout for the big fish, and the waters looked all deserted, with only a sparkling flash of gulls off the blue line that marked the north end of Garden to show that a boat was working there beneath the horizon.

Back and forth they went, and found nothing, though they searched hard enough for any sign of the black ropes that might mark a trap. Nothing came near them on the water, excepting a covey of young ducks that bore down and then wheeled and went flashing away through the waves in a hurry. With noon, they returned to camp, where the Sheriff's launch was drawn safely out of sight among the bushes down the shore, and lunched leisurely, and then returned again to the search.

It was nearly three o'clock when at last they found the trap, and then only by accident, for one of the drags picked up the mooring line, and Hardrock hauled the canoe along this until the dim mass of the trap itself was under the canoe. Fulsom came to his assistance, since it was no light task to haul in the heavy lines without tipping the canoe, and together they got it to the surface. They could see perch in it, and big bullheads from the mud bottom, and one lordly yellow sunfish, but no whisky.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Fulsom, who knew more about traps than did Hardrock. "Hold her till I get a grip on that mooring-line! Now let go, and catch hold."

Now they tugged at the line, and bit by bit worked loose the anchor down below, and after a time got it on the up-heave. Hardrock was leaning far over on the line, depending on Sheriff Fulsom to balance the canoe, and giving his entire attention to the rope below him. This came heaving up soggily from the depths, and presently disclosed another line knotted around it and hanging straight down.

"Thought so!" came the exultant voice of Fulsom. "Haul in on the short line, now—"

IN another moment the end of this came into sight, and showed a firmly lashed case of liquor. Hardrock glanced up over his shoulder.

"Want it aboard?"

"If we can get it, yes. No telling how many more cases there are, but we'll have to leave 'em for the present. We'll see what this is—make sure of it. Looks to me like you needn't worry about that murder charge any more. Better move lively, too. Looks like a boat is heading this way from Beaver. Left my binoculars in camp, so I can't tell much."

Hardrock could not pause to look—he got the box in under the canoe, then came the ticklish matter of swinging it aboard. This was finally accomplished, though at imminent danger of capsizing the frail craft; then he straightened up for a look at the

approaching boat. It was still half a mile distant, and bearing up between the islands as though heading for them.

"Better get in to shore," said Fulsom. "I aint anxious to be recognized around here until it's necessary, the way things are now. Looks like we got some Canadian Club here, all right—we'll open her up and make sure. Set that extry paddle in the trap to mark her before we go."

Hardrock nodded and made fast the paddle so that it floated on the line from which the whisky-case had been cut, then he headed the canoe for the point and pushed her hard. Whether that boat was heading for them or not, he meant to take no chances.

In ten minutes he was cutting through the shallows inside the point and was out of sight of the boat. When they came to camp, they speedily lifted the canoe ashore and in among the trees. Then Fulsom, obtaining Hardrock Callahan's woods hatchet, began to pry at the lid of the whisky-case.

"Aren't you tampering with evidence?" said Hardrock, chuckling.

"Who, me? I aint no prohibition officer," returned the Sheriff dryly. "No sir, I never voted for no prohibition, but I aim to do my duty. First thing is to find out if this stuff is whisky or not. Can't tell by the box, can't tell by the label—"

"The only way is to taste it, eh?" laughed Hardrock. "All right, I'm with you, and will give expert testimony. Go to it! We can't afford to make any mistakes; that's sure."

The case opened, Fulsom produced a bottle, unhurt by its immersion, and attacked the cork. When this was out, he handed the bottle to his nominal prisoner.

"Let's have your verdict, Hardrock!"

The latter tasted the contents, and grimaced. "It's the stuff," he returned, handing back the bottle. The Sheriff promptly tilted it, and held it tilted until his breath was gone. Then, gasping, he lowered it, and replaced the cork.

"Gosh, that's good!" he observed. "Wisht I could keep the whole bottle."

"Go ahead."

"Nope." He slid it back into the case. "I could sort of ease my conscience by havin' an excuse for one drink to make certain what the stuff was. And I sure made that drink a good one! But any more'd be stealin' evidence, which I don't aim to do. S'pose you slip out to the shore and keep an eye on that there boat. Maybe she's the one we're lookin' for. I'll lay up out o' sight till I see who it is."

SMILING to himself at the odd conceit of the Sheriff, whose regretful devotion to duty was indubitably sincere, Hardrock left the cover of the trees and returned to his clearing. He was just in time to see the launch which they had observed come circling around the point and head in. To his astonishment, he saw the figure of Nelly Callahan standing in the bow, while another figure aft was tending the engine.

The girl waved to him eagerly, while her companion, a young fellow no more than a boy, shut off the engine and let the boat run in until her nose touched the sand. By the flush of excitement in the girl's face, Hardrock guessed that she carried news of some kind. She jumped ashore, then turned and waved her hand at the boy.

"Hardrock, this is Tom Boyle Gallagher's boy Micky—Vesty Gallagher was sending him over to find you, so I came along to bring the message myself. I knew more about it than Vesty did, anyway, because I heard Hughie Dunlevy talking to Father last night—"

"All right," cut in Hardrock. "Wait just a minute, will you? Come ashore, Micky. Got any gasoline aboard?"

"Ten gallon in the tank still," said the boy, grinning.

"Know anything about engines?"

"He knows all about 'em," broke in the girl. "Why?"

"I have a launch down the shore that I'd like to have him look over. She's down by that clump of sumach, Micky, drawn up. See if you can find the trouble, will you? We may have to put her into the water."

"Sure," and Micky started off. Hardrock turned to the girl, smiling.

"Excuse me for the interruption, but I had a bit of news too, and didn't want him to overhear. Now come and sit down and tell me what's on your mind."

They sat down together on a fallen log at the edge of the clearing, and Hardrock got his pipe alight.

"Two things," said the girl, "or maybe three," and she laughed. "First, Hughie and some of his friends are coming over here tonight. I heard him tell Father they meant to drive you away, and send you back to Arizona."

Hardrock, thinking of the Sheriff among the trees, broke into a hearty laugh.

"Go on," he said after a minute. "Go on! What next?"

"Isn't that enough? Vesty got wind of it, and sent Micky off to warn you. There's no telling what they'll do, really—and it's nothing to laugh about!"

"It will be, I promise you," and Hardrock chuckled. "Not for them to laugh about, though. Don't mention it to anyone, for he doesn't want it known—but Sheriff Fulsom is over there in the trees now. It's his launch that is down the shore. I picked him up last night—he was drifting up the channel, disabled and out of gas. He and I are working on this business, and we've already proved my ideas right by finding that fish-trap and a case of whisky with it. There are other cases at the same spot, probably."

She stared at him, wide-eyed. "Oh, good!" she exclaimed.

"And I don't forget that I owe the tip to you, either," he went on. "Well, what next?"

"Hughie thinks that you did the shooting, but he isn't sure. He told Father that a strange launch had been seen around here—a green boat with a red stripe running around the house. A fishboat. I thought right away that it might be the one—"

"Good for you, Nelly Callahan! I'll bet a dollar she's the one we're looking for. Any further news from the chap who went over to the hospital?"

"He's still between life and death, they said."

"Looks bad. Well, what else is on your mind?"

She looked down at the sand, stirred a branch of ground-cedar with her foot, colored faintly. Then her eyes, direct and searching, lifted suddenly to meet his gaze.

"Nothing."

Hardrock frowned. "Something you don't want to tell me, you mean?"

"Yes. Please don't ask."

FOR a moment Hardrock looked into the troubled depths of her eyes, and the answer came to him. He remembered his talk with her father; he could make a shrewd guess at about what that sort of a man would do and say to the girl.

"All right, I wont," he said abruptly. "You remember what we were talking about when the boat came along and you had to jump in and go? About Arizona, and you, and Danny's picture of you. That's why I came up here to the Beavers, Nelly. Now let's not have any discussion of the question. I don't want to know what your father said, or how he may have reported what I said to him. The facts are that I came here because I had seen your picture, and now that I've met you, I'm going to stay here for a while. I told your father so, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Here's Micky coming back, so let's drop the subject until a better time. I'll be taking you to the dance Thursday night, as the boys say. What's the good word, Micky?"

The grease-smeared lad grinned widely.

"Ye can't run an engine without a spark, can ye? Sure, she's all right—I've got some extry batteries here and can fix her up in no time."

"But that wont fix the leaky gas tank." Hardrock looked at the boy's boat—an open launch of no great size. "See here, Micky! Could you run off some gas into that big tin can aboard your boat, and siphon that into the carburetor, and run my launch into the harbor? If you can, there's a ten-dollar bill for you. Leave your boat here and I'll rent it until you can get my tank soldered up."

"You bet!" exclaimed the youth eagerly. "Half an hour and I'll have her in shape. You going back with me, Nelly?"

"Yes, and hurry up," said the girl. "We don't want to be out all day and night."

Between them, Hardrock and Micky got the Sheriff's launch back into the water, and the boy fell to work. There was no occasion to construct a siphoning arrangement, for he discovered that the leak lay in the piping connections, and stopped it temporarily with some soap. When he had run five gallons of gasoline into the tank and turned over the engine, it functioned perfectly.

"Hop in, Nelly!" he sang out. "We'll get back 'fore dark."

"Thank you for coming over, dear girl," said Hardrock, as he gave Nelly a hand and helped her into the boat. "If I don't come around before then, I'll see you Thursday night. Good-by, and good luck!"

"Good-by," she answered quietly. Then, as the boat circled out from shore, he saw her turn a laughing face, and lift her fingers to her lips, blowing him a kiss. For a moment he stood astounded, then a laugh broke from him, and a long shout.

"I may not wait until Thursday—after that!" he called, and she waved her hand in farewell. Then the launch was drawing

around for the point, and passed from sight.

Sheriff Fulsom appeared from the bushes, and he regarded Hardrock with twinkling eyes.

"Gosh, ye look right happy over something!" he commented dryly. "Say, this was a good job ye done, too—got us a launch all shipshape! They'll recognize my launch over to St. James, but no matter. Nobody'll see it until tomorrow anyhow."

"You heard what she told me?" demanded Hardrock. The Sheriff nodded.

"Yep. I don't know that boat, but no matter. She's our meat, I reckon, if she'll only come and pick up that shipment o' case goods! But what about them fellows coming over here tonight?" His shrewd gaze inspected Hardrock gayly. "Looks to me like you and Dunlevy are bound to fight it out, young fellow!"

Hardrock chuckled. "We should worry about what happens tonight. I'm your prisoner and if you don't protect me—Hello! Sheriff, where are your binoculars? Get 'em!"

"Gone with my launch, durn you! Why? What you lookin' at?"

Hardrock, who was staring out to the northeast, drew back from the shore.

"Looks to me like our boat—see her? Green, sure enough; can't tell about the red stripe. Get back out of sight, Fulsom. Here—help run this launch up a little first! Move sharp. They mustn't suspect anyone is here. Can you make her out?"

"Yep. That's her," affirmed Fulsom confidently. "Go get your shotgun, Hardrock."

CHAPTER VIII

THE round ball of the sun was hanging low above the purple line of Garden Island in the west, and the breeze was down until there was hardly a ripple on the water. From cover of bushes along the point, Hardrock and Fulsom watched that green fishboat, a red stripe running broadly around her, spin past the point and round it, and head for the floating paddle that marked the whisky-cache.

"She's fast," said the Sheriff appraisingly. "Built for the work. She came up from the south, all right, followed the channel through past Gray's Reef as though going to the straits, then cut straight west and headed here. She wasn't taking any chances by coming up past Beaver."

"What's your program?" demanded Hardrock.

"Get out in that launch, and get quick. You got your shotgun, I've got my pistol. She'll let us come alongside, and we'll grab her, that's all. No time to waste. You're my deputy—swear!"

"I swear," said Hardrock, and laughed. "Making a prisoner into a deputy—"

"Oh hell, shove along! We got to move fast. I aim to catch her with the goods."

They hurried back along the shore and ran out the open launch. Fulsom gave his automatic pistol to Hardock, took the shotgun, and scrambled into the bow.

"You 'tend the engine. We'll get 'em back here and put 'em through the third degree separate. Don't say a word about the murder. Leave me to handle it."

"With pleasure."

THE engine spat and coughed and puffed, and presently they were slipping out past the long point. The green fishboat had halted at the fish-trap. She was a boat of fair size, housed over except for foredeck, after-deck, and a narrow strip along the sides. The after end of this house was wide open. Forward on each side were wide openings where the lifter brought in nets and fish.

Just now, however, two men were at work forward in the bow, hauling in better prey than fish. Several cases were piled up, and they were getting another case aboard. A third man appeared in the stern, stared at the launch, and called to his companions. All three turned, watching her.

Hardrock headed as though to bear up past them for Beaver Island and waved his hand, to which they made no response. The man from aft had ducked out of sight, reappearing on the foredeck with the others. As Fulsom was apparently at work on something and not interested, the whisky-runners evinced no alarm. Then, when he was opposite their boat and a hundred feet distant, Hardrock shoved the tiller hard down and swung in toward her.

One of the three waved his arm and shouted:

"Git away! Sheer off! We don't want no visitors."

Sheriff Fulsom straightened up, pointed down, and shouted something indistinguishable. Hardrock held on his course. Again

the leader of the three waved them off, this time with added oaths. Fulsom grinned.

"Got something to show ye! Look here —look at this!"

The Sheriff leaned forward as though to drag something up to sight, then came up with the shotgun leveled. The other boat was now not thirty feet distant.

"Stand quiet and put your hands up! You're under arrest. Hands up, durn ye!"

The whisky-runners were caught entirely unawares. This boat, obviously an island boat, with only two men in her, had been unsuspected; while to lake-farers any talk of arrest among the Beavers was in itself ludicrous. There was nothing ludicrous about Fulsom or the way he handled his shotgun, however, and after one surprised oath the astonished and dismayed trio put up their hands.

"Run her alongside," said the Sheriff to Hardrock. "Then go aboard and disarm 'em. Go through her for guns. You three gents roost high and quiet, or I'll blow daylight into ye."

"What's this for, anyhow?" demanded the leader. He was a big, lantern-jawed fellow marked with a scar across his cheek. His two comrades were swarthy men, whom Hardrock took to be Greeks or kindred foreigners. Who are you, holdin' us up this way?"

"Sheriff," and Fulsom put up one hand to display his star. "All right, Hardrock."

As the two craft came into each other, Hardrock jumped aboard the larger boat and made fast a line. The sight of the officer's badge had disconcerted the trio, and they offered only sullen curses as he swiftly went through them. From two of them he removed heavy automatics, which he tossed into his own craft. The third man was unarmed.

Crawling through the forward opening of the deck-house, Hardrock paused in surprise. There was no lifter in sight, no nets were aboard, nor fish. Under him was a pile of a dozen whisky-cases, the white wood all brown and soggy with water, which had evidently been picked up at some other point in the course of the afternoon. A quick search sufficed to show that no rifles or other weapons were in evidence, and he returned to the foredeck.

"Nothing aboard but whisky, Sheriff, and plenty of that," he called. "They loaded another cache aboard before coming here."

"Right thoughtful of 'em," said Fulsom grimly, and moved back into the stern, after tossing the captured weapons ahead of him. "You three birds hop down into the bow, here. Come along, now, and no talk."

"Can't we fix this up, Sheriff?" demanded the leader. "We got some money—"

"Now I'll soak you for attempted bribery," snapped Fulsom. "Git down!"

CURSING anew, the scar-faced leader got into the bow of the open launch, and his two comrades followed him. Fulsom looked up at Hardrock.

"Cast off that anchor in her bows and make sure the line's fast. Give her the len'th. Good holdin' ground here, and she'll drift in toward the shore and set pretty. No wind comin' up tonight, anyhow. I got two pair o' handcuffs at camp, and when we get these birds fixed up and have supper, we can figger what to do next."

The three "birds" looked decidedly unhappy. The two Greeks began to talk in their own language, until the Sheriff peremptorily shut them up. Hardrock, meantime, dumped the big anchor over the bows of the green fishboat, watched the line run out until it drew taut, and then climbed back into his own borrowed craft. The sun was just sinking from sight.

"Back to camp?" he asked, and Fulsom nodded assent.

The engine started up, and the boat circled out for the point, the Sheriff standing amidships with his shotgun ready. The three prisoners, crowded on the bow thwart, showed no symptoms of putting up any fight, however.

"Simplest thing on earth," said Fulsom calmly, "is to handcuff a gent with his arms around a sapling. We'll do that with two of these birds, and interview the third —give 'em turn and turn about at it. And we'll keep 'em at far separated trees. And no supper. Make 'em talk better, hungry."

As they were perhaps meant to do, these words reached and stung the trio. After a rapid-fire exchange of Greek, the leader turned around.

"This aint legal!" he exclaimed savagely. "You aint got no warrant—"

"I got a shotgun," said the Sheriff, a cold glint in his eyes, "and you'll taste it if you get gay. So turn around there and set easy. We aint ready for you to talk yet awhile."

The boat was around the point and

heading in for the shore. Hardrock, one hand on the tiller, swept her directly in toward the clearing, threw out the clutch, and after a moment threw it into reverse. With hardly a jar, the prow of the boat came into the ground a couple of feet from shore, weighted down as it was by the three prisoners.

"Now, then," ordered Fulsom, "you birds hop out and draw her up. Don't any of you make a break, or I'll pepper your hides!"

THE big leader, with a growled oath, obeyed the order. There was no sand at the water's edge, the beach being composed of small stones, which farther back ran into sand. The two Greeks likewise got out. The leader took the prow, each of the Greeks seized the gunnel, and they drew up the launch until the bow was on the shingle.

"Now you, Hardrock," commanded the Sheriff. "Never mind the guns—I'll 'tend to 'em. Run over to my pile of stuff and fetch the handcuffs, will you?"

"Sure."

Hardrock stepped past the Sheriff and jumped ashore.

At the same instant, the big leader stooped; and the two Greeks shoved outward on the boat with all their power. Fulsom, caught unawares by the tremendous lurch of the boat, lost his balance, dropped the shotgun, and reeled for an instant. The leader hurled a chunk of rock that struck the staggering man squarely in the side of the head and sent him down like a shot.

The whole thing passed off swiftly, neatly, with incredible precision and accuracy. Even as Hardrock whirled about from his spring, Fulsom was down and the launch was darting out twenty feet from shore.

Then he found all three men on top of him. One of the Greeks came first, and went sprawling in the water as Hardrock's fist met his face. The second Greek lunged in from one side, a knife in his hand, and took a kick under the chin that laid him senseless, but the leader was hurling himself forward and Hardrock could not evade. Caught in a burly grip, arms locked, both men went down, thrashing. Even then, had matters been equal, Hardrock would have won out, for with a twist he came up on top and rammed a fist into the scarred face—but just then the first Greek swung a stone that laid the man from Arizona prostrate. Dazed and almost senseless from the blow, Hardrock keeled over, and before he could recover he was pinned down under both opponents.

"Tie him up!" growled the leader, and two minutes later Hardrock was bound hand and foot, while the Greek stooped over his unconscious comrade and the burly leader stood laughing and panting. He grinned down at Hardrock.

"So that's what we think of you and your blasted Sheriff!" he declared. "We'll let him float to Mackinac, if he aint dead. By the time he gits back here, we'll sure be on our way. Got a good camp here, aint you? Guess we'll git us a bite to eat 'fore we bring up our boat and beat it."

For a little, however, the man had his hands full. The groaning Greek, revived by his compatriot, retrieved his knife and flung himself on the bound captive; the leader interfered, and the trees resounded to bellowed oaths and orders and imprecations. Hardrock, helpless to move, watched and listened grimly. At length the arguments of the leader took effect.

"And ye don't want to be the same damned fools ye were before, do ye?" concluded the wrathful leader. "We don't want to be trailed for murder! Leave him be. We'll fix him so's he can't hurt us none—and we wont murder him neither. Ye may think ye can pull a stunt like that more'n once, and get away with it; but ye can't. How d'ye know that there Sheriff didn't want ye for the other shootin', hey?"

The sullen Greek acquiesced, put away his knife, and all three men stamped away up to the camp. Darkness was gathering upon the waters, but Hardrock no longer stared after the rapidly vanishing boat that was drifted off along the shore and toward the open lake. Those words of the leader were dinning in his brain. He knew now who had shot down those two boys from St. James.

CHAPTER IX

IT was perhaps five minutes afterward, while some tins of food were being opened, that the three whisky-runners realized they had committed an error. Their leader, whose name appeared to be Marks, was the one who realized it most keenly. He came down to the shore, stared off in the gather-

ing darkness at the boat, now a mere speck in the dusk, and cursed fervently. The shotgun had gone into the lake, and their pistols had all floated away with poor Fulsom. Hardrock chuckled.

"You fellows turn me loose," he offered, "and I'll tell you where there's a boat laid up down the shore."

Marks turned away. "You'll tell more'n that 'fore we're through with you. Shut up!"

The three gathered again about their food, getting a fire lighted and in their clumsy ignorance of the woods heaping on fuel until the yellow flames were leaping high and far. Over such a fire, any cookery was impossible, and Hardrock chuckled at their profane efforts to make coffee without getting the pot too hot to be handled.

He, meantime, while apparently motionless and helpless, was in reality hard at work. He lay, half sitting, against a log between fire and shore, at the clearing's edge, arms bound behind him. He had been tied up with the first thing to hand—bandanna handkerchiefs produced by the Greeks, and had made the gratifying discovery that the material was old and would tear easily. Therefore he was tearing it, against the log at his back, and by the increasing looseness knew that his wrists were nearly free.

Marks conferred at length with his companions, who were obviously taking their orders from him, and presently the two Greeks rose and stamped off into the darkness along the shore, going toward the point. Marks himself rolled a cigarette and came toward Hardrock.

"If you're going to starve me," said the latter, "you might at least starve me on a smoke. Look out your friends don't get lost."

Marks laughed easily. "I'll get you some coffee and a smoke," he replied, "if you'll talk. Will you? Or shall I make you?"

"Sure thing," exclaimed Hardrock. "It's a bargain. And cut me loose."

"Not much," retorted the other, and went back to the fire, where he poured out a tin cup of coffee.

Hardrock seized the instant. His arms came free. Swiftly he got a hand into his pocket—thus far, they had not searched him except for weapons—and slid out his pocketknife. His arms again in place behind him, he opened a blade of the knife, and waited. One cut at his ankles, and he would be free. Without that cut, he dared take no chances, tempting as the occasion now was.

FOR Marks now came back to him, held the lukewarm coffee to his lips as he drank, then gave him the cigarette and held a match to it. Sitting down and wiping sweat from his face, for it was hot near that big fire, the burly ruffian rolled himself another cigarette. He was almost within arm's reach of Hardrock—yet the latter controlled himself. Until his feet were free he must attempt nothing.

"Now let's have it," said Marks. "I didn't want them two lard-eaters to get wise. What was it the Sheriff wanted to give us the third degree about?"

"About the shooting you fellows pulled off last time you were here."

Marks nodded, a frown darkening his scarred features. Evidently he had anticipated this information.

"Aint it hell how ye can't make foreigners savvy anything?" he demanded, to the astonishment of Hardrock. "Them two fellers have just one notion o' fighting—to take a gun and kill somebody! I'll have to let 'em go. I can't make 'em savvy that there's a durned sight more danger in a murder charge than in running liquor."

"You mean they're working for you?"

"Yep. The blamed fools run on them Beaver men the other day, found 'em lifting the trap out yonder, and riddled 'em—then let 'em go. That's a fool Greek every time. I wasn't along, dog-gone it! I was in Escanaba, sick that day, and ye can't get nothin' on me. I got to stand by them fellers, o' course, and get 'em away safe, but I don't like it a mite. This sort o' killing is bad business."

Hardrock laughed curtly. "What about the Sheriff?"

"Oh, him! He's a Sheriff, takin' chances. Same with you—depity, aint ye? Yep. He aint killed, though. He'll drift over in the channel and'll get picked up by a barge. We'll run ye out to Gull Island and leave ye there with some grub. That's decent all around. A fight is one thing, and killin' is another thing. I been running booze a year now, and never had a speck o' trouble before this. Durn them hot-headed Greeks! They've spoiled the best little game this side the Soo."

"You're sure frank about it," said Hardrock dryly."

"Why not? I want you should understand it; I aint anxious to be follered up for a killin' I didn't do! Bad enough to have my business busted up. Now I got to land this cargo and then go somewheres else. Dog-gone it! I hope they pass them immygration laws an' do it quick. A feller can't make an honest livin' no more, the way these durned foreigners are everywhere."

Hardrock broke out laughing. Marks surveyed him darkly.

"Ye may think it's funny, but I don't. It aint the law so much, neither. It's these durned islanders! They're all over the lakes, them or their relations. If they take the notion it was me responsible for the killin', they'll drive me off the lakes, that's what."

The man's viewpoint was irresistible, and Hardrock laughed the harder, while Marks sucked at his cigarette and glowered angrily. Then came the "chug-chug" of a gas engine, and a low call from the darkness. Slowly the shape of the green fishboat drifted in upon the shore and then halted as her bows hit the shallows ten feet from the beach.

"They had to swim to get her, anyhow!" exclaimed Marks. "The durned fools needed a bath." He rose and went past Hardrock to the shore. "Hey, boys! Toss that anchor ashore so's she wont drift off. We'll get away pretty quick, now."

Hardrock moved his arm, and the little blade of the penknife flashed in the firelight as he slashed the bonds about his ankles. He was free, now—but he must let them all get ashore. His only chance, against the three of them, was to get their boat and leave them here. It was a time for strategy, rather than for fighting; so, at least, he thought. He was to discover his mistake very shortly.

The two Greeks came ashore, bearing a line. It appeared that they had cut loose the anchor rather than haul it in. There ensued a furious storm of oaths from Marks; the two men became ugly, and for a moment it looked as though a row were imminent. Then Marks cooled down, and told them to get some of the supplies from Hardrock's tent aboard the boat. All three passed up to the tent, none of them observing that the captive was no longer bound.

THIS was the opportunity Hardrock had been praying for, and he gathered his muscles. Once he could shove out that boat and scramble aboard her, he had everything in his own hands! He drew up his feet, saw that the three men were busily engaged with his supplies, and rose—

While he was in the very act of rising, a voice boomed out among the trees at the clearing's edge:

"There's Callyhan and his whole crowd —git 'em all, lads! Take 'em!"

Hardrock was already springing for the water, but a figure appeared and blocked him. It was the figure of Hughie Dunlevy. Instantly, Hardrock realized what had happened, and cursed the luck that had brought the Beaver lads here at this moment. From the brush was going up a crash of feet and wild yells, Marks was bellowing, the Greeks were cursing and fighting—beyond a question, Dunlevy thought that they were part of a gang under the direction of Hardrock Callahan.

There was no time for any explanations. The man from Arizona barely had a chance to check his leap for the water, to spring back and gain balance, when Dunlevy was upon him with a roar of battle-fury and a whirl of fists.

"Ye will murder poor lads, will ye?" he yelled, and struck.

Hardrock ducked the blow and answered it with a smash to the wind that stopped Hughie Dunlevy for an instant. Glancing around, Hardrock was aware of the three whisky-runners by the tent, furiously engaged with four or five other men. He and Dunlevy were for the moment alone. Only a glance—then he was driving at his opponent, hoping still to get out and aboard the boat.

That hope seemed vain. A wild swing caught Hardrock under the jaw and knocked him ten feet away; Dunlevy was after him instantly, leaping high in air to come down upon him boots first. He came down only on the shingle, however; and the man from Arizona, evading a savage kick, reached his feet and began to fight.

Hughie Dunlevy gasped and grunted as the blows smashed into him, while before him in the firelight danced that unhurt face with its blazing eyes and its furious unleashed anger. For all his tremendous strength, the islander helplessly gave ground, was driven backward, fists driving into him with relentless accuracy. In vain he tried to grapple, to kick, to gouge—each attempt failed and only drew upon him another terrific smash under the heart.

Warmed as he was by white liquor, having great strength in place of stamina, Dunlevy could not stand up under this battering. Never once did Hardrock strike for the face, but drove in fists like hammers that pounded heart and stomach in frightful repetition.

ON the other side of the fire, one Greek was thrashing over the ground with Jimmy Basset pounding him into submission. Connie Dunlevy was down, trying to quench a knife slash that ran from shoulder to elbow. The other three island men were battering Marks, who was badly hurt and groaning as he fought, and the second Greek whose knife flashed crimson in the firelight. Now Marks gave way and came crashing down, and the snarling Greek reeled as a stone smashed into his face.

Hardrock got home to the wind with one direct punch that sent Hughie Dunlevy two steps backward and brought down his hands —drove in another that rocked him, and then set himself deliberately for the finish. His feet shifting perfectly to keep balance, he now put over a light tap to the mouth, and then laughed.

"How d'ye like it, Hughie? Come and get it, boy, come and get it—"

With a gasping bellow of anguished fury, the other obeyed, rushed blindly into the blow that Hardrock smashed in with full force—a perfect solar-plexus knockout. Dunlevy simply doubled up and rolled to the ground.

Two leaps took Hardrock to the boat. As he splashed through the water, wild yells chorused up behind him, and he glanced around to see dark figures bounding after him. He set himself against the heavy bow of the boat and shoved—vainly. He could not budge her. Desperate, he gave up the attempt and with a leap was dragging himself over her rail.

Too late! They were upon him, three of them; that effort to shove her off had lost him his fighting chance. Mad with battle-lust and moonshine whisky, they dragged him back and bore him down, all three hurtling in upon him bodily, careless of his blows, so that only they might land blows upon him. Slipping on the stones, he lost balance, went down, was stamped into the knee-deep water—

That was all he knew, for a time.

Presently, half strangled and exhausted, Hardrock came to himself again. This time he found ankles and arms fast lashed by men who knew how to handle ropes. Beside him lay one of the Greeks, dark features masked by blood, beaten senseless and bound; the other Greek lay farther away, muttering low curses.

Hardrock realized that some terrible sound had dragged him to life, and now it came once more—a low scream of agony. His head cleared slowly, as he visualized the scene before him. In the circle of firelight lay Hughie Dunlevy, still unconscious, and by him sat his brother Connie, weak and white and rather drunk, his arm all swathed in crimsoned bandages.

The other four men, by the fire, held the frantically struggling figure of Marks, and were shoving his feet into the red embers. From the man broke another scream, this time rising shrill with pain and horror.

"Quit it! Quit it! I'll tell!"

"Then talk, ye domned murderer," growled Jimmy Basset. "Pull him out and give him a drink to make him talk, lads—"

The groaning Marks waited for no drink. "It was them Greeks done it!" he cried desperately. "I wasn't along with 'em, I tell ye! It was them two done it!"

"All right," snapped Bassett, lurching a little as he glared down at the captive. "And what about this Hardrock felly? Is he your boss?"

"I don't know him," returned the unfortunate Marks.

"Shove him in again, lads—"

Marks screamed and twisted terribly. "No, no! Yes, he's my boss. Sure he is."

"Don't you fools know a man will swear to anything under torture?" demanded Hardrock furiously. "You're going too far here. Cut this business out!"

Marks was hastily flung aside. They all turned to stare at him. Connie Dunlevy, waving a bottle in his free hand, gave a weak, drunken laugh.

"Glory be, he's awake! Burn the boots off'm him, byes!"

The four lurched over. Hardrock made one desperate effort to pierce through the liquor fumes to their fuddled brains.

"Hold on, there, boys! You've got this thing all wrong. These men are whisky-runners, and they had captured me before you came along. I was getting away—"

Jimmy Basset leaned over and struck him across the mouth, heavily.

"Shut up wid you and your lies! Well we know it's you that's the whisky-runner, and behind all this deviltry. So it was them Greeks done the killin', was it? Well, it

was you behind it all, and it's you we'll have a bit o' fun wid the night. Up wid him, lads! Up and shove him in!"

Hardrock felt himself picked up. The next instant, with a wild yell, the four men shoved him at the fire, shoved his feet and legs into the heart of the blazing embers. He made one frantic, frightful effort, kicked himself out of the flames, rolled aside. The four gripped him and lifted him again, with a maudlin yell of glee.

"All together, now!" howled Basset. "One, two—"

CHAPTER X

AS the shot rang out, Jimmy Basset jumped into the air, then stood staring at his arm that dripped blood. A voice struck on the silence—a voice from the edge of the trees.

"All right, boys—hands up all around! Sheriff Fulsom talking, and two guns to talk with. First man moves gets a bullet in the leg."

That crisp, businesslike voice bit into their drunken senses like acid. Hardrock lay where they dropped him. Sheriff Fulsom stepped forward into the circle of light, a pistol in each hand, and not one of the islanders moved, after reaching upward.

"Cut loose that man Hardrock and do it durned quick. He's a Deputy Sheriff of this county, if ye want to know who he is. Cut him loose, Willy John. Move sharp."

One of the men stooped and fumbled with Hardrock's bonds. They were all struck silent and were held in a stupefaction of dismay and consternation by the appearance of Fulsom, whom they all knew. A sudden and terrible sanity crept upon them.

"You boys are shoving a good thing too far," continued Fulsom. "Hardrock and me got them murderers, and then they jumped us. Lucky I aint as soft in the head as I look to be, for a fact! Took me quite a spell to get ashore and come back here, at that. H'are ye, Hardrock?"

"All right," said the latter, getting to his feet.

"You done some swift action gettin' out of that fire, sure enough! Here, take a gun and stretch yourself. All right, boys, put your hands down. I'm doin' the talking for a spell—remember that. What's the matter with Hughie Dunlevy?"

"I knocked him out," and Hardrock chuckled. "Connie got knifed by one of these Greeks—badly slashed, I think."

"All right, Connie, you go climb aboard that there launch, and do it quick—no talk! Jimmy Basset, go with him. We'll 'tend to your arm quick enough; long's you can move your hand it aint broke. Git!"

The two men, dazed, obeyed the order and stumbled toward the boat at the shore. Fulsom looked at the other three, grimly enough.

"Now, I want you three boys for deputies. We got to take this whisky boat over to Charlevoix and lock up these birds. Hardrock, got any information to spill?"

The man from Arizona briefly recounted what Marks had told him about the murder by the Greeks. Fulsom comprehended at once, and nodded.

"All right. Willy John, I s'pose you snuck up here in a boat and left her laying down the shore?"

"Yes," said Willy John, rather sheepishly. "She's down to Belmore Bay."

"All right. You three deputies take the pris'ners and get aboard. I'll rustle up some handcuffs, if you rascals aint lost 'em. Hardrock, get aboard likewise."

Hardrock smiled. "Sorry, Sheriff. Can't be done."

"Eh?" Fulsom eyed him sharply. "We got to have your evidence—"

"You'll get it. I'll come over on the mailboat tomorrow." Hardrock motioned to the figure of Hughie Dunlevy. "I've got a little business to settle with this chap, first—I may have to convince him a little more that I'm the better man. Then we'll have to get his launch and Micky's boat back to St. James. And I have a very important errand there."

"Oh!" Fulsom broke into a grin. "Oh! So that's it, eh? That Callahan girl, eh? Dog-gone you, Hardrock, here's luck to you! See you later, then."

He went for his handcuffs. Hardrock looked down at the slowly wakening Hughie Dunlevy.

"Looks like that textbook for engineers is never going to get written!" he murmured. "Sure looks that way. I've got to convince this fellow, then I've got to convince Matt Big Mary that I'm a good man to marry his daughter, and then I've got to convince the daughter of the same thing—but, I guess an Arizona Callahan can do it, by gosh!"

And he grinned happily.

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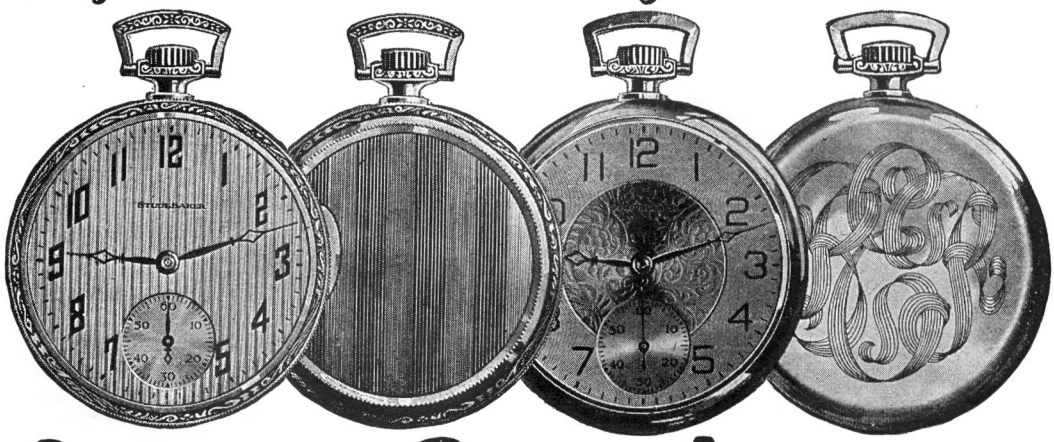

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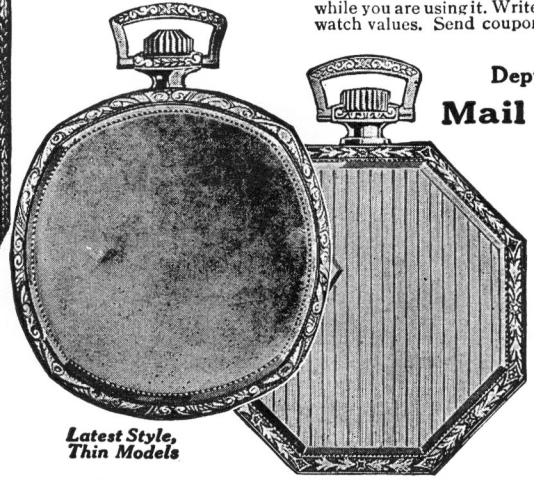

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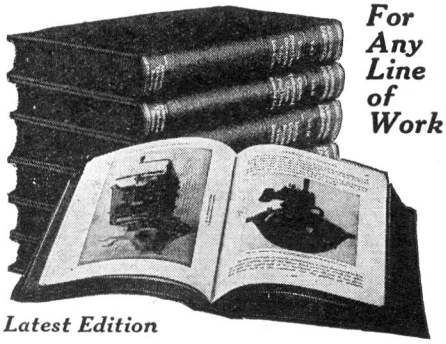

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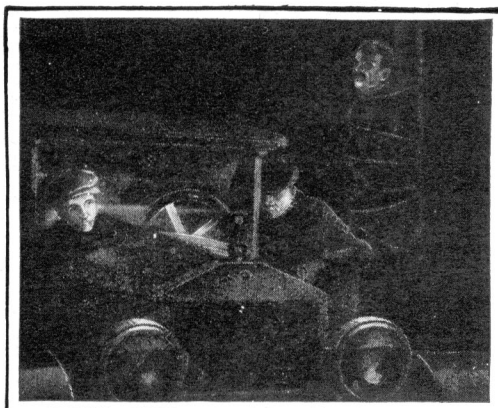

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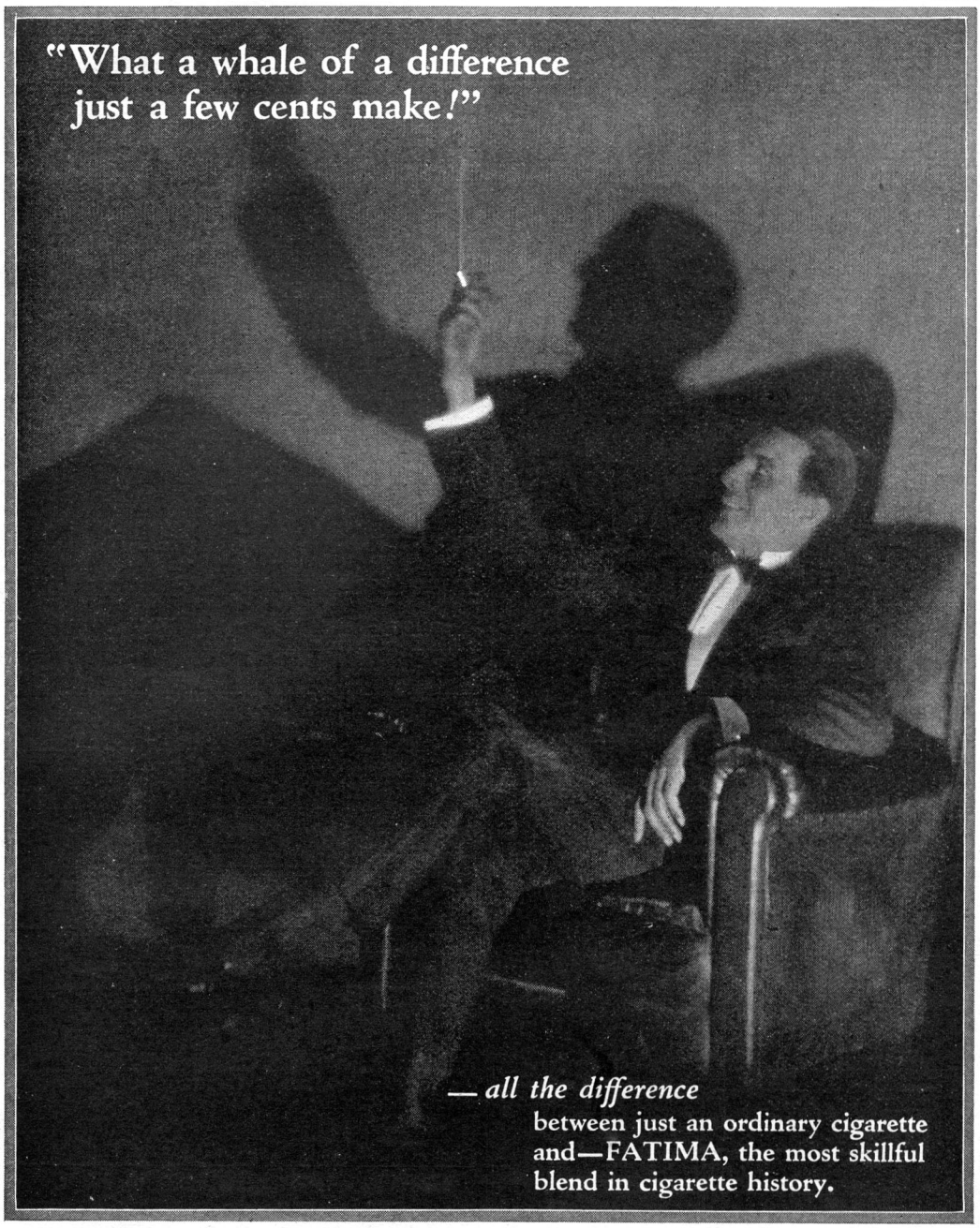

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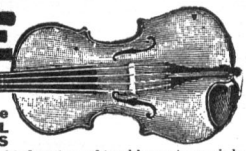

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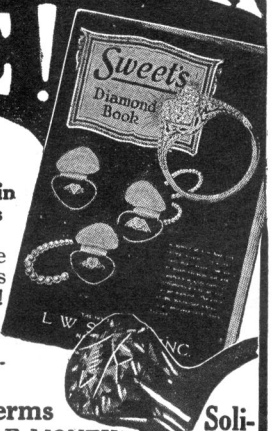

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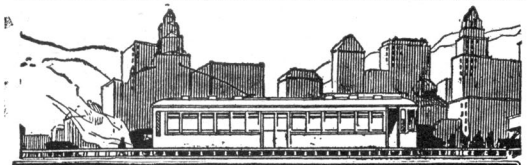

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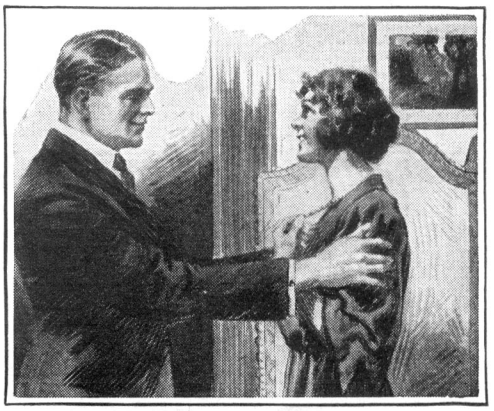

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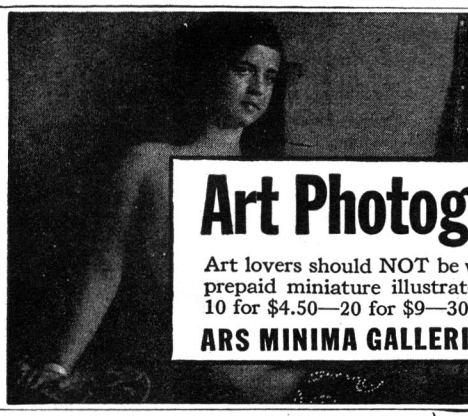

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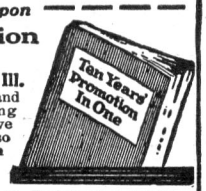

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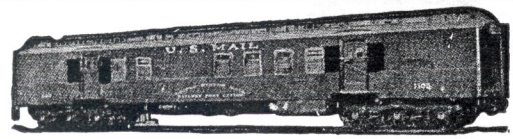

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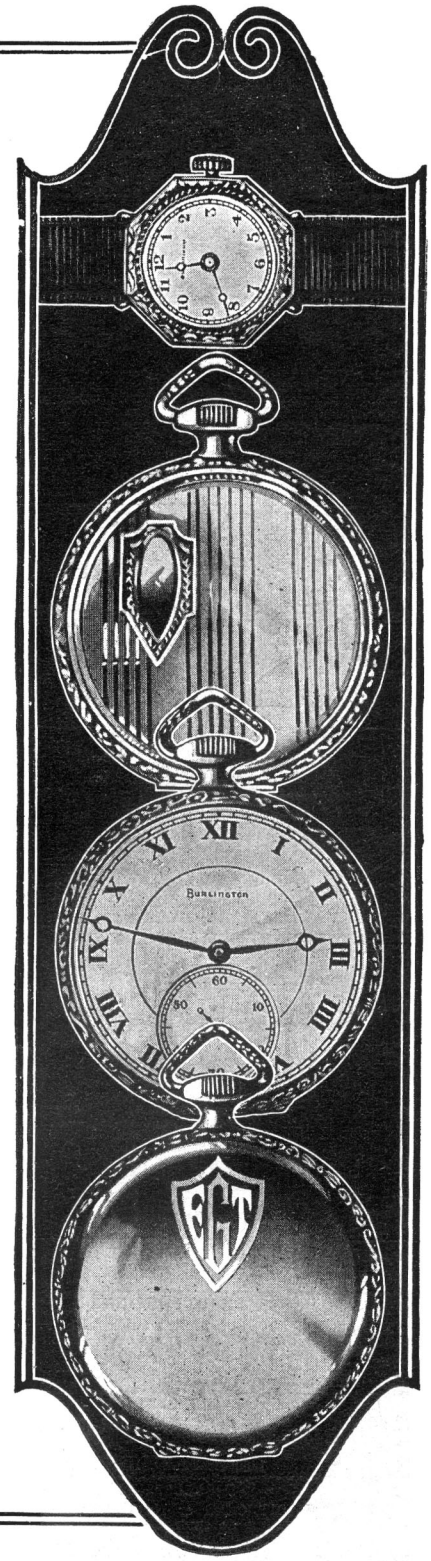

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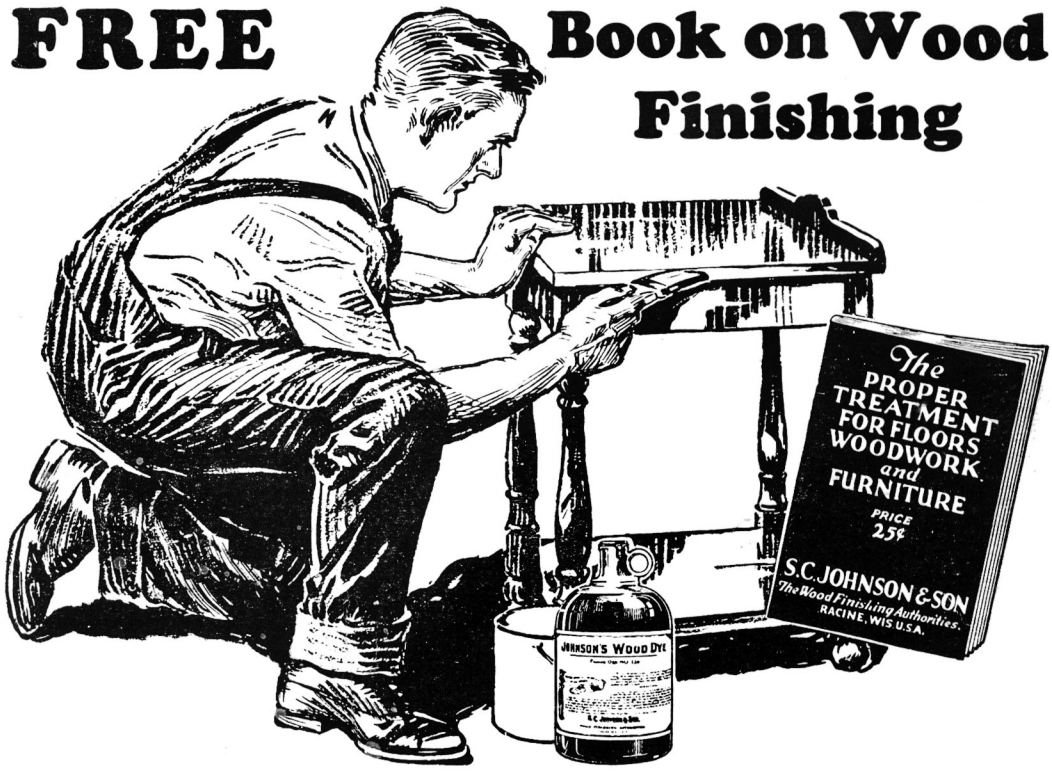

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12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6¼ in.
1 Platter, 13½ in.
1 Platter, 11¾ in.
1 Celery Dish, 8¾ in.
1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7¾ inches
1 Butter Plate, 6 in.
1 Vegetable Dish, 10½ in., with lid (2 pieces)
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