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JUNE 1924

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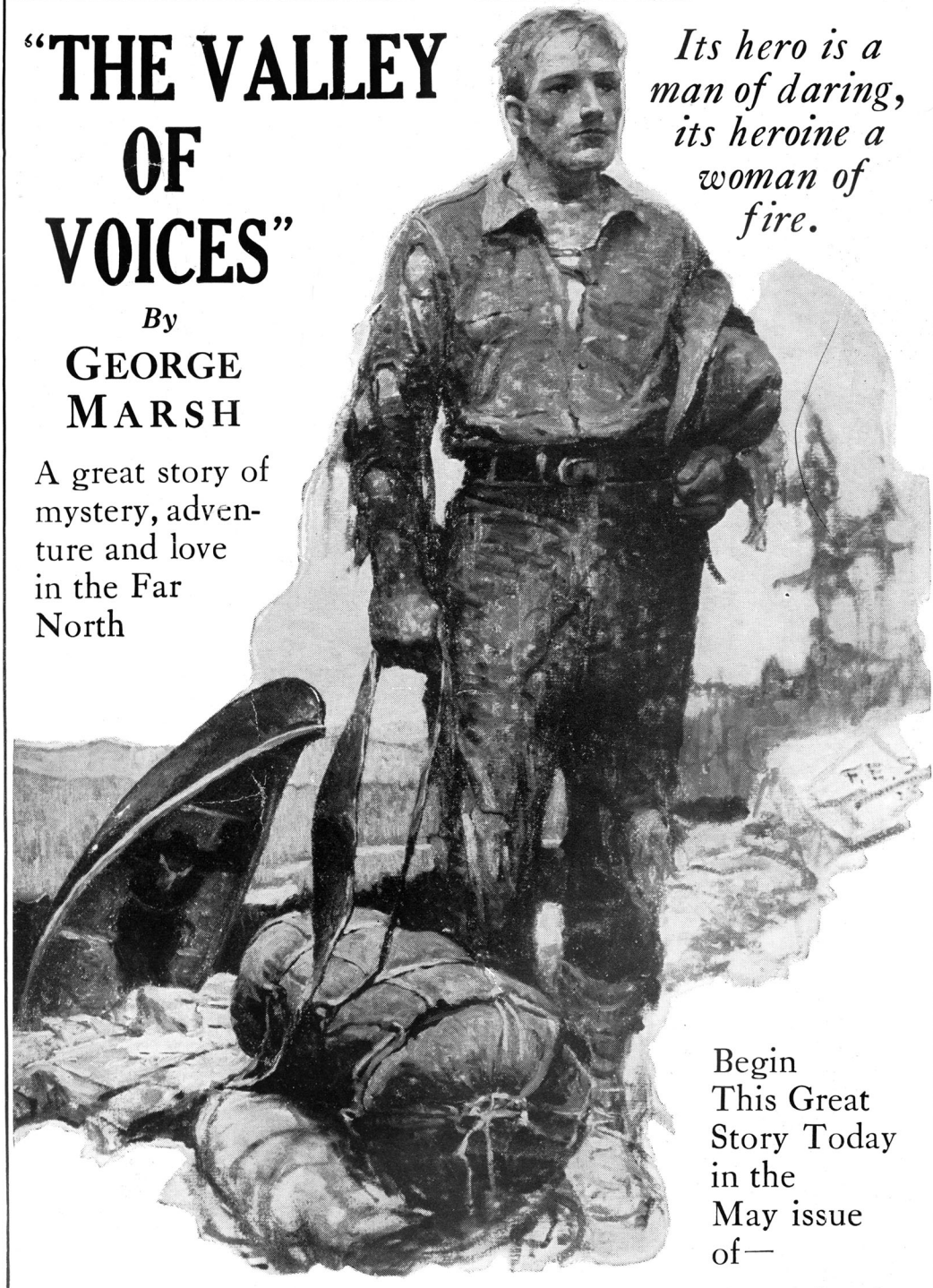

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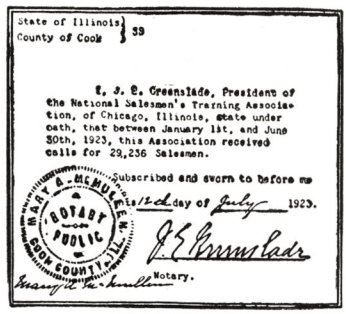

State of Illinois } ss
County of Cook }

E. J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, of Chicago, Illinois, state under oath, that between January 1st, and June 30th, 1923, this Association received calls for 28,236 Salesmen.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 2d day of July 1923.

MARY A. McMULLEN NOTARY PUBLIC COOK COUNTY, ILL.

J. E. Greenslade

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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COVER DESIGN: Painted by Lawrence Herndon to illustrate "Latigo."

A Fast-Moving Novelette

The Barren Islands By H. Bedford-Jones 168

The venturesome hero of "Madagascar Gold" is likewise the central figure in this stirring narrative of strange and swift adventure in little known seas.

Thirteen Attractive Short Stories

100,000 Dollars By Frank Parker Stockbridge 1

The man who wrote "The Jinx of Crowley's Road," "News," and many other fine tales here contributes one of the most unusual and deeply interesting stories we have ever printed.

Barratry By Albert Richard Wetjen 13

A specially worth-while story of the sea and sailors, by the author of "The Sea King" and other stories our readers have liked well.

A Sentimental Business By William Ashley Anderson 21

This spirited story, which takes you on a big adventure from New York to the Gobi Desert and back again, is by a writer who knows his subject thoroughly.

The Bond of Likeness By Steuart M. Emery 36

Here we have an exceptionally dramatic story of the underworld and the upper, told with a power which augurs well for the writer's future.

Easy Come, Easy Go By Edwin L. Sabin 47

A quaint and very human cowboy story by a writer who understands the West and Westerners.

The Hunter's Lodge Case By Agatha Christie 54

Hercule Poirot, detective extraordinary, performs one of his most remarkable and interesting feats in this fascinating tale.

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
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MAGAZINE

JUNE
1924

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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Strategy Hawkins' Hens By Edward Mott Woolley 60

A writer who is also a commercial expert here contributes a story that includes with much amusement a world of valuable business suggestions.

A Game of Draw in Borneo By Culpeper Zandtt 67

Randall Barton, a civil engineer with a love for big risks in far places, here sits into a perilous game that you'll enjoy watching.

Latigo By Clem Yore 81

It starts with a bucking contest, and then divers other exciting things transpire in swift succession in this thrill-filled story.

The Closet of Wo Fang By L. De Bra 124

Chinatown has seldom provided a more worth-reading story than this by the author of "Fifty Cans of Opium" and "When Tong Tricks Tong."

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 134

"A Night on a Breton Road" brings forward Nan Trevor in one of her most daring exploits—and shows the gifted Mr. New at his best.

One Good Turn By George L. Knapp 147

You'll find this story of certain young Americans one of the most engaging thus far written by the author of "Poetic Injustice" and "The Home Immigrant."

The Outsider By Earl K. Collins 158

This drama of a Southern swamp region and its people is notable for its realism and sympathetic character-delineation.

A Captivating Serial

The Gallowstree Mystery By J. S. Fletcher 94

Fiction offers few delights comparable to a J. S. Fletcher novel; and this present story is easily the best thus far produced by a man gifted with a real genius for the writing of mystery fiction.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (June issue out May 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on trains, a notification to the publisher will be appreciated.

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

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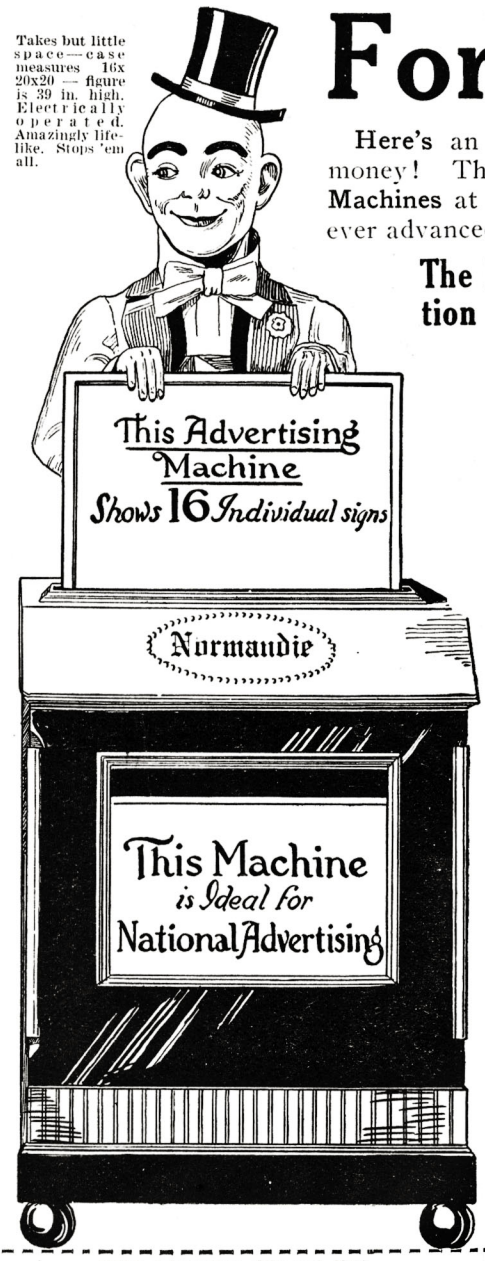

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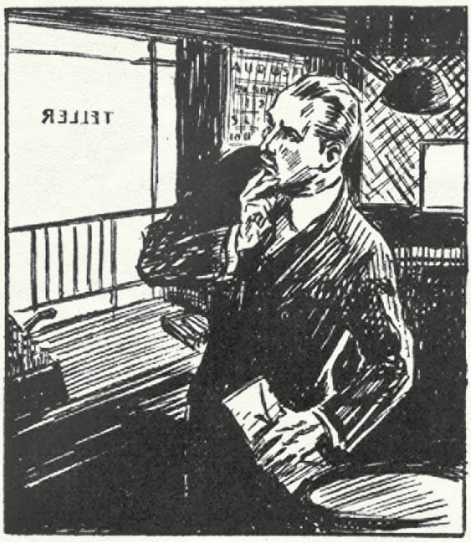
THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 39 JUNE 1924 No. 2



100,000 Dollars

The author of those famous "Buried Alive Club" stories has here written one of the most unusual, dramatic and convincing stories of business life we have ever read.

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

UP to noon on Saturday, August first, Edward Levering had always been an honest young man. Indeed, it is not saying too much to declare that he was an honest young man up to ten o'clock, or thereabouts, on the morning of August third, which was Monday. So far as anybody knows, Edward Levering is still an honest man, although one does not consciously use the adjective "young" in referring to him now. He carries himself with a certain gravity of demeanor which impresses those who meet him with a sense of maturity.

As to Edward Levering's conduct in the interval between then (meaning the August dates already referred to) and now (meaning the date, whatever it may be, when this unvarnished tale shall greet the reader's wondering eye) there may be room for two opinions. Edward Levering has his; I have mine. Others may agree with either, after they are in full possession of the facts. The facts, then, are these:

On the first day of August, a Saturday, Carey Chamberlin, note-teller of the Grangers and Artisans National Bank, came down to work carrying a big kit-bag, which he deposited in his clothes-locker, together with his straw hat and his blue serge coat. He was putting on the loose black alpaca jacket which he customarily wore while on duty, when young Edward Levering came along.

Levering unlocked the door of the adjoining one of the long row of green-painted

steel clothes-closets and greeted his fellow-worker with his customary jauntiness.

"Week-ending again, Carey?" he asked, with a glance at the kit-bag. "Which is your weak end, anyway?"

"If you don't get over the habit of making bad puns, some one will say something real mean to you some day, Eddie," grinned Chamberlin. "I don't mind telling you, though, that I suspect my head of being my weak end this time. I've let myself in for a trip out to the Cholera Banks in a motorboat, and I can feel myself getting seasick already."

"Going to take a look at the rum-fleet?" suggested Levering.

"Well, that isn't the ostensible purpose of the voyage," replied Chamberlin, "though I half suspect one of the crowd of being an amateur bootlegger; bunch from a club I belong to, uptown, are going out fishing, and I promised to go along."

Levering had changed his own coat and closed his locker by this time, and the two men ascended together to the banking floor above, where they occupied adjoining cages during banking hours.

The Grangers and Artisans is one of the smaller banks of lower Manhattan, but it yields in dignity and conservatism to none. The only time Elisha Q. Rich, its president for the past fifty years, ever had his picture in the Sunday papers was when an enterprising news photographer learned that the old man had never ridden in an automobile and "snapped" him arriving at the bank in the old-fashioned horse-drawn coupé to which he clung long after all of his contemporaries had succumbed to the lure of gasoline. Matthew Flynn, the cashier, being only sixty, and therefore nearly twenty years the president's junior, was still regarded by Mr. Rich as a boy; and being so regarded, he took a boyish delight in doing things which he knew the president would not approve if he knew they were being done—such things, for instance, as discounting a note for a friendly depositor after banking-hours. Mr. Rich was a stickler for regularity. Twelve o'clock, noon, was closing time on Saturday, and he would not tolerate the transaction of a single item of business after the last stroke of twelve, if he knew it.

On this first Saturday in August, however, Mr. Rich was away from the bank, taking his regular midsummer vacation at Saratoga, as he had done for the last fifty years. It was a scorching morning, and the day grew hotter and hotter as the hour hand crept toward the zenith. Matthew Flynn, the cashier, looked at the vacant chair in front of the president's desk, as if to assure himself that Mr. Rich really was in Saratoga and not in the bank; then he *took off his coat!*

Carey Chamberlin observed the act with amazement. He turned and whispered to Eddie Levering:

"Wouldn't Grandpa Rich have a stroke if he saw old Matt with his coat off?"

"Wonder what he'd say if we took ours off too," suggested Levering. "It's hotter'n an oven in here."

"Here too," assented Chamberlin. "I'm going to take a chance."

He stripped off his black alpaca coat and hung it over the back of his chair. Levering followed suit. Cashier Matthew Flynn saw them, and merely smiled.

THE first stroke of twelve had sounded when Joseph Dawson, the real-estate operator, entered the front door of the Grangers and Artisans Bank and advanced toward the cashier's desk. As he passed the cages of Chamberlin and Levering, he spoke pleasantly to each. He had a daughter, Marjory, whom both of the young men knew. Then he went on to the cashier's desk.

In the Grangers and Artisans Bank the president and the cashier have their desks upon a raised platform just inside the front door and to the right as one enters. The tellers' cages are in a straight line from the door to the rear of the banking room, with the note-teller's cage first. Between the beginning of the row of cages and the platform upon which the officers sit is a passageway. The note-teller's cage has a window opening upon this passageway. The window of the first paying teller's cage, the one occupied by Eddie Levering, is around the corner of the tier of cages from the note-teller's window. There is, however, a small window between the two cages, to facilitate the passage of money or memoranda from one to the other.

Joseph Dawson was still at the cashier's desk when the last stroke of twelve sounded. The shutters at all of the windows closed as simultaneously as if they had been operated by a single mechanism, and the occupants of the various cages began to list and check up their cash and credits and place them in the big steel dispatch-boxes for removal to the main vault.

Carey Chamberlin had finished his check-up and was on his way to the vault before Levering had half completed his.

At the sound of the cashier's voice, Levering looked up from his counting, and through the meshes that separated his cage from Chamberlin's. He saw Mr. Flynn, the cashier, and Dawson, the real-estate operator, standing at the note-teller's window.

"Has Mr. Chamberlin gone?" asked the cashier. Levering glanced around the empty cage and saw Carey Chamberlin's coat still hanging over the back of his chair.

"He'll be back in a minute, Mr. Flynn," he said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Don't close your box for a minute, please. Mr. Dawson wants a hundred thousand," replied the cashier. "You wanted currency, didn't you, Mr. Dawson?" he went on, addressing the customer.

"I'd rather have it in a cashier's check," replied Dawson

"Make it out, then, please, Mr. Levering," said the cashier. "One hundred thousand to Mr. Dawson, and I'll sign it. I've an appointment and must hurry. Mr. Chamberlin will fix up the papers for you."

CAREY CHAMBERLIN returned to his cage while Levering was making out the cashier's check. He was dressed for the street and had his kit-bag in his hand. Cashier Flynn stepped to Levering's window and signed the check, which Levering placed on the ledge of the little opening between his cage and Chamberlin's. Carey, he saw, was running over a list of securities, checking them off as he inspected the documents themselves one by one. Levering saw the cashier nod affirmatively to Chamberlin and wave his hand at Dawson, then hurry out of the bank.

"Got the check, Eddie?" Chamberlin asked. Levering pointed to the slip of paper on the ledge, which Chamberlin took. When Levering glanced that way again, Dawson was putting the cashier's check into his pocketbook, and Chamberlin was placing a note into a bank envelope in which there were already several folded papers, apparently bonds or stock certificates.

Levering caught Mr. Dawson's eye and indicated by a motion of his head that he would like to speak to him. Dawson came around to Levering's window.

"How's Marjory?" Levering asked. "I thought I might run out to see her tomorrow if she's going to be home."

"Come out with me, this afternoon," was the cordial response. "I'm closing a deal uptown at one o'clock, but I'll pick you up anywhere you say at two-thirty. Mrs. Dawson and Marjory are leaving for Maine on Tuesday, but I know they'll be glad to see you. Get your golf-clubs and we can get in nine holes, anyway, before dinner. There's a dance on, too, at the club tonight, I believe."

"I'm living at Allerton House on Lexington Avenue," replied Levering. "That anywhere on your way?"

"Fine! I'll pick you up there at two-thirty sharp," said Dawson as he turned to go.

Levering resumed his check-up, but was interrupted a second later by Chamberlin.

"Take care of this for me till Monday, will you, Eddie?" said Carey, rolling his alpaca coat into a bundle and shoving it through the opening between the cages, as he spoke. "I've got to rush to meet my crowd. Good-by; give my best to Marjory."

He slammed the door of his cage, and kit-bag in hand, left the bank.

Levering finished his check-up, closed and locked his dispatch-box and carried it to the vault, and was about to start downstairs to the locker-room when he remembered his coat and Chamberlin's. He reentered his cage, pulled Chamberlin's rolled-up coat through the opening, which it passed with difficulty, took his own coat off the back of his chair, rolled it around Carey's, and hurried down to his locker, where he hung up the two coats, took down his street-coat and hat, and in turn left the bank.

LEVERING enjoyed himself thoroughly over the week-end at the Dawsons' country place on Long Island. Coming in on the train on Sunday night, he reflected that Marjory was a very attractive girl. He wished he knew how to make a lot of money, so he could ask her to marry him.

Eddie Levering had never made any especial effort to do anything. Because his father had been a friend of one of the directors of the Grangers and Artisans, he had found a berth in the bank when his father's death had made it necessary for him to go to work. His mother lived with her widowed sister in their little home town up the State, on the small income her husband had left her. Her son had never

worried about anything, never fought for anything he had got and never envied the men who had got more than he had.

He went to bed to dream about easy ways of making money.

CHAMBERLIN'S locker was closed when Levering reached the bank on Monday morning. He unlocked his own, placed his straw hat on the shelf, hung up his coat and took a black alpaca office-coat from one of the hooks. As he started to put it on, his hand encountered an obstacle in the sleeve. He pulled his hand out and looked to see what was wrong. As he did so, something fell at his feet; at the same instant he recognized that the coat was not his, but Carey Chamberlin's. He picked up the object which had dropped to the floor. It was one of the envelopes used by the bank to contain customers' notes and the collateral security behind them. Across one end were the words *"Joseph Dawson, August 1,"* in Carey Chamberlin's writing.

Levering recognized at once what had happened. Chamberlin, in his hurry to get away, had shoved the Dawson papers through to Levering to be put in the vault. Then he had remembered his office-coat and shoved that into the window between the cages, on top of the envelope. The envelope, of the presence of which Levering had been unaware, had caught in the coat sleeve.

His first reaction was indignation. It had been extremely careless of Chamberlin to run off in that way without calling his attention specifically to the envelope. If anything had happened to it over the week-end, an issue of veracity would have been raised between himself and Chamberlin which might well have cost them both their jobs and perhaps got them blacklisted by the Bankers' Association, as well.

His next impulse was to "get even" with Chamberlin. He felt his pulses throbbing as a result of the mental picture of disaster he had conjured up. He would give Carey Chamberlin the same sort of a scare; let him think, for a while, that the envelope had been lost. It would serve him right. He heard a step on the stairway from above; it sounded like Chamberlin's. Hastily he hung Chamberlin's coat on the knob of its owner's locker, slipped on his own office-coat, wrapped the envelope in the morning newspaper he had brought with him and shoved the folded paper into the side pocket of his black alpaca. After Carey had had a good scare, he, Levering would "discover" the missing securities, he thought.

The newcomer, whom he met at the foot of the stairs, was not Chamberlin but old Matthew Flynn, the cashier. He held a newspaper in his hand and greeted Levering in a voice which indicated extreme agitation.

"I'm glad you're here, Mr. Levering," he said. "I want some one to go out right away, and you're just the man. See here."

He pointed to a paragraph in the newspaper. Levering took it and read the item indicated. The motorboat *Nora B* had been run down in the fog by a revenue cutter, in the Ambrose Channel, and all of its occupants drowned, the item said.

"They've just telephoned from the Barge Office asking us to send some one down there to see if we can identify one of the bodies as Chamberlin's," said old Flynn.

Levering's brain seemed to be whirling. Why, a minute ago he had been angry at Carey—good old Carey! Dead? It seemed impossible.

"You knew Chamberlin better than anyone else," he heard the old cashier saying.

"I'll go," he said, turning to open his locker again. As he slipped off his office-coat, the newspaper-wrapped package in its pocket forced itself on his attention. His first thought was to give it to Flynn and ask him to put it in the vault. Before he could act on that impulse, however, he realized the explanations it would entail. He would have to admit that he had left more than a hundred thousand dollars of the bank's securities unguarded for two days and nights. He wished old Flynn would take himself off, so that he could get a chance to slip the envelope into the vault before he started out.

ALL of this passed through Levering's mind while he was stripping off the black alpaca jacket. He took the folded paper from the pocket and laid it on top of his locker, while he put on his hat and his street-coat. The cashier was talking in broken sentences and urging him to hurry.

"Fine young man—alone in the world—made his own way—not a relative living—" Levering heard him say.

The old man was taking it rather hard, he thought. He knew old Flynn had taken a personal interest in Carey Chamberlin, but he would never have suspected the old man of being emotional.

As he slammed the door of his locker Flynn suddenly put his hand on Levering's shoulder.

"I feel very faint," he said. "Will you help me upstairs?"

Levering assisted him to the stairway, where one of the bank's uniformed watchmen joined them, and the two half shoved, half carried the cashier to his own desk, where the fresh air from an open window quickly revived him.

"I wish you'd go at once," he said to Levering. "I sent for a taxicab, and it's waiting for you now. I can't bear to go myself. I was very fond of Chamberlin and I wish you would telephone me immediately. It may be a mistake."

LEVERING gave but a passing thought to the paper he had left on top of the locker. It was too late to go back for it without an explanation which he wanted to be spared. Oh, well, it would be safe enough until he got back, he reasoned. He was as eager as old Flynn himself to find out whether the man who had been drowned was really Carey Chamberlin.

There was no doubt about it. The white, limp thing which Levering saw on the deck of the revenue cutter had been his friend. When he telephoned to Mr. Flynn, the cashier directed him to attend at once, on behalf of the bank, to the disposition of the body and the necessary arrangements for the funeral. At the modest boarding-house in the west Nineties where Chamberlin had lived for a number of years, the horrified landlady confirmed the impression the cashier's disconnected words had given him: Carey Chamberlin was quite alone in the world. He had got his early education in an orphanage, the landlady thought.

Levering was busy in Chamberlin's room, packing up his effects so that they might be stored pending the administration of whatever estate the dead man had left, when the first whisper of temptation came to him. It seemed literally a whisper, so vocal that he involuntarily turned his head to see who was in the room with him.

There was nobody there but himself; yet the words had sounded in his ear as distinctly as though they had been spoken.

"If those Dawson securities should disappear, nobody would be blamed but Chamberlin."

Levering shook off the thought almost angrily. He straightened up, his fists clenched. His indignation at the implication of his own thought was so real that his pulses throbbed again under its stress. The suggestion, however, had been planted in his mind. As he continued his work, it came back to him in various guises. The second time it recurred, he merely smiled to himself and shook his head. That was when the whisper said:

"The bank wouldn't lose anything; Mr. Dawson wouldn't lose anything; Chamberlin's bond would cover the loss."

He found himself feverishly anxious to get back to the bank. Somebody might have taken the package—he told himself he was anxious to get it into a place of safety.

When he got out of doors again, he pulled himself together. With a sense of shame that was almost overpowering, he faced the fact—the bald, undoctored fact—that he, Edward Levering, had actually been contemplating a theft.

AND yet, as he rode downtown on the subway, the suggestion kept coming back. He tried to repel it. It would recede, but it would not stay away. He found himself playing with the idea, weighing the chances of detection, mentally planning how one in his position, if he were trying to get away with a hundred thousand dollars' worth of securities,—*seriously* trying,—would make each successive move.

A hundred thousand dollars! With a hundred thousand dollars a man could do anything. By the time he reached the Wall Street subway station, he had set up every possible contingency he could imagine and mapped out a course of conduct to be followed in case any particular contingency became a reality. Then, when he reached the street-level, he threw away the whole project, if it could properly as yet be called a project.

"They're probably stock-certificates in Dawson's own name, or registered securities of some other kind, which couldn't be negotiated if they should get into the hands of a—"

He colored as he realized that his thought had balked at formulating the term—"*thief*." He whispered the word to himself and shuddered slightly.

Old Flynn, the cashier, noticed Levering's discomposure as the young man reported what he had done.

"I sympathize with your distress," he said, patting Levering on the shoulder. "It

is even more distressing than you know, however. It seems that one of the men who was on the launch with Chamberlin, and whose body was also recovered, has been identified as a notorious rum-runner. The authorities are convinced that the launch was engaged in a rum-running expedition. I hate to think that Carey Chamberlin could have been mixed up in anything of that sort, but—"

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Levering. Briefly he recounted his conversation with Chamberlin on Saturday morning. How long ago that seemed now!

"I like your loyalty to your friend," said old Flynn, with a faint smile of sympathy, "but the fact is, Levering, that that hundred thousand dollars in Liberty bonds which Dawson left with Chamberlin on Saturday can't be found. They were coupon bonds, and it is notorious that Liberty bonds are used as currency in illicit liquor transactions quite as freely as money, when large sums are involved."

It was on the tip of Levering's tongue to cry "I know where those bonds are!" and blurt out the whole story of Chamberlin's carelessness and his own. Then something stopped him. Instead of speaking, for a moment, he gripped a chair-back for support and went white.

Why, it couldn't be better if the situation had been made to order. Negotiable coupon Liberty bonds, unregistered! The numbers would be reported, of course, and the banks and Treasury warned to look out for them, but the Wall Street district was full of brokers who took pains not to inquire too closely as to the source of customers' resources, who would overlook any little irregularity in the numbers of bonds they bought—at a discount.

Chamberlin was gone—gone and condemned. He had had no part in his passing nor in his condemnation. He was glad that old Flynn's next question was so framed that he could answer it truthfully.

"You didn't notice what he did with the Dawson envelope on Saturday, did you?"

"No; I was busy, and talking to Mr. Dawson at my window, and I didn't notice what Chamberlin—what Carey was doing," he replied.

The shakiness in his voice the cashier attributed to the depth of his grief.

"It's a terrible thing, Levering," old Flynn said sympathetically. "There doesn't seem to be any other explanation, though. We've had Mr. Dawson in, and he told us, just as you have, that he was talking with you and didn't see what Chamberlin did with the papers. We've questioned all the other employees, and none of them can tell anything. We have searched every part of the bank where he might have put them. His coat was hanging on the door knob of his locker, but there was nothing in the pockets, nor in the locker. He must have taken them with him when he left the bank on Saturday."

WHILE the cashier was talking Levering was thinking swiftly. Why was old Flynn telling him all this? Was he under suspicion? Had they found the newspaper-wrapped package on top of his locker? Although he had not, as yet, performed a single act with guilty intent, the fact that he had been harboring guilty thoughts made him feel as if he were already a criminal. Already he was on guard, alert to detect hidden shades of meaning in apparently frank and open words and acts. Alert, too, to make instant choice between two possible courses of action!

After the whole episode had been closed so long that he could calmly bring it to light and analyze his own thoughts and conduct in review,—which was when I learned the story,—he said, speaking of these five minutes at old Flynn's desk:

"I had never taken anything very seriously up to that time. I had cared little and thought less about what anyone else did or said; as for myself, I had lived in a sort of mental fog, seeing no farther ahead than the day's work. Suddenly, while I stood there, the fog seemed to lift. I could see ahead. I knew, without the least uncertainty, precisely what I was going to do, not only at the moment but tomorrow, next week, next month, next year."

His first clear thought was that, whatever he might decide to do about the Dawson bonds, his own position would be greatly strengthened by taking a positive position of loyalty to Carey Chamberlin.

"I don't believe Carey Chamberlin ever stole a cent," he declared. "Listen, Mr. Flynn: you surely must give him the benefit of the doubt. He was in a great hurry when he left on Saturday. If he took the securities with him, that's no proof that he meant to steal them. He might have slipped them into his pocket, intending to stop at the vault and leave them there,

and then in his hurry forgot to do that, and didn't realize that he had them with him until he was on the boat and well out at sea. That's possible, isn't it?"

"Possible, but hardly probable for such a careful man as Chamberlin," replied Flynn. "There were no bonds in his pocket when—when they found the body."

"No, and if my suggestion is sound, there wouldn't be," Levering continued. "He'd have taken them out of his pocket and put them in the bag he had with him, as being the safer place. Of course, we'll never know, for the bag went down with the boat, apparently. But that's what I believe, and shall always believe."

Levering's earnestness impressed Flynn. "I would like to believe that," he said.

"Let's believe it, then," pleaded Levering. "Let that be the official theory of the Grangers and Artisans Bank. We owe it to Carey Chamberlin's memory not to besmirch a man who cannot defend himself."

Levering was surprised at his own forcefulness, surprised and elated when the cashier, without hesitation, agreed with him. It was the first time in his life that he had ever taken the leadership in any situation. He felt a new sense of power.

For the moment he had been masterful. Now he must not let himself slip backward.

"I'd better get to my work, Mr. Flynn," he said. "You've got substitutes in two cages and must be short-handed. Rowe knows my work, all right. Why not leave him there for the rest of the day and let me relieve Mr. Ferguson?"

Ferguson was the assistant cashier who had taken charge, temporarily, of the note-teller's work. From the note-teller's cage, Levering reasoned, he could watch more easily, the more readily discover the first signs of suspicion pointing toward himself. Three days ago he would not have had the audacity to make such a proposal; now that he had made it he wondered at the ease with which he had done it and the alacrity with which it was accepted.

"I wish you would do that, Levering," said Flynn. "You seem to be the only person in the bank who hasn't lost his head over this affair."

"Let us keep it in the bank," Levering made bold to suggest. "It wouldn't be fair either to Carey's memory or to the bank to let other people know that anything is wrong."

"Dawson knows it," replied Flynn, "but I'm sure he will not talk about. I'll issue orders that nothing is to be said to anyone. At the same time I shall inform the few who do know about it that the bank regards the loss as an accident and does not hold Chamberlin guilty of anything worse than carelessness."

A sense of being in command of the situation buoyed Levering up as he descended the stairs to the locker-room. If the bonding company on which the Grangers and Artisans relied to guarantee its employees' integrity would accept the view which he had implanted in the cashier's mind, nothing but his own fears would stand between himself and a hundred thousand dollars—and perhaps—Marjory.

Until he was sure of that, sure that no shrewd detective employed by the bonding company, working under cover and out of range of his own scrutiny, was on the trail of the missing bonds, he would make no move which would not stand the closest scrutiny. A glance revealed the folded paper, on top of his locker, just where he had tossed it. He remembered reading a story in which a thief had cleverly concealed a purloined letter by placing it on the open mantelpiece, while detectives searched the entire apartment and failed to find it. He would be patient, and meantime the bonds were in the safest possible place. Many of the bank employees put things on top of the lockers; so far as he had observed they were never cleared off.

THE next morning Levering arose with a clearer sense of having a purpose in life than he had ever experienced before. On his way to the bank he carried out a plan which had occurred to him in the night. He stopped at one of the numerous shops where surplus war supplies are sold and purchased two pairs of heavy army blankets. They made a bulky package. He took them to the bank with him and explained, to the grinning door-man who let him in, and to the janitor, to speak to whom with apparent casualness he loitered about the locker-room, that he couldn't resist the bargain, even though he would not have any use for the blankets for months.

He placed the bulky bundle, far too large to go into any of the lockers, on top of his own, taking pains that a tiny corner of the newspaper-wrapped package under it projected so that he could see it whenever he glanced up, but not so far as to be noticeable to anyone who was not look-

ing for it. He wrote his name in large letters on the exposed end of the package, and boasted to two or three of the other tellers and clerks about the wonderful bargain he had found.

There was nothing in any of his actions thus far by means of which any guilty knowledge of the missing bonds could be traced to him. Yet they were there, safe, his for the taking whenever he was ready to take them.

Secure in this knowledge, Levering took the next step toward the completion of the plan which he had mapped out. He had never been thrifty, but he had something more than a thousand dollars in his checking account and a five-hundred-dollar Liberty bond in safe-deposit. Dawson, he knew, was making money rapidly in his real-estate operations.

"Is there ever any chance for an outsider to make a quick turn in real estate?" Levering asked him, one day. They had been talking, through the window of the note-teller's cage which Levering was now permanently occupying, about Carey Chamberlin, and Dawson had been impressed with Levering's loyal belief in his friend's innocence of any wrongdoing.

"Sometimes, if he's got any money," was the reply.

"I've got a little," said Levering. "If you hear of anything interesting, I'd be glad to get in on it, if it doesn't take too much of an investment."

A FEW days later Dawson told Levering of a leasehold which could be bought very cheaply, and which, he believed, could be resold almost overnight. It would take about three thousand dollars to make the purchase.

"I'll take half of it," he told the real-estate man. Two weeks later he banked twenty-five hundred dollars, a thousand of which was profit, and he found an opportunity to speak of it one day when Matthew Flynn was within hearing. Flynn had great respect for success.

In pursuance of his carefully thought out plan Levering was building up for himself a reputation as a money-maker. He knew that the securities reposing under the bundle of blankets on top of his locker would be of no use to him if he were not in a position where his possession of a hundred thousand dollars would occasion no comment.

At the same time, though he did not realize this fully at the time, he was building up a reputation for alertness and close application to his work in the bank. He could not afford to make a single slip that might bring him even a reprimand; then too, he felt it necessary to keep a constant though veiled watch upon the actions of everybody who came within range of his surveillance. He must be quick to perceive the first intimation that might point suspicion in his direction.

Dawson took him in on another deal, then another, until his capital and profits had mounted, in three months, to more than ten thousand dollars. Meantime old Mr. Rich had come back from his vacation, and Levering had seen Flynn talking to the president and making gestures that indicated they were talking about him. The president had come to his window shortly thereafter and spoken in a complimentary way about the excellent work he was doing. Because for the first time since he had watched the work of the bank closely, he had been able to make a number of suggestions for the improvement of methods and the facilitation of business. It did not surprise him when, at Christmas, he received, in addition to the bonus with which it was the Grangers and Artisans' custom to reward faithful service once a year, a notification of an increase in salary.

Long before Christmas, however, Levering had satisfied himself that the bonding company, as well as the bank, had given up any idea concerning the missing bonds which they might have entertained, other than that which he had himself put forward.

The success of his three or four real-estate ventures with Dawson had given Levering, he discovered, a genuine interest in the realty market. He began to read the real-estate news in the papers, which he had theretofore overlooked. He found himself mentally calculating values of properties which he happened to notice on his way to and from the bank. One Saturday afternoon some affair of trifling importance took him into one of the residential sections of Brooklyn. A group of several old-fashioned houses close to a busy corner attracted his attention. He strolled around the neighborhood for an hour and discovered that the nearest motion-picture theater was ten blocks away in any direction. All around these old houses new apartments were going up.

Dawson had made a great deal of money,

Levering knew, in assembling sites for motion-picture theaters and in building and selling the theaters themselves.

"I've found an ideal site for a movie house," he said, the next time the real-estate man came into the bank. He described the location and the neighborhood. Dawson was interested. A day or two later he reported that he had secured options on the block of old houses and was having incorporation papers drawn for a company to purchase the site and build the theater.

"It will take about two hundred thousand to swing the deal," he told Levering. "How much of the stock do you want? We can sell the house for a clear quarter of a million profit as soon as it is finished, or rent it and earn twenty-five per cent on our money."

"How soon does the stock have to be paid for?" asked Levering.

"Ten per cent on incorporation, the balance as needed. We wont have to call for any more for sixty days, at least."

"I'd like to take half of it," replied Levering, "but I don't know where I could raise a hundred thousand dollars. If I didn't take up the shares when called on, I'd still have an equity, wouldn't I?"

"I could probably get your money out for you with a little profit," replied Dawson. "There are several people I might get in on this, but I figure you're entitled to the edge for discovering the site. Come in for whatever you can pay ten per cent on."

"Fair enough," was Levering's comment. "I'll take half."

He saw to it that the cashier was made aware of the deal, when he drew his check for ten thousand dollars as first payment.

"If you ever get enough ahead to swing it, I can get you a block of stock in the Grangers and Artisans," said old Flynn. "The Dover estate has two hundred shares they've offered me at five hundred. It's the best investment of a hundred thousand dollars I know of."

"I'll talk it over with you sometime," replied Levering, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

THE next step in his plan of action had now to be taken. He had about a thousand dollars remaining out of his earlier profits and the savings which he had accumulated. With this capital he began to trade in Liberty bonds, not only among the reputedly shady brokers in the financial district but with the hole-in-the-wall concerns in the theatrical region. Many of these, doing business ostensibly as ticket-brokers or jewelers, were really "fences" where thieves could dispose quickly of all sorts of plunder, particularly Liberty bonds. Within a month he knew where to "place" such bonds of any denomination, for spot cash and no questions asked. Moreover, he was known to several of the "fences" who, by reason of this previous acquaintance, were likely to be less suspicious than they would be of a stranger, when the time should come for him to offer the stolen bonds.

The only occasions upon which Edward Levering experienced a sensation of guiltiness, during this period, were when he was with Marjory Dawson. He saw more of Marjory now that the Dawsons were back in town for the winter. Not a week passed without their meeting, and often he would be at the Dawson house two or three times in a week. Her father had taken a strong liking to him, and was loud in his expressions of appreciation of the younger man's ability and business judgment.

IT surprised Levering to discover that Marjory had cared very deeply for Carey Chamberlin; they had not been formally engaged, but he gathered that there had existed a very good understanding between them. Marjory was not the sort to wear her heart on her sleeve, but it was evident to one as interested as Levering that her sorrow over Chamberlin's death was deep and abiding. The growing strength of his own attachment to her seemed to guide his intuitions; he was careful to express his own devotion to his dead friend whenever Carey Chamberlin's name was mentioned. It was after such occasions as these that he realized the depths of his own shame.

"Edward, was everything all right about Carey's accounts at the bank?" Marjory asked him suddenly one night.

Taken by surprise, Levering hesitated. "Why, I'm perfectly sure Carey never did anything wrong," he replied finally. "What ever gave you such a thought?"

"It was something my father said, the day we got the news—"

Her eyes were wet with tears as she broke off.

"I *know* that Carey Chamberlin was honest; he never had a dishonest thought," Levering reassured her.

Marjory's smile was his reward. "Are you *sure?*" she asked.

"Sure," he replied.

MARJORY seemed nearer to him than she had yet been, when they parted that night. He was glad that it had been in his power to give her a moment of happiness. Then, back in his own room, panic overtook him.

What if Marjory should go to her father and repeat what he had told her? He had told her he was *sure* of Carey Chamberlin's honesty. Would that set Dawson to wondering? He could explain, of course, if he got the opportunity, that he was expressing merely a conviction rather than a fact of which he had definite knowledge. But would he get the opportunity?

An unknown and unknowable factor had entered into the situation which, up to this time, he had felt to be completely under his control. Why had Marjory asked him that question so abruptly? Just what had her father said or suggested to her? Was it possible that Dawson suspected him of knowing more than he had acknowledged? He began dragging his subconsciousness to the surface and found a buried fear which he had overlooked. He was afraid of nobody in the bank; he had been afraid from the beginning of Dawson.

In his panic he felt the need of getting into some sort of touch with Dawson at once. He had not been at home when Levering was with Marjory, was attending a dinner of some real-estate association. While he racked his mind to remember the name of the association and the place where it was meeting, his imagination ran riot with the possibilities which the discovery of his hidden fear of Dawson disclosed.

Had the real-estate man been luring him on to self-revelation all the time? Had he seen Chamberlin lay the envelope on the ledge of the window between the two cages, that day? Was he merely waiting until Levering produced a hundred thousand dollars, to demand then to know where and how he had got it? Fear magnified by guilt becomes conviction. Levering suddenly knew there was but one escape for him.

ONCE this seemed clear, his panic left him. Instantly he remembered where Dawson was spending the evening, and went to the telephone.

"I'm glad you called, Levering," came Dawson's voice over the wire. "I was going to get in touch with you first thing in the morning. What will you sell your rights in the new company for?"

Blank amazement took Levering's breath away. He had called Dawson to offer his equity at any price, so it could be sold before he would have to complete the transaction—to tell him he could not raise the rest of the money.

"I don't understand," he replied to Dawson's question.

"I've got a buyer," said Dawson. "Eickemeyer, the theatrical man. He's right here with me now. If you're willing to discount your prospective profit a little, he'll take all the stock off our hands. It seems he's been trying to get into just that location for some time, and overlooked this site, the only one available. I've told him I thought you'd agree with me that a small quick profit was better than a long gamble. What do you say?"

"I'll go along with you," responded Levering.

He could hear voices in conversation, Eickemeyer's and Dawson's; then Dawson spoke again into the telephone.

"All right, Eddie; it's a deal. Eickemeyer'll bring you a check for a hundred thousand in the morning. I'll draw up the papers for you to sign and send 'em along with him. Good night."

A hundred thousand dollars! His own money, honestly earned. And he had been a thief for no more!

HE did not deserve this. That was his first reaction to the stunning news. Then he wondered how it had come about. There was something mystical, he felt, in this onslaught of success so soon after he had come clean with his conscience. For the road he had seen open before him, the only road he could take, was restitution.

Eickemeyer was coming in in the morning with a hundred thousand dollars for him. He would not wait for the check; as soon as he got to the bank he would "plant" the package of bonds where it would surely be found quickly; the mystery as to how it had got there would remain a mystery.

Levering slept that night more soundly than he had slept since the night of the first Sunday in August.

He was one of the first to arrive at the bank the next morning. Some workmen were engaged in repairs to the plumbing at

one end of the locker-room. Waiting for a moment, until he was sure none of the bank employees was within visual range and the plumbers had their backs to him, he inserted the key into his locker door with one hand, while with the other he pulled the newspaper-wrapped package from under the bundle of blankets and whipped it into his locker.

AT this moment his nerves were at higher tension than they had been since Carey Chamberlin's death. At no time since the moment when, in all innocence, he had wrapped the envelope containing the bonds in a newspaper, and thrown it on top of the locker, had he had the missing securities actually in his physical possession. There had been always a subconscious assurance of security in the realization that no single guilty act could be traced to him.

Now, as he unwrapped the package, he realized that he could never have gone through with his plans to dispose of the bonds. What he had felt previously had been merely apprehension; now for the first time Levering knew the meaning of fear.

The outer wrapping removed, his fingers fumbled for the clean-cut angles of the stiff bank envelope. They touched only soft paper, like the rest. Throwing caution to the winds, Levering drew the package out into the light and feverishly tore it apart.

There was nothing inside but another newspaper!

Stunned and dazed, he stared at the papers in his hands.

He had wrapped the envelope in a morning newspaper of August third; these were the early editions of two evening newspapers of the same date. While he had been out of the bank on that morning, perhaps at the very moment when the first whisper of temptation had sounded in his ears, some one had removed the package containing the bonds and substituted these worthless papers for it.

"Why, I haven't been a thief at all!" was his first formulated thought. Instantly, however, he knew that for a specious lie.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he!"

The accusing words came damningly out of the depths of his memory.

He pulled himself together as well as he could. The other bank employees were arriving now, so he threw the crumpled papers into the locker and closed it. One hope remained. He lifted the bundle of blankets down from the top of his locker. There was nothing under the bundle but the dustless pattern where it had rested.

Mechanically he replaced the bundle, then went to the vault and got his box, opened his cage and set about arranging the items he used in his daily work. As he worked, his head cleared.

Restitution had been demanded of him, and he had accepted the demand. Now, it seemed, restitution alone was not enough to satisfy the avenging fate which, he saw now clearly, had hung over him from the beginning. He could no longer make restitution without confession. For an instant the thought of buying bonds of the same denominations as the missing ones, with the proceeds of Eickemeyer's check, flashed through his mind. He dismissed that. The numbers would betray the substitution. No, he must go through with the whole performance. He knew that he could never face Marjory again if he did not purge himself of all that he had been.

He was a thief, although he had stolen nothing. His responsibility to the bank was not lessened by the fact that somebody else had stolen the bonds before he had even thought of taking them for himself. A boyish fear of being disciplined had withheld him from restoring the bonds, on that first day when he had had the opportunity to do so.

That was what he had been then—a boy. Well, he was a man now, and he would take his medicine like a man.

Confession would mean the loss of his position, of course. Probably he would be blacklisted by the Bankers' Association. Dawson's confidence would be gone; with it the opportunity to earn money in real estate, even if he had the capital left to operate with. Worst and hardest to face was the thought of Marjory. Last night he had dared to hope. Well, that was all over now.

Yet, as he reflected on these things, they did not seem so terrible. He held his head high as he greeted the president and the cashier upon their respective arrivals.

IN his cage he worked feverishly to complete the checking up of every transaction as soon as it was made. As soon as Eickemeyer had come and gone he would walk out of his cage, never to return to it.

Everything, then, must be in perfect order.

It was nearly noon before Eickemeyer came in, accompanied by Dawson. The real-estate man shoved some papers through the window of Levering's cage.

"Sign these, Eddie," he said. "Mr. Eickemeyer has a certified check here for you."

Mechanically Levering signed the papers; without a smile he took the blue slip of paper which Eickemeyer handed him. The real-estate man and the theater magnate withdrew to one of the customers' desks to complete their own transactions. Levering turned the check face down and wrote across the back of it:

"Pay to the order of Grangers and Artisans Bank; Edward Levering."

Holding his head high he stepped out of his cage and crossed the passageway to the platform upon which the cashier and the president had their desks. Old Flynn smiled as he approached.

Levering laid the check on the cashier's desk.

"This is the best I can do," he said. That was the opening sentence of the carefully rehearsed confession which he had formulated in his cage. The next words seemed to stick in his throat. He gulped, and began again. His ear, trained to note every unusual sound, caught the echo of hurrying footsteps on the marble floor of the bank. For the first time in months he did not feel the urgent need to discover the cause of the unusual occurrence, to analyze it and assure himself that it bore no suspicious relation to his own guilty secret.

"I am—" he began.

HE was interrupted by the voice of Mr. Rich.

"Flynn! Levering!" the thin voice of the old president called. Both men turned to see, standing by the president's desk, one of the bank's uniformed watchmen and a workman whom Levering recognized as one of the plumbers he had seen at work in the locker-room.

Old Rich held a bank envelope, grimy and water-stained, in his hand.

"Here are the Dawson bonds which disappeared last summer!" he exclaimed.

Levering's head whirled.

"Where did they come from?" he gasped.

"I had to pull some of the lockers out to get at a leak and found this, wrapped in a newspaper, behind the lockers," replied the plumber.

Levering heard the last words dimly. For the first time in his life he fainted.

The next thing he heard was Elisha Q. Rich's voice saying "Drink this." He opened his eyes and saw the old man holding a silver cup in one hand and a silver flask in the other.

"It's sound, pre-Volstead stuff, my boy," the president assured him. It tasted like it, too.

Levering's senses came back as quickly as they had gone.

"I told you Carey Chamberlin wasn't a thief!" he exclaimed.

"Your loyalty to him has been splendid," said old Flynn, warmly. "I've noticed how the matter has been weighing on your mind. I'm not surprised that you were overjoyed."

LEVERING drew a long breath. Elisha Q. Rich was looking at him approvingly, old Flynn smilingly.

"That check—" he began.

"I congratulate you on your decision," said the cashier. "Mr. Rich, let me introduce the newest stockholder in the Grangers and Artisans, Mr. Levering. He's buying the shares of the Dover estate."

While the old president was congratulating Levering, Flynn caught sight of Dawson and beckoned to him.

"Here are your bonds, Joe," he said, as the real-estate man joined them. "I suppose they belong to the bonding company, but they prove that Chamberlin was straight to the last."

"You always said he was," replied Dawson, addressing Levering.

"Marjory will be glad," said Levering simply.

"You'll be glad to know that Mr. Levering is becoming a stockholder in the Grangers and Artisans, Mr. Dawson," put in old Mr. Rich.

"That so, Eddie?" asked Dawson. "I had an idea you might like to go into the real-estate business with me."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dawson," Levering replied, "but I think I'll stick to the Grangers and Artisans. I'm under a greater obligation here than I can express."

Which was the closest Edward Levering came to making the confession he had planned. . . . .

How do I know so much about Levering? Well, my name's Dawson, and he told me—and Marjory—all about it before they were married.

Barratry

A tense and vivid shipboard drama wherein the honor of a sailor is put to a severe test—by the gifted author of "Fortune," "The Sea King" and other well-remembered stories of the sea.

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

THE girl in the outer office was a blonde, tall and very stately. Her blouse was white, fastened by a dark silk tie. She looked cool; you could not imagine her looking anything else but cool, anywhere. She was eating chocolates and reading a typed letter when Captain Bonner came in. Then she laid aside the letter and rose with a smile.

"Captain Bonner!" She wiped chocolate from her fingers with her handkerchief. "Oh, how are you?"

The middle-aged sailor took off his peaked cap. He shook hands awkwardly, and laughed. He said: "We had a fine trip, miss."

The girl removed a hairpin and deftly reinserted it. She patted her hair. She cooed: "And how is Mr. Robert, Captain?" Her blue eyes widened with interest. She was intimately concerned with the Captain's son.

The Captain chuckled and scratched his clean-shaven jaw. "Fine," he said. Then, sobering: "Is Mr. Markham in?"

Mr. Markham was in. He sat hunched over his desk like a wolf over a kill. The Captain stood before him smiling, a tubby, good-natured man. The voyage had been good, showing a modest profit. The shipowner clasped his hands together and frowned. Then he started talking in an even voice, emotionless and cold. The smile faded from the Captain's face.

In the outer office the girl went on eating chocolates. She heard tones raised, lowered, raised again; and she lifted her delicate brows inquiringly. But she was not disturbed. She wondered whether Robert Bonner had brought home for her the hammered brass tea-tray he had promised.

After a while Captain Bonner appeared again. He stumbled from Mr. Markham's office as though he could not see where he was going. He left the door open behind him. His hands groped for the barrier gate as though not sure of themselves. The girl, amazed, noticed they were trembling. She stopped chewing, and raised her brows again.

"Captain Bonner—" she began. But

she stopped abruptly, outraged, receiving no attention. She half rose to her feet. The sailor reached the door leading to the passage beyond the office, stumbled through, rocking slightly, and disappeared.

The girl rose to her feet. She wiped her fingers again on her rumpled handkerchief. Then she closed Mr. Markham's door. Looking into the passage, she saw Captain Bonner fumbling for the elevator button. She shook her head and frowned —she did not know Mr. Markham kept liquor in the office. Then she closed the door and went back to her chocolates.

MRS. BONNER sat in a wheel chair on the porch when the Captain reached home. She was a little woman, frail and white-faced. Despite her thinness, she was pretty. Her hands played with the soft fringe of a shawl thrown over her shoulders. She said gently: "Back so soon, Harry?"

From the house came a boyish voice, mellow and pleasing: "Is that Dad?"

The owner of the voice came on the porch—a tall, clean-built youth; his hair was curly and brown, his lips firm and red. He wore the uniform of a third officer.

Captain Bonner mumbled, "Not much business," in a dead voice. He sat down heavily in a vacant cane chair and fumbled with the brass buttons of his uniform coat. Mrs. Bonner's eyes widened, and she shot a glance at her son. Robert Bonner stood beside his father.

He said, "What's up, Dad," wonderingly. The woman's hands fluttered at her breast. She whispered: "You haven't lost your berth?"

The Captain lifted his head and essayed a grin. He faltered: "Why, no. Got a—got a raise, in fact. And Mr. Markham said he'd give Bob third's job on the new ship after this voyage. Promised me command."

The young sailor cried: "That's fine, eh? Third of a twelve-thousand-tonner. Say, I'll have a command 'fore I know where I am."

His mother's hands fluttered at her breast again. Her troubled eyes roved over her husband's profile. She said, in a low voice: "Is that all, Harry?" She could read him very clearly.

The Captain laughed, a genuine laugh, though a trifle bitter. He inquired: "What else should there be? That's all. We sail with the morning tide. They're working all night, unloading."

"I thought—you look worried," the woman faltered. "Is it money? Did Mr. Markham say anything—"

The Captain shook his head. "That money I borrowed? No—in fact, he offered to give it me as a bonus if this next voyage turned out all right."

The woman sighed, relieved. Her hands played again with the tassels of her shawl. The young sailor at the Captain's shoulder frowned a moment, puzzled. It was not like any shipowner to give something for nothing, especially Mr. Markham. But then— He shrugged; some business his father was putting over, he supposed. He said shyly: "Was Miss Du Lac at the office?"

The Captain mumbled, "Yes," and fell silent again. His son changed the conversation abruptly.

"I see they put a stone in the churchyard for Ems this morning."

THE Captain straightened and looked relieved. He said: "Well, that's good. Ems was a fine sailor. I'm glad."

"I'm glad too," said the woman. Her eyes were soft. "Ems wrote a letter before—the end. I had it only this morning. Mr. Larson, the harbor-master, brought it up."

The Captain turned at this, and grew interested. His son nodded, and his face went into gentle lines.

"Ems wrote it with a pencil just before he died," he said. "Said he'd always loved Mother and always would."

The woman broke in, gently: "Your father knows." Her voice grew sad. "Ems was a fine man. He wrote that he remembered my motto, and it was helping him to face the end. He must have scribbled the letter the evening before—he—went." She bowed her head.

The young sailor asked curiously: "Motto? What was that?"

The Captain stood up and removed his peaked cap. He twisted it through his fingers. He said in a strange voice: " 'A man's worth is measured by his ability to stick to his guns.' " He was silent for a moment. Then he added, passionately: "Ems never had a wife!"

The woman gasped faintly. Her hands fluttered like frightened butterflies. She murmured: "Why, Harry." Then louder: "It is your father's motto too, sonny."

The young sailor frowned. "What's the matter, Dad?" he said.

The Captain shook himself as though he had just come from under a shower. He said, gutturally: "Nothing."

The woman bent her head and dreamed. Robert Bonner dreamed. And the Captain dreamed also, bitterly. Ems had been the woman's lover in those days when the Captain had courted her. And now Ems, not two months before, had kept the sea tradition of the master-mariner. Adrift in an open boat with two of his passengers, after shipwreck, the water had run low. There was enough to last perhaps two men until land was reached. There was not enough for three. Captain Ems had gone overside in the night. And the two who had been his charge had come through to deliver his last writing.

Robert Bonner said abruptly: "Well, if we sail in the morning, I'll go in and pack. Guess I'll run down and take a look at the stone this afternoon."

The woman breathed deeply, as though awakening from a sleep. She whispered: "A man's worth— I like to think that Ems died that way. . . . . If you'll wheel me down, sonny, I'd like to see it too."

The Captain bit out shortly: "We'll all go." His frown was heavy and his face dark. Dark thoughts clouded his mind. He went into the house and moodily locked himself in his room. Robert Bonner looked at his mother and sighed, shaking his head. He was perplexed.

HE was still perplexed two days later as he paced the bridge of the *Fair Lady*. He wondered what it was all about. For an hour past, his father and the mate had been closeted in the chart-room. The door had been shut, despite the hot forenoon. The young sailor thought he heard voices raised in anger. He was not sure. He crossed the bridge and lingered near the helmsman, trying to distinguish words. He frowned heavily. His father had been acting strangely ever since the *Fair Lady* had sailed.

The chart-room door opened, and the mate came out. He said in a loud and sour voice: "You'll do it! If you don't, I will."

Captain Bonner appeared, slowly, like an old man. His face was stern. He said, "I don't like it," and then shut up as he caught sight of his son. The mate muttered something deep in his throat and strode to the head of the companion down to the lower bridge.

He called, "I'll wait in your room," and disappeared. His shoes clattered on the companion steps. The Captain grunted dully and walked to the for'ard dodger, tight-furled against the bridge-rail. He fumbled with it, unseeing. With elaborate carelessness the third mate joined him.

The Captain said abruptly: "Not thinking of marrying, Bob?"

The young sailor gaped. He fumbled at his tie and stammered: "Why, no, Dad. I hadn't thought—I—" Then, recovering: "Not at all, sir."

"Don't!" snapped the Captain. He swung away and went down the companion. The third mate put a hand on the bridge-rail and swore. He had never known of any trouble between his mother and father. Then what was the idea— He shrugged hopelessly. His father must be going crazy. Somehow the whole voyage seemed crazy—the haste of departure, the hiring of a new mate at a moment's notice, the hinted-at rewards if the trip was successful. But he must surely find out the trouble and make peace between his parents.

In the Captain's cabin, the mate said: "You've got to see it through now. It can't go wrong. And anyway, if you don't do it, I will."

The mate rose from his chair and tapped the ash from his cigar. He was a lean man, tall and brown-looking. There were hollows in his cheeks, and deep lines on each side of his thin mouth. His eyes were stone-colored. He wore a suit of grimy white duck, and he smelled of talcum powder.

The Captain started pacing up and down the cabin. He held his hands behind his back, and the flat, thick fingers opened and shut spasmodically. Suddenly he stopped.

He demanded: "Are those your orders? To do it if I wont?"

The mate nodded and laughed. Harsh lines grew round the corners of his mouth. The heavy lids drooped over his eyes.

"That's my orders. Markham told me to see it through."

The Captain laughed then, bitterly. He observed: "Made damned sure, didn't he?" Then in a softer voice: "The blackguard! He threatened me. I borrowed money from him a year ago. My wife's been ill, and there were bills. Markham said he'd call it square if I—did what he wanted."

The mate sat on the edge of the table. He shrugged. He blew smoke through his quivering lean nostrils and watched it dissolve above his head. Then he sneered: "I can't see what you're kicking at. Thousand dollars to lose a ship. And you get a debt wiped out besides."

The Captain went on: "If I refused, he said he'd break me. And he can—foreclose on my home, turn out my wife. She's sick. I think I told you." Then suddenly, as though just hearing what the mate had said: "No, you wouldn't see what I'm kicking about. You've never had any pride. Never kept your record clean, did you? You don't know what it means to be called a decent seaman."

He resumed his pacing up and down, head bent, his hands behind him. He was a gentle man, with a soft voice normally. The mate watched him narrowly for a while. He allowed smoke to trickle from his mouth. Then he said: "Look here. Don't get cold feet. It's safe and easy. Take your thousand and shut up. It wont hurt your blasted record. No one'll ever know."

The Captain stopped again. His eyes blazed. His short-clipped graying hair bristled. His soft voice strengthened.

"You'll stop that damned insolence! While I'm master here, you'll treat me as such. See? You couldn't understand. I don't give a damn what other people think. It's me—myself! Do you think I could look another man in the eyes again? Now get on deck and shut up."

"All right, sir." The mate flicked his cigar into a brass cuspidor and scowled. His lips twitched. "We'll be at St. Mathew's Shoals tonight near twelve."

"At night, eh?" The Captain glared. He swallowed hard, then brought forward his fists and clenched them and shook them at the deckhead. He spoke between his teeth.

"So that's why you dropped to half-speed this morning. I was going to ask you. Had it all timed, eh? Arrive there at night. You rotten swine! Get out of my sight. Why is it men like you go up for seamen's tickets?"

The mate swore under his breath. Then sullenly he went out of the cabin. On the bridge he ran into the third mate. He said: "Look here, Bonner. Get the watch to see the boats are in order. I'm going to sleep for an hour or so."

The third mate scratched his head.

"Men're busy with that forehold, sir—cleaning up. Wouldn't it—"

The mate snarled: "You'll do as you're blasted well told!" He was gone, rattling down to the main deck and swearing as he went. The third mate groped inside his coat for his whistle, and his blue eyes were very cloudy.

"Crazy as hell," he murmured. "Old man's crazy. Everyone's crazy."

IN his cabin Captain Bonner paced up and down, his hands behind him. Conflict wrenched him. A worse crime than mutiny was barratry. But Markham had said, quite definitely, that it must be done. The alternative was ruin—worse! It was in the shipowner's power to have a captain blacklisted from every reputable company. It was in his power to foreclose on the little cottage where Mrs. Bonner was an invalid.

And for temptation Markham had promised to forget the old debt. And he had promised Captain Bonner command of the big new freighter that was building. His son was to be third mate of her, and prosperity was assured.

Captain Bonner knew what Markham asked was easy. But should he betray the *Fair Lady,* he would brand himself for life. He was made that way. He would never be the same man again. He would loathe himself. And Markham, knowing he couldn't be trusted, despising his attitude, perhaps, had put aboard the mate, his own creature, and bribed the chief engineer. As the mate had said, the wrecking of the *Fair Lady* would be accomplished, anyway.

The ship was old, a good craft in her day, but now rusty and weary with the sea. She carried a heavy insurance. Her cargo was insured—a false cargo, as the Captain had learned: a few cases of goods on top, the rest cases filled with rubbish.

The Captain wondered a little why Markham had not fired him and placed a skipper he could trust in command. But then, any skipper who was willing to do such a thing must necessarily be a man under suspicion. And the underwriters might demur when the insurance came round to be paid. With Captain Harry Bonner on the bridge, it would be known that matters were square. Captain Bonner had the reputation. It was the one great reward that square dealing had brought him. He winced.

Markham was so insistent. It would be so easy. A few smoke-cartridges fired in the holds and cabins to scare the crew, a semblance of panic on the part of the officers in the scheme, and then the order to abandon ship—abandon her off St. Matthew's Shoals, where the currents would carry her to the surf and the quicksands.

The Captain dropped into a chair and groaned. He held his head between hot palms. Why was he so made? Why couldn't he view the matter the way the mate viewed it? Why couldn't he be indifferent and callous? What were record and career, anyway? It was funny he should think boastingly of his record. What had it ever materially brought him? At fifty, here he was in command of a tenth-rate ship.

Why shouldn't he take a chance? It meant a decent command, cash money, debt wiped out, a new start. He would be as good as made. After all, it might be possible to keep the thing a secret. If it was engineered right, the whole thing could be made to look genuine.

The curse lay in having imagination. It had kept him before from making easy money. He rose abruptly to his feet and crossed the cabin to his desk. He would sum up the prospects of the ship's surviving. He ripped open a wide, flat drawer and pulled out a chart. He pored over it, bit his lips nervously. The sweat streamed from his face, trickled down his throat. It was not only the summer heat that bothered him. He crumpled the chart with a savage gesture and groaned, closing his eyes.

He knew so many men who had kept the faith. He had always before felt proud of belonging to a profession that boasted so many. There was Marlowe, who had gone down with the *Andrew Jackson* because three sick men had been forgotten. And Marlowe had spent his last precious minutes lashing the men to a hastily made raft, that they might be saved.

And there was Ems, clean and laughing Ems, who had loved Elsie Bonner. The water was nearly finished, and Ems was a shipmaster with the tradition of the sea behind him. The passengers were his care and charge. Now they had raised a stone in the churchyard to his memory. He had kept the faith.

Captain Bonner shivered and stood tense. Ems had never been up against this. He had had no wife. The balance with him was his own life and honor—not a hard decision to make. If it were not for Elsie, he himself would not hesitate. He would stand and be smashed. But he could not bear the thought of her, invalid and homeless, nor himself, her breadwinner, blacklisted and disgraced throughout the ports. Nor Robert, who soon was to marry Miss Du Lac of Markham's office, and who would assuredly be broken too. The Captain stood for nearly an hour, without moving, except to glance up at the clock on the bulkhead. The *Fair Lady* would be off the shoals by midnight.

JUST before going on watch that night Robert Bonner knocked at the door of the Captain's cabin. He went in after a while, though no voice called him. He found his father sitting on a leather settee and staring before him with bleak eyes.

The third mate said, "Sick, Dad?" in a startled voice. The older man's face was gray. He straightened with a start, aware for the first time of an intruder.

He muttered: "No, I'm all right. . . . . Sit down."

Robert Bonner obeyed, frowning. He commenced: "I wanted to tell you. We're figuring on getting married when that new ship's done. Marion—Miss Du Lac and I. We talked it over. We figure—" A gesture silenced him.

The Captain said, "Bob—" and then stopped. He swallowed hard. "Boy, I've got to tell you. You're my son. I wouldn't want you to go on thinking I was clean. . . . . Sit still. . . . . I'm promised command of the new ship on one condition: the *Fair Lady* must not come home."

He stopped, lowered his eyes. Robert Bonner's jaw dropped. He forgot to breathe. He stared at his father as though the older man was mad. Slowly the meaning of the words trickled through his brain.

"Mr. Markham can take our home—your mother's home and yours, Bob. He can smash me. He can smash you. He'll do it if I fail. You understand?" The Captain's voice sank. He gazed restlessly at his son's shoes. "I want you to know. It—wont be so bad if you understand. For your mother's sake—for yours too, if you want to get married."

Slowly Robert Bonner recovered himself. His jaw came up. He licked his dry lips and relaxed. He whispered: "Barratry! You're going to—oh, my God!"

The Captain lifted his face, and it was the face of an old man. He said simply: "What can I do?"

His son mumbled incoherently. He fumbled with his tie and breathed hard. He shook his head slowly, perplexed, outraged. The teachings of years swelled revolt within him. The enormity of the suggestion made his revolt cold; he did not flame up. He whispered again, "My God," and went on fumbling with his tie.

The Captain dropped his head again. He felt numb. He was aware a red flush was creeping under his skin. Shame! Already it was coming to him.

Robert Bonner spoke in a queer voice: "Smashed. Smash you. Smash me. I—I suppose he can. And Mother—"

The Captain spread his hands. "She will have no home, nothing. . . . . I wish I was dead."

"But—" The other licked his lips. Barratry! The very idea terrified him. His set eyes turned to his father, and they softened. Something of the older man's agony he began to understand. Warmth grew inside him. He slipped forward and touched the Captain's shoulder. He muttered: "Buck up, sir. I—it can't be so bad as all that."

The Captain groaned: "I guess not. I'm a fool." He laughed and stood up. "I'll see it through. If you understand, it wont be so hard to face—the others—and Ems' stone in the churchyard."

Robert Bonner stood up too. He said, desperately: "No other way out?"

"Not that I can see. If we had no mother to look for, it wouldn't matter."

The young sailor said, "No—no, of course not," while he frowned. There must be some way out. The Captain walked moodily to a port and gazed out through the thickening dusk. Eight bells sounded.

Robert Bonner recalled himself with an effort. His watch. Without speaking, he strode from the cabin and went up on the bridge. The Captain bowed his head as he went, and clasped his hands behind his back.

THE third mate relieved the first. The latter went into the bridge wing and peered through night-glasses away on the port bow. The third mate entered the chart-room and switched on the light. He examined the chart spread on the bench. The second mate came in while he was busy. He was a curly-haired man, wise with the sea. He said seriously: "I say, Bonner, I'm worried."

Robert Bonner looked at him with lack-luster eyes.

"Well?" he said.

The second mate hesitated. Then he burst out, whispering: "Look here. We've changed the course twice since four o'clock, the mate's watch."

The other frowned moodily. He asked roughly: "What of it?"

The second mate stiffened at the tone: "We're heading straight for St. Matthew's Shoals—that's all. Thought you'd like to know."

"I'm not responsible for this damned ship!" snapped the third mate. The second mate stared at him, amazed for a moment, and then went abruptly out of the chart-room. Robert Bonner cursed.

The Captain stumbled up on the bridge. He groped through the darkness and found the mate in the bridge wing still. He said, in a weary voice: "I can't go through with it."

The mate started, and his hand shot out, gripping the other's arm above the elbow.

He muttered hoarsely: "You've got to, see? If you don't, the chief and I will do something. You can't stop the thing. And Markham'll smash you if you don't help."

The Captain quivered in every limb. Again he vacillated between two points. He whispered: "My God, I can't do it."

"He'll chuck your wife out," reminded the mate, leaning over the shorter man. "He'll pitch her out, neck and crop. And you aint got the money for another home. She'll go in the poorhouse, and you'll be finished with the sea."

The Captain nodded. He groped for the rail and leaned on it, breathing heavily. The mate slapped him on the shoulder.

"It's all right. Not a word'll get out. It'll be the making of you. Markham don't ferget his friends. I know. I sank the *Mary Anjou* for him."

The Captain panted, at that. He turned his head. He moaned: "Was she killed too? My God, and I thought Barrett lost her because his compasses went wrong."

The mate laughed. "They did. I put 'em wrong. Barrett wouldn't come across, and you know what happened to him."

The Captain said mechanically: "He shot himself in the end—drank himself insane."

"Markham broke him," the mate re-

minded, "though the inquiry board exonerated him."

"I don't care," said Captain Bonner. The sweat trickled down the hollow of his throat. "It's Elsie."

The mate grunted. "Exactly. Your wife. You can't have her broken."

After a while the Captain said: "All right. You're a rotten swine, though. You're as rotten as Markham—worse, because you're a sailor, and you ought to understand."

"I understand what side my bread's buttered." The mate laughed again and moved away. The Captain stumbled down to his cabin to get a drink. He thought he needed it. On the carpet was the chart he had crumpled earlier in the evening. He picked it up and put it away. He took several drinks. He wished the liquor would numb his thinking. On the bridge Robert Bonner wrestled dumbly. There must be a way out.

FROM for'ard, faintly through the open ports of the cabin, came the lookout's cry.

"Breakers on the port bow, sir. Breakers!"

From slumbering stillness the *Fair Lady* woke to life. Shoes pounded on the bridge overhead. From for'ard other voices called. A dull murmur appeared to pervade all space. The wheel spun over with a humming, creaking noise.

The Captain started at the first cry. His listlessness faded. He was the sailor, alert in the face of danger, capable and confident. He reached the door, eager for the bridge, where he could command. Then he fell back, and his shoulders sagged as he remembered.

What was the use of going up? He could not save his ship. He was not employed to save her. He was employed to kill her. A master standing idle while his command drifted to destruction. They called him square and a straight man! He shivered.

Some one shouted, "Fire!" on the main deck. The mate must have set the smoke-cartridges going. The Captain shuffled to the desk where the decanter and siphon stood. He took a drink.

He laughed terribly. He set down the glass. And all about him men ran and shouted. The murmur of the surf on the quicksands grew louder. The engine pulse changed. The *Fair Lady* shook as she felt her death approach. And Captain Harry Bonner laughed.

Marlowe had spent his last minutes lashing sick men on a raft. Ems had gone overside when the water was low. Keeping the faith, of course. That was the pride of the service. The sea had not been conquered by brass buttons, nor uniforms, nor men who killed their ships. Keepers of the faith! But Marlowe and Ems had never had wives!

The cabin door went back with a crash. The little brass ring handle rattled and quivered with the shock.

The mate strode over the storm-step. Behind him lanterns flickered and danced through rolling smoke-clouds. His lean face was alight with triumph and excitement. His teeth gritted together.

"Come on deck!" His voice was insolent. "Come on and give the word. I've got them scared stiff. Abandon ship! Give the word, and they'll jump. She'll drift aground in half an hour."

The Captain rocked as though he had been struck. He rubbed his forehead with a cold hand. He mumbled, "Oh," like a wide-eyed child. Then he went past the mate and up on the bridge.

Robert Bonner groped toward him, white-faced and tight-lipped. He shouted something. The Captain threw him out of the way roughly. He was in no mood for the boy's advice. He tried to speak to the mate. There was a terrible tightness in his throat. Horror swept him. What was he about to do?

HE swayed. His heart pumped heavily. There was no other way! The issue was a stark fact. The sailor battled with the husband in him. He couldn't do it. But he must—must—*must!* The word clamored in his brain. Sailors should never marry. It wasn't right. They could not see their wives sick and homeless and penniless. Nor could they do the thing other men asked of them.

The mate clamored at his elbow: "Abandon ship, you fool!"

The Captain waved a shaking hand and nodded. In time, in time. He licked his lips and tried to speak again. Once spoken, the words would be echoed along the decks. The sweat broke out coldly all over him.

Ems had won himself a name by following the unwritten law and his own code of honor. But Ems never had married.

There it was. There had been no issue for him. To give up life was an easy decision when a man was single—easy compared to this! The Captain licked his lips again.

Easy for Ems to die—and easy to write, with a touch of the dramatic, the last note to Elsie Bonner. What was it he had written? Always had loved her? Some such nonsense. The Captain opened his mouth. The words rattled in his throat. The long years of honorable service smashed in a moment. The sound of the surf was drawing terribly near.

The mate was screaming: "Have you gone to sleep? Give the word. Come on!"

IF he didn't, Markham would claim payment, would smash him higher than a kite. And Elsie—what was it Ems had said? Strange he couldn't forget Ems right at this moment. Something about a motto carrying him through, or holding him up. That motto! He'd been thinking of it quite a bit. Damn!

"A man's worth is measured by his ability to stick to his guns." He cursed dumbly. He shook himself. The mate was shouting in his ear again. He started, hoarsely: "Abandon—" The mate was screaming: "Louder! Louder, you fool!"

Calling him a fool! Fine state of affairs when a chief mate— His throat felt horribly tight. He didn't think he could speak if he tried. What was it Ems had written? That the motto was holding him up—helping him to face the end. That was it. And Elsie Bonner had said: "A man's worth—I like to think of Ems dying that way." Why, she understood. Of course she understood. She had given Ems tribute at the last because he had stuck to his guns.

It followed that if she would give tribute to a man who was a half-forgotten lover, what would she not give to her husband? She would understand, of course. The Captain laughed suddenly. The tightness went from his throat.

The mate was shaking him and screaming again: "Are you mad? Markham'll do for you for good if you don't—"

The Captain stopped laughing and stared at the mate, puzzled. What was this? Oh, the man Markham had put aboard to sink the ship. Of course, he had known Captain Bonner would not do it. Captain Bonner had a motto—what was it? He remembered. Same motto as Ems had had.

Robert Bonner came from the darkness. He cried: "What are you going to do?" The strain was telling on him. His hands shook. His eyes were big.

"Get those men calmed." With a rush the Captain found his voice. "That smoke's fake. Nothing to fear. We're standing by." He was suddenly aware he had been speaking. He had to think to remember what he had said. He was conscious of a warmth inside, a comfortable feeling. Robert Bonner had gone running into the darkness, sobbing aloud.

The mate was choking. He rocked at the Captain's elbow. "Markham'll smash you," he shouted. "You fool!"

The Captain held him off and shook him.

"In irons you go! Damn Markham! What do I care? He can't hurt me."

"He'll smash you. He'll chuck your wife—"

"I don't give a damn. And she don't give a damn. Now get out of my sight!" He flung the raving man away.

He jumped for the telegraphs, screamed an order to the wheel. The *Fair Lady* swung away from the line of white that cut the dark sea. She drew clear. Men were not shouting on her decks now. They were working, quiet and grim.

IT had been done. There was no issue now —only the aftermath to be faced. The Captain looked away astern, over the sea, where the stars were driving light-shafts through the water. He felt sanity returning slowly. He felt calm. It was hard to keep clean.

He muttered to himself: "Twenty-five years' work gone smash. Start again. . . . . It's worth it." Elsie Bonner would understand. He was sure of it now. He wondered how he had ever come to doubt it. Somehow under the stars he saw a picture. It was a boat rocking on the water. And in the boat he saw Captain Ems, scribbling a last message. "Your motto helped . . . . face the end." Of course Elsie understood.

"The Bent Man," a distinctly unusual novelette by Clement Wood, will be a feature of our next issue. Be sure to read it.

A Sentimental Business

A deeply interesting story of big business and adventure in the Gobi Desert, by a man who has himself been a business man and adventurer in China, Africa and France.

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

STANDING by the window of his office on the fourteenth floor of the Commercial Building, Paul Getman looked out upon the teeming city with brows drawn down over slightly protuberant bloodshot blue eyes. His roving gaze took in the deep cañons with their eddying currents of human beings and the populous cliffs that towered above them; the lofty terraces where jets of steam gave an illusion of low-flying wisps of clouds; the flat steel-gray bay beyond, streaked by criss-crossing vessels; and the lower harbor, where the winter sun struck a sudden flash of cold brilliant light.

His full face was splotched and bursting with blood; his hands moved restlessly in the pockets of trousers that clung tight to heavy thighs. A speculative expression was in his eyes. Opening his mouth, he hesitated, then said in a high-pitched impatient voice—taking fire with enthusiasm at the thought:

"Look at it, Siddons! Full of bums—and yet think of the possibilities! My God, think of the possibilities right down there!"

The second member of the firm of Getman, Siddons & McKenzie lifted his dark head with a flashing silky look of admiration, and a short cultivated laugh.

"It's all a matter of perspective," he said. "China seems a bit out of the way. I'm bound to overlook a lot of possibilities while I'm there on the ground, and you'll have them all tabulated when I get back."

"Well, for God's sake, don't overlook the main possibility! We've got to get McKenzie out! Keep your eye peeled!"

"You're chief," said Siddons, looking blandly at the end of his cigarette, but with a shadow of uneasiness in his eyes. "You got him into the firm; I suppose it's all right to ease him out."

"He's nothing but dead weight!" exclaimed Getman explosively. "He'll make sixty or seventy thousand out of it, as his end. What the devil more does a man want, anyway?"

"Oh, I suppose it's all right," said Siddons hastily. Getman looked at him with bulging, truculent eyes, until the polite Siddons was obliged to light another cigarette to cover his embarrassment.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" demanded Getman with sudden exasperation. "I can't understand you. I don't

believe you've yet grasped the first essential of business."

"I'm willing to follow you, though."

THERE was a flattering note in this declaration that Getman was not supposed to miss. The lifting of his brows was accompanied by an involuntary lift of his head as he directed his gaze to the Brooklyn docks, where iron ships from all the world leaned under cargoes that had been lightered in strange harbors. Getman was a man who projected his schemes into far places. No movement in the intricate processes of commerce evaded him. The bourses of the world stuttered their messages to him from under the glass dome of the ticker; the ships of the world put those messages into action directly beneath his eyes. So far as Getman was concerned, the operation was simply a mental calculation.

Once he had sent a cargo of cotton to Manchester. This was at that period of the War when prices were beginning to soar; so, while the ship was actually at sea, and he found a better market offering in Marseilles, he diverted the ship to that port. Before the cargo was landed at Marseilles, a still better market offered in Bombay, and the stuff was accordingly transhipped. From Bombay it went to Madagascar and afterward back to Aden. Finally, just as the War ended, the cargo was actually landed in Constantinople, and the bazaars at last spread the cloth for sale to the people.

To Getman, the movements of that ship upon the different seas had been like the dancing ball upon the roulette wheel—hovering here, darting there, hesitating, resting, bouncing, whirling, dribbling down, and finally halting with a jerk, snug upon the winning number.

The men with puckered eyes and cracked and calloused hands who lived between the iron decks meant nothing to him. For him the whipping roll of mighty seas was flattened into the shiny blue of a table map. The roar of the hurricane, the moan beneath the sea's rim, the different voices of distant harbors, the procession of stars overhead, all that went into these ships' weary voyaging—the waiting ones at home, the smudged letters that carried messages of longing, of rebellion against hard necessity, of love intensified by absence, of mad aspirations—all, all was lost to him!

"If you want to get anywhere, Siddons," said Getman in more agreeable accents, but with increasing vehemence, "you've got to follow the ball! There's only one person in the world to work for—yourself! Make good! To hell with sentiment! To hell with ethics—unless you can use them to serve your own purpose! The whole God-forsaken game's nothing but a scramble, anyway. If you want to get through, if you want to get anywhere, hit the others on the head! Make 'em squeal! Hit 'em!"

Siddons cleared his throat quietly. He was of a slightly fresher generation—a generation of branded gentlemen, well-groomed, dark, good-looking, quiet, skeptical, a man of social discernment and natural perseverance. His education had been classical and scientific. He successfully combined in his personality suaveness of manner and coldness of mind. He inherited a tradition of honor, but his instincts were not so good; so, though he protested at questionable practices, he readily yielded to stronger forces. This willing hypocrite was a logical partner for Getman, whose instincts were all those of a bull.

THE two partners standing by the window had just reached a decision that characterized both. They had agreed that young McKenzie, the third member of the firm, should be ousted. He had entered the firm two years previously, paying two hundred thousand dollars for his junior partnership, and had gone immediately to China as the resident member of the firm. His usefulness was now ended, and Getman wanted a free hand once more.

Getman and Siddons had established their Chinese branches during the War, when European competition had become negligible. European agents, to hold their Chinese customers, had even gone to the extreme of handing over their unfillable orders to American traders, taking no profit themselves except the advantage of keeping a hold on the market. When the War ended and these European firms were again in a position to take care of their orders, many of the Americans found themselves floundering like fish on the bed of a stream that has been suddenly diverted.

Getman and Siddons were among them.

Their first failures would have meant little more than disagreeable experiences; but the New York banks all at once became shy of all foreign trade, and firmly refused to help them further against the Eastern

market. For lack of a small margin they were in danger of being wiped out. All their resources could not meet the emergency.

At this moment Fate, in the form of Getman's restless daughter Leila, introduced Bob McKenzie, a nice-looking, easy-going dilettante, with a small fortune, an amused indifference toward any kind of profitable labor, and the air of one who regards all unnecessary industry as an absurd waste of time that might be far more pleasantly spent in recreative pastimes. He lived on the labor of his ancestors, and enjoyed life with pleasant and exasperating cynicism. He fascinated Leila.

THIS daughter of the merchant bull had in her personality a terrible mixture of explosive elements. Her eyes, though blue as May, often smoldered; and she had a calm, repressed air about her, as though she fought the natural briskness of her nature. High ideals shone in her face; strong compelling passion glowed in her heart. She had the strong, firm, elastic body of youth. She seemed always poised to leap, to whirl in a dance, to plunge into a lively sea. Yet she acted in everything with the greatest composure. She fascinated the slightly smiling McKenzie.

Looking at him with a sulky expression, she exclaimed in a repressed voice:

"If you knew how you annoy me!"

"What-ho!" said McKenzie with a look of mild surprise. "What have I done?"

"You have answered yourself," she said. "What have you done?"

"Why, nothing that I know of."

"Oh," she said with sudden exasperation, "that is just it. You have done nothing! Why don't you do something?"

McKenzie leaned from where he was sitting in a comfortable chair and took hold of her hand experimentally, his eyes glistening.

"No!" cried Leila, jerking it away vigorously, and jumping to her feet. "Not that!" She stood for a moment pressing her hands together, looking at him as though he were some offensive creature, while he stared back, startled and a little uneasy. "If I were a man," she continued, "this kind of a life would kill me. I'd always be doing something. Doing! Doing!"

"Yes," said McKenzie agreeably, "that's the way men are—always doing something —or somebody."

"I can't understand you! You have all the elements of a fine man—I mean it! And yet you show no more interest in man's natural instinct to compete for supremacy— Haven't you any ambition? Don't you ever feel the desire to get out and fight?"

"No ma'am."

"But you did!"

"Well, that was necessary. But I didn't *like* it. Besides, you don't mean soldier-fighting, do you?"

Leila burst into exasperated delicious laughter, with a touch of wantonness in it that made McKenzie's heart start pounding.

"Oh," she said, "if I were a man, I'd be a pirate. I'd go into business with the idea of being the greatest whatever-you'd-call-it in the world! And no one would stop me, because I'd smash them! I would! I'd have no more regard for ethics— It's not the money that counts; it's the fight!"

"I see. There'd be a great wrestling match, if you ever ran into your father in business, what?"

"I'd smash him too!" said Leila decisively.

Inspired by these belligerent expressions, it suddenly occurred to McKenzie that Leila craved cave-man tactics. For himself, he cared not what tactics he used, so long as he won her. Rising abruptly to his feet, he said in a voice authoritative yet tremulous:

"Leila! I want you!"

At the same instant he put his arms firmly about her and attempted to kiss her. Had she been one-half willing, he would have succeeded without difficulty; but the girl, though taken by surprise, slipped from his grasp. They whirled and faced each other foolishly.

"I always seem to be making mistakes," he said lamely.

"Oh, sometimes," she said, looking at him wistfully and patting her hair, "I like you a lot. That was just silly. I know you misunderstood. The trouble is, I like you, and yet you disappoint me—horribly!"

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, please do something. Don't be just a lounge-lizard!"

"Good Lord, I'm not that, Leila. Anything but that."

A flash animated his thin face. He looked alert and dangerous.

"No, no! Now! You're different! Oh,

please do something—I know you could."

"If I take hold of something, and make a big success of it, will you marry me?"

Leila's hands flew to her bosom; her lips parted; her eyes widened, gleaming.

"Oh," she cried breathlessly, "bring me the success first! Bring me the success and then I will give you an answer."

There was just a faint touch of hardness in McKenzie's voice:

"Princess, I will return with a success—nothing less!"

Without a word she flung her arms about him and kissed him emphatically.

"Ah," she cried joyfully, "you *are* a man!"

AFTER this somewhat disturbing interview, McKenzie went down to the office of Getman and Siddons to consult Leila's father. Getman and Siddons absorbed him as the Israelites of old did absorb manna.

Within three months McKenzie found himself in China, serving as the resident partner, with the strict understanding that his duties were vaguely of a diplomatic nature—to observe, advise, report. All executive functions were to remain in the hands of the several managers. In other words, McKenzie was looked upon as a nonentity.

After the crisis that almost ruined Getman and Siddons had passed, there was a great wave of prosperity that bore them on its crest. Getman was almost smothered with the horrible realization that young McKenzie's two hundred thousand dollars had not been necessary to the original firm, after all. This knowledge lead logically to the conviction that the third member of the firm was nothing more than a parasite. Getman could not stand a parasite. McKenzie's fate, therefore, was a foregone conclusion.

The only unsettled point was the method of procedure.

There were two alternatives: McKenzie must either be diplomatically forced out, or the firm would have to dissolve and reorganize.

It was finally decided that Siddons should make a flying trip to China to look over things generally, and to try to find some definite and sufficient reason to warrant their requesting McKenzie to resign. It was agreed between them that they would let him out with a profit of seventy-five thousand dollars, which, while handsome enough in its way, did not in the least justly represent the apparent value of the third partner's share.

This, then, was the essence of the conference which ended with Getman's profane ultimatum:

"Get him out! He's milking us! Get him out, Siddons, or by God, I'll dissolve the whole rotten business, and go it alone!"

"Understood!" said Siddons calmly, putting on his coat.

THOUGH this calmness of demeanor persisted as Siddons descended in the elevator, and proceeded uptown to his club, he was not so calm inside.

Getman's last threatening remark had bludgeoned aside all thought of protest; but it had also stirred up Siddon's innate caution. There was nothing worse in the big man's business principles, so far as Siddons was concerned. The impeccable and courteous clubman was thoroughly inured to the idea that all is fair in business except bankruptcy. That alone left an ineffaceable stigma. But there was another thing that had suddenly struck Siddons and made him squirm inwardly with apprehension.

He knew that Getman was a natural pirate, and would balk at nothing to gain his end. His extended business career, his gambling proclivities, and his great resiliency, made it quite possible for him, in an emergency, to scuttle the ship and, escaping in a smallboat, set out undaunted to capture another. Very well: since that was the senior partner's nature, was he not just as likely to give him, Siddons, a *coup de main* when his back was turned as he was to order him to administer the *coup de grâce* to the young fool McKenzie? Before the evening was done, he admitted to himself that there was such a possibility.

It made him feel sick and shaky. Siddons was the kind of man who trusts nobody but yet must cling to a stronger personality. His air of calm conservativeness concealed, in fact, a suspicious and sly nature. All at once realizing that he had been forced into a position where he could seek the advice of no one but himself, he fell back instantly upon his natural instincts. How could he protect himself while hunting the unsuspecting McKenzie?

The next day, with the problem still unsolved, he received one of Mrs. Getman's customary perfunctory invitations to tea. Inspiration flashed!

Mrs. Getman, as a young woman, had been palely pretty; but after passing thirty, she gave up the last hope she had concerning her successful husband, who had for many years begun to regard her as nothing more than a poor and objectionable relative. For many years she nursed a secret quavering resentment, falling back on books and art and charity for consolation. She knew she was being badly cheated, and when Leila spread her eagle wings, Mrs. Getman fluttered more timorously than ever. At last, when her husband superbly ordered her portrait painted as an anniversary present, the poor woman, overcome by the irony, revolted.

She fell fluttering into the arms of the amazed and somewhat frightened portrait painter of middle-age, forced to perfect discretion by his desperate fear of the great Getman, who seemed to him to personify the bull of Bashan itself.

The only one who seemed to be obviously affected by this unfortunate affair was Leila, who had been kept out of the way as much as possible, in convents, mostly, where she imbibed a set of good ideals from perfect strangers who were paid for the job. When this cultivation of the mind and character was done, she found herself at home flung among a curious hodgepodge of guests attracted by parents of extraordinarily dissimilar tastes.

Her father played the rôle of bluff, hearty, open-handed magnate, lavish and picturesque in his hospitality. A Mongol footman and Chinese maids gave an imperial touch to the setting; and a lavish display of wines indicated a sovereign's immunity from legal restrictions. His guests were merchants or bankers of lesser rank, who gossiped like middle-aged women, the only difference being that their interest was of things of a different sort. They drank freely of the proffered wine, and when it began to catch hold, flirted insultingly with women who regarded the insults as compliments: leaning over them, admiring their gowns, rendering their conversation inoffensive by means of good-natured bantering laughter—while their wives across the room flirted just as outrageously with other men. It almost seemed as though these men had no regard for anything except matters of business, for only in discussing business did they become really serious.

On the other hand, Mrs. Getman's satellites were made up principally of artists and authors and poseurs. Not being able to discriminate, she accepted them at their own value, which was high. Secretly they regarded the business men with a sort of defiant envy. Their manner was variously superior, irascibly contemptuous, apologetic, eager to please; and the amount of talk they indulged in, if converted into productive energy, might have brought forth some works of genius. Leila's knowledge of art was based on thoroughly seasoned examples, and she couldn't get over the impression that her mother's friends were good advertisers but poor producers.

The whole mixed crew stirred her up furiously by their froth and clamor. They stimulated her by arousing her resentment, and all her beauty glowed in their presence, so that the men looked at her long and thoughtfully, while the women appraised her charms maliciously.

McKenzie had drifted into this crowd quite unintentionally, and Leila held him there.

Another man who was well above the average was her father's other partner. Leila had always taken Siddons for granted, however, as an expected guest on Sundays, sharing her father's confidence, retiring from the ladies, conferring in the sacred depths of the library, where bankers' agents of importance foregathered. Quiet, complimentary but not unctuous, good-looking, clean, well-groomed, with a compelling air of mystery about him, he was a man who caught the attention of women.

Leila had never thought of him in any rôle except perhaps that of a rather youthful uncle, the friend and confidant of her father. This did not raise him the least bit in her favor, because she understood in a vague way something of her mother's misery, and her own nature was too combative to find her father congenial. She did not like her father—and for this her father was alone to blame, since the girl had deep wells of emotion within her, and a craving for affection.

THE day after Siddons' sudden flash of inspiration regarding the safety of his own position while in China, he arrived in his car at the Getman residence in Hempstead to put his plan into immediate effect.

After courteous but confident preliminaries, he asked Leila to marry him. Leila experienced a shock. She looked at Siddons in a state of mental and emotional chaos, finally blurting:

"Mr. Siddons, I—I— You can't mean it. It never occurred to me. Why, you're *Father's* friend!"

"Do you mean I'm too old?" exclaimed Siddons with acute surprise.

"Why, no! No-o! Of course not. But you never said or did anything—"

Siddons stood up with a smile, engaged in thought for a moment with his hand to his mustache, then took a turn up and down the room, while Leila's eyes followed him with fascination, as Siddons supposed they would.

"Leila," he said at length, coming to a halt before her, "you know me better than anyone. I think you understand me. I'm a business man. That means I've got to take the world by the throat and shake its pockets loose. I've got to be strong. I haven't had time to fool with women. But you! You are different. You're a daughter of your father. You take your place as naturally as—as an empress in this—this aristocracy of wealth. Strong men must have strong partners—and I want you!"

"Oh!" breathed Leila softly, with her hands folded limply in her lap. Siddons talked like a forceful man, and as Leila stared at him, she saw in his steady brown eyes an expression of keen understanding and somewhat impatient assurance. She caught her breath, flurried, uncertain. "But why—" she began lamely.

"I am going to China," said Siddons with an abrupt gesture; "and I want to be sure of you before I leave. Leila," he added, his voice deepening as he leaned forward and placed his hand steadily on her wrist, "you don't understand. I'm crazy about you. But I can't show it. I'm a business man, and I don't know any of the—eh—lounge-lizard tricks, you see. I want to be open with you. I know you're that kind of girl. You've seen me often; you know me; I'm your father's friend. I tell you, Leila, I'm crazy about you!"

"Are you really going to China?" said Leila breathlessly, slowly recovering from her astonishment.

"Yes," said Siddons, hiding his impatience with forced politeness. "I'm going this week—on the *Shenzu Maru* from Vancouver. I want to feel that you will wait for me while I'm away. It wont be long—two months, perhaps. Will you wait—that long?"

Leila rose, slipping by him with a lithe movement, reaching for a bell-cord as an excuse for her action. A perverse imp was clamoring within her. This extraordinary revelation excited her strangely. What blazing forces were there smoldering behind Mr. Siddons' baffling eyes?

"Will you see Mr. McKenzie?" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Yes, of course."

"Will you—"

"Please don't evade me, Leila. I am very serious, you know. We haven't much time—and I must be certain!"

"Oh," cried Leila, "I think it is *wonderful* for you to ask me! Wonderful! I can't understand it! But you can't—you really can't expect me to decide so quickly?"

"Well, why not? In business we make the big decisions just that way. We give them long consideration—then act! What is the use of lingering?"

AT that moment a servant appeared at the door, and Leila told her with a rather distracted air to bring tea.

"Never mind tea!" exclaimed Siddons.

"Then a whisky-and-soda for Mr. Siddons, and tea for me," said Leila, and Siddons for the moment could think of nothing to say.

When the servant had gone, Leila held out her hand to Siddons.

"There!" she said, with a firm clasp. "Thank you! And I promise you I'll wait—I'll wait until you return before I'll accept any other man."

Something in that handclasp started a storm in Siddon's head. He swayed involuntarily towards Leila. At the same instant he caught himself in the face of something cool and intangible that angered him yet kept him in check. He wanted to seize her; yet he feared the loss of dignity that a repulse would bring. Biting his lip, he placed a chair for her at the table where the tea was to be served, reflecting that after all, he had gained enough in strengthening his ties with the family.

"All right, Leila," he said firmly. "I'll show you. Your father and I will be about the biggest traders in America when I get back. I'll bring you the tribute of a queen—a conquest!"

During tea he spoke gossip, explained his plans, took her perfunctory messages to Bob McKenzie, and looked at his watch once or twice. Then the tête-à-tête began to have a curious effect upon him. He had come in the mood of a shrewd, practical man who had a veiled proposition to make;

but it grew on him slowly that he had undervalued the market. As he stole surreptitious looks at Leila, each one increased his admiration. Reaching forward, he rested his hand once more on hers, and a startling electric thrill passed through him.

Leila responded to his look with a sparkling glance, but she drew her hand away. Siddons possessed a great deal of magnetism, and she could not help feeling some response to the passion that mounted in him.

The arrival of Mrs. Getman prevented any further sentimental passages.

Before Siddons left, however, he managed to convey the impression that an understanding existed between her daughter and himself, and public announcement only awaited his return from China. It was stated so ambiguously that Leila had no contradiction to offer, even though she felt inclined to. And Getman knew, five days later, when he saw Siddons off for China, that his departing partner was a prospective son-in-law. He didn't like the restraint this put upon him. He felt resentfully that Siddons had played him a damned dirty trick by going behind his back!

WHEN Siddons arrived in Shanghai, he found that McKenzie had taken advantage of the Chinese New Year to go up into Mongolia on a hunting-trip.

This gave Siddons a very much desired breathing-space in which to look over the scene. He had not yet formulated any plan upon which to work, trusting that an untrammeled inspection of the various branches might reveal something he could seize upon to develop his scheme.

The secret of the success of Getman, Siddons & McKenzie lay principally in their managers. These men were pioneers in the inland China trade, and were glad to work for the firm for several reasons. Chief of these was that they were under contract on a liberal percentage basis; there was no limit to the business they might do, and therefore no limit to their profits. Besides, the firm had gone ahead in the beginning with the conviction that the Chinese government would not enforce its treaty rights to exclude all foreigners attempting to do business in China outside the Treaty Ports; Getman was a gambler, and he believed he might go boldly in and trade anywhere without opposition. The results proved that, up to a certain point, he had been right. The Chinese offered no protest at the extension of their branches, and accordingly they sprang up everywhere in the small cities throughout the provinces; but there was always the possibility that if the resentment of the Chinese government was aroused, it might summarily forbid all trade, shutting down these branches, and going a long way toward ruining Getman, Siddons & McKenzie.

This was a fact that had always filled Siddons with uneasiness. He did not have the gambling instincts of his partner, and would have preferred a safer business conducted exclusively in the Treaty Ports. It was a point upon which he continually sought the advice of the various managers. They were almost unanimous in their opinion.

They were violently opposed to shutting down any of the branches. The fact was that their incomes depended upon this sort of business. Restricted to the Treaty Ports, they could not meet European competition on a basis profitable to themselves.

"But suppose something happened that compelled us to shut down?" said Siddons to the Sianfu manager. "There is that possibility, you know."

"I'd damn well chuck the business! I'm out to make a living, and there'd be nothing in it if I had to run a branch like a suburban department store!"

"Um," said Siddons reflectively, inwardly wincing, "that's about what I thought."

Gradually it grew upon him that somewhere in this attitude of the managers lay the clue to what he was seeking.

BY the time Siddons reached Peking, he had perfected his plan. The capital was torn and harried by political rumors, stratagems and *coups* of all sorts. The frantic government, beaten dumb, was in a mood to pick on any plausible victim and annihilate it, to prove both strength and patriotic intentions. Everyone in China realized it, and walked softly-softly.

Semenoff, at that time, was the *bête-noir* of the northern frontiers.

No matter what Semenoff's policies were, his fate was a stormy one, and anyone involved in friendship with him was likely to be involved in endless troubles. The Chinese were particularly vexed at the gentleman because of his disturbing activities in Mongolia, already overrun with brigands and adventurers. And McKenzie

was on a prolonged expedition into Mongolia, ostensibly to hunt sheep!

Siddons set himself out to be friendly wherever he went. His visits were hasty but hearty. He bluffly flattered the various managers, made careful memoranda of their little needs—sending this one a saddle, that one a new rifle or shotgun, and another a bunch of books or several handsome rugs for his study—and anxiously asked their frank opinion about the presence of McKenzie in Mongolia.

He admitted reluctantly to them that representations had already been made about the younger partner's activities along the frontier. He was believed to be making some sort of secret deal with Semenoff and the Siberian government!

"You can see," said Siddons angrily, "what sort of effect that's going to have on our business. The first thing we know, the government at Peking is going to land on us and close up every inland branch we have."

"Wow! But it doesn't sound like McKenzie to me."

"Too easy-going to get mixed up in politics?"

"Well, yes—"

"I hope so. But that's just the trouble. I don't believe he has anything to do with Semenoff's outfit, either. It would be absurd to suppose he'd be anything but loyal to his own firm. But apparently he doesn't realize what he's up against. He seems to be out here more for the fun of the thing than anything else; and it would certainly be unfortunate, to say the least, if we had to close up shop just because of an escapade. Anyway, if you should get any definite information about him, don't hesitate to drop me a line confidentially, will you? I don't want you to get the wrong idea about McKenzie, but it looks to me as though it's going to be necessary to take the matter up with him when I get to Kalgan."

By the time Siddons reached Kalgan, every manager in North China was worried and angry. McKenzie was a good fellow, but there was no percentage in losing all they had built up because of a bit of damn' foolishness. It was not difficult for the managers to believe that McKenzie had really got the firm into serious difficulties with the Chinese authorities, since everyone knew he had gone out into Mongolia accompanied only by Mongol and Chinese servants.

THE manager at Kalgan, however, was of a sort distinctly different from the others, and he gave a bellow of laughter when the report reached him. Charley Davis was an enormous man, six feet six inches in height, lean, loose-jointed, slightly stooped, with great hands, a shock of soft dark hair, and large candid gray eyes. With the body of an artilleryman and the eyes of a dreamer, he might have been taken for anything but a business man. His lips were thin and slightly pursed, as though he felt intensely whatever thought was in his head. When drunk he went Berserk; when sober, he was a child and a philosopher. He was the kind of man who ruins himself through excess of vitality and imagination—gets killed, or throws the world away with a gesture.

When Siddons repeated the rumors concerning McKenzie, Davis roared with laughter, and Siddons immediately took a dislike to him. Davis checked his laughter and pursed his lips.

"Well, sir," he said, clapping himself on the knee with a great powerful hand, and looking out the bungalow window, opaque with a Gobi storm that had been blanketing the town in a blizzard of brown dust and grime for three days, "I got a message from him yesterday. He expects to be at Hanopar, at the head of the Pass, in a few days."

Siddons was taken aback. He was not quite ready for this. But he managed to look pleasantly surprised.

"Oh, he'll be here in Kalgan, then, in a few days?"

"Yes, God willing. Now, I've got a string of camels I've been waiting to send to Urga for the last four days. This dust has been holding them up. Just the same, I'm going to send them away tomorrow, and I want to ride a couple of days out on the plains with them—past the danger-zone, you understand. I'll get a good horse for you, and you can come along with me. We'll probably meet McKenzie about a day or so beyond Hanopar."

Siddons demurred. The trip sounded extremely arduous. Hitherto his traveling in China had been made comfortable. Solicitous managers had made his way easy, any direction he turned. Skillful servants accompanied him; a clever and efficient interpreter rose swiftly to overcome every emergency that came; hotels reserved their best rooms; he sailed on the speediest boats; he was given excellent compartments

on the mail trains; and everywhere he traveled in pleasant company.

Davis, however, was a man who looked on the world as the property of the Almighty. Nothing awed him; nothing frightened him; nothing seemed to hold his respect but things of infinite majesty. He had the fatalism of the Turk, the unconquerable philosophy of the Frenchman, the wistfulness of the Irishman. He took the world as he found it, and expected those who rode with him to follow the same trail. Why the devil shouldn't Siddons swing into a saddle and ride up to the plains? All objections were brushed aside.

BEFORE nightfall the following day the camels were swinging insolently up the rocky Pass, nostrils twitching in the teeth of the choking gale.

Keeping his pony in the lee of a particularly large camel, Siddons overcame his disgust with the thought that he must see McKenzie without delay. That night he slept in a little mud inn which provided him with scant comfort, and where the charcoal-fumes gave him a headache that set his brains slopping inside his skull.

When they left the inn at Hanopar, the track led vaguely away over the rolling plain like the wake of a wallowing tramp in a lazy heaving sea, under thick saffron clouds.

The season was bad. The cold was intense. Dust rolled in billows high above them. Gray dust-devils leaped unexpectedly and whirled about them. The great Bactrian camels with the long brown wool almost sweeping the dust through which they shuffled, crowded upon each other's tails, while the camel-men trudged on ahead with heads bowed to the dark blasts. The great bells of the leading camels clunked dolefully.

At the head of the caravan, wrapped in swirls of dust, rode a group of Mongol horsemen muffled to the eyes in stained sheepskins. Rifles were slung across their backs. At every unusual sound—the high moaning of the wind, the whisper of dust and pebbles swirling underfoot, the roar of a sudden blast—they spread out, lifted their bowed heads, and looked anxiously about them.

This was a danger-point for caravans. Here Mongol and Chinese brigands often camped astride the road. Since Semenoff had begun his Siberian adventures, Cossack and other Russian deserters had added to the perils of the desert. The long single line of slow-moving camels made an easy target; a few desperate well-armed men charging at full speed could throw the half-mile column into panic, make a good haul, and escape again on the limitless plains with little danger of capture.

Davis and Siddons rode beside the caravan, parallel with the middle of the line, so that they were somewhat free to range on either side with little danger of losing the camels.

Siddons was almost overcome by the overwhelming mass of the plains. The gray earth rolling endlessly underfoot, the clouds of dust surging overhead and swirling about them like a backwash, seemed like the raging surf of a formless dream. Dirty, stifled, smothered in dust, cut to the bone by the piercing wind despite his sheepskins, Siddons slumped heavily in his saddle, miserably aware—for the moment—of his unimportance.

ANOTHER night, with a temperature of fifteen degrees below zero, he slept rolled in sheepskins between two camels, after eating a gritty mutton stew boiled over a smoking fire made of argol. Shivering in his sheepskins, he cursed Davis—furtively, because he felt somehow subdued in the presence of the big man—and doubly cursed Bob McKenzie.

He came to believe that McKenzie was deliberately responsible for his uncomfortable adventure, and in the end was convinced that simple justice would be done when he was kicked out of the firm. His grievances were increased by a conviction that this caravan transport was both inefficient and wasteful, and he held Charley Davis responsible for the fact. Like many business men in executive positions, commerce to him had always been a matter of clean typewritten sheets whose figures summarized the essence of exchange and barter. The difficulties which Nature and the limitations of man throw in the way of marketing merchandise had always been irritating details to be left to subordinates for investigation and report.

Now, as he rode beside Davis, he had reached the point of sullen rage. Caught, for the first time in his life, in a position beyond his power to exercise influence, he was compelled to suffer frostbite, dirt, hunger and exhaustion in silence.

Rubbing the mud out of his eyes,—at

the corners of which it froze in little scales,—he stole glances of increasing hatred at the dimly outlined figure of Davis, riding slightly ahead of him with chin uplifted, occasionally bellowing snatches of Mongol songs that were caught from his lips and drowned in the turgid blast.

Siddons felt that if he could put his hand on something and rend it to pieces, it might relieve the terrific nervous tension which held him. But the cold filled his veins with ice, and he huddled in his saddle, shivering and groaning.

Finally, in desperation, he yelled:

"For God's sake, Davis, when do you intend turning back?"

Davis drew his horse alongside, and blowing the dust off his eyelashes with a twist of his lips, bawled in his employer's ear:

"Say when! I thought you'd like it!"

Siddons' voice cracked shrilly with the vehemence of his reply. Under his breath he added:

"The fool's crazy! We'll get rid of him too—damned gangling idiot!"

"I'll ride to the front," roared Davis, "and turn things over to Fang Leang! We can get back to Hanopar in two camps."

Siddons tried to spur up after Davis as the big fellow urged his horse forward at a heavy lope; but the business man's pony resented the unexpected dig and became as surly as his master. While Siddons struggled with his mount, Davis disappeared.

A moment later, Siddons experienced a curious sensation. It was the sensation of a man, who, having taken shelter in a barn, suddenly finds the roof being torn off by the wind. The heavily charged clouds that rolled past him began to snap and sparkle. In spite of the plunging of his mount, he became aware that the camels were no longer advancing. They were tugging at their nose-pins, bawling and jamming together. Running figures passed him. Shadows suddenly materialized into horsemen just beyond the fringe of the veil.

The caravan had been attacked.

SIDDONS' horse felt the panic, caught its feet, took the bit, and bolted straight into the shadowy clouds of dust. As soon as he could kick free, Siddons slipped from the saddle. In falling, he collided with another horse. Tumbling head over heels, he clutched out spasmodically. His hands gripped another horseman, and together they went sprawling to the ground—striking, clawing, grunting, cursing, rolling over and over in the dust.

In the meantime Davis had ridden straight into the attacking group at the head of the column. Safety, from his point of view, lay in going forward. He flung himself among them with a roar; and his Mongols followed, like shadows against a circus tent, with shrill, startling cries. The action was too swift and too close for rifles to be drawn and used, especially since they were wrapped in rags to protect them from the dust. Davis' Mongols scattered the attackers with the shock of their charge. There was a fierce, stifling mêlée, smothered in the dust that still swirled in gusts about them.

Davis felt his horse sag under him, and he went rolling among ponies' hoofs, his sheepskins saving him from a bad bruising. Then he went Berserk. These Mongol ponies are short-legged, but with the barrels of horses and the endurance of burros. Davis' great height on foot, therefore, gave him an advantage. But when his horse fell, his weapons had gone with it.

Without hesitating, Davis threw himself at the nearest rider, and by sheer strength dragged him from the saddle and flung him to the ground. He fell upon him, clutching for his throat, and at that moment saw he was a white man.

"Ah, you damned beggar!" he grunted.

Straddling his yelling captive's chest, while the struggling man kicked and writhed, he reached back for a knife with which to finish him. The gray eyes, starting out of a face smirched with mud and dust, were blazing. The stained chapped lips spat out mud and wool. A frenzied voice yelled above the uproar:

"Davis! You long-legged beggar! Look what you're doing, damn you! Look out!"

Davis let his knife slip back into its sheath, and thrust his face down to get a better look at his captive. Then he burst into a bellow of laughter. He rocked back and forth, catching his breath and roaring. All at once a thought struck him, and he became silent, pursing his lips and looking down thoughtfully at Bob McKenzie.

"Mack," he said solemnly, "you certainly surprised us. What do you mean coming at us this way?"

"Get off, you ruddy elephant! You're breaking my ribs."

"You're a lucky man. You yelled just in time. I was going to stick a knife in you."

"Get off, you damned bandit! Let me up!"

"Stop kicking!"

"Wow!"

"Well, stop kicking!"

"For God's sake, Davis, have some sense. You're crushing me!"

"All right. There you are. Now talk."

"Talk! We ran into a bunch of bandits. And—and before we could beat it, you—you snaffled me off my horse. You're one of them! You long-legged horsethief!"

Davis put his heavy glove over McKenzie's empurpled face, and bent down to whisper hoarsely in his ear:

"Mistake, Mack! We've made a crazy bloomer! Wait a second! I want to get something straight. Who are these fellows with you? You've got Russians in your outfit."

McKenzie, sitting up somewhat dazedly, wiped the dust and mud from his mouth and eyes, and looked blearily into the shadows about him as though he had just come out of an unpleasant dream.

"Yes," he said, "they're Russians. Some of Semenoff's friends, I think. I met them near Kwei Hua, and they came along with me. Kind of tough, but I guess they're all right."

"Tough? Listen!" said Davis sharply. "I've got Siddons with me. He's back there among the camels—"

"Siddons! You mean my partner?"

"Yes. Siddons, from New York. He's been in China for about three weeks—and he's on your trail! There's been a complaint in Peking that you've been working in with Semenoff's people, and he came out here to see—"

"Look here, Charley, what the devil are you driving at? Siddons here—here? Out in the Gobi?"

"Yes, here!" yelled Davis with exasperation. "What are you trying to do—give me an argument? Siddons is over there with the camels, if one of your ruddy fools hasn't bowled him over. He's here to get the goods on you, so far as I can see. If he locates you with this crowd, he's got you!"

"But why?" said McKenzie in stupefaction.

"I don't know—except that they say you're ruining the firm."

"What!"

The two squatting men looked at each other for a moment through slitted eyes. The bawling of the camels could be heard in the darkness behind them like the call of high-flying geese; men cursed gutturally; occasionally a rifle spat with a thin snap; dim figures went plunging past on horses whose hoofs were muffled in the dust. Davis suddenly rose to his feet and pulled McKenzie up with him.

"Mack," he said, "get your gang together and disappear. I don't know what Siddons' idea is; but you don't want to be seen with these Russians."

"The devil I don't! Siddons doesn't bother me!"

"Never mind that. Take my word for it. When you're ready to come in, make a detour and send me a *chit* from Tatung. In the meantime I'll try to find out what Siddons is up to."

"All right, Charley," said McKenzie abruptly, thrusting out his hand. "Thanks. I'll see you in about a week."

THEY ran staggering through the shadows to the point where the mêlée seemed to be simmering down, both sides realizing that a mistake had been made. In the confusion it was still difficult to identify numbers and faces; but McKenzie found a horse, and managed to get away with his party without discovery by Siddons.

Davis made his way back slowly and thoughtfully along the line of camels.

Under a lifting swirl of dust, he suddenly came upon Siddons straddling the body of a prostrate man, very much as he had been straddling McKenzie. Davis' first feeling was of astonishment and admiration for the prowess of Siddons, though as a matter of fact Siddons' lucky conquest had been made possible by the timely jolt of a pony's hock. The New York business man looked up with a face as smudged and dirty as a coal-heaver's.

"I've got one!" he grunted.

Davis looked into the dull, sullen countenance of a fat, dark-eyed Siberian.

"All right," said Davis stiffly, pursing his lips.

Siddons got to his feet, shaking the dust from the fur about his face, while Davis jerked the stranger up and sent him spinning into the arms of a couple of Mongols who had come running.

"We'll take him back to Kalgan," he said. "We chased the others."

"He says he's one of Semenoff's men," said Siddons cheerfully, as he watched the captive being led away. "He speaks French. And he says he's been working with McKenzie. Pretty state of affairs, I must say!"

"Hell, no!" said Davis, staring after the man.

That night he explained things to the Siberian, and gave him the best extra horse he had.

Three days later, after a dash across the plains and a wild scramble through the hills and down the rocky defiles that mark the edge of the Mongolian plateau, Siddons and Davis were again in Kalgan.

The keen, cold highland air, calm and pure after the duststorm had swept away over China, had sung in Davis' ears, bringing the tears sparkling to his eyes, sending the blood racing through his veins like wine. The stars snapped and twinkled with flashing color; the planets, clear and round, came close to earth; and the plains, rolling away in frozen billows, brought to his strongly beating heart that feeling of spaciousness—of vastness and liberty, of majesty and awe—that a man can only know upon a wild sea, in lofty mountains, in the desert. Surrounded by servants, merchants, clerks, an accumulation of mail, and merchandise stacked within the walls of the compound, the big man experienced a depressing feeling of having sunk into a turmoil of gibbering purposeless creatures involved in a frantic effort to sell something —to sell wares, opportunities, or themselves.

On the other hand, Siddons, for his part, felt that he had suddenly been restored to life, catching the spark from the activity about him. He went through his mail eagerly and swiftly, dictating letters, reading and drawing up reports, dispatching telegrams, and writing in his own hand a neat little pile of mail.

Davis could not give much attention to the member of the firm, since he found himself immediately involved in clearing up the business that had accumulated in their absence on the plains. In fact, he saw little of him except at the evening meal, when both were too tired or preoccupied with their own affairs to indulge in confidences. At the same time Davis was aware of a sort of furtiveness in the attitude of the New York business man that annoyed him. It was as though Siddons looked at him with impatient curiosity, tinged with the contempt a man often feels for people and customs he does not understand.

Davis could learn nothing from him; and though at length they parted on the little railroad platform with a hearty handshake and every evidence of friendliness, the big fellow had the unpleasant conviction that somehow or other he had been frustrated in his efforts to learn something to the advantage of his friend.

THE following day McKenzie rode into Kalgan from Tatung.

There was a very forcible and formal communication awaiting him from Siddons, in which that gentleman regretted that he had not the opportunity of discussing business affairs with him while on his tour of the China branches, and informing him that it was imperatively necessary, both in his own interests and in the interests of the firm, to sail for New York immediately to discuss a reorganization.

McKenzie's coppery face became slightly drawn and sallow.

"Charley," he said helplessly, handing over the document, "what do you make of this?"

Davis read the paper carefully, with pursed lips.

"It looks to me," he said slowly, "as though the beggars want to crowd you out."

"No!" exclaimed McKenzie. Then with his elbow on his knee, and biting his thumbnail, he began to think. But the problem was entirely beyond him. "They can't do it!" he said vehemently. "They can't do it! But what's the idea, anyway? I don't understand it at all!"

"Siddons didn't flatter me with his confidence," said Davis dryly; "but after he left, I happened to glance through the *chit*-book, and I notice that your partner sent a 'strictly private and confidential' letter to every manager out here, with the exception of me."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, it simply means he has a secret understanding with everyone of authority out here, except you and me—and it's against *us*."

"I don't understand it!"

"Oh, hell, why bother about it? If I were in your place, I'd tell them to make me a proposition; and if they offered me a fair price, I'd get out. What's the use of fighting against a disagreeable partner, anyway? You're not aiming to startle the

world with any great financial success, are you? You've got enough; why don't you let go and enjoy it?"

McKENZIE stood up and looked out into the camel-yard for a moment in silence, an expression of great unhappiness on his face. After several false starts, he said with an effort:

"Yes, I do want to make a success! That's why I came out here. A girl told me she had no respect for a man who couldn't prove himself capable of getting out in the world and doing something successful in a big way. I—I—well, I made a sort of bargain with her. She's still waiting for me to come back and show her a success."

"What kind of a girl—" began Davis angrily.

"Wait a minute. You don't understand. She's the kind that effervesces with energy, ideas, inspirations. She's really a wonderful girl, Charley—and I'd never go back and tell her they'd beat me!"

McKenzie, for sufficient reasons, had kept his head turned away, still looking blankly toward the camel-yard.

"Oh," said Davis, who understood idealism better than anything else. After drumming for a while on his desk, he added briskly: "Well, then, sir, if that's the case, we'll damn well make a success out of it! I'll admit that I don't like to be beaten by that beggar Siddons, either. Come on, let's go!"

McKenzie turned with a flashing smile.

"But I don't even know their motive," he protested.

"That's easy," said Davis. "They want to keep the business in the family! Siddons is engaged to marry Getman's daughter, and I suppose they don't want to share their pocketbook with strangers."

The expression on McKenzie's face was so very peculiar that Davis, thinking he had not been understood, repeated the information. McKenzie's face became putty-color and his hand groped furtively for the windowsill. After a while he said in a hollow whisper:

"You're—you're guessing?"

"No, I'm not. Siddons told me so himself. There's nothing extraordinary about it, is there?"

He saw the answer in McKenzie's face. Before he could think of anything to add, McKenzie, with a wry smile and a hopeless gesture, said:

"Well, that settles it. There's no use fighting. I'll sell out if they want."

The full enormity of the thing rushed upon Davis. He rose to his feet and banged his huge fist upon the table.

"No," he roared, "it doesn't settle it! No, by God! If necessary, we'll fight the whole rotten crowd! *Toujours l'attaque!*"

TWO months later Charley Davis entered the New York office of Getman and Siddons, noting with interest as he passed through the door that the name of McKenzie had already been erased.

He followed the overwhelmed office-boy so closely that he entered Siddons' private office without being announced. Siddons was seated at his desk when the door filled with the bulk of the man with whom he had ridden on the plains of Mongolia. Some instinct of self-protection caused him to push clear of his desk and scramble hurriedly to his feet with a startled expression on his face.

As Davis caught sight of Siddons, however, his lips pursed in an uncertain smile. Thrusting his hand forward, he took that which Siddons automatically extended to greet him. Tossing his hat to a chair, he said in a genial voice:

"Well, Siddons, I never expected to see you here. I'm a son of a gun if you don't look like a different man from the one I met in Kalgan. You look better satisfied, for one thing—and your face is cleaner!"

The business man laughed uneasily, and motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Davis. When did you come in?"

"A week ago. I want to get straight on this reorganization scheme. Don't want to sit down, thanks. I get restless in the city. It's like a trap to me. Too many unnecessary complications."

He walked over to the window and looked out across the confused mass of buildings, hot under the early summer sun. Through the deep cañons, streams of human beings flowed sluggishly, setting in toward the shadows of the teeming cliffs that rose above them, where veils of dissolving steam gave an unpleasant suggestion of humidity. His eye looked out across the gray-blue bay beyond to the glimmer of the open sea. With his great hands thrust against the small of his back he looked down upon the most remarkable city in the world.

Sparring for time to prepare for an unpleasant interview, Siddons said:

"What do you think of it?"

"Millions of people, I understand, all crowded sweating together! Well, I'll tell you; it's nothing but a lot of huts to me." Davis swung about suddenly and caught Siddons with his mouth open, in the middle of an exclamation. "Listen! I've come from China to find out exactly what kind of a proposition I'm up against."

"Eh?" Siddons made a disparaging gesture. "Why, exactly how?"

"Well, I mean, with the dissolution of the firm, and the new organization, I'd like to know where I fit."

"What does your contract say?" said Siddons primly.

"My contract terminates with the dissolution of the firm."

"Well?"

"You mean I'm out of a job?"

SIDDONS said nothing, the answer being obvious.

"Well," said Davis, as though the wind had been taken out of him, "you needn't think I'm going to let you get away with that. I've got certain legal rights—"

"I'm afraid not," said Siddons with an air of authority. "The fact, Mr. Davis, is this: Mr. McKenzie brought the firm to the verge of ruin in China by his thoughtless intriguing with the Russian general, Semenoff. When I arrived in China, I found the state of affairs actually a scandal—so much so, in fact, that every single manager we had in North China, with the exception of yourself, handed me his resignation rather than continue with the firm with the daily prospect of everything going to pieces. You know well enough what happened at Kalgan on the plains."

Davis stirred uncomfortably, but said nothing, preferring to listen with painful attention to the full exposition. Siddons screwed his cigarette in an ash-tray, and lighted another to impress Davis with his perfect self-possession.

"Well, then, there was nothing to do but put the matter straight up to Mr. McKenzie. He admitted he had been foolish and thoughtless in the whole business, and rather than imperil the firm's interests, he—finally—resigned. He rather jacked us up on his share, too, I don't mind saying."

"Hum!" said Davis, looking into his broad palm reflectively. "Did all these other fellows have the same contract as me—that is, terminating automatically in the event of a dissolution of the firm?"

"Yes. That protected everybody in case of emergency."

"It doesn't seem to have protected me. How about these others? Have you given them new contracts?"

"We're sending them."

"Sending them! They haven't arrived yet, then. Well, hell, then none of them have any claim on you!"

"No."

"And you haven't got any claim on them, either!"

Siddons smiled.

"No. But we have our organization. And I imagine they all know what's in it for them."

"But where do I come in?"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Davis, you're in the same class as Mr. McKenzie. It's no reflection on you personally—and we'll be very glad to help you in any way, outside the firm. It's no reflection to say you'd be rather a hindrance to the new firm."

"Oh!"

AFTER a moment's painful silence, Davis asked if he might use the desk phone. Siddons pushed it toward him with a faint sigh of relief; and while the big fellow was talking, took the opportunity to step into a neighboring office and tell Getman of the Kalgan manager's presence. Siddons certainly would never have guessed that Davis was calling up Getman's house; and had he known, he would not have believed that it was to get in communication with Bob McKenzie.

"Hello, Mack. I'm just about through with Siddons. They're hard-boiled. Are you all set?"

"Yes, old boy, I am!" said McKenzie in tones of high elation.

"Let's go!"

Davis replaced the receiver and straightened up just as Getman entered the room with an air of veiled belligerency, followed quietly by Siddons.

"How are you?" said Getman, removing a cigar from his mouth and nodding his head.

"I want to explain something to you, Mr. Getman," said Davis in a cheerful voice, standing with his legs apart, his hands behind his back and his chin slightly tilted.

"I'm listening," said Getman.

"They told me you were hard-boiled—that you were one of these go-getters with a club—that if a man raised his hand to

fight you, you smashed him, and danced upon his carcass. Your idea of business was to get ahead, regardless of any other consideration. You had no room for sentiment."

"What in hell are you driving at?"

"I've got a power-of-attorney from Bob McKenzie, and besides that, I've gone into partnership with him. And I just wanted to see if you two weren't a bit sorry—"

"Sorry? What for?"

"Playing a dirty game."

"By God, if you tell me I've been playing a dirty game, I'll—I'll—"

"Go on!" said Davis, and he showed his teeth in a tight-lipped smile. Getman pawed the air with one hand and waved his cigar with the other. "You're a good shadow-boxer," said Davis critically. "Be calm a moment, and listen. I understand you've kicked Bob out of the firm—"

"Yes," yelled Getman, exploding shrilly like a steam blow-off. "And—"

"And me!"

"Yes," said Siddons firmly over Getman's shoulder.

"And all your other managers have resigned in order to join your new firm—your new organization in China. Am I right, Mr. Siddons?"

"Yes."

"Well, gentlemen, I'm here to tell you you've overlooked a fundamental principle in this business. You've neglected the sentimental aspect of the whole affair. Siddons thought he was on the right trail, but he's too damned conceited to realize his own failure."

"Davis—"

"Never mind the unimportant asides! Gentlemen, the fact is this: you haven't got any organization at all in China! It has been completely wiped out!"

BOTH Siddons' hands flew in the air and his mouth dropped open. He jerked his head aside to look with startled eyes at his apoplectic partner. Getman merely lowered his head and thrust it forward, as though waiting for the full force of the attack.

"If there had been any decency in you," said Davis, "we might have let you down easy. But there was no sentimental interest for us; so we just clubbed you. After Siddons left China with his hat full of resignations, McKenzie and I completed a little organization of our own; and the first thing we did was to sign up every manager in North China and all their assistants—"

Getman let out the roar of a wounded bear; and Siddons hissed painfully through his teeth.

"Now," said Davis, raising his own voice in a domineering shout, "I'll do a little roaring myself. We're through with this dirty yellow pup Siddons. But as for you, Getman, I'm commissioned to say that when the banks begin to pull the props from under you again, your son-in-law is willing to consider taking you into the firm of McKenzie and Davis."

SIDDONS was struck dumb; but Getman raised his right hand with a gesture of remonstrance and walked unsteadily over to the desk, where he slumped heavily in the chair.

"Wait a minute!" he said faintly. "Wait a minute! The round's over."

Davis looked at him apprehensively for a moment, as the older man fumbled for a handkerchief and awkwardly wiped his face. After a while he lifted his eyes, shaking his head slowly from side to side; but he was breathing evenly.

"What'd you say 'bout son-in-law?" he said unsteadily.

"Why, Bob McKenzie married your daughter this afternoon." He drew out his watch. "They're on the train now, bound for Vancouver. They'll be on board the *Shenzu Maru* in another week on their way to China. You see, she told Bob to make a success in China, and he brought back your scalp."

"My scalp! Her father's scalp!"

"She accepted it, too! But only on condition that you can come into the wigwam when you begin to realize the value of sentiment."

Siddons, at the doorway, sniffled faintly, and moved away—softly—softly.

HAROLD MAC GRATH himself, famous teller of delightful tales like "The Man on the Box," "A Splendid Hazard" and "The Man with Three Names," has written for readers of this magazine his most captivating novel. Be sure to begin it, "The Green Stone," in the next, the July, issue.

The Bond of Likeness

A writer new to The Blue Book has in this remarkable story of Flower Mary, Benny the Mink, Swedish Anna, the State's Attorney and his wife, written one of the most tensely dramatic bits of fiction we have ever printed.

By STEUART M. EMERY

FOR a full minute Adams had been standing at Barron's elbow. He was entirely too well-trained a clerk to break in on a superior's train of thought. One, two, three stiff pages of legal paper crackled and turned over before Kendall Barron took notice of him.

"Well, Adams?" he inquired finally.

"Flower Mary's outside, sir."

There was no reply. Barron's fingers, straying to a row of buttons, pressed, and a thin-faced man came in from the adjoining office. Barron placed a finger halfway down the page before him.

"This paragraph is inference, Galloway," he said in a level voice. "We want to go to the jury with facts, not deductions, for the Mortimer case. Get this statement supported by credible evidence, or out it goes. —Adams, you were saying?"

"It's Flower Mary." Adams became the prompter. "You know—Benny the Mink's girl. Says she has to see you, sir."

"She has no basis for a call," answered Barron without looking up. "Galloway, you represented the prosecutor's office for us when the man was sentenced this morning? It was ten to fifteen years, I suppose?"

"Fifteen," said Galloway dryly. He seemed to hesitate. "It's all there in the noon edition at your elbow, Chief. You might as well read about it as have me tell you. The reporters got it pretty straight."

"I sincerely hope they did. If the press can't handle a simple account of a gunman's sentence for attempting to murder a policeman in cold blood—"

Still Galloway appeared to have something on his mind. "There was something else, Chief. It's in the headlines."

BARRON put aside the documents of the moment and picked up a folded newspaper. He noticed three or four members of his staff obviously watching through the

open door the scene at his desk. But they saw no change in expression in the firmly cut face, marked with lines of decision.

There was no sound as Barron put the paper down. "The *Gazette* seems to have made quite a thrilling incident out of it. It isn't the first time a crook has sworn he'd get the prosecutor who convicted him. Galloway, we might tell the *Gazette* man when he drops in next that he goes in pretty heavily for the lurid. Was it really anything like this?"

"Judge Martin gave him his fifteen years," said Galloway. "Then—you know the way Benny the Mink snarls, sort of sidewise and showing his teeth?"

"I was forced to observe Benny the Mink's snarl for three whole days while I tried him. He squirmed a good deal on the stand. His face was not exactly pleasant. But go on."

"He was drooling a bit at the mouth. He sort of scrunched into a ball and his eyes got red. Squeezing his hands up like claws when he sighted me! 'You tell that damned cold-blooded Barron guy I'll get him,' he yapped out. 'Put me away, would he? I'll put him away, the dirty, white-collared mouthpiece.' Excuse me, Chief, but it's all there in print."

"So I see," remarked Barron. "But I didn't think, Galloway, that you'd be quite as melodramatic about it as the *Gazette*. That's the sixth time, isn't it, the Benny the Mink type has sworn to put a little lead into me? I seem to be here still. That will be all, Galloway."

Once more Galloway paused. "This one means it," he said in a lower, more serious voice. "He's done in half a dozen men even if we can't prove it."

"I said," repeated Barron evenly, "that that would be all. The State prison has a way of taking those ideas out of a criminal's head, especially in fifteen years. Now we happen to be on the Mortimer case."

WITH a little shrug Galloway withdrew. There came a slight cough. Then Adams spoke again.

"And Flower Mary, sir? I'll send her away?"

"Tell her," said Barron, "the case is closed." For several minutes his pencil scratched rapidly across typewritten sheets. He had, he thought, the crux of the Mortimer case almost in his grasp. Another half-hour of driving concentration should give it to him.

He was not aware that commotion had arisen in the outer office. He did not hear the clash of voices or the swift stumbling of feet. It was only at the jarring slam of his own door that he looked up inquiringly. Breathing heavily, a woman stood braced against it, her hands outflung along its panels. She seemed like some strange wild animal at bay.

"Damn them," she was gasping between lips crimson with paint, "they couldn't keep me out."

"So I see," observed Barron. "And now that you are in?"

"You know me?"

"I have that pleasure. It's Flower Mary, isn't it? You sat with Benny the Mink's counsel through the trial. I thought perhaps you might take the stand."

ONE hand went up to touch the tumbled, dyed hair under the cheap hat. Her face was livid with powder and pallor. What vestiges of attractiveness had once been Flower Mary's were not in evidence now.

"I wish to God I had," she said tensely.

"It will do you no good to break in to see me in this office," he pronounced clearly. "You must know that. I have finished—completely—with Benny the Mink."

"This morning," she said huskily, "they gave him fifteen years. I was there. You know what that means?"

Barron shrugged slightly. "A criminal with an extremely bad record will be safely out of the way for a long time. Your friend Benny the Mink is bad clean through."

"He'll die up there. His last trip pretty near finished him." She leaned over the prosecutor's desk, her face strained with the intensity of her pleading. "You aint going to kill him off like that? He'll go straight if you let him go this time."

Even now Barron's mind carried the impress of slinking, warped shoulders and ratlike eyes, of an evil, sagging mouth and yellow, bared teeth.

"You tell me that, when the last thing Benny the Mink said was that he would get me, so help him God, and that no jail this side of hell could hold him off it? You heard him yourself if you were there. He has been duly tried, convicted and sentenced. That's an end of it."

"He wouldn't have been," burst out Flower Mary, "if it wasn't for you." Savagely her lips twisted. "You and your office—you sent him up. I tell you he

wont last a year. You've got a big drag in this town. You can get him off if you want to."

"I cannot," remarked Barron. "A pardon from the governor is the only thing that can keep Benny the Mink out of prison. If Patrolman McGovern hadn't been shot within three blocks of a hospital operating table, your friend would now be on his way to the chair. He can consider himself lucky."

HE rose from his seat and stood with his hand on the knob of the door. Flame smoldered in Flower Mary's eyes; her flat bosom surged. In another moment there might be almost any kind of a scene.

"You're better than the Benny the Mink kind," he said quietly. "I remember you when you were a kid selling flowers off a stand on that corner downtown. You were a quaint, plain little thing. When I was a law-student just working my way up, I used to stop now and then for a buttonhole. That's where you got the name of Flower Mary, isn't it? You see, I traced you back when I took up the case."

"You can stop that stuff," said Flower Mary sullenly. "That was a hell of a long time ago."

"It was. Sixteen years, as I recall. I'm not asking you any questions—everything is there in the files. I am just telling you that once you had a decent education and some folks, even if you haven't them now. Don't let me see you here again, Flower Mary."

He found his hand thrust aside and the girl with her back once more to the door, barring its opening with her body. Unrestrained, tempestuous emotion confronted him, wrenching her features.

"Listen," she said hoarsely, "I know you too. I'll give you the truth."

"That all came out, I think, at the trial. Two of Benny the Mink's witnesses, as you may recollect, are now under indictment for perjury."

"I know," she flamed back. "You smashed his alibi all to pieces. He shot McGovern, all right. And you went and made a speech about McGovern, the fine cop, protecting the town. Hell, he was a worse crook than Benny!"

"What's that?" said Barron sharply.

She flung her head back and laughed—harshly. "Oh, my God, the man doesn't know! That dirty double-crosser McGovern worked in with the loft gang. He deviled me for weeks—the big, blue scum—to steer for them! He said he'd frame me for a dip and send me up if I held out on him. He had it all fixed—and then I told Benny."

Barron faced her, steel-cold. "So Benny the Mink went out and shot him. In the back."

"Yes," she flared. "Can't you see? It was me he tried to croak him for." Pathetically her thin fingers wove together. "You get it now—don't you? He's my man. He had to bump McGovern or I'd have done a stretch sure."

Her breath caught, and she fell silent, but only for an instant. One hand went out gropingly toward Barron. A little trickle marred the coated powder on her cheeks.

"You ought to know what it's like. The papers gave you a big splurge when you got married. What'd you have done if you'd been Benny?"

Poised and calm, he stepped away from her, leveling his eyes at her shaking figure.

"I am not here to discuss situations that could not possibly exist. There is no excuse for murder, or attempted murder. What is the use in bringing up hopeless arguments?"

"You wouldn't kill for your girl?" Flower Mary, all too apparently, was verging on the break. "I tell you—I tell you, Benny went out to shoot for me! You're no man if you wouldn't do the same! And you stood there, hounding him, beating him down, dragging it out of him. You broke his alibi—you sent him up!"

THERE was, for a moment, silence.

"He's my man," she repeated dumbly. "You're putting him away. He wont live up there. You'd do what he did if you had to."

"I would not." Barron's glance met hers, held it despite her wilting, and backed his words with living emphasis. "You needn't try to press your own viewpoint on me. You're on the wrong end of this business. —Galloway!"

"Human? You?" Flower Mary hurled out the words. "I've watched you—you damned machine—at work. You've got lots to learn, you have. You think you're different from the people you wring the guts out of, like me."

"Galloway!"

"Sir?" The lean features of his assistant had appeared, almost tardily.

"Flower Mary is ready to leave. Will you kindly see her to the main door?"

Galloway's hand was tossed from her arm. A convulsed, writhing face was lifted to Barron.

"You wont lift a finger to help him? Not when you know?"

"Under no circumstances," said Barron, turning to his desk, "would anyone do what Benny the Mink did unless they had his streak of plain evil. Go to the governor if you wish, but it will be useless."

The door was open now. Framed in it stood Flower Mary—wild, broken and ugly.

"I hope," she rasped, "that he does get you. Maybe I'll get you myself."

"Let's not be foolish," said Barron, the next docket in his hand. "Good afternoon."

Abruptly quiet fell upon his office. The sound of sobs, fiercely choked, and dragging footsteps, had ended. Stepping over to the window for a moment, Barron drew out his cigarette-case and found a match.

"I'd rather like," he said half aloud, "to get this man Mortimer."

IT seemed that he would get him, although it would take a long time. Hardly credible that the case had dragged on almost a full month since he voiced that remark—but it had. Barron sat back in his chair a little from the table, conscious that an errant breeze coming through the open windows of the breakfast-room was stirring among the napery. Already one slit envelope from the pile of mail beside his plate had drifted to the floor.

"They'll all be off the table soon," laughed a soft voice. "You're so careless, Kendall, when you're wrapped up in something. I think you've even forgotten me!"

His wife's deep violet eyes were smiling at him. A slender white hand and arm reached out from the sleeve of a lacy housegown toward the singing silver percolator. There clung about Marcia Barron a fragile freshness and spirituality that vested with grace her every small domestic act. Barron looked up at her, his light eyes for an instant shadowing with the strange intensity of tenderness that she knew and waited for.

"Not ever, Marcia," he said quietly. "But I'm rushed. I can't take any of this correspondence to the office with me. We put on a new witness at ten."

"Do you know what they're saying?" She rose, and coming around the table, put both hands on his shoulders. "I'll whisper it—just to you. If you win this case, there'll be talk about you for governor. There!"

"They always say that," replied Barron, "when a State prosecutor gets away with a big piece of work." In the slightest degree his eyes had narrowed; if they had been married for more than six months, Marcia Barron would have known what that meant. "We sha'n't build air castles yet awhile."

Easily he reached for his mail. Soiled, and addressed in a sprawling, blotchy hand, it lay before him—a letter oddly out of place amid the orderly, typed array. He felt his wife's soft cheek pressing his; her arms were about his neck.

"But it's nice to build the air castles," she murmured. Her voice broke off. "Kendall! Kendall! What is that?"

He had crumpled the scrawled sheet into a ball, thrusting it deep into a pocket.

"No! No! I saw it! I read it!"

"It's nothing, Marcia—nothing at all, I say."

She was on the arm of the chair, her eyes wide to their depths with fear. "That was Benny the Mink—the man who swore he'd shoot you weeks ago! Let me see it, all of it! Oh, Kendall!"

HER fingers caught his, flung them off, and brought the draggled letter to the table's surface before he could prevent. White as the lace of her gown, she bent over it. The message, scribbled quite evidently with a stump of pencil, was brief.

I'm out. I remember who put me away.
B. THE M.

"Yes," said Barron, rising to his feet, "Benny the Mink seems to have proved that jail couldn't hold him. But he's a hundred miles off by now, Marcia. He'll place all the distance he can between himself and this town."

"He wont," she gasped. "He means to do what he said to you. He'll try to kill you, Kendall!"

Odd, that watching the pallor deepen on her cheeks, he should see again the twisted fury of Flower Mary pleading for her man. Barron took his wife's hands in his.

"There will be no danger—absolutely none," he reiterated assuringly. "If Benny the Mink so much as shows the tip of his nose, he'll go back to prison with another five years added to his sentence. Do you think he is going to risk that? I know his

type too well. They threaten, but they save their skins."

"But—I'm afraid," she faltered. "Terribly afraid!"

"My dear," said Barron firmly, "if as prosecutor I took seriously every threat made against me by a criminal, there would be a double cordon of police around this house night and day. Forget all about it, there's a good Marcia. I shall."

"You wont—arm yourself?"

He laughed. "Most certainly not. Between the police and the prison guard, Benny the Mink will either be laid by the heels before nightfall or he'll be out of the State for good. Wish me luck, dear. I've a big bit on today."

Tremulous but mustering a smile, she followed him to the door. He had a last glimpse of her, still a little white but fighting it bravely, as he sent his motor whirring downstreet. She was only a bride, after all—his Marcia. But a frown darkened his eyes as he came into his office.

"Benny the Mink is out," he said curtly to Galloway. "Are the police after him?"

"About twenty of them," declared Galloway. "They got the news late last night. It seems this Benny jail-jumper got up on the prison roof and broke out right next to the guard's tower. Clubbed the guard with a piece of pipe and got his gun. All in beautiful broad daylight!"

"If they're looking for clues," said Barron, tossing something to the desk, "give them that. It came in this morning's mail. —Adams!"

The clerk came forward and pressed a sheaf of papers into Barron's briefcase. "Court in a quarter of an hour, sir."

"Very good." At the door Barron turned. "Galloway, you might tell our friends the police that if they really want to locate Benny the Mink, they might put a couple of good men on Flower Mary. She'll go to him, wherever he is."

Nodding, Galloway picked up the telephone. When he had finished, he found Adams gingerly tampering with the envelope Barron had thrown down.

"Bad business," suggested Adams ingratiatingly. "Can't make head or tail of it."

"Is it?" inquired Galloway. For several minutes he stood, concentrated on the tattered white square, turning it over and over. Then he spoke. "Adams, I'll agree with you for once. This letter of Benny the Mink's was mailed right here in town at two o'clock this morning. It's none of my business, but I think I'll just stick pretty close to Mr. Barron all day."

THE thin Galloway, in consequence, passed a tiresome, eventless morning and afternoon. Five o'clock came upon him pretending to be busy at his own desk while he tried to catch the conversation going on next door. Barron, evidently, had his own house on the wire.

"That's you, Marcia?" he was saying. "Good—now, listen carefully. I sha'n't be home until late, dear. I've had a sudden call to address the Downtown Club dinner. Send my evening things down there for me, wont you? I'll be tied up here for more than an hour yet."

Her voice came, almost pleading, over the wire. "Tonight, Kendall? You're not coming home to me tonight?"

"Not till late. I can't miss this chance —you'll guess why."

He did not know that, white-faced, she was clinging to the telephone, that her hands were quivering a little.

"But you know—what that man said. Don't go out, Kendall, don't. Not tonight! Come home and stay with me."

"My dear," said Barron, a shade brusquely, "I can't let my plans be upset by a message that means nothing. The police have been searching for our letter-writer all day. That means he's gone for good—and an excellent riddance! I'll be back about midnight. You might get some people in for bridge."

"No," came her voice, "I think I'd rather just wait up for you. I'll be so worried until you come."

"That's foolishness, Marcia," he said stiffly. "I'll send you up a couple of new novels. I sha'n't wake you when I come in." Quietly he hung up the receiver.

The hands of the clock in the main office were on the edge of seven when Barron rose from his desk, thrust the mass of papers into a drawer and locked it, and made for the door. Even as he hurried himself into the dinner clothes that he found waiting in a room at the club, his mind kept formulating swift, trenchant sentences, phrases that he would drive home when he found himself on his feet facing the tables.

HE knew, when he had finished, that he had given them something to think about. There had been a moment of

silence, and then a long, running storm of applause. Taking his coat from the hall attendant, Barron mechanically shook the hands that were held out to him and made his way to the curb and his car. A clean, strong record of progress behind, a steady, day-by-day drive that always went forward and upward—this was in Barron's thoughts as the streets commenced to roll away. For a moment he was fiercely proud.

"Nothing to hide," he said to the crisp, cool night. "Nothing to come up and catch me from behind. It's all there written for anyone to see."

Lights sprang at him suddenly from the lower floor windows of a familiar house. That would be like Marcia—still up, despite his counseling. He visioned the quick, gay smile that would glorify her face, the little fluttering rush to get into his arms and there enjoy triumph to its fullest. . . . . At this point he became aware that somewhere some one had screamed.

He was in front of his own home, brakes brutally jammed on. A taxicab, darting up from behind, flung out a passenger, and Barron saw that an automatic was held in a ready hand.

"On the job, Chief," said Galloway dryly. "You take the front; I'll take the back. We've got him, whoever it is in there."

Barron hardly heeded that his unexpected aide had gone running along the side of the house. He himself was at the door, wrestling with a key that stuck in the lock. With a smash of his shoulder he drove back the stubborn oak and plunged down the hall, coming out through hanging portières into the library. On the floor by the piano lay a huddled heap, one hand with rings on it outflung along the floor. Barron knew the hand and the rings.

He went to his knees and clutched her to him. "Marcia! Marcia! Good God, what has happened?"

Behind him a tall French window, its fastenings shattered, swung open into the night. He heard the footsteps of Galloway crashing along the gravel. But he had no eyes or ears for anything but the woman in his arms. She lay limp, her eyes closed, her mouth twitching.

"Marcia! Marcia! It's Kendall. Speak to me!"

Her eyelids fluttered, and the violet eyes looked up at him in awful fear. "That man," she moaned. "The terrible man! He was here—right in front of me."

Swiftly his glance searched the empty room. "He's gone," he said soothingly. "Through the window!"

"Kendall, Kendall, he didn't kill you? You didn't meet him?" For a moment her whole body stiffened and then went limp again. Her head fell back.

"Steady, Marcia," said Barron, watching the dreadful spread of pallor. "I'm quite safe. It's all perfectly all right."

ONCE more her eyes opened. "I was playing," she murmured vaguely, "that waltz you like. Then he came out of nowhere. His face was horrible—he stood and snarled. He said—he said: 'Where's Barron?' Looking at me like a wolf with fangs! 'I've come to pay a little debt he knows about.' He had murder written on him. Kendall! It was Benny the Mink!"

"Yes," said Barron, a sudden flame in his eyes. "I think it was."

"He'll kill you! It's all he thinks about! You're not safe—not safe—a minute. You'll never be safe again! I tried to get up and call for help. Then everything went dark—I could only see that horrible, twisted face. Kendall!"

Slowly her body slipped from his arms. She had sunk back, shuddering, into unconsciousness. Now and then a tiny moan escaped her. He bent over her, chafing her wrists, pouring water out of a vase, from which he flung the blooms, onto her forehead. Gradually he discovered that a voice was speaking above him.

"Not a sign of anybody outside, Chief. Must have jumped the wall just before I got around to the back. I've been over the grounds."

"Galloway," said Barron, without removing his eyes from that stricken white face, "down the street—four doors—Dr. Brunswick—quick! Then phone headquarters Benny the Mink is loose, and to damned well get him."

Crammed into trousers and shoes, with a coat flung over his pajamas, Dr. Brunswick came. He heard Barron's few jerked-out sentences while he worked.

"Shock and a blow," he said briefly. "Mrs. Barron struck her head against something—I think the corner of that piano seat—when she went down. We'll get her around, but it's too early to say much yet."

Barron bent down, putting the Doctor aside. "I'll take her," he said, and lifted his burden. "You get nurses—anything."

Marcia's lips moved as he placed her on the soft covering of her own bed, and he could just catch the words, torn from the depths of unconsciousness.

"Kendall! He'll kill you, he'll kill you!"

Quietly he put on all the lights about the room, drew the blinds and settled down by the bed holding one slim hand in his. His face was rigid.

IT was even more rigid, days later, when he sat in his office and received a visitor. The Mortimer case was a thing that was done. It had drifted into the past as one more clean-cut victory for the prosecutor's office. Two nurses moved now about the quiet house far uptown. A policeman also stood night and day on its sidewalk—that was Galloway's doing.

"There's no change for the better?" asked Barron quietly.

"None," returned the Doctor. He took off his glasses and polished them nervously, clearing his throat. Then with a sudden, unexpected gesture he put his hand on Barron's arm. "I've just come from the house. There's something I think you ought to know before you go back there this afternoon."

"I thought it would be like that," said Barron with complete calm. "Let me have it, please."

"We're approaching some kind of a crisis. I've done everything that medical science can do." A nod answered him. "You know what the case has been like—long periods of absolute syncope v. ied by an intense, racking fear when Mrs. Barron becomes conscious. The injury to her head, of course, has a great deal to do with it. But your wife is possessed of the idea that your life is not safe for a moment—that is the heart of the matter. If that fear is not removed—"

"I see," said Barron. He looked squarely at the Doctor, but when he spoke it was as though to himself. "I know my wife. This is the tenth day since that man got into the house. I don't suppose this can go on much longer without her giving way completely?"

"I'm afraid," said Dr. Brunswick slowly, "the man will have to be caught—soon. And even then—"

"I can finish that sentence for you. Benny the Mink got out once before. My wife does not believe he can be kept in again. Nothing can persuade her of that in her condition."

"Of course, I am always hoping. Often in these cases there is a sudden change."

"I am not expecting any," returned Barron. "The case, as we analyze it, has come down to this. If the police catch this Benny the Mink and he offers resistance so they can shoot him down, then my wife's fears will vanish. She will recover. As long as he remains alive, threatening my own life, she will grow worse. Presently there will be no hope for her. Is that right?"

"That is what I wanted you to know," was the answer. "Our hands are tied. You see?"

"And when do you expect the crisis?"

"It may came at any time. Tonight—tomorrow."

Barron's hand went out and touched the buzzer. "That is sooner than I thought. I suppose you will be going back to the house now? In the meantime—thank you for what you have just told me. It is only what I have suspected for several days."

The door closed behind his caller. "Galloway," said Barron in a hard, cold voice, "I want Flower Mary produced in this office inside the next half-hour, and no mistake about it."

HALF flung by Galloway's hand, the girl came in. She stood, a figure of derelict defiance, before his desk.

"You've got me?" she said in a husky voice. "You think you have?"

"Flower Mary," said Barron, "I want only one thing out of you. I'm passing up the police now. Where is Benny the Mink?"

"I'm damned if I know."

"That is a lie. You are the one person in this town who knows where he is. You've persuaded the police you don't, but you can't impress me. You are not going out of this office until I have the information I want."

Flower Mary smiled—a crooked, broken smile. "You aint going to get it. Go ahead with your third degree."

Barron's light eyes went stony. For the space of a full minute he studied her. This was not fear of him that lurked in her glance—it was desperation. Suddenly she lifted a face lined with torture.

"I've looked for him. God, I've looked for him! All over this town since he got out. He should have come back to me—I've got hold of some money. I'd have helped him make a get-away. It was all I

cared about. But I don't know where he is—nobody does. Do you think if I knew I'd ever let you jam it out of me?"

Truth threaded her accents. Flower Mary rushed on.

"I don't know where he is, I tell you! I'm raking this city from end to end for him. Why didn't he manage a line to me? Why doesn't he give me a chance to get to him? I'm going crazy, between him and you bulls!"

"Then it's so?" demanded Barron.

"Is what so?"

"About Swedish Anna?"

"That rat? Where does she come in?"

"The police," said Barron, watching her keenly, "have a report that the girl known in this town as Swedish Anna was waiting for Benny the Mink in the woods with a car the day he got away. She also cannot be located. Your friend seems to have other acquaintances than you."

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" Livid with fury, Flower Mary clutched at Barron's shoulders. "Tell me that's a lie! She's a dip, a pickpocket! She's got no looks. Benny'd never give her an eye twice. I'm his girl. He's never had another."

"That's all there is—the one unconfirmed report. But Swedish Anna can't be found. You can draw your own conclusions; personally, I don't take much stock in it. You might put your hands down and get yourself together. Now—tell me—where is Benny the Mink?"

"Damn you," she got out hoarsely, "I don't know."

His eyes bored deep into hers. With a little motion of weariness he turned away.

"You can leave, Flower Mary," he said. "I believe you. I am through with you."

"And that Swede—"

He put up his hand. "She is no concern of mine. If you want anything more on that, you'll have to dig it up for yourself. You don't know where Benny the Mink is, but"—she shrank back, fearful of the emotion that blazed for an instant in his face—"I am now going to make it my business to find out. Tonight!"

IT was a quarter to midnight when Dr. Brunswick came down the stairs and found Barron in the library, an unlighted cigar between his teeth.

"You might go up now," Dr. Brunswick told him. "She's calling for you again."

He hardly recognized the drawn, haggard face on the pillow. Already the nurse was there, slipping an arm under the weak shoulder while she held something to his wife's lips.

"It's me, Marcia. You've been sleeping a little, haven't you?"

"No," she murmured faintly, "I—I can't any more. Kendall, don't—don't go. Every time you leave, I can't help listening—for a shot."

Night after night—the same piteous plea, the same terrible flush that came and went. The hand that held his quivered without rest.

"They—haven't—caught—him?"

"Not yet," said Barron tensely, "but they will, Marcia."

"Oh, will it do any good? It wont—it wont, Kendall. He'll escape again—he'll kill you. I can't bear it. My head! I feel all gone! Kendall! Kendall! Kendall!"

Outside the door, he heard the nurse's voice, suddenly calling. Footsteps came rapidly up the stairs. The Doctor's voice spoke from behind him.

"It's what I was afraid of. You'd better leave the room. This is the crisis, Barron."

He stood confronting a closed white door behind which lay his wife. The minutes went by somehow—he could catch the low, serious tones of the Doctor giving orders to the nurse. Sharp, high moans drove into his brain like stabs.

IT was some time before he realized that the telephone was ringing incessantly. Mechanically he picked it up.

"Yes, this is Mr. Barron speaking. I cannot receive any calls now."

The voice was the voice of a stranger. It was harsh, jangled, strained with venom.

"Do you want to get Benny the Mink?" it asked.

"I do."

"Before morning?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Never you mind who I am," grated the hidden tones. "Maybe Benny the Mink bumped off a brother o' mine. You listen to this." Harshly the words ran on, sentence after sentence. Then finally: "He's there now, hiding up. You can land him—I wont."

"Where are you calling from?"

"Never mind that, either. I'm handing you the dope. That's all." On the wire fell complete silence.

"It's a trap," said Barron aloud. "But if it is or if it isn't, Benny the Mink is at

the other end of it. The police? Galloway? No, by God!"

He was in his own bedroom, wrenching at the lower drawer of a tall, carved desk. His hands came away holding in them a leather holster from which emerged the butt of an automatic. Through the adjoining door he could still hear those faint sounds of fear and pain.

Dr. Brunswick answered his low knock. "I'm leaving the house for an hour or so," he said softly. "I have just had a call on a big case."

The Doctor answered the question that looked out of his eyes, fixed on the frail figure in the bed beyond.

"She may rally. She may not. If you were a praying man—well it never does any harm to ask for a miracle."

"And that," said Barron in a clipped, steely voice, "I am just about to perform."

HIS car swept down the gravel drive and out onto the street. A long, straight race for almost a mile, and Barron turned the wheel sharply to the left at the top of a hill. Down there amid the shadows and black, broken outlines of buildings across the railroad tracks lay the core of the slums where Benny the Mink even at this moment crouched in his hiding-place. He turned down a cul-de-sac between two houses, and stilled his engine. From his side pocket he drew the automatic and shot a cartridge into the chamber.

Across the railroad tracks that glistened almost at his feet—along them for fifty yards. The second door in the corner building—four flights up—the room in front. Quietly Barron repeated the directions to himself. A jagged board fence ran beside the tracks and bending low in its cover he commenced to move swiftly. In another moment he was peering over its top at an oblong light that splashed a glow in the evil frontage of a tall brick house over the way. Clattering, roaring, rattling so loudly it seemed that every ramshackle building within a block must topple under the racket, a string of freight-cars passed; and when they had gone, the oblong of light was blackened by a form that Barron knew. Benny the Mink was looking out openly into the night. It was no trap.

Fence, tracks and a sinister, dark street lay behind him. Barron was inside the house, feeling his way up the black well of the stairs. The sounds of humanity sleeping uneasily in the dank miasma of the tenement struck on his ears as he went up, landing after landing. At the fourth he paused. A few feet away a dying gas-jet sputtered on the wall, a mere pencil of orange in the gloom. But under the door that he faced another streak of light showed, although not a sound came from the room within. Barron put his fingers to the knob, turned it swiftly and entered. The barrel of his automatic jutted out ahead of him.

"I've come to get you, Benny the Mink," he said. "Keep those hands of yours up."

ACROSS a littered table, yellow, broken teeth snarled at him. All the evil in that seamed, scarred face seemed to flow to the surface in one venomous look.

"Up, I said." Wavering shadows on the bleak, plastered wall behind showed arms upraised. The little eyes of Benny the Mink spat flame.

"You damned mouthpiece!" he grated. "Somebody squealed to you."

"They did. You shot one person's brother too many. Whose it was I neither know nor care. The point is—I've got you now."

"Yah! Put me away again—you and your bulls! I'll get out. I'll do you!"

"Benny the Mink!" Barron's tones rose, icy cold. "I haven't come to put you back in prison. I've come to put you in another place—a safer one. I'm not here to take you—but to shoot you."

He saw the twisted figure before him cringe. "You broke into my house to get me as you said you would. My wife tonight is dying from fear that you will do just that. It's your life against hers, Benny the Mink. It's her one chance. You've driven me to it."

"It's murder," broke from the cracking lips.

"By your own code! You shot McGovern because he tried to frame Flower Mary. In my own office she said to me: 'You're no man if you wouldn't kill for your girl.' I'm killing for mine—killing you."

"Flower Mary?" spat out Benny the Mink. "That's a scream, that is. I bumped McGovern for Swedish Anna that he got fresh with. I'm through with that Flower Mary. I guess she good and knows it." His eyes roved treacherously about the room. "You rotten lawyer, she's nothing but a—"

The words were checked abruptly. "That

will do," said Barron, menace in his voice. "She's tried to stick to you through hell. You've cast her off—let it go at that."

"It's murder," snarled Benny the Mink again.

"It is not murder. You have a gun on you. I shall take your gun from you and put it and mine in the middle of that table. We shall both reach for them at the same time. But I shall get you, and you will miss me. That is the chance I'm offering you. God knows I shouldn't give it to a thing like you. Stand back against that wall. I've not a moment to waste."

Benny the Mink looked up into eyes implacable with purpose.

"I've killed six men," he hissed. "You think I'm going to miss? You'll draw fair?"

BARRON shrugged contemptuously. Passing his hands about, he ripped a black-barreled pistol from Benny the Mink's hip-pocket and flung it to the top of the table. From far away, sounded the long drawn-out whistle of a train.

"Inside the next two minutes the express for the East will pass under these windows. We can fire a dozen shots, and they will never be heard in this house. The only law now is that of the man who draws the quickest."

For an instant the killer's madness flared in Benny the Mink's eyes.

"I said I'd get you, you damned mouthpiece. Now is when I do it. I pretty near got that wife of yours, didn't I? You'll be cold when Swedish Anna and I—"

The cringing air had dropped from him; the desperation of the cornered rat had taken its place. He was all animal fury.

"You're there. I'm here," said Barron curtly. "The guns are on the table. And here comes the train. In ten seconds more, I shall give the word."

But the word was never given. That single glance at the watch on his wrist had been the moment for which Benny the Mink had been waiting. In one lightning leap he was at the table, the butt of his pistol in one hand, the other lifting the table upward and flinging it in front of Barron as he in turn dived forward. To the sound of splintering wood he went down pinned beneath it. There was in his ears the clattering din of the train plunging through the night below, the deafening blast of its whistle. He looked up into a round muzzle—behind it, Benny the Mink's face, ghastly and demoniac in triumph. He was yelling, almost soundlessly in the turmoil: "I've got you, you—"

The flat, abrupt report of a pistol followed. It was all over. Barron could not understand why there was no sting of pain, no wrench of agony as life left his body. And then he saw that the barrel in Benny the Mink's hand was dropping, that Benny the Mink himself, with a blank, surprised expression, was sinking slowly to his knees. Little red bubbles came out on his lips. Dying away in the distance, the roar of the express had dwindled to a murmur. The drama of the littered room had been played.

"The dirty scum!" said the voice of Flower Mary. "I drilled him clean."

SHE stood in the doorway, her eyes ablaze. The pistol which she had just fired hung down in one hand. Her narrow bosom was heaving.

"I heard him—I heard him. Throw me over for that Swedish Anna rat, would he? You told me to dig it up. I did—I found her. Half an hour ago."

Slowly Barron got to his feet. "You were just in time," was all he said.

"There's your murder for you." Voice and look were hard as stone. "You've deviled me enough. Now you can send me to the chair."

She tossed her weapon to the floor. It fell with a thud beside a crumpled, quiet figure as Barron went over and closed the door, listening for an instant in the hall beyond. Nothing—not a sound beyond the mysterious creakings of an ancient house in the hours before the dawn.

"I've done him in," whispered Flower Mary. "I don't care what happens now. He tricked me down to the ground. Now he's got his."

Her hair, tumbled and straggling, fell about her shoulders in wisps. Strange shadows from the lamp flickered over her chalky face with the smouldering eyes. Flower Mary, it was all too apparent, was burned out, done with, through. She was incapable of further emotion.

She spoke again, tonelessly. "Call in your bulls and get it over with. I'll wait. So will Benny."

"You do not seem to realize," said Barron, picking his words with care, "that I came here myself to kill Benny the Mink. In a fair draw, yes—but to kill him just the same because he was draining the life out of my wife. You were right, Flower

Mary, when you threw words at me in my own office. I had a good deal to learn. I'll shoot—like any other man—for my own. I have hammered you and tortured you, but I think I understand you now."

"For God's sake," said Flower Mary hoarsely, "don't give us a speech. You've got a killing on me."

"In another fifteen minutes I can call my house and put my wife's fears forever out of her mind," Barron's voice went on, half thoughtfully. "I can do that only because you stepped in when Benny the Mink had me helpless in front of his pistol. If you had not shot when you did, my wife would not live the day out. Do you think I can forget that?"

"You're no friend of mine. I didn't shoot him for you. He could have croaked you, for all I care about it."

"You are going to get out of this town cleanly and safely, Flower Mary," said Barron.

SLOWLY the incredulity in her eyes died. "You mean—you're going to give me a get-away? You're double-crossing your own bulls?"

"I am," remarked Barron. "Just that thing. I left my prosecutorship and everything else back on the hill when I came down here tonight. Maybe I will pick it up when I return, maybe not. We'll make the State junction in an hour in my car. There's a train for the South stops there at dawn. I am putting you on it."

Her voice rose, quivering. "What's the use in it? I shot him. I shot Benny."

"You have your whole life in front of you, Flower Mary."

"And what's it worth?" For an instant, flame again raged in her bleak, tortured face. She ripped her words out. "This isn't any world for people like me. I guess I know that too damned well. You can send me away. You can give me all the money you want. I'll only spend it—then I'll be back where I am now. What have I got to start over again for? What have I got left?"

Once more her voice rose. "Benny missed you—I didn't miss him! What in hell do you make of that? Why did I do it? Why did I do it? You know people—tell me why I did it! Look at him on the floor! I put him there! Do you think anything matters to me?"

From the night outside came a small, shrill sound. With two quick steps Barron was at the window, drawing aside the blind for a fraction.

"It's Galloway," he shot back over his shoulder; "the man who tipped me off on the hide-away has passed it on to him too. He's down in front with four policemen, closing in on the house."

He came back to her, hurried but cool. "There's always a rear way out of these places. We can make the roof long before they reach this floor. We'll leave them to find Benny the Mink alone."

"No!" she cried. "Let them come. I love him. And I shot him." Flower Mary was kneeling now amid the stains of the floor, holding the head of Benny the Mink to her. A stiffening arm lay alongside his body, the hand still clutching the pistol that had gone down with him, undischarged. Her lips sought the seamed forehead. For the first time the sobs came, tearing her thin body.

"Get out. Don't you see—can't you understand? I want to be with him. They'll take him away in a minute. They'll never let me see him again. I shot him—now I want him while I can. You can't do anything for me. Go! *Go!*"

He had one glimpse of stricken, tear-wet features before he saw something else. The eyelids of Benny the Mink fluttered—the eyes were opening in just a faint flicker of red. Slowly, very slowly the hand that held the pistol was rising. Above the clatter of feet on the stairs he heard her cry:

"Benny, Benny, you're alive! Oh, thank God, thank God, I didn't kill you! I'll get you out of this! I'll make them take me with you!"

Even as Barron leaped forward, the pistol came to rest, pressing deep against the girl's side.

"Flower Mary! Look *out!*"

She turned up to him a face at perfect peace, all trace of pain and trouble smoothed away.

"I know. I can feel it. Good-by—you've been good to me. If he doesn't get me, he'll get you."

"Yah!" said Benny the Mink, and pulled the trigger. As her body came down on his, he quivered a little and went still. Benny the Mink was completely dead now. But he had not taken the last long trip by himself.

Barron lit a cigarette as Galloway and the police came crashing into the room.

Easy Come, Easy Go

A delightful story of a real Westerner is here set down in engaging fashion by the gifted author of "The Devil of the Picuris" and "Three Black Hills."

By EDWIN L. SABIN

TO the beef round-up camp, now in the last stages of the hectic trail, there arrived, seeking the 77 outfit as by tryst, a party of four in a buckboard—driving in at noon, across the brown parched plains, timely to the cook's shrill yelp, "Come an' get it!"

They were, to wit: a stout ruddy man, a younger man, and two dazzling girls of garb femininely adapted to the Wild West. The equipage pulled down; lengthy Tex, the 77 foreman, rose from his seat upon his hams, to meet it.

The four piled out, the girls gazing open-eyed.

That which they saw was a conclave of ten hungry, hardy, red-faced punchers, reeking of the sun and saddle, squatted in various postures around the cook's Dutch ovens and earnestly stowing away the midday chuck of coffee, beef, beans, stewed canned tomatoes, hot bread and sorghum.

That which the diners saw was two damsels fabulously appareled and glowing with innocent curiosity, the young sprig in dude rig of riding-breeches and natty flannel shirt and polished puttees, the elder man caparisoned to similar "sporting" effect and manifesting an important strut, aggravated, perhaps, by the bondage of the flesh.

It was one world imposed upon another.

Here, then, was the 77 owner, from the East, evidently to see how his—*his* cows and men were stacking up! Had brought his friends or family ("tourists," in any guise) to the show; and first they were watching the "animals" eat.

"Oh, how romantic!" breathed one of the damsels, lips parted.

"Oh, hell!" murmured man to man.

DIGNIFIED as "Mr. Matthews" by virtue of his office, Tex acted host. The party seated themselves. The somewhat flustered cook, Tex assisting with the utensils, proceeded to serve from his cow-camp menu.

The 77 stoically swigged and champed. At last—

"All right, boys." Tex had spoken from his feet. The horse-herd was in, confined by its rope corral. With creaking of joints the men rose from their post-

prandial cigarettes, to take down their ropes from their saddles and to stump on to snare their afternoon mounts.

NO joints protested more than those of Laramie,—"Laramie Red,"—who had been riding a hard-bitted horse all the morning and was due, he knew, to fork Old Thunder this afternoon.

The horses of one's string, however, should be ridden turn about. Consequently Laramie flicked his noose for Old Thunder; and at the clap of the hemp around his neck, Old Thunder followed the trend of the rope. A mild-in-appearance, fly-bitten roan, he, with a sleepy eye—but with Roman nose and aggressive chocky head wherein obstinacy had its dwelling-place.

With "Oh!'s" and "Ah!'s" and sundry "By George! See that!" the tourist squad had taken station to observe the very simple operations of tossing a noose over a horse's head, yanking him forth, and investing him with bridle, blanket and saddle, and man. Perhaps there was romance in this, too. Kin savvy? If so, it had been imported for the occasion.

"What a pretty horse!"

Laramie was conscious of blue eyes in a fair flushed face devouring his every motion—fascinated, maybe, by his flaming thatch, his largely freckled visage impervious to wind and weather, and his bowed legs set by thirty years of chasing cows.

But "Pretty hawss!" Old Thunder? Who'd ha' thought it?

"What's his name?"

"Satan, ma'am."

"Oh!"

Laramie grimly continued with his routine. Old Thunder submitted, as if contemplating that period of coltship when he indeed might have been "pretty." His retrospective mien portrayed docility.

"Here's a genuine cow-pony," pronounced the elderly man, who was doing the critical. "Hardy, obedient, faithful, the cowboy's most valued partner. The real cowboy never abuses his horse. Depends on him too much. That's why he changes mounts whenever he can. Well, people, you're seeing the actual thing—the Western cowboy at work, off the films. That's good. You know your business, my man."

Laramie did not deign answer to that exalted address "My man." He sensed the sly anticipation of his fellows as he gathered the lines, turned stirrup to his foot, and with hand to cheek strap and hand to mane vaulted aboard in single movement.

"Go!" somebody yapped.

Old Thunder exploded. Always did. But this present play caught Laramie in a frame of mind more savage than usual. Was he to be butchered for a tourist holiday? He gave the brute its head and raked with spurs relentless, to have the fit over with in short order. And ride he could, could Laramie Red, veteran of the range dating back to the long trails, to Abilene, Ogalalla and Miles City.

Cheers and cries attended upon him, inciting Old Thunder. His hat sailed free. After the preliminary cavorting, Thunder, true to his system, launched himself into furious straight-away out across the brush, with Laramie sitting heavily until the fit should expend.

And when he rocked in upon an Old Thunder, now satiated, to get his hat and to receive instructions for duty, he encountered a blast extraordinary.

THE elderly man, swelling like a turkey cock, advanced upon him.

"Is that your horse, sir?"

"No sir; I wouldn't claim any such animal," retorted Laramie, ruffled anew.

"Right. It happens to be my horse. You're fired."

Laramie gasped.

"What's that?"

"You're fired, my man."

"Me?"

"Yes. I'm owner of these cattle and these horses. I'm full owner of the Seventy-seven. Understand? I employ cowboys, not busters. I'll have nobody in my service who abuses animals. They tell me this horse is perfectly gentle when he's been handled properly. I can see that for myself. You're ruining him. No doubt you meant to show off a little, but that doesn't go with me. Give your time to the foreman, and he'll pay you to date. If you intend to be a cowboy, I hope this will be a lesson to you. Br-rumph! No words, now." The oracular dignitary had finished.

But Laramie could muster no words of utterance before ladies. There they were, those two, standing aloof and eying him with look that scorched. And—"If you intend to be a cowboy," the stout gent had said. "If you *intend* to be a *cowboy!*"

Suffering cats! He, Laramie Red, intend "to be" a cowboy! And—"They tell me this horse is perfectly gentle when he's been handled properly!" So he was. The deviltry having been ridden out of him, he'd be as meek as Moses; as witness now—a staid old fool!

Fired! That verbal mandate waited upon no further repetition. Laramie swung from the astonished Thunder and commenced rapidly to unsaddle. Tex, who had been busied elsewhere, came hurrying with gait interrogative.

"What's the matter, Laramie?"

"There's nothin' the matter with me. I'm turnin' in this hawss," growled Laramie, engaged.

"What's wrong with the hawss, then?"

"Nothin'. He's plump gentle—a purty little hawss. But I'm quittin'."

"You! No! Why's that?"

"Been fired, aint I? No man need tell me that more'n once."

"Who told you?"

"Yore big boss over yonder." Laramie indicated with jerk of red head.

"What for?"

LARAMIE smiled sourly through the perspiration of his rugged countenance. By that twist of the lips he revealed the injury done to his very soul.

" 'Cause I abuse his pet stock. Got to learn how to handle hawsses, yet."

"Hold on! You say he fired you?"

"He shorely did. I'm quittin'. Here's his hawss. You got my time?"

"No!" Tex implored. "Wait! Why, doggone his skin—" He wheeled about, but the "big boss" was valiantly coming as if to impress the stamp of authority. And the lingering riders grinned.

"This man says you've discharged him, Mr. Bunyan," Tex accused.

"So I have. On the spot, too. Look at that horse. The man's a brute."

"Easy, now, Mister," Laramie warned, a glint in his hazel eyes.

"Shore, I see the hawss. There's nothing wrong with the hawss," Tex would placate, somewhat bewildered. "And I'll say the man you're speaking of is a top hand—there's not a better man in the outfit. You can't fire *him.*"

"Can't I?" The owner of the 77 repeated. "Look at that horse. In a lather already! See how he's marked up. The man's a—hum!—he's too rough. I'll not have my horses foundered, or their tempers ruined. Let the man learn to handle horses; then if he wishes to come back, I'll consider him. How much do we owe him?"

"But great Scott, Mr. Bunyan!" Tex writhed with honest anguish. "The hawss aint hurt. His hair's scurcely mussed. You can't set a man afoot for that! A hawss has got to be *ridden,* else he aint any good in the herd. I wouldn't waste time with a plumb mean hawss—haven't much use for a buster, anyhow. And if I caught a man mistreating an animal regardless, I'd be the fust to fire him. Old Thunder aint been mistreated. He's just nacherly a trifle gay when he's fust forked. He does it a-purpose; he *expects* to be tapered off like Laramie tapered him—wants somebody to come right back at him, and then he's peaceful. That hawss is ready to go all the rest the day. He's only one o' them kind that's got to be uncorked. Why, Laramie wouldn't choose to hurt a hawss or ary other animal. But on the range a man has to ride and to rope and to brand; that's what you pay him for, aint it? Laramie's a cow-man—been at it twenty-five or thirty year. He knows the value of hawsses and cows as well as I do. You can't fire him for nothing."

Mr. Bunyan pursed his lips and gave judicial answer.

"I still think he should be discharged. But perhaps he was only showing off before the ladies. He's a ladies' man! Anyway, he'd better stay until you've shipped the cattle."

"I had, had I?" Laramie snorted. "Thanks. Wouldn't care for some. I'll leave my saddle in the wagon, Matthews, and hoof to town. I'll go to cookin' before I'll ever lay hand on another Seventy-seven hawss."

"No, Laramie!" Tex pleaded. "Stay and we'll talk this over. I need you. You *got* to stay."

"I'm full up on talk, and I'm full up on punchin', too," replied Laramie. "For the information of this loco, I'll say I was goin' to quit anyhow. Decided that yesterday. He's late. But I'll finish out on yore account, Tex; then I'm done."

"Oho!" chuckled the aggravating Bunyan, out of wisdom excessive. "Pay-day; then wine, woman and song, eh?"

" 'Cordin' to yore tell," growled Laramie. He resaddled Old Thunder, brusquely mounted, and without instructions rode off on duty self-assigned.

THE virtuous Mr. Bunyan returned to his party.

"Did you discharge him, uncle?" one of the girls asked breathlessly. "Wouldn't he go?"

"He'll stay till after the round-up. Was rather saucy about it. Said he was going to quit anyhow. The sooner he quits, the better."

"Independent, aye?" the younger man queried.

"Oh, it's easy come, easy go, with these cowboys. He's probably saved his wages. No way to spend 'em, you see. So at first opportunity he'll lay off and blow 'em all in. That's it. Then he'll be hunting another job. The same old story. I don't worry."

Laramie rode on, for a distance, alone. Thud of hoofs sounded. Happy Jack drew in to pace him and be his partner for the afternoon's last circle.

"Say, Laramie, you aren't goin' to quit, are you?" Happy blurted. "Sure not. Everybody knows you're all right."

"You bet I quit."

"But you aint fired. Tex does the firing in this outfit, and you can stay till your feet drop off."

"Then I fire myself. 'Brute' and 'ladies' man,' am I? I know when I got enough, and I'm plump sick o' ridin'. There's no thanks to it. There's nothin' to show but saddle-corns and rheumatics and a bad reputation. What's a puncher, outside o' story papers? Yep, I've made up my mind. I'll quit at the shippin'-pens, when I aint needed. I aim to sell my saddle and straighten out my legs, and never ride no more. Mebbe I can live on my income," he dourly added.

"Aw, Laramie!"

"I've said it. If you're goin' to talk, you can talk about the weather."

THIS evening the 77 camped by themselves, for the outland guests had left. After supper Laramie waddled over to sit beside Tex and put an important question.

"How much'll I have comin' to me, Tex, when you pay off?"

"Where?"

"At the shippin'-pens. We draw our money when we strike town at the end of the drive, don't we?"

"Shorely. You needn't worry about that. You'll get your share, unless you want me to hold back."

"Nope; no holding back this time," said Laramie. "How much'll it be, Tex? You can figger, can't you? I aint kept track."

"What do you want to know for?" Tex demanded. "Can't you wait? There's no way to spend it here. You'll spend it fast enough when you do get it. Why don't you let it grow?"

"Well," said Laramie, "I'm curious. It's mine, aint it? Then I get it, don't I? How much?"

"But what'll you do with it? Throw it away?" Tex reproved. "Five dollars will give you a good time in that shipping burg; the rest wont harm you if I keep it for you."

"I don't stop in that burg," announced Laramie. "I told you I'm quittin'. I'll need all my money."

Tex deplored:

"Oh, pshaw, Laramie! I was hoping you'd got that out of your system. The old man's gone. 'Twasn't only a flash in the pan. I mean for you to stay on. Blamed if I'll let you leave the Seventy-seven."

"Can't help yoreself, Tex," said Laramie. "I been thinkin' of quittin', two-three weeks now, and I do quit, soon as we reach the pens. You'll have men enough there."

"Going to join another outfit?"

"Nope. When I quit, I quit ridin', and I pull out."

"Why—what do you aim to do? You're talking foolish!" Tex censured.

"Me?" said Laramie. "Well, I reckon I'll go to little old K. C. I aint been in a city since—gosh, I don't know when, Tex. It's time I was learnin' something."

"You might have gone," Tex snapped. "You've been started—I've started you, myself; but 'fore you got to the train, where were you? Plumb flat. But all right: I'll send you in with the stock. Give you another chance."

"No, sir!" said Laramie. "I don't go as any stock-tender, Tex. I go civilized. I know I've fell by the way, on several occasions, Tex, but this time will be different. There don't nary man call me a brute ag'in. I quit the range, and I live white. When I get to Kansas City, I'm goin' to the swellest café in that town, and I order me the best feed on the hull mee-noo, regardless. I been livin' so long on beef, I moo whenever I see a calf. I reckon I'll put up at the best *ho*-tel, and I'll take in the best thee-ater, and I'll buy some store clothes. Wow! Hey?" And Laramie fairly licked his chops.

"Shorely," agreed Tex in tone caustic. "I see yuh. Easy come, easy go. You fellows are alluz fools with your money. All right; what'll you do then?"

"Well," said Laramie, "lackin' better while I was lookin' round, I suppose I might get a job at the stockyards. I know cattle. But that wont be ridin'. It'll be loafin'. Now," he concluded, "you understand why I figger ahead on what's comin' to me. How much?"

"Very good," Tex rapped. "Seeing you're bound to know, I'll give it to you straight. Close as I can calkilate, Laramie, at the pens you'll have exactly thirty-three dollars and fifty cents due you. Want cash or a gold bond?"

"What you sayin', Tex?" Laramie gasped. "I got more than that!"

"No, you haven't. You remember, Laramie, that last time you turned loose, after the calf round-up, you lost all your money, and your saddle, and bridle, and boots, and your four-gallon Texas hat, in a tin-horn poker-game. So I had to stake you to a new outfit. Those things cost. And you've been drawing a dollar or two, now and again, since. I can show you in black and white."

"You needn't, Tex. Yore word's good." But thirty-three dollars and fifty cents, after thirty years of dogging cows from the border to Montana! Shucks!

Laramie rallied. He had faced worse crises.

"I'll take it, anyhow," he said cheerfully. "I aint clean busted."

"No," said Tex. And he added with significant disapproval: "Not yet! But if you come back with your fifty cents, you'll be doing well."

SO Laramie Red was quitting! Considerable more remained to be said upon the subject, chiefly among his mates. And the chantey welled with drawl of chorus his-way directed:

After the round-up's over,
  After the shipping's done,
I'm going ho-ome, boys,
  Never more to roam.

Capped by the remindful—

Gimme a platter o' Lillian Russell,*
Gimme a look at a skirt and a bustle,
Then take my money and watch me hustle
  Back to the sage and sun!

*Peaches and cream, of course!

"Laramie wont get past the first stop with a 'Last Chance' sign over a door," they laughed. "What'll you bet, Laramie?"

"I know that's regulation with you-all," Laramie answered soberly. "Nope, I don't bet. Can't afford to, after only thirty year workin' for grub. But you needn't lay any plate for me. When I ride, I ride in the cars. And while you or'nary brute punchers are still ruinin' hawsses, I'll be eatin' off French mee-noos and sleepin' in a real bed. Anybody who thinks I don't mean it had better make me an offer on my saddle. I've fired myself, and I'm *done*."

TRUE to his promise, several days later Laramie found himself at the railway station of the shipping town—a wayside town bared upon the bare plains, drenched with sun and dust—a spasmodic little town livened at intervals, as now, by the beef herds bawling in the pens and shutes, and by the brown, rollicking riders turned loose from the durance of the trail for their brief fling.

Easy come, easy go, this, where (in the language of the country) "the coyote howls and the poker-chips rattle and money rolls up-hill!" Wow! A rebound to riotous living, even to the extent of canned peaches and canned cream; then—"back to the sage and sun." Therefore, the session being limited and sentiment for a "plumb idjit" scant, Laramie, having rigorously declined invitations to a farewell that might have cut his travels short again, was alone at the station. Behind him the revels beckoned. He licked his lips thirstily.

He had shed his chaps; he had consigned his saddle and bridle and bed-roll also to Tex, for disposal. Somebody would buy them—and pay out of future earnings. But he was free, and he had his ticket, and money besides—hard money for that feed, and a thee-ater, and a "top" bed with sheets and pillers; reckoned he'd have to get a nightshirt!

The long train thundered in. And he (a figure *sui generis*, in his high-heeled boots and his big hat and his stained checkered blouse and his dusty trousers shaped to irrevocably bowed legs) was stumping down the line, when he brought up against another figure, just mounting the steps of a Pullman.

This was his critic, name of Bunyan.

"Hello, my man." Mr. Bunyan paused. "Stock-tender, eh? Did you decide to stay on for another try?"

"No sir," said Laramie, holding himself in stern check. "It happens yore stock-tenders don't travel on passenger cars. They travel caboose, if they're lucky. Besides, yore cows are old enough to travel alone, and so am I. I've quit; I've drawed my pay and I'm headin' for Kansas City, never more to roam."

Mr. Bunyan smiled with smile exasperating.

"You are, are you? Hunting a job there?"

"I suppose I'll have to earn my keep, after I've been fed up and to a thee-ater. Reckon I'll enjoy life a little, fust."

Mr. Bunyan laughed.

"That's it! Easy come, easy go! Can't spend your money fast enough in this town, eh? Those other boys don't seem to have any difficulty, judging by what I've seen and heard. You men are all of the same stamp. You lack good sense. What you earn in one month, you guzzle and gamble away in half an hour. I suppose that's being a cowboy!"

Laramie recognized that in this ironical diatribe there might be a grain of truth.

"As for 'easy come,' I dunno," said he, out of memories of the thirty years' wind and weather, round-up and trail. "But I've ree-formed. If I hadn't, I'd take no such talk from *you*."

With that, for fear he might tarnish his new shield at once, he waddled on, red and resolute.

HE discovered a seat in the chair-car; and having sat right there and slept right there so as to hold it and himself down, he arrived in the morning at Kansas City. He stumbled out upon the platform of this union station that clanged and buzzed, pent with energy.

Now the vague city, meshing him about, lured his farther incursion. Somewhere there was the swell café, and the pulsing life, and the thee-ater, and the bed with sheets, and the nightshirt and the store clothes. And somewhere, he fully comprehended, there were seductive bars, welcoming such as he—a man off the range, with his pockets lined.

People casually viewed him as he stood. They could not mistake him: the typical cow-man, veteran showing in every wrinkle of face and garb: a red-headed, sorrel-visaged, puzzled migrant from the land of chaps and saddle.

As he stood blinking, those "brute" instincts surged within him again. Powerful thirsty he was—it had been a long time. Hungry, too! His money burned in his jeans. It clamored for air and action. His feet twitched.

"Gee gosh!" quoth Laramie, scratching his thatch. "I got to do something. Mebbe I'd better eat a snack just to ca'm me down. 'Twont make no difference when I find the genuyine lay-out. It'll give me strength to look careful, for the best'll be none too good for me."

He wandered amid reverberant gates and corridors, and boiling crowds, and his nose and ears led him to the dining counter—to the warm aroma of food and the clatter of laden dishes. He sat upon a stool, awkwardly forking it with his crooked legs and his tipsy boots, and he shoved his hat back and squared before the menu. Over this he pondered, running it through with gnarled forefinger.

THE titles mocked him. He seemed likely to starve in the midst of a strange plenty.

"What'll it be?" the waitress chided.

"Oh, shucks!" Laramie murmured. "I'm an orphan on this range, miss," he apologized. In his desperation he could think of but one sure bet. "Fetch me a platter o' beef," blurted Laramie.

"Steak or roast?"

"Make her steak," bade Laramie, still playing safe.

"That," informed the waitress, "will take about fifteen minutes. It has to be cooked to order."

"All right," said Laramie. "I reckon I can stick it out. You tell the cook he can be cookin' me a can o' coffee, at same time."

He sapiently left his hat upon the stool, as sign, and wandered again, for that poignant urge of unlawful thirst nagged him. Presently the wail of a child penetrated through the echoes of the waiting-rooms; and like a knight errant seeking the source of distress he was tolled on until, quite ignorantly, he had invaded the women's section. Always was soft toward kids, anyhow.

This was an unhappy, protesting kid, asylumed in the lap of a plump young woman who, brightly if (to eyes other than Laramie's) somewhat extravagantly appareled, in vain hushed it and rocked it. Gazing down, these he saw; and the woman, gazing up, saw him—a rough red-

head, breaking his seamed countenance into a quizzical smile.

"That yore kid, ma'am?" asked Laramie.

She answered, rather frightened, and clasping the child more closely:

"My sister's. Not mine—no!"

A comely young woman, she, with round cheeks and sloe-black appealing eyes. Laramie's heart fluttered responsively.

"What's the matter of him? Sick?"

"Hungry, I guess."

"Why don't you feed him?"

"No mooney. Lost my mooney." The plaintive foreign intonation was delicious. Laramie seized upon her helplessness.

"Hey? Where you goin'?"

"Denver. Don't know now."

"Yore man out there?"

"Got no man. My sister's man send me mooney to bring baby. Now I lost my mooney. I teenk baby hungry. No breakfast."

"Gee!" Laramie commiserated. "How long you been here?"

"Five hour. I not know what to do." Her wondrous eyes swam.

"Gosh!" quoth Laramie. "I'm yore man. You throw in with me. Gimme the kid. I've wrestled calves."

He took the child; he brazenly dragged her up; and to her alarmed expostulations forced her on—

Mr. Bunyan, picking his teeth, crossed the trail.

"Oho, my man! Already at 'work,' are you? Didn't look far, eh? Tut, tut! You can do better than that!"

"You—get—out o' my way!" Laramie growled, suffused with wrath at the indictment from this satisfied, plethoric slanderer who alleged to have caught him at something or other, to no credit.

LARAMIE proceeded. He swept his hat from the stool.

"Set there, now." The waitress was just bearing in the platter. "I got the chuck done already ordered. Here she comes. And say!" Laramie burst out. "If 'taint enough, you order more. Then you buy some sort o' ticket. I haint but twenty-five dollars, odd; here 'tis." He had fumbled in his hip pocket, and he plumped his buckskin sack into her unwilling lap.

"No, no!" protested the young woman in perplexity.

"Yes, yes," rebuked Laramie. "Shucks! There's plenty more where that come from. Fust you see it, and then you don't."

He beat retreat, lest the incident be noticed. Now he was vastly relieved. Had had his fill of city life, anyhow. He strolled the length of the counter and paused to point.

"How much are them sinkers?" he demanded.

"Doughnuts? Two for a nickel."

"Gimme a dozen and keep the change," directed Laramie. And he parted with his remaining fifty cents.

Toting away the sack, at last he felt like himself—busted. He swaggered through the station outskirts and into the yards; and at a string of empty stock-cars finally found a brakeman whom he knew.

THE 77 was at the tail-end of loading when he appeared, tousled and red-eyed from journey by freight, at the camp near town—he having hopped off, convenient.

"It's Laramie! Whoopee! Thought you were in Kansas City."

"So I was," said Laramie; and he took mental note of the ravages of time in that period of his absence. All the outfit had not come to yet. "Howdy, Tex? Need a hand?"

Tex faced him.

"By jiminy! Out by passenger, back by freight! Or did you *walk!* Busted, I'll bet."

"You win," granted Laramie.

"What was it this time special? Liquor, cards or women?"

"Well, this time it was women," Laramie confessed, shamed.

"I knowed it!" Tex vowed disgustedly. "I wont ask you where you've been or what you've done. No use. Shore, you've a job. Your stuff is just as you left it. Oh, heck!" groaned Tex, lapsing into the lingo. "You fellers never l'arn nothin'. Easy come, easy go. You ought to wear that for your brand."

"Yep," said Laramie, humble and crimson. "I never did have no sense. I'm a shore brute. What hawss do I ride ag'in, fust?"

"Wild Horse Mate," another fine story of the real West by a man who knows it well, will be Edwin Sabin's contribution to our next issue.

The Hunter's Lodge Case

The famous "little gray cells" of the great detective Poirot function admirably in solving what at first seems a particularly puzzling murder mystery

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

"AFTER all," murmured Poirot, "it is possible that I shall not die this time."

Coming from a convalescent influenza patient, I hailed the remark as showing a beneficial optimism. I myself had been the first sufferer from the disease. Poirot in his turn had gone down. He was now sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows.

"Yes, yes," my little friend continued. "Once more shall I be myself again, the great Hercule Poirot, the terror of evil-doers! Figure to yourself, *mon ami,* that I have a little paragraph to myself in *Society Gossip.* But yes! Here it is! " 'Go it, criminals—all out! Hercule Poirot,—and believe me, girls, he's some Hercules!—our own pet society detective can't get a grip on you. 'Cause why? 'Cause he's got *la grippe* himself!' "

I laughed.

"Good for you, Poirot. You are becoming quite a public character. And fortunately you haven't missed anything of particular interest during this time."

"That is true. The few cases I have had to decline did not fill me with any regret."

Our landlady stuck her head in at the door.

"There's a gentleman downstairs. Says he must see M. Poirot or you, Captain. Seeing as he was in a great to-do,—and with all that quite the gentleman,—I brought up 'is card."

She handed me the bit of pasteboard. " 'Hon. Roger Havering,' " I read.

Poirot motioned with his head toward the bookcase, and I obediently pulled forth the "Who's Who." Poirot took it from me and scanned the pages rapidly.

"Second son of fifth Baron Windsor. Married 1913 Zoe, fourth daughter of William Crabb."

"H'm," I said. "I rather fancy that's the girl who used to act at the Frivolity—only she called herself Zoe Carrisbrook. I remember she married some young man about town just before the war."

"Would it interest you, Hastings, to go down and hear what our visitor's particular trouble is? Make him all my excuses."

Roger Havering was a man of about forty, well set up and of smart appearance.

His face, however, was haggard, and he was evidently laboring under great agitation.

"Captain Hastings? You are M. Poirot's partner, I understand. It is imperative that he should come with me to Derbyshire today."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," I replied. "Poirot is ill in bed—influenza."

His face fell.

"Dear me, that is a great blow to me."

"The matter on which you want to consult him is serious?"

"My God, yes! My uncle, the best friend I have in the world, was foully murdered last night."

"Here in London?"

"No, in Derbyshire. I was in town and received a telegram from my wife this morning. Immediately upon its receipt I determined to come round and beg M. Poirot to undertake the case."

"If you will excuse me a minute," I said, struck by a sudden idea.

I rushed upstairs, and in few brief words acquainted Poirot with the situation. He took any further words out of my mouth.

"I see—I see. You want to go yourself, is it not so? Well, why not? You should know my methods by now. All I ask is that you should report to me fully every day, and follow implicitly any instructions I may wire you."

TO this I willingly agreed, and an hour later I was sitting opposite Mr. Havering in a first-class carriage on the Midland Railway, speeding rapidly away from London.

"To begin with, Captain Hastings, you must understand that Hunter's Lodge, where we are going, and where the tragedy took place, is only a small shooting-box in the heart of the Derbyshire moors. Our real home is near Newmarket, and we usually rent a flat in town for the season. Hunter's Lodge is looked after by a housekeeper who is quite capable of doing all we need when we run down for an occasional week-end. Of course, during the shooting season, we take down some of our own servants from Newmarket.

"My uncle, Mr. Harrington Pace (as you may know, my mother was a Miss Pace of New York), has for the last three years made his home with us. He never got on well with my father, or my elder brother, and I suspect that my being somewhat of a prodigal son myself rather increased than diminished his affection toward me. Of course, I am a poor man, and my uncle was a rich one—in other words, he paid the piper! But though exacting in many ways, he was not really hard to get on with, and we all three lived very harmoniously together.

"Two days ago my uncle, rather wearied with some recent gayeties of ours in town, suggested that we should run down to Derbyshire for a day or two. My wife telegraphed to Mrs. Middleton, the housekeeper, and we went down that same afternoon. Yesterday evening I was forced to return to town, but my wife and my uncle remained on. This morning I received this telegram."

He handed it over to me, and I read:

> Come at once. Uncle Harrington murdered last night. Bring good detective if you can, but do come.
>
> ZOE.

"Then as yet you know no details?"

"No, I suppose it will be in the evening papers. Without doubt the police are in charge."

IT was about three o'clock when we arrived at the little station of Elmer's Dale. From there a five-mile drive brought us to a small gray stone building in the midst of the rugged moors.

"A lonely place," I observed.

Havering nodded.

"I shall try and get rid of it. I could never live here again."

We unlatched the gate and were walking up the narrow path to the oak door when a familiar figure emerged and came to meet us.

"Japp!" I ejaculated.

The Scotland Yard Inspector grinned at me in a friendly fashion before addressing my companion.

"Mr. Havering, I think? I've been sent down from London to take charge of this case, and I'd like a word with you, if I may, sir."

"My wife—"

"I've seen your good lady, sir—and the housekeeper. I wont keep you a moment, but I'm anxious to get back to the village now that I've seen all there is to see here."

"I know nothing as yet as to what—"

"Ex-actly," said Japp soothingly. "But there are just one or two little points I'd like your opinion about all the same. Captain Hastings, here, he knows me, and he'll go on up to the house and tell them you're coming."

I went on to the house. I rang the bell, as Japp had closed the door behind him. After some moments it was opened to me by a middle-aged woman in black.

"Mr. Havering will be here in a moment," I explained. He has been detained by the Inspector. I have come down with him from London to look into the case. Perhaps you can tell me briefly what occurred last night?"

"Come inside, sir." She closed the door behind me, and we stood in the dimly lighted hall. "It was after dinner last night, sir, that the man came. He asked to see Mr. Pace, sir, and seeing that he spoke the same way, I thought it was an American gentleman friend of Mr. Pace's, and I showed him into the gun-room, and then went to tell Mr. Pace. He wouldn't give no name, which of course was a bit odd, now I come to think of it.

"I told Mr. Pace, and he seemed puzzled, like, but he said to the mistress: 'Excuse me, Zoe, while I just see what this fellow wants.' He went off to the gun-room, and I went back to the kitchen, but after a while I heard loud voices, as if they were quarreling, and I came out into the hall. At the same time, the mistress she comes out too, and just then there was a shot and then a dreadful silence. We both ran to the gun-room door, but it was locked, and we had to go round to the window. It was open, and there inside was Mr. Pace, all shot and bleeding."

"What became of the man?"

"He must have got away through the window, sir, before we got to it."

"And then?"

"Mrs. Havering sent me to fetch the police. Five miles to walk, it was. They came back with me; and the constable, he stayed all night; and this morning the police gentleman from London arrived."

"What was this man like who called to see Mr. Pace."

The housekeeper reflected.

"He had a black beard, sir, and was about middle-aged, and had on a light overcoat. Beyond the fact that he spoke like an American, I didn't notice much about him."

"I see. Now, I wonder if I can see Mrs. Havering?"

"She's upstairs, sir. Shall I tell her?"

"If you please. Tell her that Mr. Havering is outside with Inspector Japp, and that the gentleman he has brought back with him from London is anxious to speak to her as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir."

I WAS in a fever of impatience to get at all the facts. Japp had two or three hours start of me, and his anxiety to be gone made me keen to be close at his heels.

Mrs. Havering did not keep me waiting long. In a few minutes I heard a light step descending the stairs, and looked up to see a very handsome young woman coming toward me. She wore a flame-colored jumper, that set off the slender boyishness of her figure. On her dark head was a little hat of flame-colored leather. Even the present tragedy could not dim the vitality of her personality.

I introduced myself, and she nodded in quick comprehension.

"Of course I have often heard of you and your colleague, M. Poirot. You have done some wonderful things together, haven't you? It was very clever of my husband to get you so promptly. Now, will you ask me questions? That is the easiest way, isn't it, of getting to know all you want to about this dreadful affair?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Havering. Now, what time was it that this man arrived?"

"It must have been just before nine o'clock. We had finished dinner, and were sitting over our coffee and cigarettes."

"Your husband had already left for London?"

"Yes, he went up by the six-fifteen."

"Did he go by car to the station, or did he walk?"

"Our own car isn't down here. One came out from the garage in Elmer's Dale to fetch him in time for the train."

"Was Mr. Pace quite his usual self?"

"Absolutely—most normal in every way."

"Now, can you describe this visitor at all?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't see him. Mrs. Middleton showed him straight into the gun-room and then came to tell my uncle."

"What did your uncle say?"

"He seemed rather annoyed, but went off at once. It was about five minutes later that I heard the sound of raised voices. I ran out into the hall, and almost collided with Mrs. Middleton. Then we heard the shot. The gun-room door was locked on the inside, and we had to go round the house to the window. Of course that took some time, and the murderer had been able

to get well away. My poor uncle"—her voice faltered—"had been shot through the head. I saw at once that he was dead, and I sent Mrs. Middleton for the police straight away. I was careful to touch nothing in the room but to leave it exactly as I found it."

I NODDED approval.

"Now, as to the weapon?"

"Well, I can make a guess at it, Captain Hastings. A pair of revolvers of my husband's were mounted upon the wall. One of them is missing. I pointed this out to the police, and they took the other one away with them. When they have extracted the bullet, I suppose they will know for certain."

"May I go to the gun-room?"

"Certainly. The police have finished with it. But the body has been removed."

She accompanied me to the scene of the crime. At that moment Havering entered the hall, and with a quick apology, his wife ran to him. I was left to undertake my investigations alone.

I may as well confess at once that they were rather disappointing. In detective-novels, clues abound, but here I could find nothing that struck me as out of the ordinary except a large bloodstain on the carpet where I judged the dead man had fallen. I examined everything with painstaking care and took a couple of pictures of the room with my little camera, which I had brought with me. I also examined the ground outside the window, but it appeared to have been so heavily trampled that I judged it was useless to waste time over it. Now I had seen all that Hunter's Lodge had to show me. I must go back to Elmer's Dale and get into touch with Japp. Accordingly I took leave of the Haverings, and was driven off in the car that had brought us up from the station.

JAPP I found at the Matlock Arms, and he took me forthwith to see the body. Harrington Pace was a small, spare, clean-shaven man, typically American in appearance. He had been shot through the back of the head, and the revolver had been discharged at close quarters.

"Turned away for a moment," remarked Japp, "and the other fellow snatched up a revolver and shot him. The one Mrs. Havering handed over to us was fully loaded, and I suppose the other one was also. Curious what darn fool things people do. Fancy keeping two loaded revolvers hanging up on your wall!"

"What do you think of the case?" I asked as we left the gruesome chamber behind us.

"Well, I'd got my eye on Havering to begin with. . . . . Oh, yes,"—noting my exclamation of astonishment,—"Havering has one or two shady incidents in his past. When he was a boy at Oxford, there was some funny business about the signature on one of his father's checks. All hushed up, of course. Then he's pretty heavily in debt now, and they're the kind of debts he wouldn't like to go to his uncle about; whereas you may be sure the uncle's will would be in his favor. Yes, I'd got my eye on him, and that's why I wanted to speak to him before he saw his wife; but their statements dovetail all right, and I've been to the station, and there's no doubt whatever that he left by the six-fifteen. That gets up to London about ten-thirty. He went straight to his club, he says, and if that's confirmed all right—why, he couldn't have been shooting his uncle here at nine o'clock in a black beard!"

"Ah, yes—I was going to ask you what you thought about that beard?"

Japp winked.

"I think it grew pretty fast—grew in the five miles from Elmer's Dale to Hunter's Lodge. Americans that I've met are mostly clean shaven. I questioned the housekeeper first, and then her mistress, and their stories agree all right; but I'm sorry Mrs. Havering didn't get a look at the fellow. She's a smart woman, and she might have noticed something that would set us on the track."

I SAT down and wrote a minute and lengthy account to Poirot. I was able to add various further items of information before I posted the letter.

The bullet had been extracted and was proved to have been fired from a revolver identical in size to the one held by the police. Furthermore, Mr. Havering's movements on the night in question had been checked and verified, and it was proved beyond doubt that he had actually arrived in London by the train in question. And thirdly, a sensational development had occurred. A city gentleman, living at Ealing, on crossing Haven Green to get to the District Railway station that morning, had observed a brown paper parcel stuck between the railings. Opening it, he found

that it contained a revolver. He handed the parcel over to the local police station, and before night it was proved to be the one we were in search of, the fellow to that given us by Mrs. Havering. One bullet had been fired from it.

All this I added to my report. A wire from Poirot arrived while I was at breakfast the following morning:

> Of course black-bearded man was not Havering. Only you or Japp would have such an idea. Wire me description of housekeeper and what clothes she wore this morning. Same of Mrs. Havering. Do not waste time taking photographs of interiors. They are underexposed and not in the least artistic.

It seemed to me that Poirot's style was unnecessarily facetious. I also fancied he was a shade jealous of my position on the spot, with full facilities for handling the case. His request for a description of the clothes worn by the two women appeared to me to be simply ridiculous, but I complied as well as I, a mere man, was able to.

At eleven a reply wire came from Poirot:

> Advise Japp arrest housekeeper before it is too late.

Dumfounded, I took the wire to Japp. He swore softly under his breath.

"He's the goods, M. Poirot! If he says so, there's something in it. And I hardly noticed the woman! I don't know that I can go so far as arresting her, but I'll have her watched. We'll go up right away and take another look at her."

But it was too late. Mrs. Middleton, that quiet, middle-aged woman, who had appeared so normal and respectable, had vanished into thin air. Her box had been left behind. It contained only ordinary wearing apparel. There was no clue in it to her identity, or as to her whereabouts.

FROM Mrs. Havering we elicited all the facts we could.

"I engaged her about three weeks ago, when Mrs. Emery, our former housekeeper, left. She came to me from Mrs. Selbourne's Agency in Mount St.—a very well-known place. I get all my servants from there. They sent several women to see me, but this Mrs. Middleton seemed much the nicest, and had splendid references. I engaged her on the spot, and notified the Agency of the fact. I can't believe that there was anything wrong with her. She was such a nice, quiet woman."

The thing was certainly a mystery. While it was clear that the woman herself could not have committed the crime, since at the moment the shot was fired Mrs. Havering was with her in the hall, nevertheless she must have some connection with the murder, or why should she suddenly take to her heels and bolt?

I wired the latest development to Poirot, and suggested returning to London and making inquiries at Selbourne's Agency.

Poirot's reply was prompt:

> Useless to inquire at Agency. They will never have heard of her. Find out what vehicle took her up to Hunter's Lodge when she first arrived there.

Though mystified, I was obedient. The means of transport in Elmer's Dale were limited. The local garage had two cars, and there were two station flies. None of these had been requisitioned on the date in question. I may also mention that inquiries at the Agency in London bore out Poirot's prognostication. No such woman as "Mrs. Middleton" had ever been on their books. They had received the Hon. Mrs. Havering's application for a housekeeper, and had sent her various applicants for the post. When she sent them the engagement fee, she omitted to mention which woman she had selected.*

SOMEWHAT crestfallen, I returned to London. I found Poirot established in an armchair by the fire. He greeted me with much affection.

"*Mon ami Hastings!* But how glad I am to see you! Veritably I have for you a great affection! And you have enjoyed yourself? You have run to and fro with the good Japp? You have interrogated and investigated to your heart's content?"

"Poirot," I cried, "the thing's a dark mystery! It will never be solved."

"It is true that we are not likely to cover ourselves with glory over it."

"No, indeed. It's a hard nut to crack."

"Oh, as far as that goes, me, I am very good at cracking the nuts! A veritable squirrel! It is not that which embarrasses me. I know well enough who killed Mr. Harrington Pace."

"You know? How did you find out?"

"Your illuminating answers to my wires supplied me with the truth. . . . . See

*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.*

here, Hastings, let us examine the facts methodically and in order. Mr. Harrington Pace is a man with a considerable fortune which at his death will doubtless pass to his nephew—point number one. His nephew is known to be desperately hard up—point number two. His nephew is also known to be—shall we say a man of loose moral fiber? Point number three!"

"But Roger Havering is proved to have journeyed straight up to London."

"Précisément! And therefore, as Mr. Havering left Elmer's Dale at six-fifteen, and since Mr. Pace cannot have been killed before he left (or the doctor would have spotted the time of the crime as being given wrongly when he examined the body), we conclude, quite rightly, that Mr. Havering did *not* shoot his uncle. But there is a Mrs. Havering, Hastings."

"Impossible! The housekeeper was with her when the shot was fired."

"Ah, yes, the housekeeper. But she has disappeared."

"She will be found."

"I think not. There is something peculiarly elusive about that housekeeper—don't you think so? It struck me at once."

"She played her part, I suppose, and then got out in the nick of time."

"And what was her part?"

"Well—I presume to admit her confederate, the black-bearded man."

"Oh, no, that was not her part. Her part was what you have just mentioned, to provide an alibi for Mrs. Havering at the moment the shot was fired. And no one will ever find her, *mon ami,* because she does not exist! 'There's no sech person,' as your so great Shakespeare says."

"It was Dickens," I murmured, smiling. "But what do you mean, Poirot?"

"I mean that Zoe Havering was an actress before her marriage, that you and Japp only saw the housekeeper in a dark hall, a dim, middle-aged figure in black with a faint, subdued voice, and finally that neither you, nor Japp, nor the local police whom the housekeeper fetched, ever saw Mrs. Middleton and her mistress at one and the same time. It was a child's play for that clever and daring woman. On the pretext of summoning her mistress, she runs upstairs, slips on a bright jumper and a hat with black curls attached which she jams down over the gray transformation. A few deft touches, and the make-up is removed; a slight dusting of rouge, and the brilliant Zoe Havering comes down with her clear ringing voice."

"But the revolver that was found at Ealing? Mrs. Havering could not have placed it there?"

"No, that was Roger Havering's job—but it was a mistake on their part. It put me on the right track. A man who has committed a murder with a revolver which he found on the spot would fling it away at once; he would not carry it up to London with him. No, the motive was clear; the criminals wished to focus the interest of the police on a spot far removed from Derbyshire; they were anxious to get the police away as soon as possible from the vicinity of Hunter's Lodge. Of course, the revolver found at Ealing was not the one with which Mr. Pace was shot. Roger Havering discharged one shot from it, brought it up to London, went straight to his club to establish his alibi, then went quickly out to Ealing by the District Railway, a matter of about twenty minutes only, placed the parcel where it was found and so back to town. That charming creature his wife, quietly shoots Mr. Pace after dinner—you remember he was shot from behind? Another significant point, that! She reloads the revolver and puts it back in its place, and then starts off with her desperate little comedy."

"It's incredible," I murmured, fascinated. "And yet—"

"And yet it is true. *Bien sûr,* my friend, it is true! But to bring that precious pair to justice, that is another matter. Well, Japp must do what he can—I have written him fully; but I very much fear, Hastings, that we shall be obliged to leave them to Fate—or *le bon Dieu*—whichever you prefer."

"The wicked flourish like a green bay tree," I reminded him.

"But at a price, Hastings, always at a price, *croyez moi!*"

POIROT'S forebodings were confirmed. Japp, though convinced of the truth of his theory, was unable to get together the necessary evidence to insure a conviction. Mr. Pace's huge fortune passed into the hands of his murderers. Nevertheless, Nemesis did overtake them, and when I read in the paper that the Hon. Roger and Mrs. Havering were among those killed in the crashing of the Air Mail to Paris, I knew that Justice was satisfied.

"The Kidnaped Prime Minister," another exploit of Hercule Poirot, in our next issue.

Strategy Hawkins' Hens

There's a lot of valuable business wisdom beneath the foolery in this joyous story of a man who undertook to sell farm products in New York—for Mr. Woolley is a commercial expert of renown

By EDWARD MOTT WOOLLEY

YOUNG Mr. Pendleton Pedway returned to the metropolis after a year spent in the West selling farm supplies. On leaving the train, he omitted to tip the Pullman porter, because there reposed in his pocket only a solitary nickel, which possibly he could use at a slot-machine restaurant. First, however, he hied himself to the new Strategy Hawkins Building, on the sixtieth floor of which he was admitted to the innermost sanctum of the salesmanship wizard.

"I have heard," said young Mr. Pedway, rather nervously, "that you sometimes extend counsel to men who are not financially able to liquidate the fee."

"On condition that my advice be followed," qualified Hawkins as he pressed a button and requested Delia Jones to bring in a fresh humidor of Cuban Meditations.

"Just a moment, Delia," he called as his secretary was flitting out. "You might order a plate of ham-what-are and a couple of those Western Washington eggs, along with a pot of coffee from my Brazilian plantation, Delia. I suspect from this young gentleman's physiognomatic symptoms that he has not regaled his taste-center this morning."

Pedway's eyes spoke his gratitude, and he merely added: "Eggs turned for thirty seconds, if you please."

A LITTLE later Pedway leaned back, in Hawkins' disappearing lunch nook, and sighfully contemplated the remnants. Hawkins had planned this office lunch conceit for distressed men like Pedway. He knew how disastrously hunger reacted on man's constitutional temperament.

"Now," said the strategist, catching Pedway's soughing whisper of content, "you are gastronomically fit. With my favorite prescription within your girdle, and a pint of my artery tightener in your veins, come out here and dispossess yourself of your woes."

Pedway's lineaments were well ironed as he seated himself again in the big leather chair beside Hawkins' mahogany desk.

"Thank you," he observed, accepting a Meditation. "The fact is that I have fizzled, out West, as I had already fizzled in the city. You see, I went westward on the advice of my prospective father-in-law, who came between Eloise and me in a manner I consider unwarranted. I was a broker's clerk here in town, sir, but had accumulated nothing but a deficit when the old man told me to keep off his stoop until I could show an earning capacity commensurate with the girl's spending habits. And to get rid of me, he painted in dauby colors the opportunities to sell agricultural supplies beyond the Mississippi. In the hope of winning Eloise, I borrowed railroad fare of Jack Harrison, my chum, and went to that great farming region. My return tells the story."

"Do I understand that you devoted yourself to selling husbandry supplies—out in the agricultural country?" Hawkins inquired, removing his cigar from his teeth and permitting a filament of humor to play beneath his highly ornamental but vigorous nose.

"Yes; I tried to sell agricultural goods, Mr. Hawkins. I did sell several batches of them. But the field was not what Eloise' father had painted. Competition was very heavy. Why, at one town there were thirty-seven other salesmen at the same hotel, all trying to sell lubricating grease for threshing machines! There were several thousand drummers out there selling fertilizers, and more chaps than you could count offering poultry goods, and—"

"Sure," commented Hawkins. "What could you expect when you foolishly tried to sell that kind of stuff in the country? My boy, the pastorals are no place to sell agricultural supplies!"

THE strategist leaned forward, with one one arm on the sliding lid of his desk, and went on:

"You should have tackled the city, bub; you made the common error of trying a thing tremendously overdosed. Trying to sell farmers' stuff in the country, my son, is like offering chocolates to a girl who has just nibbled a two-pound box of Shyler's assorted, with half a pound of gum-drops for dessert. Boy, the only place to dispose of agricultural chattels is right here in the metropolis."

"What?" inquired Pedway blankly.

"Listen," repeated Hawkins. "The city, I say, is the place to sell fertilizer, grease for threshing machines, chicken incubators, duck-food, and cholera serum for pigs."

"What do you mean—the city?" asked Pedway. "How can a man sell hog-cholera medicine in New York? I tell you, sir, I must have real spondoolix. Wont you advise me how I can acquire enough treasury certificates to marry Eloise? Mr. Hawkins, with your judgment of men, do you think I have the qualifications to earn a living for—for two? If so, how?"

"Yes," assured Hawkins, "your anatomical carvings would indicate latent ability; but your perception stop is jammed. Your thinkery needs a grindstone."

Hawkins interrupted himself: "Delia, bring me that report of our Research Department on 'City Markets for Hen Houses, et Cetera.' "

PENDLETON PEDWAY, finally accepting Hawkins' advice, along with a loan of a hundred dollars for working capital, selected fifty great financial and industrial concerns with headquarters in New York, and securing the names of each Chairman of the Board, set out to canvass them, having first secured from the Chicken Incubator Corporation of America an agreement to pay commission on sales. The sales manager of the Incubator concern had laughed incredulously at first, but subsequently had said: "Go ahead—by jinks, maybe old Hawkins has the right hunch."

After unhappy adventures with the first four chairmen, Pedway got his teeth clinched and called upon Mr. Van Arsbrundt DeCoin, chairman of the vast Machinery Corporation of America, Europe and the Orient. Hawkins had warned him to use real strategy in gaining admission, for DeCoin was one of those captains of industry who run on limited schedule, like the Twentieth Century. He would receive a business caller at three-thirteen P. M., for example, and remark as he said "Good afternoon" at three-fifteen, "Excuse me, but I am due at three-nineteen for a directors' meeting of the Hay Exchange National Bank."

Again taking Hawkins' advice, Pedway had made an excuse to wait in the outer room until DeCoin's secretaries and office-boys were momentarily off guard. Then, having long pedal attachments, he stepped over the railing and walked boldly into the big man's astonished presence.

"Who are you?" asked DeCoin. "I have not seen your card."

"My name is Pedway, sir—Pendleton Pedway; I am a salesman of—"

The Chairman of the Board turned suddenly livid. "I never see salesmen—begone!" he exploded. "How did you get here—how dare you?"

"If you will give me five minutes, sir—"

"Not one minute! Not a second! Not a fraction of a moment!"

He pressed his red alarm button, designed for the Association of Chairmen of the Boards, and a gong clanged in the outer office. Instantly in rushed DeCoin's three secretaries, followed by four stenographers and five office-boys, and a special policeman in a carmen uniform.

"Put this ruffian out!" choked the Chairman.

"One second," gurgled Pedway as the carmen gentleman's hands gripped his left arm. "Just a moment, sir. I—I—I rep—represent chick—chicken incubators. I sell—"

He was being perambulated through the door, but something happened.

"Chickens?" broke in the grizzled old Chairman of the Board. "Chick—chickens, did you say? Wait—bring the man back! What about chickens? Bring him back, I say. Now then, what did you say about incubators?"

WHAT happened subsequently may be told more entertainingly in the words of Hawkins, as he retailed the story to Delia Jones, choosing his own diction:

"You see," said Hawkins, "that our market experts were right in their report that one out of every five board chairmen in New York has a chicken-farm hobby, either actual or potential. Coming down a step lower, to presidents of such corporations, six out of every ten spend at least a thousand dollars a year on chicken dementia, or can be induced through psychological manipulation to spend that tidy sum.

"The percentage of those who have hens on the brain becomes less as we go down the scale—vice-presidents, treasurers, secretaries, auditors and reception managers; but by the great spoon, Delia, the number of people who want chicken plantations jumps tremendously when we reach the sphere of those who sit eight hours a day on high stools worshiping the inkwell, the oversize ledger and the quick-acting blotter. But this latter class of small spenders we are holding in reserve for a modified type of cash extraction.

"Yes, Delia, Pedway's experiences have run true to our conclusions. You see from his report that on the average he has made sales of chicken-truck to one out of every five chairmen. The first four canvassed proved lemons, and he came to me quite discouraged. Think of it, Delia—ready to curl up after being thrown down by only four chairmen!

"To be sure, two of them treated him rough—but look here, girl, don't ever Mendelssohn a man who can't come back after four chairmen hand him a pass to the sidewalk."

"I have never seen the man I want to marry!" quoth Miss Delia, flushing.

"You know it took four cups of our Hawkins Quadruple-Pep Coffee to draw Pedway's cerebro-spinal axis tight and hold his backbone sufficiently erect to get him past DeCoin's guardians." Hawkins ignored Delia's cynicism apropos of marriage, and continued:

"But DeCoin ran true to form, Delia. As the fifth prospect, he contributed extraordinary evidence to our scientific data on the Illusionary Cycles of Chairmen of Board."

"Did he buy some hencoops?" inquired Delia Jones, who was still inclined to be a trifle artless and literal.

"Hencoops!" sputtered Hawkins. "Good Lord—what didn't he buy? Look here!"

HAWKINS picked up the typed report Pedway had just sent in.

"Old DeCoin had been a 'parlor' poultryman for thirty years, Delia—never owned a pair of walking drumsticks in his life, but was always on the verge of buying a coop of them. Had taken six correspondence courses in handling live broilers and eggers, and attended every hen-and-rooster show at Madison Square Garden for two decades. Didn't read anything except his company's balance-sheet and nineteen poultry journals.

"Now, then, why hadn't DeCoin ever actually established the mammoth chicken grove he'd dreamed of for years up among his topmost anatomical rafters? Simply because not a single chicken sales-hound had ever got a tooth in him. Not one road drummer had discovered him, up there in the Gothic Machinery Skytopper.

"Yet all the time, Delia, old DeCoin was actually aching to see a chicken-hound! For eighteen years he'd been planning to take the matter up on his own initiative,

and seven times had scheduled four-twenty-seven P. M. as the time to call up somebody; but his four-twenty-six appointments had dragged a few seconds and prevented. Delia, in salesmanship the crime of omission is as common as the thinkless human automat who goes around with a slot in his brain waiting for buyers to drop in their orders. Such a man never leaves a residuary estate.

"Did Pedway sell him some hencoops?" repeated Hawkins, echoing the girl's question. "Delia, Pedway booked a stack of orders a foot high. And already DeCoin has bought a hundred acres next door to Tuxedo, and will open his chicken plantation as soon as the hens and their bedroom furniture arrive.

"Incubators—sure, Delia; ten of the biggest and most modern coke-burning, self-registering chicken maternity hospitals ever contrived. They will hatch four hundred twelve thousand eggs at one clip.

"And of course DeCoin knows the difference between royal-pedigreed and plebeian eggs, Delia. Pedway sold him a thousand blue-blooded baby poultries, every one of whom belongs to the Hens of the Eugenic Evolution, and every hen of which has participated in the most famous egg-laying contests.

"Look here—six hundred ninety-six of those hens can produce an egg every twenty-three hours for a year, deducting their February vacation, starting on Washington's birthday.

"Look—one hundred fifty barred Plymouth Rock ladies, elegant of shape and carriage, with large lovely faces, unvamping but ruby eyes, and socially correct backs, striped like zebras, and neck hackle feathers such as no débutante ever dreamed of.

"White Wyandottes—yes, two hundred of these most fashionable and magnificent fowl. And a hundred silver-laced lady birds with plumage that would back your own species off Fifth Avenue, Delia. Yes, and Buff Orpingtons and Black Minorcas and Mottled Anconas, all exempt from the frying-pan because of their feathers and high egg-power.

"These thousand hens and their prince husbands cost DeCoin some ten thousand dollars; and to house them fittingly, he ordered through Pedway a specially architectured Chicken Biltmore, together with a thousand luxurious trap-nests, brooders, poultry drinking-fountains, sanitary troughs, egg-testers, et cetera.

"Yes, Delia, I see among the orders quite a drug-store of remedies for sorehead, scaly leg, limber neck, and so on. And a ton of ground oyster shells."

Here Hawkins was called to San Francisco to market a surplus crop of Precocious Prunes, but Delia ran her experienced eye over Pedway's report and found chicken sales to nine other Chairmen of Boards, out of the total of fifty.

HAWKINS had suggested to Pedway that he canvass a list of one hundred ninety-eight medical specialists in the metropolis, to discover their agricultural or horticultural hobbies.

"Our information indicates," ruminated the sage, "that thirty-three and forty-seven hundreths per cent of all city super-doctors have hankerings in the direction of the open."

Having acquired considerable immunity against contumelious chairmen and similar products of the present mad era of speed and taxes, Pedway was not much the worse for disastrous contact with the first five medicos he canvassed. They had dealt respectively with such quality articles as diabetes, arterio sclerosis, eye-squint and skins-you-don't-love-to-touch. It was not until he hit Dr. Abel Tendon, the great specializer in the realm of neurasthenics and hallucinations, that he found Hawkins' philosophy of markets running true again.

To accomplish an audience with the noted alienist, Pedway had feigned a near-mania (the plot of course laid by Hawkins), and found himself quickly in the doctor's sumptuous inner chamber, fitted with queer and repellent devices for determining the twists of the patients' nerve fibers. Dr. Abel Tendon began the diagnosing of Pedway's supposed melancholia, and was testing the tension of his nerve-voltage when he paused unexpectedly to indulge in a dissertation on threshing machines. Pedway discovered, with bated breath, that Doctor Tendon's own obsession was this spectacular and famed red contraption of the wheat-lands.

"Great spoon!" chortled Hawkins, when he received Pedway's report. "Delia, that chap is learning. As soon as he discovered Doc Tendon, he appointed himself special sales-hound for the Thresher Manufacturing Company of Fargo, N. D., and since then he has sold the medic $8762.69 worth of threshing machine parts alone. But that isn't all—"

"What does the poor fish want of threshing machines?" inquired Delia, sniffing. "He gets fifty dollars a minute for telling people their nerves are shot to pieces."

"Nay," broke in Hawkins. "Threshing machines are the best tonic a neurasthenia repair-man can find for his own shattered ganglia. Doctor Tendon came from the country thirty-nine years ago, and has been trying ever since to invent a device that will thresh wheat and oats at the same time, and separate the two. You see, he has a shop in the Peanut Cake Building in Brooklyn. Whenever the load of his melancholy sickers becomes too obsessing, he ducks out through the freight elevator and orders his chauffeur to roll him over there, leaving the patients to rave until the police separate them. Even a lunacy doctor must have his own fanaticisms."

A moment later Hawkins' cigar fell out of his lips in an explosion of mirth, but Delia caught it, as she had learned how to do through long experience.

"The best yet!" Hawkins declared. "Doc Tendon had just a small model of a threshing machine, three feet long, but Pedway has sold him a crimson he-machine from Dakota. He has leased big space on the twenty-ninth floor of the Peanut Cake Building, and will install the threshing machine there, with all appurtenances for the development of his invention. And he has commissioned Pedway to buy him a wheat-stack and an oat-stack, to be shipped to Brooklyn as soon as available. When Doc Tendon's duplex threshers are ready, he plans to establish a company to operate them throughout the West, and to give up neurasthenics. Pedway should have a good thing just selling the doctor band-cutters and cogwheels."

PENDLETON PEDWAY continued to dissect out the agriculturists of New York, assisted by Hawkins' Research Department, discovering some astonishing things.

"You can find more surtax ex-farmers to the square inch in New York than there are farmers in Kansas," the strategist deduced, contemplating the charts made by his analysts. "Living in this old burg are 1067 times as many prosperous scions of poor farmers as there are on the farms of Iowa and Missouri, and 983 times as many rich uncles of farmers, right here in my own building, as you could scare up in Nebraska.

"Which means," he Sherlocked-Holmes'd, "that the farm market here is beyond the realm of algebra or calculus to compute.

"Now, then, my boy, the manifest procedure is to disconnect from the maddening subway crowds these swollen-tax sons and uncles who have fathers or nephews still grubbing the rock and muck, and lead them kindly to the point where they feel the spending impulse stirring about in their diastolic regions. Indeed, your work along this line, Pedway, recalls to my neurocrane-braincase the fact that nine years ago I had three hundred twenty-seven cousins, many of them removed to the seventieth degree, engaged in the pastime of extracting three daily eats from country mud—all these are Hawkins by name. Today there are undoubtedly a thousand.

"I am beset by remorse, Pedway, and shall have them looked up and supplied with—let us say beehives. Growing honey must be an agreeable vocation, since I pay for it ninety cents a pound, by the case.

"Ah, yes, Pedway, you can find in Manhattan a mammoth market for beehives and similar Louis the Fourteenth architecture."

"Why not bees, too?" suggested Delia Jones, who happened to come in just then with a bunch of telegrams from people who wanted Hawkins to come by the first train.

"To be sure—bees." Hawkins smiled. Then he reached over to a bookshelf and took down four immense volumes. The first bore the title, "Who's Who From Kansas in New York." The titles of the others simply substituted the States of Indiana, Missouri and Minnesota.

"Go to it, Pedway," he said. "Get after the sons and uncles. Blood is thicker than water, and you can work on these rich relations of the impoverished yeomanry until they come across—"

HAWKINS broke off, his eyes suddenly kindling as a new occult prompting arrived at his cranial wireless receiving station.

"Pedway, the mercantile and industrial business of the whole country is financed by Wall Street—in effect, New York. Then let us apply the same principle to agriculture, in a more circumscribed way, and sell these rich city relations the pleasures, health and profit of tilling the loam and making two blades grow where one didn't grow before. We can do more than

get these human New York mints to loosen up in behalf of their family blood; we'll sell them outdoor stuff for themselves.

"Aha, Pedway! We're on the trail of a market richer than the overdone Klondike or the grand opening of Oklahoma's red clay-banks."

He buzzed for Delia, and said, with tensity: "Send Professor Dzieniszewska up here at once."

Forthwith arrived the young Doctor of Market Research, and Hawkins presented him to Pedway as a comer in the science of detaching large oodles of coin from New York spenders. Although scarcely twenty-eight, Dzieniszewska was earning a big salary as an original think-artist among Hawkins' researchers.

"Professor," said Hawkins, "I should like you to ascertain for me how many men there are in New York from each State in the Union who pocket every year one hundred thousand dollars or more, and how many who shake down gold persimmons to the extent of fifty thousand, twenty-five thousand, and fifteen thousand. Do not bother just now with those who come lower in the ready-cash category.

"And Professor! I want your deductions as to what percentage of these plums can reasonably be amenable to our newly conceived System of Sidetracking City Spenders to the Purchase of Hens and Supplies for the Open generally.

"You understand, Pedway," Hawkins again addressed his latest protégé, "that we have no vagary for detaching these urban spenders from their accustomed New York sleeping-cells, or from their downtown niches on the thirtieth or forty-seventh floors. Far be it from me to attempt depopulation of Manhattan or the Bronx, or to interfere with the many-headed populace who squirm daily within the Loop in Chicago. Nay, Xantippe, as the saying is—nay! Our campaign shall take the form of selling the outdoors as relaxation, to those who can afford a piggery or a figgery of their own, or who can extract joy from capitalizing and supplying scientific counsel to their relations in Texas, Maine or South Carolina.

"What's that, Delia?" asked Hawkins, as the girl issued a rather vehement observation. "Why, sure, New Jersey too! Any old State. I forgot that you lived in New Jersey, Delia. Pedway shall get after that old Uncle Rufus of yours first of all, and smoke him out. I swear that within six weeks Unkie Rufus shall—let me see, Delia, I forgot just what you wanted most—"

"Bees," broke in the girl. "I never really told you how crazy I am to have bees. Don't you think I could do it, with my acre?"

"Confound me!" emanated from the strategist. "Why didn't you speak about bees before, or about anything else you wanted. You shall have an acre of bees, or ten acres, provided you agree not to quit me. But just as an experiment, let us first see how our scheme works out with Uncle Rufus Jones."

SOME weeks later Hawkins sent Delia Jones out of the office on a trumped-up errand so that he might talk without embarrassment to Pedway.

"Great work, boy! Even if you hadn't made another sale of bees and bee stuff, the reconciliation effected between Uncle Rufe and poor Delia would be enough. It is the more notable because it typifies our newly discovered markets in the city for henneries, threshing machines and such.

"Yesterday I took a run out into Jersey, up near the Ramapo Hills, where Delia lives with her aunt's sister-in-law, maiden. Think of it, for thirty-two years old Rufe, with all his money, has looked over his glasses and never seen those two women. Rufe got mad when Delia was born because they couldn't name her Rufie. In the meantime for twenty years he's been president of Jones, Jumpjoy & Killjoy, and Dzieniszewska tells me he pulled down last year $299,999.

"And not a hobby in the world except the Winter Garden and Follies, and the Sunday night sacred concerts on the Cloud-top Roof. Well, I ran out to Delia's yesterday and saw the swellest bee-plantation that even the editor of *Bee Growing* ever cast his optics upon.

"Pedway, you'd never guess it—Uncle Rufe was there himself. He's almost a psychopath now over bees—clean nutty. Guess what the old chap was doing, with his coat and vest off, and his necktie over his left ear!"

Hawkins' cigar fell out of his teeth, and as Delia was not there to catch it, Pedway put out the fire with his foot.

"Well, hang me if he wasn't holding the head queen bee while Delia's aunt's sister-in-law clipped its wings!"

"Sure," said Pedway. "When the queen's

wings are snipped, she can't get off the place, and the bees wont abscond without her."

"Boy, you're a genius," insisted Hawkins, taking a fresh cigar. "You've got that bee stuff in your loft as if you'd been selling bees for ten years. How much did you sell old Rufus?"

"About $26,979, so far. He put a double battery of hives around Delia's place, and now he's buying one of the Ramapo mountains to provide plenty of epigæa repens and azaleas for his bees. I forget how many breeding queens he took, but they cost all the way from ten dollars to $316.29 apiece; and of course that meant hundreds of colonies of proletariat buzzers, along with trained-nurse bees for the infants. He paid high prices to get double-bar bees with extra kind dispositions—"

"TO be sure," echoed Hawkins, concealed somewhere in the Cuban smoke. "If he had sent any winged adders up there to sting Delia, he'd have had me to reckon with. Delia's bee-yards are sure great, Pedway. Now, to how many other Who's Whoses in New York have you sold bee goods? Get the States they come from, arranged alphabetically, and give the data to Dzieniszewska."

"I'll make a full report," agreed Pedway, "including orchard stuff, barn ventilators, nursery goods, fertilizers, cattle medicine, and that batch of skunks Higgens Quirk bought for the fur-farm I found for him out on the Passaic River. Quirk never had a mania, either, until I got him interested in skunks; and now he spends three days a week among 'em."

"You'll sell more New York billionaires on skunks," Hawkins observed. "Keeps 'em away from the office."

"However, it's easier to sell orchard goods, Mr. Hawkins."

"You've done rather well in that line, Pedway. I'll hand you the blue ribbon for getting all those Biltmorians into apples, peaches, prunes, horseradish and cranberries. How many cranberry orchards have you dispensed and equipped?"

"Cranberries no longer grow on trees, Mr. Hawkins, but in bogs. I've placed six Jersey bogs, and old Cashman TenDyke has already lost his reason over his. For ten years he's never done anything except go to sleep at directors' meetings in the Woolworth Tower, but now he wades around in that cranberry bog nine hours a day, in hip boots and has more fun than he's ever had before in his life.

"Yes, Mr. Hawkins, I haven't done so badly with orchards. This morning I got Peck Moneyweight on the dotted line for one hundred seventy-five thousand gallons of lime-sulphur spray for the apple orchard I bought for him down on the Chesapeake; and I'm going to sell him tomorrow an eight-eye spray-truck and Triple X-BB equipment of nozzles. Moneyweight is tired of his job as owner of the Seventeenth National Bank, and has collected eleven nephews from Idaho to help him keep the bugs and borers off his eleven hundred acres of apples."

"Good," approved Hawkins.

"I've just ordered for Russell Doright-Bunker a twelve-hundred-dollar kit of orchard knives, Mr. Hawkins. Bunker has been tied so tightly to his insurance company for forty-three years that he has scarcely seen a tree outside Central Park; but now he's luny over black root-rot, blister canker, and tonsilitis of apple buds. He's got his coat off down there, and wired me yesterday for a set of tools to do bridge grafting with."

"He's the old cuss who bought forty-one orchard heaters, eh?" inquired Hawkins.

"Forty-two," Pedway corrected. "And a hundred tons of charcoal. Also four hundred rolls of wide adhesive tape to cover the stubs after his amputations—to prevent aphis, he says. Now he's going hunting for root-snakes, and—"

"Hold on!" broke in Hawkins abruptly, tossing away his cigar and getting rather ponderously to his feet. "Wait a minute, sonny. By the great spoon, if I don't buy one of those apple estates myself! Or maybe a skunk-farm or cranberry hog. Boy, you've come to the right place this time. I've been a fool to work nineteen hours a day, haven't I? Here I am, prematurely old, and getting around like a hippopotamus, with more money than I can spend or give away—what?

"I say, how much do you want to fit me out an orchard, a cranberry bog and a skunk-farm? I'll take all three—spot cash. By the everlasting spoon, I'm going out for some fun! Pedway, you've hit the richest agricultural market in the world—little old New York. Yet you've touched only the high lights—wait until you get after the multitudes! Come and have dinner with me tonight— What? Why, sure, bring Eloise."

A Game of Draw in Borneo

Our daring engineer friend Barton takes cards in a hazardous little party out Borneo way—and plays them in telling fashion at the show-down. Mr. Zandtt is in excellent form here.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

THE game really began during the ball on the after-deck of the B. P. liner *Arafura,* the second night out from Thursday Island, for among the dancers and the spectators in their deck-chairs along the gangways were nearly all of those who, sooner or later, took a hand in the playing—though up to that time not one of them had any premonition of the blind chance which was drawing them together in a web of cross-purposes and conflicting interests.

Coming up from Sydney, the two passengers who stood out most prominently among the saloon crowd—liked by almost everybody—were H. H. the Rajah of Kloedang and Miss Kate Dorrington, whose father was the American resident manager of a large exporting house in Hongkong. She was the sort of girl who may always give a handicap to far handsomer women because of her ease in any situation, the brilliant animation of her face when she talks, and a personal magnetism which makes even a plain-looking girl too strong an influence to resist. The Rajah's popularity was the exception which proves the rule among Oriental potentates, by which many if not most of them are treated as déclassé. He was Eurasian—which accounted for the light complexion that enabled him to pass for an Englishman at times, but which ordinarily would have made a difficult barrier to cross with Europeans. Yet to such good purpose had he used his university course at Leyden, with a postgraduate two years at Oxford, that he compelled respect for what he actually was—a scientific and progressive ruler who, when he emerged from the jungle fastnesses of his Raj in Borneo, held his own with any class of business or professional men or in any stratum of society.

Beverly Dorrington, of course, was known most everywhere in Asiatic waters—for plenty of reasons other than his being Miss Kate's father. And in the thirty-six hours since they had come aboard at Thursday, two American engineers—Randall Barton and Fred Bates—had made

themselves known and liked by that species of freemasonry noticeable among the majority of those who travel on deep water. They had just finished an extremely hazardous exploring trip through the interior of Papua—so that a mere sketchy description of what they had actually been through, dragged out of them in fragmentary bits by other passengers, was enough to surround them with a breathless audience whenever they could be induced to talk.

Among others in the saloon were Mr. Karl Schmidt, a ponderous Teutonic individual who could be as quick as a cat in spite of his weight—formerly a botanist, but for several years a speculator in various things peculiar to the East; gun-runner, smuggler, all that and more had been hinted in connection with him, but proof was lacking. He had money, and had the easy manner of varied experience in any company. And because individuals of a species do flock together, Patrick Joy had been his usual associate since they met on board—each having previously known of the other by name and reputation.

After these we might include three missionaries who played chorus, as missionaries usually do in Eastern waters—the chorus of disapproval on general principles. Girls of the Kate Dorrington type were too bold, too frankly clothed, did so many things which no girl of thoroughly respectable upbringing would ever *dare* to do.

GOING back to an intermission during the ball, while the stewards were serving ices, cakes, brandy-peg and the like to dancers and spectators in their deck-chairs —the Rajah, whose dancing was something good enough to watch, had gone to his own chair in one of the 'midships deck-bays, where his secretary had fetched a tray of refreshments and then squatted on the deck by his side for a confidential talk in one of the Malay dialects which few Europeans understand. The secretary happened to be a first cousin—himself a university man, but with the unmistakable Oriental complexion. He seemed a simple, loyal, upper servant to the casual observer, but his wide knowledge and judgment were so exceptional that he had become the Rajah's confidant upon various matters, the chief of his secret service.

"Thou hast learned something, Ali? Is it *pukka* information?"

"Thou mayest judge for thyself, O Tuan! For, seest thou, one gains much by dealing with men like Tuan Dorrington in a direct manner which no Malay ever would use. I took him a bundle of thy cigars—to make opportunity. We were alone by the rail—none near us along the gangway. I asked if he had known the Tuan Barton before he came aboard? Perhaps by reputation? Asked his opinion as to that one's honesty—reliability. As nearly as possible, I will try to recall his exact words:

" 'Ali, I don't know just what you're trying to get at, whether you're asking these questions on your own hook or, as I suspect, for your cousin the Rajah—it's my business to know something of most of the native rulers out here, you understand. But I see no reason why I shouldn't answer your questions, anyhow. As it happens, I'd never met Barton Sahib before he came aboard—or Bates Sahib either. But I know that Barton did very creditable work on the Yangtse surveys and on some of the South American railways before he went back to New York. He's just pulled off a big and difficult stunt in Papua, in the mining line, for a couple of Wall Street magnates. Now, a man who does things like that, for the sort of people who employ him, can't afford to be crooked in anything. If he plays absolutely straight, all the highly paid work he can handle comes to him without asking. If he plays crooked just once, and is caught with the goods—he's done! Also, you can gamble that any other engineer he picks for a traveling companion is of the same breed. You can tell that to the Rajah or keep it for your own information. Incidentally—I imagine that either Barton or Bates would be a dangerous fighter if anyone tried to start anything with him. Any more questions? Got anything else on your mind?' So thou seest, O Tuan—thy estimate of the American Tuans was as it proves."

WHILE the Rajah and his secretary were conferring by themselves, Barton had managed to get Miss Dorrington away from her other admirers for a few moments —and through his knowledge of ship construction, eluded them until the music started up again, enjoying a tête-à-tête which wasn't confined as much to personal topics as he had in mind when they disappeared. As soon as they were out of hearing, she gave the talk an entirely different slant, considerably to his surprise.

"Mr. Barton, you've had some pretty hair-raising experiences down there in Papua—also a good many others in China and South America. Do you by any chance know anything of interior Borneo?"

"Why, merely from hearsay—but from engineers and naturalists who I'd say were pretty close observers. As I got it from them, when one goes fifty miles back from any coast in Borneo, he's in more or less undeveloped, wild country, governed by the Malay sultans and rajahs with a Dutch Resident to represent the Indies Government, advise them, and keep tab on what they're raising which may be taxed. You see, the Dutch have got things about where they want them with the natives, under their paternal system of government. It's a policy of noninterference with the natives as long as they cough up a rather staggering percentage of whatever they raise, in the way of a tax. Of course, the Dutch assist them a lot in getting supplies for cultivation, making it as easy as possible for them to produce in quantity—and the rajahs get enough for their own share to more than satisfy their average wants. No foreigners are permitted to exploit their territory under concessions or bring in outside population which eventually might shove the sultans and their people into the discard.

"With the average, lazy, shiftless Malay ruler, this sort of thing is entirely satisfactory. He lives as his ancestors did a thousand years before him—does little or no development, has his harem and his childish amusements, is satisfied to live in some sort of a palace surrounded by a town of nipa huts. But with those who have been educated in Europe, and there are quite a few of them, the whole proposition is galling—unsatisfactory. They would be quite willing to get extra income from mining and planting concessions, being fully able to prevent the incoming foreigners from getting out of hand. Some of them have cleaned up their towns, until they are both sanitary and attractive, and raise an amount of sugar, rubber, tobacco and spices which is almost unbelievable when you consider the labor necessary and the transportation problem where there are no railroads—practically no roads at all. Men of this sort find the Government percentage a galling tax—but they're up against it. There doesn't seem to be any way of beating the Dutch game. Er—how do you happen to be so much interested in Borneo? Been talking to His Highness of Kloedang?"

"That was an easy guess! Of course! He and Father have been discussing his Raj up there in Kloedang, wherever that may be—going over some of his plans for improvement and general development. The man is progressive—rather brilliant in the way of education. I think Father is as much interested in his little capital as I am; if the Rajah isn't willfully exaggerating what he has accomplished, he must have a very attractive town there."

"How do you get there?"

"Go up the Sessajap River a hundred and fifty miles in a launch—then have his Malay *wallahs* carry one in a hammock slung from a long pole through blind jungle trails, forty miles farther, until you strike the motor-lorry road he is pushing through to the river."

"AND those *wallahs* are head-hunting Dyaks, of course! If they happened to get full of arrack on the way or go amok from religious fanaticism, the white folks in those hammocks would never get through to the capital in one piece. Their heads undoubtedly would, but that's the only portion of one's anatomy which interests a Dyak in the least—the rest he leaves where it happens to drop. Northern Luzon, Formosa and Mindanao are full of those birds, too. One of the magazines published some photographs of their playful little amusements in this line, a couple of years ago. Of course, in the case of this particular Rajah, if he's as popular at home as I've heard, he would have his people fairly well in hand. He is their religious chief as well as secular ruler, and could doubtless protect his friends with a taboo which means a reasonable amount of safety."

"Would you risk going up to his capital, yourself?"

"Why—of course, if I had any good reason for going."

"The Rajah wants Father and me to pay him a month's visit—or as long as Father's business will permit. Says he can give us some big-game hunting which is moderately safe, good horses to ride, lovely jungle scenery, a comfortable palace with modern conveniences to stay in, thousands of flowers that we never saw before. In fact, quite a number of amusements in addition to the mysterious attraction in the place itself. Would you go?"

"Well—that's something else again. Probably there's little chance of anything serious happening to you in the circumstances; still, it really isn't the place for a white woman! If three or four other women happened to be going along with their fathers or brothers—"

"The Rajah said he would gladly invite any party we wished to make up from among our friends—but I couldn't think of a single girl now in these waters who would take a chance on it, or who wouldn't be bored stiff with such a place when she got there! It would interest me a lot, because I'm something of a botanist and bird-fancier—also, a photographer in an amateur way. Father would find enough business discussion to keep him interested—"

"I don't—t h i n k—I—j u s t—get the Rajah's idea in wanting you up there? What's his object?"

"Well—frankly, I think it may be some business proposition he wants to put before Father and you. Did I say he spoke of asking you, also? My end of it is supposed to be curiosity as to how that sort of a man and his people really live—the curiosity of an American girl who knows nothing but the usual mode of life in civilized countries—though of course he knows there will be a good deal of scientific interest also, in my particular case."

"Hmph! I don't see why he can't talk business with either of us here, without dragging us up into the Borneo jungle! If he has some proposition which makes it seem worth while to make the trip—well, that's another matter—after he's explained it first and given us an opportunity for considering it. As for your going along, Miss Dorrington, I really don't like the idea. As I said before—it's no place for you!"

"But white women do go to such places! Several of them have done so—and come out none the worse for it."

"The exception proves the rule—they'd be the first to warn you of the risk. As a matter of fact, very few of them try it a second time."

AS they leaned over the rail, talking in low tones, a couple of indistinct figures approached from the after end of the gangway, having presumably come around from the weather side. The moon had gone down, leaving but the tropic starlight which was slowly blotted out by drifting clouds and the resulting darkness seemed by contrast unusually opaque. The two men who passed could have had no idea who they were and would themselves have been unrecognizable if the stouter one's Teutonic accent hadn't betrayed him. The girl's arm trembled with distaste as it rested against Barton's, on the broad rail.

"I simply can't stand that man! He considers himself irresistable with women—appears to have taken a fancy to me, with no encouragement whatever on my part! But the way he looks a girl over is insulting! He's too fat! He perspires too freely! Twice, this evening, he's tried to get a dance with me! Imagine!"

"Has he been—er—persistently annoying you? If he really has—" Barton didn't finish—but she felt the muscles harden inside his sleeve. Somehow this pleased her, immensely.

"Oh, no—I haven't let him get as far as that. Thank you just the same, my friend, but so far, I've been able to look out for myself."

"That's one of the things one notices first about you, Miss Kate—it made me like you a lot at first sight! But a woman isn't always in a position where she *can* depend upon herself alone. Even if you carry a gun,—as every white woman should in this part of the world,—you may be grabbed from behind and find yourself powerless to use it. In the case of a man like Schmidt, it's some additional protection if he knows that one or two of your male friends are onto him—ready to start something if he oversteps the line."

"Thank you for being that kind of a friend—upon so short acquaintance! But don't make the mistake of underestimating Mr. Schmidt. He was down on the steerage-deck the other morning,—what excuse he had for being there, I don't know,—and a lascar happened to come up behind him, barefooted of course—not making a sound. I never saw anything quite so sudden as the way Schmidt whirled around on his heel and grabbed the man's throat—he nearly choked him unconscious before the second officer interfered. Nobody seemed to know what it was all about. Schmidt claimed that his life had been threatened a number of times, said he was taking no chances when anyone sneaked up behind him. He apologized, gave the man ten guilders. But if that lascar ever gets the chance to throw a knife into him from a safe distance, he'll do it!"

AFTER handing Miss Dorrington over to her next partner, Barton lighted his pipe and strolled forward along the darker part of the gangway, though a number of girls would have been glad to have him cut in for an extra dance. Now, an engineer, accustomed to constant use of maps and drawings, cultivates the topographical sense to an effective degree. Where the average person couldn't swear to the window of his own stateroom from the outside if a bet depended upon it, any engineer would locate it instinctively from mere familiarity with the steamer's deck-plan—knows where it is when the gangway is so dark that he can't even see the window. So when Barton passed two men in steamer-chairs, he noticed that they were directly under the window of his room—the blind of which had been closed. He would have thought nothing of this had he not distinctly caught a remark as he passed:

"T'e Rachah iss not staying py Singapore—*nein!* He goes to Sandakan on der Pritish Intia poat—undt he inwites t'e Dorringtons to go wit' him to Kloedang. For why does he do t'at? I t'ink mebbe I couldt guess—pecause I know somet'ings apout der Rachah w'ich ot'er people don't know. I wass botanizing in Kloedang when he wass a poy—twenty-fif' years ago—undt I see ot'er t'ings pesides flowers!"

As it seemed likely that Schmidt would explain what some of those things were, and as Barton thought by this time that any information concerning the Rajah might be useful, one way or another, he slipped in through the saloon-companion, hurried down the little side gangway to the door of his room, unlocked the door and stepped inside without making a sound. Then, kneeling on the transom behind the blind, his face was within a foot of the German's head as he talked. A whisper could have been distinctly heard. As it had taken him less than a minute to get inside his room, with the door locked against interruption from Bates, if he came below for anything, he lost very little of the conversation:

"My imbression iss t'at der Rachah haf somet'ing waluable up at his place. Mebbe it wass rich mines to be deweloped—or expensive timber, if he couldt get him oudt. Mebbe he's got more rubber or tobacco than der Gofernment achent t'inks he couldt grow. Undt der Dutch achent wass not a Resident in t'is case—he only goes up t'ere once or twice a year. Der Rachah couldt keep him oudt altoget'er if he wish', chust py nodt furnishing carriers from der Sessajap. Der Dutch don't care, much—pecause der rifer iss der only way his stuff couldt get oudt, undt t'ey haf a station at der mouth where t'ey take t'eir percentage of his shipments. Well—subbose he haf got somet'ing waluable? Mebbe he t'inks t'ere might pe some ot'er way of getting him down? Undt if he figures t'at oudt—why t'en I was get interested, pecause I know somet'ings w'ich might work oudt big for me."

"What is it, Schmidt? Any chance of letting me in on it?"

"MEBBE so! Mebbe so! I wouldt haf to haf some help—der sort of help w'ich iss nodt too squeamish, y'understand. I tell you apoudt it! When der Rachah wass porn, his mutter—der white woman—haf one of der ship's doctors from t'is line—old Toctor Murphy, who wass on t'is ship years ago, when he retire' mit a pension undt turn' der chob over to Toctor McWilliams, who iss now on poard. She insist t'at Murphy write oudt a birth-certificate for der baby—undt she keep t'at mit her own papers in der old palace. In a year or two she died. Mebbe der old Rachah got her papers—mebbe he nefer bothered. He had two ot'er wives in der harem—undt fife ot'er children, who all die put one pefore he die himself. He name' t'is Rachah as his oldest son undt successor. Now, possibly t'is Rachah haf all his mutter's papers undt put t'em in der vault of his Singapore bank. Possibly not! You pegin to catch der idea? Subbose I undt you wass go up to Kloedang—undt mebbe find t'at birth-certificate? Der ot'er son, Boro Selah, iss weak—wouldt do anyt'ing for money to spend in Batavia or Sourabaya. Subbose he promise to gif me any waluable mine or crop t'at der Rachah may haf up t'ere chust now—prowided I change t'at birth-certificate undt write in *his* name instead of 'Thomas Pulangor,' his half-brot'er? Undt t'en swear I wass botanizing in Kloedang when he wass porn—a year pefore his half-brot'er? T'e Dutch Gofernment don't like der Rachah a whole lot—he's too independent undt progressive. T'ey wouldt much brefer a weak man like Boro Selah—subbort his claim—place him on der *musnud.*"

"Theoretically, you mean! They

wouldn't attempt sending a military detail up there to seat him and turn the present Rajah out!"

"No, t'ey wouldn't do t'at. It wouldt cost more men undt expense t'an it wass worth. But wit' us to help him, Boro Selah couldt get a following among t'e natives—we furnish a few arms—take der Rachah py surprise—put Boro in bossession of t'e palace—find whatefer waluable stuff wass t'ere—undt get him oudt, somehow. Afterwardt—we don't care if der Rachah captures Boro undt gets back der Raj for himself. Outside of Kloedang, he wouldn't pe der Rachah any more—pecause der Dutch wouldt discredit him undt efen seize whatefer money he haf in der Batafia or Singapore banks. The minute he go outside, Boro's subborters wouldt try to put him in bossession—undt bime-by we get anot'er waluable lot of stuff from him, if we help again."

"H-m-m—the whole proposition hinges upon your getting hold of that birth-certificate, with the chances against you."

"Oh—I don' know! Of course der chenuine document iss pest pecause t'ere couldn't pe no question apoudt it. But anot'er certificate mit der signature of Toctor Murphy wouldt do chust as well—not?"

"Not if the original is in the present Rajah's possession, in some safe place, where he can produce it if desired!"

"Efen if der ot'er certificate wass dated a year aheadt? Eh?"

"You'd have to prove that Murphy attended the native Malay wife also—and the Rajah might easily prove he didn't!"

"T'is wass pefore he wass porn—remember! Nodt so easy to prove anyt'ing like t'at—when he haf nefer known it might pe adwisable to look up any such question."

"Suppose the scheme is successful—and you find a lot of valuable stuff up there, of one sort or another? How would you get it out, when the Rajah himself can't?"

"The Rachah hass territory undt broperty in Kloedang where t'e Dutch can seize it in any comblication—not in bosition to defy t'em undt do as he blease. If he try too much funny pusiness, t'ey might sent up a punitive expedition—or arrest him when he go' oudtside. But me—I don' gif a tamn for der Dutch. I take force enough to fight my way t'rough—kill some of t'em if t'ey wass try to stop me coming oudt. Der only gunpoat on der coast doesn't anchor off der Sessajap once a year! Undt der deputy commissioner at der Tarakan Station nefer hass more as thirty or forty men he couldt get toget'er—not more as ten, if I come down der rifer unexpectedly. Der Dutch can outlaw me, of course—but t'at don' mean not'ing oudtside of t'eir territory. T'ere efen wouldn't pe much risk if I go pack some more. T'ey got to catch me pefore t'ey couldt do anyt'ing!"

BARTON'S first instinctive move was to hunt up Fred Bates, who happened to have no partner for the next two dances, and take him up on the boat-deck where nobody could overhear his murmured account of what he had accidentally discovered. It was against regulations, of course—passengers not being allowed above the A-deck—but the two engineers were old deep-water travelers to whom sea-courtesies were frequently extended. The first officer saw them from the bridge as they came up, but knew they had some excellent reason for doing it,—possibly a chat with the radio-man, as they were both operators,—and so shook his head when one of the quartermasters would have gone after them. Bates' first suggestion after hearing the story was, of course, the obvious one:

"Hmph! You want to give this dope to the Rajah, *pronto!*"

"Stop and think a bit! How do you size Schmidt up? How far do you think he'd go if he felt like it?"

"W-e-l-l—just about the limit, I guess! The man's no fool; he's quick as a cat—I saw that muss in the steerage, myself. He's damn dangerous, if you ask *me!*"

"Exactly! Now—suppose I tell the Rajah what I know? He'll naturally start in to make some change in his plans if he can—he'll be likely to act, unconsciously, as if he were sore on Schmidt about something. Inside of two or three days Schmidt will suspect that he's more or less onto what he has in mind. That would make it almost impossible for Schmidt to stick around Kloedang for a while, botanizing, or searching for that paper. It would occur to him as simplifying matters if the Rajah never returned to Kloedang—that would give him a chance to be in the place several weeks before anyone up there heard that the Rajah was missing. So our friend the Rajah would go overboard some night—with a knife stuck into him to make it unanimous. Do you get it? Then

again—beyond that consideration, is the difficulty he'd have in getting up to his own place any sooner than he's figuring on, now. The British India boat will get him to Sandakan before any of the Koninklijke packets are due at Tarakan. And the Rajah keeps his river-launch at Sandakan. So telling him would only keep him in a stew until he does get home—by which time a lot may have happened."

"You figure that Schmidt will manage somehow to get there first?"

"If he decides that the Rajah actually has something which might be worth his trouble. So far—that point is pure guesswork and speculation with him. He'll chew it over in mind during the next day or so—very likely pump Dr. McWilliams as to what old Doctor Murphy may have told him about Kloedang and its possibilities. Schmidt will be recalling what he himself remembers about the locality. Once he's convinced that there probably *is* something of value there, he'll move—and it'll be a good imitation of something sudden. The man has been in these waters long enough to have a good many resources that we know nothing about—in some way or other, he'll get up to Kloedang before the Rajah, and be innocently classifying jungle-plants when His Highness gets there with the Dorringtons if he persuades them to visit his place, which I think likely."

"Well—that seems to let us out—eh? Nothing much that we *could* do, even if we took a chance and butted in!"

"That the way you feel about it, Fred? You'd drop it there—see a pretty decent chap done out of his Raj by a rotten skunk—perhaps lose his life as well?"

"Why—no! Not if there was anything I could do without getting wiped out myself! Doesn't seem to be my scrap, exactly. I'd certainly give the Rajah all the dope before he leaves the ship, whether it means worry and risk to him or not. Honestly—I don't see anything else to be done!"

"Then, if I figure out some way of getting there before that fat slob, you don't care about sitting in and drawing cards—eh?"

"Why—yes, I guess I do, Randall! You and I have been in some pretty tight spots—I'd kinda hate to think of your bucking anything like this without taking me along! We made quite a bunch of real money down there in Papua—don't have to work for a good many years unless we feel like it. Frankly, old man, you're about the limit when it comes to doing things on impulses. Professionally, you work with about as cold and deliberate precision as anyone I ever saw—check up at every step before you take the next one. But it's not your temperament! When it comes to any personal action outside of business, you let yourself in for all sorts of risk and trouble before you stop to think what you're doing. Just to satisfy my curiosity, would you mind telling me how you can possibly get to interior Borneo before either Schmidt or the Rajah?"

"Let's go talk with Jimmy Travers in the radio-room—then perhaps I can tell you that! Just by luck, he happens to have one of the latest type of radiophone sets, with a soup-plate transmitter—and he talks Dutch sufficiently well to make them understand him. Come along!"

WHEN they tapped on the door of the radio-room, Travers happened to be alone and opened the door. Knowing that they were somewhat privileged persons on board, having sailed with Captain Sutton before, he admitted them, locked the door and drew the window-blinds. The Captain and two of the mates occasionally came in for a brief chat when off-duty,—when his "watcher" was below,—but they were the only visitors he was likely to have, messages being sent and received by telephone from the purser's office.

"Jimmy, you get Sourabaya and Singapore without any trouble, don't you—with this regenerative set of yours?"

"I've talked with Singapore from Brisbane, under good atmospheric conditions—and got Pearl Harbor in Hawaii at the same time! Why? Would you wish to talk with some one up yon?"

"I sure would, if you can locate him—and it shouldn't be difficult if he's anywhere near a land telephone. Try the military aviation field at Sourabaya, first—ask them if Major Thornton Grant, the American ace, is anywhere within call? Give them some code hint to work on three thousand meters—to lessen the chance of anyone picking it up."

In less than five minutes Travers was talking with the Dutch signal-quartermaster-sergeant at Sourabaya—learned that Major Grant was temporarily employed by the Government as a civilian aviation-instructor, and was at the moment playing cards in the Commandant's quarters. Five

minutes later his voice came through the air so clearly that Barton recognized it beyond any question. With a suppressed shout of pleased surprise, the Major as quickly knew that of his old A. E. F. friend.

"Where the devil *are* you, Randall? Batavia?"

"Hardly! We're two days out from Thursday—bound your way. Say, Thornton, we'll have time for gossip later—let's get down to business before we're interrupted! What sort of busses have you got, there? Anything good enough for sustained flight—or just practice junk?"

"Most of 'em kinda junky, of course—but there are a couple of Spads and a Fokker which are good enough to go anywhere—in reason. I'd take the monoplane up to Hongkong in a minute if the Government had any urgent reason for it."

"Would they let you take it to Saigon and back as a practice flight if you guaranteed to make good any damage to the 'plane?"

"I think so—if there were any reasonable excuse for the trip."

"Suppose that it was urgently necessary for one of your old A. E. F. friends to reach Saigon a week or more before any steamer could possibly get him there—would make good any damage, and pay for the use of the bus? How would that do?"

"I don't think they'd object to that in the least—in fact, they'd be glad to know they had a boat which could be depended upon for such a flight—quite a little prestige in it for *them,* you know!"

"And if the Commandant understands that it's probably a diplomatic service matter, he'll be willing to treat it confidentially, wont he? Not give out any definite statement as to your passengers—or say the flight was anything but a practice-trip?"

"So much the better! Interest him a lot! When are you due?"

"Sometime Wednesday. Don't want to start while the steamer is in port—she just happens to have passengers and cargo for Sourabaya, this trip, and wont anchor in the mouth of the river a minute longer than she has to. There'll be a thousand dollars in it for you, personally, Thornton—two of us to go with you as *mécaniciens.* You can pick up some Frenchman coming back."

"Why not take one of my Hollanders from here?"

"Not on your life! Tell 'em four would be too much of a load for the 'plane!"

"H-m-m—I think I get you, Ranny! O. K. I'll be ready next Wednesday—with the boat tuned up and tested. You can give me the story later."

WHEN Barton took off the head-frame,—and smilingly switched the soup-plate transmitter out of circuit for the moment,—he asked Travers for the bill. After paying this and getting his receipt, he laid twenty-five pounds in crisp Bank of England notes in the operator's hand.

"I'd like to have you keep that yourself, Jimmy, as a little evidence of appreciation on my part. You heard one end of the talk and can form some idea as to its confidential nature. Grant was in a soundproof booth—so I think he was safe enough at that end, and we were talking on a wave-length not likely to be picked up by other stations. If it happens to leak out anywhere that Bates and I are thinking of going to Indo-China that way, it'll block what we hope to accomplish and make the trip useless—but I think there's very little chance that anybody will hear of it. Many thanks, old man!"

When they went below, Barton said that he would make no further move until the Rajah opened the question of their going up to his capital town, and would see that Schmidt thoroughly understood they hadn't contemplated anything of the sort before. It happened that nothing was said to Barton on the subject until the day before they reached Sourabaya. Then he explained that they were leaving the ship there and going back to Macassar—whence he thought they might get up to the Sessajap on a junk, if the Rajah was quite sure he wanted them. In that case it was possible that they might reach Kloedang before His Highness' party—so he asked for a minute description of the place and the trails which led to it—also a note to one of the Rajah's most trusted men explaining that they were two of his particular friends, coming up on special business.

Going below with them to his room, the Rajah took from his trunk a large-scale Dutch survey map showing every detail of rivers, mountains, clearings and jungle which the Government surveyors had seen, and a good many added ones that they had not. The river-landings and main trails were clearly shown, with their distinguishing marks. His Highness smilingly re-

marked that if it were only possible to drop down from the sky, there would be no possibility of their mistaking the locality for any other, inasmuch as there was a mountain of peculiar shape within five miles, and his two white-marble palaces—built with stone from a Kloedang quarry—were unlike anything within hundreds of miles. He had done some amateur flying with a 'plane built in his own machine-shop, so knew exactly how the terrain looked from aloft—but of course never dreamed it would be possible for them to fly across the Java Sea and Borneo to get there. Eventually such things would be done—but he failed to realize how far beyond the experimental stage practical aviation had actually gone. It was still two weeks before news of the New York to San Diego nonstop flight was flashed around the world. Before leaving the stateroom, Barton made a tracing of the map and jotted down the main details he wished to remember. His Highness thought the possibility of their reaching Kloedang before him quite remote, but had his own reasons for wishing them to have a good deal of authority if they did make it, and so wrote a note to his Prime Minister instructing him to carry out any order or suggestion from them without question, as they were going out of their way on business for him.

AS the *Arafura* was dropping anchor at the mouth of the river, Barton learned that Schmidt and Joy were also leaving at Sourabaya—and made a point of keeping them more or less in sight during the afternoon. At five o'clock he and Fred Bates were not altogether surprised to overhear the German, in the offices of a big shipping and brokerage house, dickering for the charter of a small power-yacht of the "submarine chaser" type—just l a r g e enough for two or three men to live, eat and sleep aboard, yet with sufficient beam to be fairly safe in anything except a typhoon. Built on skimming-dish lines, with a powerful motor, she was capable of doing twenty knots in a smooth sea. As she had been lying idle for some time, an expense to her owner, he was glad to give a four months' charter for a nominal sum. In fact, provisions, petrol and his general outfit were Schmidt's main items of expense. Of course, if the Rajah had known what he had in mind, he probably could have obtained a similar boat to reach the upper Sessajap in the shortest possible time, but he wouldn't have risked taking his guests in it, especially women, on a trip of over twelve hundred miles around Borneo. Knowing the Eastern Archipelago and its weather as he did, it's doubtful if he would have cared much about such a trip himself.

Before making any suggestion to Major Grant that Saigon was not their real objective, Barton gave him a detailed account of what the man Schmidt had in mind and his chartering of the power-yacht that afternoon—letting his old friend draw his own conclusions as to where the German and Patrick Joy were actually bound. Grant considered this thoughtfully a moment or two—then showed that he had sized up the situation, perfectly. The engineer had shown him an Admiralty chart of the China Sea and his own tracing of the Rajah's topographical map.

"You want me to drop you into Kloedang, of course! Being the Rajah's prospective guests and friends, as you are, I'd feel bound to do exactly as you're doing, myself. In one way, you're trying to save a valuable life and property for the Dutch Government—for which they certainly ought to be under obligations to you. On the other hand, if my smellers are as keen as I think they are, you've some idea of eventually trying to cheat the Dutch out of a considerable sum in taxes—though you've said nothing to that effect. But I'm not supposed to suspect anything of the sort—as an American, I hope you do it! The Dutch colonial system is all right, and fair enough for the average sultan or rajah because he's too lazy and shiftless to deserve anything better. In the case of a man like Varudeh Thomas Pulangor, who is spending a share of his own private fortune to develop and improve his principality and its population, the system is a hardship. A man who will cultivate as many square miles with Para rubber and high-grade tobacco as I have a suspicion Pulangor has been doing without Government knowledge, is entitled to a good deal more of a speculative profit on it than the Government tax leaves him. . . . . All right! Let's go! It's about seven hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies—we should make it at sunrise or before. Then I can reach Saigon by night—say I had to come down on the beach because of engine-trouble—and hunt up some bright Frenchman to go back with me."

OWING to the weight of petrol they were obliged to carry, it was difficult to gain much altitude with the big 'plane until they were well over Borneo; but before striking the mountainous neighborhood they got up two thousand meters, where there was little risk of hitting anything, though Grant was flying entirely by compass over pitch-black country where there was no illumination in the villages after seven or eight o'clock. When the terrain became more distinct in the early light, Barton thought he made out the peculiar-shaped mountain several degrees off to their left, and the Major considered it advisable to investigate—as the air-currents might easily have shifted them from their course. As they flew over it, there was little question as to the landmark; and in a few minutes they saw, distinctly, a white gleam from the two marble palaces, and the cleared ground which the Rajah used in his aviation experiments.

Having watched him at that sort of thing for hours, the Dyaks were neither scared nor surprised when the big monoplane swooped down in a beautiful landing, dropped two white men with their luggage, and went up again, disappearing in the morning mists toward the north. They supposed the Rajah had merely sent a couple of his friends on ahead of him in some 'plane which he had bought outside; his letter, which Barton gave the Prime Minister, confirmed this impression, and he readily promised to pass the word among all the people that none of them should tell any stranger how the Rajah's guests had arrived, under penalty of death. (When His Highness placed a taboo on anything in that Raj, even by proxy, it was some taboo.)

The two engineers found themselves received with every mark of respect, and lodged in luxurious quarters with modern conveniences. All the leading officials were fetched in to be presented to them, even the Rajah's harem women, veiled, of course—which Barton, more familiar with Oriental customs than Fred Bates, accepted as an indication that the women were pleased with their appearance and likely to exert considerable influence in their favor. For every stranger in an Eastern city or village comes, sooner or later, under observation from curious flashing eyes behind the harem grilles, and is discussed in detail. If the women make a point of being presented to him,—supposing, of course, that their lord and master is one of the progressive Mohammedans,—it may be taken as evidence of liking for their lord's newly arrived friend. And this harem influence is worth much, at times. Matrimonially speaking, Pulangor was a bachelor of thirty-nine, as he had never consummated a legal marriage with any woman—was supposed to be considering one or two of high rank. But like other Mohammedans he maintained a harem as a matter of course; and if a glimpse of the inmates could have been obtained when they were unveiled, it would have been seen that Pulangor's taste ran to European types of the finer sort.

BARTON had a smattering of Malay and the Cantonese dialect. Both he and Bates spoke very decent French. As several of the high-caste women were Anamese by birth or descent, they and some of the officials spoke understandable French; and with British territory but a few hours' hike through the jungle, a number had some knowledge of English. So there was little difficulty in carrying on a conversation.

Without asking blunt or suspicious questions, Barton adroitly led the talk into a description of the more pretentious buildings, the sanitary and water systems, telephones and electric-lighting plant. Talawan, of course, was no Western city of brick and stone. Most of the houses, though better and more solidly built than the average Bornese structures, were of the usual nipa construction, large enough to be used on the prevailing community plan. But all Government buildings were of reinforced concrete except the old and new marble palaces. The older building, dating back for several generations, was a beautiful example of Oriental carving, but it was now given over to various department offices and the storage of more valuable materials. After absorbing this information without questioning, and being shown through the building, the engineer muttered to his friend at first opportunity:

"They know we're here on business for the Rajah, but they haven't the faintest idea what it is or how far our authority goes. Anything in the line of architecture or archæology, they'll swallow as a matter of course—because His Highness must have had several men in that line of professional work up here. We can make plans of every room in that old palace,

measure the walls, rip out portions of them if we wish to, photograph the carvings, ask any questions as to what the rooms were used for, originally—and it'll all be accepted as part of our job. The more of it we do, the more respect they'll have for us!

"I figure that Schmidt and Joy can't get here for more than a week, and I'm going to drop a hint in the Prime Minister's ear which he's sure to spread—that we've heard certain enemies of the Rajah are somewhere along the Sessajap, pretending to be scientists but gradually working this way with the idea of making trouble, one way or another. Fortunately, that half-brother of the Rajah's went up to Saigon a week ago—to spend some of his money on a Paris opera-singer who has caught his fancy. I doubt very much if Schmidt heard of this—he sent no radio-messages from the *Arafura* that we didn't know about. If he turns up in the time it should take him to make it in that power-launch, we can assume that he expects to find Boro Selah here in Talawan. Not finding him, he wont know whom it might be safe to approach with any revolutionary suggestions—all he can do is to nose about in the neighborhood, presumably botanizing, and smell out what Pulangor really has under cover that might be valuable—then mark time until the half-brother turns up again or he can get in touch with him elsewhere.

"All right! I think we can put a taboo on Schmidt that'll hold him wherever he tries prying into anything—chase him out of one jungle path after another. But let's comb that old palace before he gets here, and see if we can't turn up something!"

THE former Rajah's hereditary palace was a two-story structure built around a small court and tank, his own suite having been on the ground floor with doors opening upon an outside portico running around three sides as an arcade. Over this, on the second floor, had been the several rooms of the harem, with doors opening upon an arcaded balcony and a private stairway down to the tank and garden in the court, which was surrounded by solid walls to insure privacy, the only other door being from the Rajah's suite. Rooms on the farther side of the building had been used by his leading officials. When the new palace was built and the old one abandoned for residential purposes, the harem rooms were fitted up with running water and electricity for such overflow guests as could not be accommodated in the newer building, and the farther apartment was equipped as a photograph-studio and dark-room. The old Rajah's suite had been turned into department offices—and everything on the farther side had been used as storerooms for various commodities, implements and so forth.

When they told the Prime Minister that they would want to do considerable measuring, drawing and photographing of the upper rooms and might just as well sleep there, he immediately had everything cleaned up and placed at their disposal—really very well satisfied to lodge and take care of them with so little extra trouble. In making their selection, Barton took the Ranee's former boudoir for himself, while Fred Bates took the living-room adjoining it. This gave them all the opportunity they wanted to search her living quarters, as the Malays who had been selected to wait upon them could be dismissed whenever they wished to be alone. In the morning, after refreshing baths and breakfast, they shut themselves up in the two rooms for a conference—the drawing-paper, rulers and T-squares on the table indicating what they were likely to busy themselves about. Bates was inclined to be pessimistic concerning their search:

"You can see for yourself, old man—practically everything in these rooms has been installed since they were fitted up for guests! In fact, whatever furniture the Ranee had must have been destroyed years ago."

"Don't overlook the point, Fred, that even among a loyal people there is a certain amount of petty thieving and espionage. In any Oriental principality, there is intrigue started by other wives, concubines and court officials. The Ranee—being a white woman, thoroughly onto such possibilities—wouldn't use any piece of removable furniture as a place of concealment for anything she considered valuable, and she probably had very little furniture anyhow. A Malay wife would have neither bed nor chairs—they don't use 'em. But they were probably fetched in for the Ranee, because she wouldn't have been comfortable without them. Now—this was her sleeping-room. There would have been more opportunity to fix up a place, here, without being observed, than in the living-room.

Suppose that, furniture being out of the question—not much of anything else except the bare walls—what would come into your mind as a good hiding-place? Look around you—and do a little figuring!"

After a little silent inspection, Bates could see but one possibility.

"The stucco above the tiled wainscoting would show any attempt to cut through it—and there aren't even many cracks, considering its probable age. But a tile might be removed and the cracks partly cemented around it so that it wouldn't be noticeable."

"Exactly! And if such a loose tile were more than a foot above the floor, it would be more noticeable than one on the floor level. Eh?"

"By Jove! That's right, too!"

"Well, I'll get down on my tummy this side, with a jackknife—and you take the other. Let's have a careful look-see—as a starter!"

GOING around two sides of the room, examining every tile for three courses above the floor, Barton was forced to the conclusion that none of them had been displaced since they were set in the wall. But an exclamation from Bates indicated that he had discovered something:

"Say! The cracks around three sides of this tile are pretty solid, though they look like fresher cement! On the under side, I can shove in the whole blade of my knife!"

It took them half an hour to chip out the cement from the cracks—then they pried out the tile and discovered a space of considerable size behind it. Reaching in his hand to feel around, Barton's fingers touched a package off at one side. When this had been carefully worked out through the opening, it proved to be a packet of papers wrapped in several thicknesses of what had been oiled silk, originally, but which was now a disintegrating, sticky shell. Cautiously removing this, Barton unfolded several of the documents—then gave a low whistle of satisfaction.

"Here's a letter from Doctor Murphy dated 1883—accepting the old Rajah's proposition to stay in Talawan as resident physician for a term of five years at a regular salary of two thousand Straits dollars a year, and a three months' annual vacation to go outside, when there was no immediate need of his services. Here are birth-certificates of Varudeh Thomas Pulangor, March 20th, 1884—Boro Selah, December 9th, 1885—Pramba Jan, 1886—and Trangau Pulau Misgit, 1886. A memorandum from the old Rajah declaring Varudeh Thomas Pulangor his legal heir and successor—some of his letters to the Ranee, written in English! Several other papers which Pulangor should be mighty glad to get."

"Well—I'm—damned! Think of having the luck to stumble on what we were after, first shot! Can you beat it!"

"I don't admit more than a small part of it as luck, Fred! We knew exactly what we were after; we knew the one place it was most likely to be if not already in the Rajah's hands. After looking about this room, we knew any place of concealment must be, approximately, in one location. Well—we've still got a whale of a job to get these papers out of the country—into the Rajah's box in some English bank-vault. First thing to do is photograph every one of the documents and make several good prints of each. Some of these we'll seal up—address one lot to the Rajah and another to Kate Dorrington—place them in the Prime Minister's hands for delivery in case anything happens to us. Then you and I divide the originals; you keep the Doctor's contract and those other birth-certificates—next to your skin! I'll keep the Rajah's certificate and his father's declaration, myself. That gives four chances of getting his proofs to some place where they can be safely kept."

SCHMIDT and Joy turned up in Talawan one morning when the engineers had gone several miles away to look at one of the rubber plantations, and inquired for an elderly palace official who had been Prime Minister for the old Rajah. The Dyak, after careful inspection, recognized the German as a botanist who had been there twenty-five years before—presumably a friend of His Highness. For the moment he forgot the warning that two enemies of Pulangor were likely to show up, and gave them adjoining rooms to those occupied by the engineers in the old harem. They asked for Boro Selah—and when told that he was away, asked for three of his intimate associates, who came up to their rooms, were primed with very good whisky, and presently named a dozen or more who had reasons of their own for wishing to see Boro Selah on the *musnud*. By the time Barton and his friend returned, a dangerous little conspiracy had been hatched—

having to do not only with the killing of Pulangor, but the abduction of Miss Dorrington for Schmidt himself.

Barton, however, wasn't fool enough to minimize the danger of having men like Schmidt and Joy in the town. They were fairly stupefied when they understood that the engineers must have been there for over a week. The thing was obviously impossible! But they maintained poker faces—greeted them as old shipmates from the *Arafura,* and seemed to have nothing on their minds beyond botanizing. Barton's talk with the Prime Minister, on the other hand, was very much to the point. The official recalled that several Dyaks who had visited the recent arrivals that morning were chronic soreheads, and had frequently given Pulangor trouble with the Dutch agents who occasionally came up for inspection.

"Those men probably are all friends of Boro Selah, Juallam! And Schmidt will hatch up a nice little revolution with them if you don't watch out! My suggestion is that you shadow everyone who talks with Schmidt or seems friendly toward him—be ready to arrest and lock them up the minute I give the word! I'll keep track of Schmidt and Joy, myself—but I want your men to watch every move they make and report to me! Under no circumstances let them see any of the plantations or mineral outcrops!"

THE tile in the Ranee's boudoir had been cemented in place again, and dirt rubbed into the joints to age them like the others. But that night a careful inspection of the tiling in both rooms showed that Schmidt and Joy had found a chance to go over every inch of them and scratch the old cement in many places—apparently without discovering anything. Had the engineers failed to reach Talawan ahead of them, they certainly would have obtained the documents before the Rajah's arrival.

Twelve days later His Highness reached the town with his guests—all of them being surprised and delighted to find the engineers there, but disgusted at Schmidt's presence, though the Rajah—knowing nothing of the German's duplicity—was courteous to him and Joy, as he invariably was to any casual guest.

That evening, with large-scale maps spread upon a big table in the room used as a working office on the ground floor, the Rajah explained to the two engineers one of his reasons for requesting their presence in Talawan at that particular time. Although two French windows communicating with a garden veranda were open, it was a serious offense for any of his people except the palace guards to intrude upon his private grounds or quarters—in fact, the idea was so unthinkable that no special detail was considered necessary in the neighborhood of that particular garden or veranda. There was no probability of interruption without his permission.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my inquiries concerning you were so entirely satisfactory that I'm going to explain some conditions, here, very frankly. I have been sending out shipments of rubber and tobacco, of course—carried in small quantities on the heads of my Dyaks, or slung from poles between pairs of them, as far as the river-landing on the Sessajap. From there, it has gone downstream in *bancos*—nipa-covered barges—drawing four or five feet, when the river was high—and has been transshipped to Koninklijke freighters at the mouth of the river, where the Government maintains a station in charge of a deputy commissioner who collects the Government share of my stuff, the station being near Tarakan, which is a port of call for the smaller branch steamers. Now, as a matter of fact, the tax eats into my profits so heavily, considering the difficulties and cost of transportation to tidewater, that I've deliberately set aside half my crops each year and stored them here in a place where no agent is likely to come upon them. If I could get this accumulation on board a couple of steamers without paying any Dutch tax, the profits would amount to something of a fortune! I'm rather hoping you may be able to suggest a way to do that?"

BARTON had been studying the maps for half an hour, and referring to the volume of Admiralty Sailing Directions for that part of the Archipelago.

"I notice that one side of your Raj is actually the border of British North Borneo—and that in carrying stuff over that forty-mile jungle-trail, you cross what appears to be the headwaters of a small river which comes down to Celebes Sea just inside the British line—the Sibuko—apparently having four and a half fathoms on its bar."

"There are a good six fathoms in its estuary—and no people at all along one of

the outlets; but it's very shallow above that."

"How much water—where your trail crosses it on this bamboo bridge you have marked on the map?"

"Possibly one fathom, during the rains —two or three feet at other times. Out of the question to get a *banco* down, loaded with rubber!"

"Any more water, say, ten miles below? It would only be a twenty-two-mile carry from here, at that."

"Possibly five or six feet in the dry season."

"Ever been down it? Many snags or other obstructions?"

"H-m-m—no more than might be removed in a week, I'd say. I went down in a canoe some years ago. But it's impracticable for *bancos*—"

"Oh, forget your *bancos* for a while! Nothing to hinder a couple of good-sized cargo-boats from loading in that uninhabited delta-channel, is there? Not one chance in a thousand of the British spotting them?"

"No. If I got my stuff that far, I could load it."

"Then why not float it down the Sibuko on long bamboo rafts that would carry two or three hundred tons of rubber or tobacco on three-foot draft at the outside? The rivers are high, now—the rains will last a few weeks yet—you've bamboo to burn, all round you—hundred-foot stalks, five or six inches in diameter at the butt. It's unsinkable — can't capsize — wouldn't take over a couple of weeks to build them—"

An oily chuckle made them start up and whirl about toward one of the French windows opening upon the veranda. Against the pitch-blackness of the night, outside, Schmidt's bulk loomed up like a great menacing toad—a pistol held loosely in each hand.

"Parton, my friend—you wass a pright man! Mebbe I wouldtn't have t'ought of t'at scheme py der Sibuko. Undt der tamn Malays keep chasing me pack so I don't find oudt how much rupper undt tobacco der Rachah haf until I hear him say so! Vell—I'm sorry, chentlemen—put you interfere wit' my blans so much I guess I haf to eliminate you."

Schmidt made the mistake of underrating Barton—of stopping to joke before shooting the three of them, as he might have done before they whirled about in amazement at the sound of his voice. He had them covered, as he supposed—it never occurred to him that either of the three would risk being killed in the attempt to draw a weapon. Barton fired two shots from his hip—the slight motion of his hand from the table scarcely perceptible in the light from the single electric lamp by which they had been examining the maps. Schmidt pulled his triggers twice as he fell—but he was dead before he struck the floor, and the shots went over their heads.

THEN a woman's scream echoed from the drawing-room beyond the Rajah's suite —muffled by the intervening doors. With a sharp command to follow him, Pulangor ran out through his private garden, through a small gate—and around to the main veranda, just as a Dyak was about to knife Mr. Dorrington, and Patrick Joy was running through the compound with Miss Kate in his arms. His Highness shot the Dyak just as Barton landed on Joy's back with his fingers on the man's throat—but Barton was obliged to shoot Joy to stop the conspirator from jabbing his gun against the American's side and pulling the trigger.

The girl didn't faint as Barton held her close to him so that she might not see the man die—but she was pale and weak for the moment, making no objection when he picked her up and carried her back into the drawing-room, where Fred Bates was giving the whole story to her father and the Rajah. Then she looked up at her rescuer in wonder—as the Rajah himself was doing, with some realization of what he owed the two Americans. He determined that they should have no cause to think their time or risk had been wasted. And the girl promised herself with equal fervor that she and her father wouldn't lose sight of Randall Barton for some time if they could help it. They were grateful to Fred Bates as well—but felt that without Barton's experience and leadership, the result might have been disastrously otherwise.

"The Honor of Liu Kung," another thrill-filled adventure of Barton the engineer, will appear in our forthcoming July issue.

Latigo

"Riders Up!" comes the cry; and the cowboy nicknamed Latigo undertakes to tame the worst of them. The story of his ride and of the more serious adventures that made him known as a killer are here told in spirited fashion.

By CLEM YORE

LATIGO was about to pull himself into his saddle, as the foreman of the Slash V Bar outfit stepped from the grain-shed and spoke to him.

"Did you know that Ponca Lucas was the marshal at Oldtown?"

"What's his specialty?"

"Bein' quicker'n a diamond-back."

"Meanin' which?"

"He's itchin' to drop you this afternoon. Just got it over the phone awhile ago. He *knows* how come you for to be in this country, an' aint aimin' to let you get outa it. He's packin' a grudge, seems like."

Latigo looked toward the steel-blue spread of the greasewood where it merged with the horizon haze, and then turned in his saddle and slowly drawled:

"None o' you boys reckoned who I was, didja?"

"Well, sorta; but you're a salty hand an' a good boy; we don't aim to smoke out a man's affairs on this range."

"Where did Ponca come from, here?"

"San Juan, Uncompaghre Basin an' San Luis Valley."

"Uh-huh?" This information startled Latigo, and he said almost with resignation:

"I reckon I have to slide in an' ride," he added, "but I'll kinda drink light—just 'cause Ponca's lookin' out for me to do somethin' dif'rent."

"Thata boy—go along easy! We'd hate to miss you roun' the chuck-wagon these next three weeks. So long!"

Latigo overtook both Snook Burgess and Yuma Charley Good quite a while before Oldtown's grandstand came into view.

The three cow-hands rode up to the chutes and were spotted by the wild-horse wranglers.

"You fellows aimin' to cough up a five-buck entrance-fee?" asked the chute-manager, who was also a judge.

"Here 'tis, an' real homin' coin. We

jest nacherly figger on takin' it along back with us," laughed Snook Burgess, as he handed over fifteen dollars.

"Write their names an' stick 'em in the hat for the saddle buckin'. What's the kid's name?"

"Latigo," volunteered Yuma Charley.

"Latigo?" repeated the judge. "Latigo, what?"

"Latigo's plenty," smiled Latigo.

"All right. Latigo, Snook an' Yuma—write them three down an' shake 'em up with the rest. Now let's get the pickin' over. There's ten o' you boys in the saddle events. Rules is reg'lar; judgin' best rider for carriage, spur-scrapin', front an' back, both feet, an' best all-aroun' appearance. You understan' reg'lar rules, all o' you?"

The contestants indicated assent.

One of the wranglers began to pull names from a hat. Latigo drew White Lightning. He laughed.

Ponca Lucas, the marshal, edged in close, stood straddle-legged and in a sneering, quiet tone spoke:

"Some fellas is just luck-wicked."

Latigo wheeled; his eyes ceased to radiate mirth, and his lips drew in. Yuma Charley nudged him and laughed: "White Lightnin's quite some way from bein' a rockin'-chair, at that."

"An' some distance from bein' a Side-wheelin' Bess or a T. N. T.," returned the marshal.

"Put my name back in the hat," laughed Latigo, "an' when Bess or T. N. T. comes out, I get first one—that agreeable? Looks like you boys, over on this grass, kinda hanker after givin' strange riders all the best o' it."

"You drawed, fella, accordin' to Hoyle," sang out Cody Scoville, "an' bein's as how I an' my crowd's come such a long way to ride, I'm a-sayin', right now, you ride as you draw. The chief's here to see it's done just that way, aint you, Ponca?"

Everybody laughed.

THE drawing was over, and it was whispered about that after all, White Lightning, being free from a former wire-cut on a front foot, and having run the range for more than a year, was the worst bad one on the wild-horse menu.

The top prize was a silver-mounted saddle and bridle, and one hundred dollars cash. The band began to play; the crowd scattered; and the calf-roping was on.

Snook Burgess fell into an easy throw, dropped a perfect loop and made a quick tie. Latigo rode away from the crowd and slipped a band, made from a slice from an inner tube, around each spur and under each heel. Events were snapping fast. The calf-roping was finished. Snook Burgess rode an exhibition bareback steer event. Yuma Charley and four or five others took their mounts handily and won lots of applause. Cody Scoville was disappointed at his ride; he pulled up the tie-rope and changed hands, and did it after giving a great performance on Black Jack.

"Rider up!" some one yelled from the chutes. "Latigo."

When White Lightning had been prodded into the chute and saddled, Latigo said: "Put a flank-string on her; let's give it all to 'em."

"She'll give it all," a voice said.

"Put it aroun' her." The rope circled the mare's flanks.

Latigo crawled the chute and dropped into the saddle, and as he got the hackamore tie-rope properly in hand, the gate was flung wide.

Out the horse came on a dead run, head down, tail extended; back level and feet flying. For forty paces she flew straight ahead and at so fast a clip, that the pick-up man and judges were left behind. Then—

She left the ground, leaped sidewise and lit on all four hoofs in a bunch a hat would cover. An audible exhaust of lungs came from the grandstand. For an instant only did the silence last; then began a buzzing of surprised cries. Latigo held his seat and was putting the rowels into the filly's neck and scraping her shoulders, ribs and flanks constantly; she lunged and plunged and sun-fished, at times seemingly all together.

Latigo was out ahead of all riders. Suddenly the mare reared and feinted a backward throw. Latigo's hat came off, and he slapped it across the horse's head, emitting a series of cries like those of a coyote.

"Look at that ridin' fool!" sang out Yuma. "Is that sassy plenty, Lucas?"

One of the judges shouted through a megaphone: "Take him off!"

The pick-up rider tore beside Latigo and leaned from his saddle; but the boy scorned the outstretched arm. Beyond bounds and across the field he rode alone, the mare tearing directly for the cattle-pens. Before she reached these, however,

Latigo's hat had beaten her to a new course, and once more she came back to the stand, tearing in close to the rail in a quivering and terrific series of half-falls and stiff-legged bucks. Three riders headed her, and unable to shake off the hated thing on her back, she ceased struggling and fell into a loose, long lope, then dropped to a slow canter and stopped at last, stock-still, nostrils distended, eyes wild, head held sidewise, and her hide flecked with foam.

A cry went up from the stand. Cody Scoville picked Latigo from the saddle with one arm and rode with him to the judges.

The first face Latigo saw was that of Ponca Lucas, and the first words he heard came from the marshal: "Ridin' at Oldtown's better'n rustlin' calves in the Cold Creek country," remarked Ponca. Latigo made no reply.

The events proceeded to the finish, and after it was all over, Latigo rode uptown, swinging the silver-mounted prize by the ornate horn and holding it against his chaps. He ate supper with some of the boys at the Picket-pin Café.

THE recollection of the cold glimmer and the calculating sheen in the eyes of the marshal lingered with Latigo as he ate a double T-bone steak and two helpings of American-fried spuds, and some eggs sunny side up. He couldn't get those eyes out of mind, and yet he wouldn't allow the memory to kill his appetite or cause his smile to leave his lips. After the meal, as he stood on the covered porch, Yuma spoke to him: "What'll it be, calico or green-cloth?"

"It's gotta be stud; I've never took the bridle off on the women thing yet."

Cody Scoville came out and joined the two.

"Before I go uptown, I'd like to cache this saddle," suggested Latigo.

"I'm goin' down to the sidin'," said Cody, "an' if it's all right, I'll pack the saddle along an' sling it in with our leather."

"Fair enough," said Latigo, "an' we'll be waitin' for you. How long'll you be?"

"Boy," said Cody, laying a hand on Latigo's shoulder, "I'm aimin' to be just somewhere's 'longside you all the time tonight. 'Pears to me like them clouds"—he raised his eyes—"is plumb anxious to spill a lot o' dirty weather."

Latigo laughed.

"I don't mind the rain," he said. "What I hate's a lot o' dust an' wind."

"Say, kid, come yere!" Scoville led Latigo into the shadow of the water-tank. "Easy on the licker, son, an' don't you go f'r to yank your gun till I gets back. Gimme your paw."

"Surest thing you know," Latigo replied, accepting the hand; then turning to Yuma he said: "Let's go—where's Snook?"

"Payin' that six-dollar check o' yourn. Why don't you stop dietin'?"

AT midnight the milling stars rained down a white light on the town. The air was crisp and laden with the dissonance of out-of-tune pianos and the inharmonies of the human voice raised high in ribald mirth. The metallic laughter of women rose above the sharp and well-meant profanity of men; but the town was good-humored and nearly everyone was happy, for the day was winding up without tragic discord or disgrace.

Latigo, Yuma and Snook were walking toward the corrals, from where they would ride to their ranch, and behind them strolled Scoville and his boys, who were taking their stock out that night on the train, to exhibit them two days later three hundred miles away.

Latigo was glad and in a singing humor. The night had passed without further contact with Lucas; but just as they rounded the last of the shambling buildings that lined the borders of the town, he spotted Ponca stepping out of a doorway directly upon them. The meeting could not be avoided. The officer halted the group; in his hand he held a long black gun.

"You fellows mosey down that side-street," he ordered. "This *hombre* an' me, we's got a heap to say to each other. Mosey, now, *pronto*-like."

Cody made as if to circle the crowd.

"Stick 'em up, you fellers, an' beat it," Lucas said. "If you don't, I'm unloadin' into him right now."

Latigo was left alone, staring into the cold, dull eyes which caught and held, in some satanic manner, the myriad lights from the illuminated street toward which they glared.

"You know what's a-comin', don't you?" growled Ponca.

"Yeh, I reckon this is jest 'bout the kind o' killer you are," prodded Latigo, "quick an' desperate, like a skunk in a hen-house."

"All right!" Something in the taunting voice of Latigo altered the design of Lucas. "I aint arguin'; you pull your gun when I raise mine above your eye. I'm willin' to give you that much chance; they tell me you're some fast."

Latigo found and held the eyes before him. He paid no heed to the pistol-muzzle that was ascending slowly before his gaze. He held the sight of Lucas steadily, and watched and listened. Ponca's lips parted; very slowly he said: "I'm a-croakin' you 'cause you beat Scudder to it back in the Territory, an' Scudder was my friend. Ten years ago Scudder an' I an' Walkaway put your old man out; an' now, they tell me, you're a-goin' to clean us two. That's why I'm croakin'—"

The gun before Latigo wavered as it went above his eyes.

He caught sight of the cocked hammer held back by Ponca's thumb.

The weapon was still ascending when Latigo slapped his hip, spinning his holster upward, a streak of yellow flame leaping from it. Ponca's face wore an expression of grotesque amazement. He tried to use his arm, but the boy's bullet had broken the shoulder. Again Latigo's gun, hidden in the holster, poured forth flame, and the upstanding form of Lucas wilted, slumped to the earth and settled limply in a heap.

Latigo removed his hand from his gun-butt, and the swivel-hung holster dropped parallel with his leg. For a brief second he took in the man on the ground; then his comrades rounded the corner, guns in hand, bent on avenging him. Consternation filled their features as they gaped at Ponca Lucas.

"This way," commanded Cody. "Trade your hat with my Slim here; he's a-ridin' your hoss back as a stall. That's our engine a-spottin' cars now, come on, you—before these greasers wake up an' tote this gossip round the town."

FIFTY miles down the railroad Latigo heard Cody talking through the half-opened horse-car door to a man who held a lantern so that its rays fell dully into one end of the car. Scoville was gaping from his blankets in a sleepy tone:

"Hell, no! There's nobody here but what our pass calls for. Me an' two hands an' the three that's back in the caboose. Latigo, you say his name is? You mean that kid what won the top prize at Oldtown?"

"Yes, that's him. They was a-sayin', back there, he mighta been with you-all."

"That's funny. Tell me 'bout it."

"There's a string o' empties up ahead," interrupted a brakeman. "Maybe he's in one o' them. Hustle, Sheriff—Nineteen's a-humpin' it along back o' us, an' orders are to meet her at Salt Flats."

Latigo heard the men move away and the door close. The voices outside grew faint. The locomotive gave a sharp series of blasts. The train groaned, and a bump ran throughout its length. He dug a little more snugly beneath saddles and blankets piled across several bales of hay. When the train attained full speed, Cody crawled over to him and said: "Come on—kick out o' there an' tell me all about it. You can compose a cigarette just as soon's you like. Man, I'm et up with curiosity. Come on an' spill it all."

Latigo arose from the tangle in which he lay hidden, just as one of the other boys lit a lantern. Through the ventilators of the car a cool and fragrant breath came from the desert.

"That's real smelly," sniffed Latigo. "What it is?"

"Greasewood bloom, an' some other flowers. Don't you know it's plumb March already?"

And that was how Latigo came to be down in the sand country where fences aren't everywhere yet, and men are still known by brands carried on stock. It was a land that charmed Latigo, and so he decided to remain—he and his silver-mounted bridle and saddle, which Cody dropped out to him, early the next night, as the train was pulling away from a watering-tank and where, far into the chaparral and mesquite, a dim yellow light told the direction to be followed to water, work and a place where he could wander from, on and on, till he lost his name.

OLD man Tarrent sat in the shade of his pepper-trees looking up the river.

"Sixty miles from a railroad an' doin' the best I can," he mused. "I wonder what's a-keepin' the boys?"

Night fell. The ancient pioneer moved into the house.

Far away a whippoorwill called. A bat flew round and about a thin shaft of light filtering into the night across the fire-flower and poppy-beds, from a sitting-room window. Old man Tarrent heard his boys ride into the corral. He shouted for the

foreman, and when his assistant came into the house, he pierced him with a glance, as he said anxiously: "Well?"

"You was right. They've not only laid that drift fence down, but they burnt a mess o' the poles an' piled barb-wire on top the blaze. Both corrals gone, an' the water-hole fenced with our wire. It'll take a week to roun' that herd out o' the Brown Hills. That's just my way o' thinkin'."

"Me too! Well, you boys ride in tomorrow—it's Saturday, aint it?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Ride in, an' let's get it over with. You frame it up on Buck Riley an' let the kid get to him. An' don't none o' you boys mix in an' get hurt. Let them two do the smokin'; but now, listen—"

AT noon the next day Latigo and five of the men from his outfit, including the foreman, rode down the winding dust of Green Tree. It so happened that all the men had money—a gift from old man Tarrent, a day at his expense. Such generosity was nothing short of sheer luck, and so it became them to make certain that Green Tree be allowed to view them on parade.

When Latigo was unbridling his pony, behind the Gopher, he looked across his saddle and caught the eye of a girl whose hair was ablaze with a tangle of lights. Instinctively he raised a hand to his hat and was rewarded with a smile. Some quality within his throat compelled him to gulp. He felt that staring was profane, and so he lowered his gaze. The girl stooped to drink from a water-tap, and as she finished, she again caught Latigo's eyes and smile. There was something shy, almost girlish in the manner in which he avoided rudeness, and it wasn't until she was disappearing around Lige Thomas' barn that he essayed another look. He heaved a sigh and walked into the street, where he saw his foreman talking attentively to the other hands; but he did not hear what was being said. When he joined the group, it vanished into the Gopher.

All day the boys stayed there. Toward night another outfit arrived in town. The bartender gave this information first.

The foreman gathered his boys about him—all except Latigo, who was singing a long, plaintive ballad for a group about the front of the saloon. A Mexican musician accompanied the singer on a concertina, and the words rang sweetly through the room.

But I'm dreamin', just a-dreamin'
Like a salty hand will do,
An' my blue roan's tired an' steamin'
An' reckon I'm tired too.
But I'm thinkin', an' I'm smilin'
As I'm blinkin', an' a-whilin',
Yes, I'm linkin', an' beguilin'
All that's best in me to you.

"Now you, Fred," the foreman was saying, "you mosey over near the store an' post office; an' right down back o' them empty crates, is the wires. When you git the high-sign from Fat, here, you use your cutters an' slice them wires; an' if you git a chance, reach inside the window, when the excitement gets jest right, an' unhook the bat'ries out the phone box, an' fetch 'em with you. Then come round, get your hoss an' head home—savvy?"

"I gotcha."

Latigo sang another verse.

Yes, I'm moonin', just a-moonin'
As I 'braid this appetite,
For I'm spoonin', just a-spoonin'
With the whisperin' of night;
An' the needle-dust of stars above
Is what I'd like to say of love,
But on my way, I've gotta shove
Through the whisperin' of night.

Immediately following the song, when laughter, jibes, applause and hearty appreciation were commingling, Buck Riley stepped into the room, followed by six of his men; one of these whispered into his ear: "That's him—sure is, that slim cotton-top, with the five X beaver—"

He never completed his confidence, for Latigo had fixed his eyes, in the bar-mirror, and the man saw something die in Latigo's face and something very ugly take its place.

Latigo swung about casually, and stared calmly into Riley's eyes. The features of Riley's companion recalled to him something reminiscent of Oldtown's rodeo. He placed them at once. They belonged to the wrangler who had drawn his name from the hat.

All eyes centered on Buck Riley's attitude toward Latigo; everyone felt a sense of premonition.

Then a girl laughed; and somehow the tension broke.

THE town was in an uproar. Small clots of men were clustered here and there; a crowd was gathered about a black

object stretched on the platform outside of the Gopher.

The one telephone instrument in the village was out of commission, and the nearest one available was thirty miles away—thirty miles to the south, on the feeding ranch of Sid Weston.

Sid's daughter was in town for the night, and her car in front of the hotel. They found her eating at a restaurant and started her home to call the sheriff and thus notify the county of the flight of the killer.

The moon was coming up over the eastern hills as she slipped in the clutch and sped out into the desert. To the south were banks of clouds, hanging black and ominous over the mountains. Distant thunder rumbled in the air like a low growl.

They had told her the killing had been wanton, that it had been done by a man called Latigo, a bad man from Oklahoma, who had a string of murders to his credit all across the country.

And when they described him, she recalled the eyes that had smiled into hers so honestly and shyly across his pony at the hitching-rack. As her car raced over the sand, she saw those eyes; and they were kindly, not like the eyes of a killer, surely not those of a man whose heart was black.

OLD man Tarrent was seated before a blazing ironwood log in his fireplace, listening to his boys tell of the killing. There was a pleased twinkle about his eyes, a hideous expression lingering and shaping itself odiously around his lips.

"An' then what?" he asked impetuously.

"Well," answered the foreman, "it all come off reg'lar. I had Jake here tell Hettig who Latigo was, an' Hettig told Buck Riley. Seems like Riley had a fella in his outfit what just arrived from Oldtown; an' this guy pointed Latigo out, soon's he got inside the Gopher. The kid was just a-finishin' a song when he spotted Buck an' his man a-whisperin'. From then on, Latigo's drinks were sure slim."

"Well, and—" urged Tarrent.

"I see what was a-comin'; so I edged outside an' got ready to slip the news to Fred to get busy with his wire-cutters. More'n a hour went by. Then Buck ambled close to Latigo, an' he had his gun under his vest. He slipped the muzzle ag'in' Latigo's rib, an' you never heard a man read the gospel to another like Riley fed it to the kid, who jest stood with his back to 'im a-takin' it, an' a-sippin' a chaser an' a-smilin' back at 'im in the glass.

" 'So you're Latigo—come in yere to put Buck Riley away, eh?' That's what Buck was a-sayin'; then he let out a line o' language that sizzled the air. 'You're plumb eloquent,' says Latigo. 'An' to show you that you got me wrong, I'm willin' to let you get away with it an' maybe gargle a drink with you.' 'Listen, kid,' answers Buck, 'you're wanted, an' wanted bad, dead or alive. Now, make a play for your gun an' quit snifflin' that drink, for it's sure goin' to leak soon.'

"I was a-peekin' in through the window, 'longside which I'm standin', on the porch, an' I see Latigo's smile, the wickedest lips I ever see—maybe not so sinful as chilly. Then he called for a drink. 'Just a suicide snort,' he says, 'for when I sit down this glass, I'm sure goin' to pull my iron.' The drink was shoved at 'im, an' he poured a big one. Then, here's where I see his oil. He lifts that glassful o' moon with a left hand, tilts his elbow, fancy-like, an' when it comes chin-high, he twirls his wrist, an' it lands in Buck's face. 'Stead of jumpin' back, the boy leaned past Buck's gun an' got his body plumb inside. When Riley let his finger loose, that hunk o' lead busted the window in front of me. I ducked; and Herb, here, told me afterward that Latigo let loose only one wham an' then backed out. Buck was drilled clean; and when they examined him, they found the slug had ranged up and come out a foot an' a half above where it entered. The kid dropped, in turnin', an' shot from the holster. I waved to Fat, an' Fat gave the signal to Fred; then we beat it."

"What did the boy say to you?"

"I come up to him as he was unhookin' his pinto. He just looked at me a long time, an' then he said: 'Didja know who I was?'

" 'Sure,' I said. 'Why, the ol' man found that out in July.'

" 'Where I come from, an' because why?'

" 'Certainly.'

" 'An' did the boss want Riley put away?'

" 'Well, he wont weep none,' I says.

"He didn't answer me for a little bit; he was a-gittin' a knot out of his tie-rope an' slippin' a bridle on; then he said: 'You tell old man Tarrent to keep my money

till I writes for it. I got thirty-eight days a-comin'. I'm ridin' on a little further.' Them was his words; an' I'm a-tellin' you they sure sounded pitiful."

"They sure did!" coincided another hand.

"He was a good boy," quietly remarked the old man. "Too bad he hit the grit; now, what we gotta do is see that the inquest brings in a justifiable verdict. We can't have anybody troublin' an' tailin' that kid, from hell to breakfast, on account o' that killin'. Why, in my time—oh, shucks! It was self-defense; everybody knows that. I'll ride up to town tomorrow an' explain to Pete 'bout them wires, and return his bat'ries. Ev'ry thing's comin' out all right. It was a good day's work. Let's go to bed. Watch that damn cat when you go out; I don't want it in here."

LATIGO mused on the words of the foreman and knew what had happened; and this knowledge saddened him.

"Now you done it," he mused, "—allowed these *hombres* to use your gun to wipe out competition." He clacked his tongue, evidencing an instinctive disgust for his stupidity.

Old man Tarrent arose to his mind.

There he was, sitting in the ranch-house waiting for the boys to bring the news to him. He saw it all now; it was Tarrent's job—an old man too, near to his grave. But then, it was pretty much the country after all—the country got a man. It didn't matter to Tarrent which way the shooting had gone. If Buck killed him, then they'd have hung Buck or he'd have jumped that range. Tarrent's stock would, either way, be free to graze anywhere. . . . . Funny how his name had followed him.

He was riding in the deep chaparral. The first hour brought him to the top of Henry's mesa, and here he looked back at the town. There it lay, its lights merged into two small glows. They looked like a couple of punchers smoking cigarettes while waiting for the herd to settle down. He'd seen such lights riding night-herd.

Across the mesa he loped, estimating the town ten miles behind him.

A roll of thunder bit into the air, and he turned and looked long and carefully at the clouds rolling toward him fast; a stroke of vivid lightning illumined the horizon, silhouetting the hills, which seemed very close; it split the black cloud-curtain wide open and exposed the heavy banks. "Whew!" he mused. "If they touch a hill —they'd empty, right now."

Two hours went by, two long, tedious hours.

Fear gripped his heart with a sickening reality, compelling him to face about and peer along his back trail. Pshaw! They couldn't tail him, in the dark, through that brush. But the next day?

A drop of rain struck his hand. Rain? The thought of rain brought him instant relief. If he could head into the path of that storm, why, he'd have a clean get-away made especially for him. The rain would wash out the faint trail of his pony's hoofs. He turned toward the clouds' center and rode down from the mesa into a broad basin. Spattering drops of rain fell upon him. He removed his papers and tobacco and put them in a saddle-pocket, muttering the words of an old cowboy song:

> It's cloudy in the west, a-lookin' like rain
> An' my old slicker's in the wagon again.
> No chaps, no slicker, an' it's pourin' down rain
> An' I swear I'll never night-herd again.

On he went, giving the horse its head, in a general way, but knee-guiding it always to the north, where the clouds were. North—that was it; he wanted to get north. He'd had plenty of the south and sand and —that other thing, that made men want to kill him. He didn't want to kill anybody—except just one more man.

HE saw a light off to his side and stopped to listen. The wind and rain swishing through the mesquite made all other sounds inaudible. Then came a lull, and he heard the purr of an automobile. *They were after him in a machine!*

A wide creek-bottom loomed; its banks were too steep to descend, and he ran along these, seeking for a crossing; then, as he came out from behind a thick clump of cacti, he once more discerned a light-flash; in its circle there was exposed the hood and windshield of an automobile. The dazzling ray came only in flashes. It was a hand-torch. He fathomed the trouble. Something had happened to the lights of the car; it had missed the concrete bottom of the road, where it crossed the creek, and was now caught in the soft stuff. The engine was running.

The light suddenly moved, revealing the car to be a runabout, the seat of which was empty. The electric spot was laid on a

fender; some one passed between it and Latigo. That was better—only one person there, a little fellow. Well, he just had to cross that creek-bottom.

He dismounted and led his pony to within fifty feet of the stalled car. Here he found a wash in the bank, down which he pulled his horse. On the opposite side he mounted, turned to look once more at the car, and then—

In the soft earth, near a sunken rear wheel, he saw the features of the girl he had beheld at the water-tap behind the Gopher. For a moment only did he hesitate.

"Shucks!" he mused, turning his horse's head, "I can yank that Rolls Rough outa that mud in a jiff."

He whirled to the bank's edge and shouted. The light was extinguished, and when it flashed again, he saw the girl, attired in riding trousers, trying to place a bundle of greasewood boughs beneath a wheel. The girl gave no evidence of having caught his voice; the engine had drowned out all other sound. At that moment—

THERE came an ominous sound as of rushing water. Latigo had heard that noise before; it was a head of water coming down the dry creek; and if it caught the girl standing as she was—

He looked up the deep water-bed and saw, just as a lightning flash illuminated the night, a moving wall rushing down the bottom, folding over and over, like soft mud. That head was a good four feet high, and back of it, was the real thing. Decision came to him instantly.

If that light of hers would only stay where it was! Unhooking his lariat, he dropped into the road. He had forty-five feet of throw-rope, but he'd have to get closer than he was. He stuck spurs in his pony, twisting out a big loop as he rode, and when within thirty feet of the girl, his rope swished through the air, settled about her; and as he snubbed it to his horn, he turned his horse and dashed for the high ground. As the girl reached the center of the creek, the water struck her and carried her tumblingly over and over. She came to a halt as the full head of the stream jerked her to the end of the rope. The pony strained against the lariat, and the girl came out of the whirling smother dragging along the sand. Latigo dismounted and raised the limp body in his arms as he removed the loop.

"YES'M," he was saying, "it shore was. A reg'lar September cloudburst. They tells me they're real frequent up in them hills."

She liked his voice; it sounded soft and drawly. It was too dark for her to see his face.

"My little flivver," she said, "—I guess it's done for."

"Serves it plumb right, for buckin' where it did."

They both laughed, and Latigo was warmed by the closeness of their mirth. It drew them together, he fancied; and strangely, he didn't feel tongue-tied or shy.

"Where you headin'?" he asked.

She started to tell him she wanted to get to a phone, but some impulse urged her not to do this.

"Home," she answered instead.

"Live far?"

"Ten miles."

"Which way?"

"South—right on this road."

"Ma'am, I'm a-ridin' thata way; you can have my hoss."

"Can't we ride double?"

Latigo tingled at the thought.

"Shore, we can," he replied. "Shucks, this pony weighs a thousand an' twenty, an' he's been eatin' his head off. Are you in a hurry?"

"I ought to have been home a long while ago; but when my lights went out, I rolled into that hole. I've been there two hours at least. Have you the time?"

Latigo lit a match.

"Yes'm—it's after two o'clock, a little bit."

By the light, the girl caught sight of his features.

These confirmed her memory of the face that smiled at her yesterday and coincided with the description given her before she left town. So this *was* Latigo—the killer of men! The thought numbed her—but only for a flash. This boy was not odious to her. She knew that definitely.

"You get on," she said, "and leave your foot out of this stirrup. I'll climb up, all right."

They started off. The feel of her arm about him thrilled Latigo.

"I believe it's a-quittin'," he said after a long silence. "Look yonder—there's the moon."

"Isn't it wonderful?" she replied; and then: "Why don't you smoke? I don't mind it."

"Thank you, ma'am—I b'lieve I sure would like to tumble one. Just hold these ribbons."

As he lit his cigarette she saw his face again, and the bitter things men had told her of him went out of her mind. . . . . Some time later they came to her home, where she dismounted and went into the house.

HER father was not in bed. She listened at the cook's room.

"Wong!" she called, knocking on the door, "Wong! Where's Father?"

She heard the Chinaman stumble across the floor and ask from inside the panels:

"Missy, you want'em Wong?"

"Where's Father?"

"He go one, maybe two clock, yestiddy. Ride 'em machine him fella Sawyer. He go T Bar O. He say maybe you follow him—today—I dunno—maybe tomollow."

"Did he take the machine?"

"He all time hully, heap hully, ride 'em that fella Sawyer machine."

"Wong, listen!"

"Y'less, missy."

"I got caught in a cloudburst coming down Indian Creek and lost my Lizzie. Now I'm going up to Father. A cowboy rode me this far. He roped me out of the water. You take care of his horse; and—Wong—"

"Wong all time *sabe.*"

"Put that horse in the south pasture on West Fork, and if anybody asks you about that horse or about me, you don't *sabe.*"

"Me *sabe?* By an' by, nex' week maybe, Wong come up T Bar O. Boss say me come."

"All the hands go with Father?"

"All go yestiddy mornin'."

"All right—good night."

She removed her wet garments, slipped into a rough outing suit, secured a lunch, wrapped it in a heavy coat and joined Latigo.

"Get down and unsaddle," she said. "You'll find grain and hay in that shed; then bring your saddle and meet me here. We're going to ride north."

"I'm aimin' to keep shovin' on, ma'am."

She laid a hand on the pony's mane and looked up at him. Dawn was streaking the desert and tipping the hills with faint gold and old rose; by its light she discerned his smile. There was some wistful quality about the expression, as though his soul was weary; it tore away all her reserve.

"We are going to join my father, who has gone to our other ranch, two hundred miles from here—up in a hilly, sweet-water country. They need men like you there; and I thought you'd like to ride that way. Never mind the pony; just bring your saddle and bridle. We'll go in Father's machine."

Latigo gazed into her face; and then lifted his eyes to the rising lilac streaks far behind it, where the sun was transforming the earth into a flood of delight.

Dawn? A new day?

Comprehension came to him; he didn't wonder or quibble—he did not question, for unutterable peace filled his being; and where peace dwelt, there love was; and where love came, there dwelt no fear.

"Yes'm," he stammered, "I'll sure do it. I'm sick o' this sand. I'd like to ride in a sweet-water country once more."

HE flung his saddle into the back of the car, after putting his horse away, and helped her fill a five-gallon can of gas. They swung out of the yard amid a joyous serenade from the ranch roosters, and as they dashed along the narrow road, the brush slapping the fenders, day came full and white.

"You saved my life back there," she said. "Well—turn about's fair play, isn't it?"

"Yes'm," he replied.

Something in the way she uttered "Turn about's fair play," rather than the words, compelled him to realize that she was deliberately carrying him away from danger, and that she knew the urgency of flight. This thought forced him to say:

"But you don't know who I am?"

"You're Latigo?"

"Yes'm."

A meadow lark, sitting on a cluster of mistletoe in a mesquite's top, burst into a note of joy. The engine purred an answer. Latigo's eyes became misty, and to conceal his emotion, he lowered his gaze to the floor-boards, where he saw her foot; it was jamming down the accelerator as far it would go.

After a while, as though she knew his mental confusion, she said without looking at him: "My name is Gerry."

"Gerry?" he said abstractedly. "What's your daddy's name."

"Weston," she replied, "Sidney Weston."

The earth was suddenly blotted out; the beauty of the hour was gone.

"Did they ever call him—Walkaway?" he asked.

"I don't believe Dad ever had a nickname," she said. "I've never heard of it."

This information brought all the beauty of the awakening day to him, and he babbled beside her like a boy. He told her of the horror of his last few months, and how he had fled from place to place in a constant dread of capture—all because he had endeavored to bring to justice the killers of his father.

He described the trial of the suspected murderers, the finding of Walkaway Weston's pistol near the scene of the homicide, and how influential men had proved an alibi for the accused, who had at once disappeared.

All day they talked, and it was agreed that he should carry an alias, and remain unknown, until his name had been cleared.

It was just after dark when they reached the end of their journey. Gerry's father had suddenly gone East to undergo some sort of an operation. She did not tell Latigo what it was, but before she bade him good-night, she had seen Ben Phillips, the foreman, and it was arranged that Latigo was to ride the north line of the T Bar O and batch in a cabin on the slopes of Three Finger Mountain. He had been entered on the pay-roll as Ned Harris.

ONE snappy morning in December Gerry rode up to Latigo's cabin, her eyes ablaze, a shout of gladness on her lips, and brandishing a letter in her hand. Dismounting, she pulled him into the cabin and sat down beside him at a table.

"At last, it's here," she said. "I'll read the most important part first. Oh, but it's good news!"

As she read, Latigo noted the brilliant light of excitement glowing in her eyes.

"'*There are now no indictments existing against him.*' Isn't that great!" she exclaimed. "Old man Tarrent wrote this letter; he and I have been at some good work; wait till you hear it all." She continued to read:

"'After our investigation, the authorities in Green Tree, Oldtown and Cold Creek, decided to quash all charges, and I was present when each county attorney asked the court to dismiss the indictment. We found enough good eye-witnesses to prove self-defense in each case. And now he can return to any of these towns whenever he desires.'

"Old man Tarrent spent a lot of time and money, getting that information, Latigo; and the Cattlemen's Association of this State stood solidly back of him," said Gerry. "He was a dear; and it seemed as if he regarded it as a duty, just as though he owed you something."

"I know who it was was back o' him," replied Latigo. "I never can thank you enough."

"Do you want to please me?" she asked.

"Ask me anything. I'd consider it plumb cheap."

"Forget about Walkaway; will you?"

LATIGO looked away.

"Seems like, oveh there,"—he pointed from the window,—"that there's somethin' always a-callin' me, like it does the li'l ol' brown bear. It's always a-whisperin' to me, 'Come oveh an' look on the other side.' Till I throw my eye on Walkaway, seems like I had a job to finish, an' I just gotta keep a-shovin' on."

"Last week you promised me to try and forget that."

"I did; but let me ask you somethin'. If you knew sure-enough some fella was runnin' loose, just because the law failed, would you forget? If he killed your daddy?"

"I wouldn't hate, Latigo," she replied seriously; and as she went on, it seemed to him as though some strange power was voicing, through her, a fundamental truth: "It isn't God in us, when we hate. Love and hate can't abide in the same person. One always kills the other. Why not let hate die?"

"Whata you mean—'xactly?"

"Suppose you fill a quart measure, completely full of water; can you force any more into the measure?"

"Can't be done."

"And if you're filled with love, it's the same way; you can't hate—there wont be room."

He sat immobile looking into her eyes while an indescribable delight suffused his face. As Gerry saw this transformation, something superb and lovely came into her being, and she felt a burgeoning, as though suddenly she had become another individual—or as if there, just at her elbow, the shadow of her girlhood was standing, on the verge of vanishing forever. When she rode away a little later, Latigo mused as he watched her disappear: "Here's more'n a quart; an' it's plumb full a'ready."

"WHEW!" said Latigo, as he looked out of his window the next morning. "Snow! An' doggone, they're sure gettin' res'less."

He saw the cattle coming out of the timber in long, thin black lines, and dotting the white floor of the bottoms. Danger was at hand; he knew that; destruction was lurking beside that vast herd.

He tried to phone the ranch, but could obtain no response; probably the line was out. Hastily saddling his horse, he began to hunt the trouble and found it at last when within sight of the main headquarters —a lodgepole pine had fallen and broken the wires. He repaired the damage and jogged slowly to the ranch, looking carefully at the sky from time to time, and noting that it was heavily overcast, and that already a wind was hurrying south along the crests of the distant hills, raising the fresh snow on top, until the peaks appeared to be a series of smoking volcanoes.

As he entered the bunkhouse, Ben Phillips greeted him.

"Hello, Ned!" he said. "Think it was Christmas?"

"Nope. But them flats below me is lousy with whitefaces, an' they're comin' out of the timber like somethin' had skeered 'em."

"That's sure bad," said Ben. "All the boys are away; I sent 'em to Willow Creek to bring back the horses, and they wont be in till night. How is it in the hills?"

"She's gettin' ready to empty. I'll bet them doggies, right now, is a-headin' out. I've been gone more'n three hours, 'cause the phone was out. They was a-millin' then."

Phillips was shaving at the time, and between strokes he said: "I wasn't aimin' to move 'em till next week—but—I reckon we've got some night ridin' to do, real soon. I'll be through in a minute. Sit down. There's a paper there."

In the tray of an open trunk Latigo saw an old-fashioned plush photograph-album. "Can I rubber, at that?" he asked.

"Sure," said Phillips. "Look it over an' see where I get my good looks."

In turning the pages, the photograph of a man whose eyes somehow caught and held his, stared at Latigo. For a long time he looked at the face.

"Who's this dude?" he asked.

Phillips glanced at the album.

"That—why, that's Walkaway Weston taken back in the San Luis Valley.

"Walkaway Weston—from San Luis Valley!"

He closed the album and laid it back in the tray.

The foreman continued to shave. The sound of an auto was heard; Phillips leaned toward the window and said: "The ol' man's a-gettin' home. He wired Gerry last night to meet him at the railroad."

AS Gerry and her father were entering the house, the foreman raised the window and shouted: "Welcome home! Ned Harris is here an' says the bunch is gettin' out the timber. I'll have to be a-ridin' after the boys an' all the spare hands I can get. I'll see you when I get back. How'd you come out, lucky?"

"I wont know for quite a while yet. Is Harris with you?"

"Yes."

"Send him over."

Latigo, looking from the window, saw the face of Gerry's father. It was much older, but—in it were the traces of the features he had seen in the album.

"Didja hear?" queried the foreman. "Go on over; you'll like the boss."

"I'm a-goin'," replied Latigo, and he walked out of the house, like a man newly arisen after a fever.

"HARRIS," he heard a voice say, "Gerry told me how you saved her. I'm glad to meet you, boy."

Latigo did not hear, for he was peering into the wide, almost staring eyes, above the table. His hand worked gradually toward his side, and when he spoke, it was in a measured and exasperatingly slow tone.

"Look at me," he said. "Don't you know me?"

"You're Harris. What's the matter with you?"

"I'm not Harris. My real name is Clay Terry, son of Clay Terry, who was killed in the San Luis Valley. I know you, Walkaway, an' you know me too."

Gerry, entering the room from the kitchen, heard this much of Latigo's accusation.

"They call me Latigo," he went on. "It was Latigo when I got Scudder—Latigo when I got Ponca Lucas. I've been after you a long time. . . . . Where's your gun?"

"Latigo!" cried Gerry. But he did not hear.

"Move!" he continued in a rage. "I don't want to plug you while you're sittin'. Make a play—I'll give you a chance!"

"Latigo!" cried Gerry; she had moved noiselessly to his side. "Don't you see—look at him!"

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's blind."

Latigo looked at Gerry and suddenly there surged through him a repellent nausea for the deed he was about to attempt; he drew his hand from his hip and took his eyes from Gerry. Her words of yesterday came to him. *"Suppose you fill a quart measure completely full of water—"*

"Blind—my God—blind!" exclaimed Latigo.

He turned and walked to the door. As his hand touched the knob, the blizzard struck the house, its shriek ringing through it and around the gables. Latigo looked back at Gerry.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"I've gotta get in front of them cows before they reach Shale Cliffs at Seven Mile. If I don't head 'em, they'll all walk into the river before night. . . . . You was right 'bout that quart."

She saw him open the door, disappear. Then she heard her father. She turned and looked at him. He was hunched over his desk, his face horribly distorted, as though in the agony of fear, or as if he was struggling with words that would not come. In a huge paroxysm of effort he shrieked:

"Go after him, Gerry. Don't let him go there."

"I don't intend to," she said coldly. In her voice there was mingled scorn and pity. She rushed to her room and attired herself in heavy winter clothing. Then she went to the stable and saddled her horse.

THE snow was falling fast, and Gerry had great difficulty in following the hard pace Latigo was setting. By the time she reached Seven Mile, she no longer could make out the tracks of the pony ahead, for the snow was five inches deep and the wind severe. Yet as she gained the long flat which led to the cliffs, she smelled the steaming cattle and heard their low bellowings, and the scraping of their horns and hoofs. The wind died, and through the falling veil of snow, as she galloped forward, she saw the leaders coming out of the defile known as Jackson's Wash.

They were plodding doggedly on, pawing through the drifts, staggering head down, coats frost-crusted, mouths laden with dangling ribbons of ice, and eyes surrounded with a matted and outstanding beadwork of rime. The entire herd, compactly formed into a long, undulating and snakelike mass, was coming out of the Wash. It moved stolidly, conveying an impression of unpreventable doom. The thought came to the girl that these dumb brutes realized that they were executing a march of death, but that they were pursuing the call of an unconquerable instinct, following a master-mind, and that there could be no escape.

She was aghast as she realized that she was looking upon one of the "drifts" of which she had heard old men speak many times, as though describing something ghostly.

She swept the surrounding landscape for Latigo, and had about abandoned hope of seeing him, when she discovered his hat bobbing in the front ranks of that moving jam; there he was, and in his hand, poised high above his head, she saw his gun. It hung like a black and hated omen in the air. As she watched him, she understood that he was trying to work his way out of the herd so that he might kill its leader.

WITH an increased fury the blizzard once more struck the herd. And to Gerry it looked as if the entire line rose and fell as the cattle winced at the driving impact of the cold. She rode to a point opposite the head of the procession, and cupping her hands she screamed: *"Latigo—Latigo!"*

It was of no avail, for the sound of her voice was lost in the whirling howl of the air. Then—

Off ahead, scarcely two hundred feet from Latigo's pitching and tossing shoulders, she saw Commodore Point. And she knew that from this spot the land fell away in a sheer drop of one hundred feet into the rushing and whirling eddies of the river. Again she caught Latigo's voice, and saw his pony rear and plunge amid the cattle. She felt a keen sense of admiration for the bravery and cool workmanship of that horse. Of a sudden the bark of a gun came to her, and a gap appeared before Latigo. A steer was down. In rapid succession five more detonations rang out, and five animals cleared a spot around Latigo. He had seen the bluff and heard the river. Gerry beheld him endeavoring to pull his horse out of the tangle. It rose on its hind legs high above the backs of the

cattle; then it fell, and Latigo disappeared. Without hesitation she dashed into a small opening in the mass, just back of the leaders, screaming at them, and making for the spot where she had last seen Latigo.

Her sudden attack upon the van of the column did a marvelous thing. The leaders, in utter consternation at the sound of pistol-shots in among them, and attacked simultaneously by the horse upon their rear flank, broke into a fast run and drove away from the remainder of the herd—rushed forward until they dashed from the cliff and fell headlong into the icy water below.

But Gerry's sudden attack, which had severed the leaders from the main body, had served its purpose—had caused the new trail-makers of the main section to turn abruptly down the shale-slope away from the precipice. She watched the steaming horde as it passed, and the horror of the marching cattle, the sound of the river and the sight of wounded stock around her, so distracted her that it was some time before she located Latigo's horse. It was dead, and piled around it were the carcasses of eight steers. She looked for Latigo and found him at last under the ledge of an upshooting slab of shale; blood was flowing from a wound in his scalp. She ran to him and raised his head to her knee and with a hand scooped snow over his face. Presently he revived.

"Where are you hurt?" she asked.

"I'm not suff'rin' any," he replied. "How come you for to be here?"

"I followed you—because," she answered. Then she added: "Lie still, and maybe we can get out of here in a little while."

He heard the passing of the herd—looked about and saw his dead horse and the heaps of steers about it.

"Let's see if I can walk," he said.

He made the attempt and arose to his feet.

"We turned 'em, didn't we?" he said as he beheld the new direction of the herd. "I'm all right, but I feel like somebody fed me through a hopper."

"Stand here," said Gerry. "I'll get my horse."

LATIGO mounted Gerry's horse from the side of a dead steer, and Gerry, to make room for her legs, behind the saddle, pulled an extra coat from the tie-strings and threw it away. The wind whipped it under the feet of the cattle.

"Why did you do that?" asked Latigo.

"Because," she replied, "I want them to find it at the same time they discover that silver-mounted saddle of yours."

She mounted, and supporting Latigo with one arm, picked the reins from the horn as the horse moved away. Latigo dropped his head till his lips touched a bare spot above her glove.

"Where we goin'?" he asked.

"Back to your cabin."

"Back to my cabin?" he repeated.

"Yes, Latigo; and when you can ride, we're going to shove on and keep shoving on, just you and me, till we see what's calling you on the other side."

She saw him sway, and with her arm she steadied him.

SIDNEY WESTON had regained his sight; it was weak and dim as yet, but by filtering the light through colored glasses, he could distinguish objects close at hand. He had been assured that ultimately he would fully recover.

One day early in the spring, as he sat under the porch of a hotel in Phoenix, he made out the faces of Latigo and Gerry staring at him. He arose, stupefied, and strode toward them. He attempted to speak, but it was his daughter who first broke the silence.

"Father," she said, "you can see?"

"Thank God, I've found you," he answered. "My child, you must have been blind too." Then to Latigo: "I was struck dumb that day when you accused me, and before I could deny anything, you were both gone. You don't know how I've suffered. We found your coat, Gerry, and Latigo's horse and saddle, and we searched the river for miles. . . . . Gerry, when you were quite a young girl, my brother Will, whom they called Walkaway, was drunk one night when Clay Terry, my best friend, was killed. I couldn't see Will punished; my mother begged me to save him and shield him. I had to carry that secret all alone—had to hide it even from you. Two months ago he died."

"Father!" said Gerry, her voice filled with horror at what she had heard. And then as if to turn away the memory, she added: "Tell him, dear."

Latigo grasped Weston's hand. "I'm glad," he said, "my dad an' you was pals, for Gerry an' I—why, we kinda took up with each other." . . . . We—we been married three months."

"And eight days," added Gerry.

There is a certain rich romantic flavor to a J. S. Fletcher novel that has not previously been achieved since Stevenson. You must surely read this one; even if you missed the first installment, the synopsis below will enable you easily to pick up the thread.

The Gallows-

By J. S.

(What Has Already Happened:)

THIS history of black crime (in which a deal of mystery and some love-making will have to be duly chronicled) begins with the unexpected reappearance of my ne'er-do-well Uncle Joseph Krevin at our little seacoast village of Middlebourne. I was eighteen then and had begun the study of law, but an illness had set me back, and I was just beginning to get around again under the care of my much older sister Keziah.

Well, Uncle Joseph turned up one bright spring morning and got scant welcome from Keziah, who had little fondness for him or his kind. However, we took him in. And that night it all began. For we, and others of the village were roused by a wild scream from the direction of Gallowstree Point, a sandspit on which there still stood the remains of an old gibbet. And when an investigating party hurried thither with lanterns, the body of a man was found tied to the old gibbet, a rope twisted tight about his neck. And from the distance there came the retreating sound of oars.

This dreadful event was only the beginning of many strange happenings: When we told Uncle Joseph of the murder out on Gallowstree he collapsed in a faint. And next morning when we went to call him to breakfast, he had disappeared.

A Scotland Yard detective named Cherry came down to investigate the matter, and he and I soon became good friends. And presently we had more than a murder to perplex us. For Miss Ellingham—a wealthy woman who had lived in the Orient, who had bought the estate of Middlebourne Grange near us, and established herself there with a varied retinue of servants—reported that a tremendously valuable and ancient Chinese vase, along with a pair of rare little idols, had been stolen from her collection.

Was there any connection between these two crimes in our peaceful village? It seemed probable, but none of the small clues which Cherry developed got us very far. He had more hope of certain investigations to be made in London; and you can imagine my delight when he invited me to accompany him thither. *(The story continues in detail:)*

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"Black Money," "The Middle of Things" and "The Great Marquenmore Case" have made the author of this fine story known to our readers; so when we say "The Gallowstree Mystery" is the most fascinating of all, you will know it is exceptional indeed.

tree Mystery

FLETCHER

ALTHOUGH I was now eighteen years of age, fancied myself not a little, and was about to enter on life as a full-fledged articled clerk with a tailed coat and top hat, I still regarded my sister Keziah with awe, as being head and autocrat of our family; and when Cherry flung out this exciting proposition, I turned on her as a small boy might turn on a stern headmaster of whom a holiday is suddenly craved. And inwardly I quaked, for Keziah's always stern face grew dark with something very closely resembling horror.

"London!" she exclaimed. "Him? And I'd like to know whatever for, Mister? The very idea!"

"There are reasons, ma'am," answered Cherry. "I wont say state reasons, though they are almost of that nature. But—reasons! Good reasons. Police reasons, if you like."

"I don't want Ben mixing up with police," snapped Keziah tartly. "I don't mind his going about a bit with you—you're in plain clothes, and look something like a gentleman, and you seem a very decent young fellow. But if it comes to uniforms—"

"Ben will not associate with uniforms, ma'am," interrupted Cherry. "He'll just go with me on a quiet little trip, tomorrow morning, and I'll deliver him to you again, safe and sound, on Sunday evening. I want him."

"And for what do you want him, pray?" demanded Keziah. "Let's be knowing that!"

"Well, if you will have it, he may be useful to me in tracing that uncle of yours, Mr. Joseph Krevin," replied Cherry. "He might identify him. Let him come! The sooner Mr. Krevin's little mystery is cleared up, the better—for everybody, you included, ma'am," he added with a significant look. "And—it wont cost you anything."

"Let me go, Keziah!" I pleaded.

"Oh, you'll be ready enough to go, my lad, I'll warrant!" exclaimed Keziah satirically. "You'd be off this instant, no doubt! But if you're strong enough to go traipsing about London, you're strong enough to start lawyering at Mr. Phil-

brick's—that'll be a deal better than running after good-for-naughts like Joseph Krevin. And you give one such short notice!" she went on, turning to Cherry. "How do you think I can get him ready to go voyaging all that way by tomorrow morning?"

"That way—sixty miles!" said Cherry. "Lord save us, ma'am—he isn't going to the North Pole! Ready? What is there to do to make him ready? Nothing, I should think!"

"That's all you know!" retorted Keziah. "I shall have to get out his best clothes and air them—he's never had 'em on since his illness. And it's past ten o'clock—and you'd better go away, and let me get to work."

"Meet me at the station at a quarter to nine, Ben," said Cherry, making for the door. "I'll take every care of him, Miss Heckitt—and good night!"

KEZIAH made no reply beyond a mumbled phrase or two—she was already opening and shutting the drawers of a great press wherein she kept our best garments in camphor and lavender. Presently she had my Sunday suit and clean linen on a clothes-horse before the fire—and next morning when she hurried me off to the station as spick and span as if I had been going to a wedding, I verily believe that she was secretly delighted that she had turned me out looking as important as the occasion demanded.

"And mind you don't get lost in those streets!" she called to me as I opened the garden gate. "And if you do see your Uncle Joseph—"

But there, for once in her life, Keziah failed for words, and after shaking her head dismally, waved her hand, went in and shut the door. And it was not out of ingratitude that I immediately put her out of my mind, which, to tell the truth, was seething with anticipations of adventure.

There was not much adventure to start with. Cherry had an armful of newspapers when I met him at the station, and he occupied himself during most of our two hours' journey in reading them, passing one after the other over to me as he finished each. Every paper was full of our affair—and to my astonishment, I saw that the theft of the Kang-he vase was already reported. There was, to be sure, not so much of that, but there was a plenitude of stuff about the murder of Cousins, and its peculiarly grisly character, and no end of speculation and surmise. I remarked to Cherry that I had had no idea we were all being so much written about, and he laughed.

"It's those inside the game who see least of it, Ben," said he. "The outsiders, the spectators, see most! This is a bit of fat for these newspaper fellows—yards of good copy it gives 'em. And see how they theorize and speculate and suggest about it! Well, it all helps. The press is a valuable adjunct to the police, and I've known cases in which an astute young reporter did better work than a trained detective. And that reminds me, my lad, that when we get to London Bridge, two friends of mine, belonging to the Department, are to meet me, and I shall want a bit of private talk with them; but that wont take long."

THE two friends were awaiting us, evidently by arrangement, just outside the barrier. One was a young man of about Cherry's own age; the other was a middle-aged man; both were very ordinary in appearance and might have been anything in the clerk or tradesman way. Instead of looking the alert, keen-faced, sharp-eyed individuals I had always fancied detectives to be, they seemed to be remarkably apathetic, unemotional and casual in appearance. And as we walked across to the refreshment-room, toward which all three turned as if it were a matter of course that they should, they talked, somewhat lackadaisically, about the weather, and the eldest man remarked that if we didn't get rain soon, his kitchen garden at Golders Green was going to be a frost—which eventuality he seemed to regard as the last thing in catastrophes.

When we got into the refreshment-room, Cherry installed me at a table in a corner, with a glass of port to console me; he and the other two got together at a quiet spot of the bar, and with glasses in hand began to talk. And I, watching them closely, saw then that they were waking up and debating keenly enough whatever it was that Cherry first told them: there was a good deal of stroking of chins, and tapping of fingers, and exchange of nods and winks. Eventually all three seemed to come to some conclusion; the two strangers went away, once more looking unconcerned and apathetic, and Cherry came back to me.

"That's one bit of business done, Ben!"

he said cheerfully. "Now come upstairs to the dining-room, and we'll have some lunch. And then—we'll get on to our own special business, whatever luck we have with it!"

I was curious enough to know if he had learned anything from the two men who had just gone away, but too shy to ask him. A few mintues later, however, when we had picked up our knives and forks, he suddenly leaned across the table to me.

"Ben," he said, "did you ever hear of your Uncle Joseph being in India—or anywhere else in the East?"

"No!" I answered promptly. "Never! But then, I never heard anything of Uncle Joseph till he turned up that morning. Keziah never talked of him, and as you know, he'd been away from our parts nineteen years or so—never been near us."

"Um! Well, he'd be somewhere or other," he remarked. "And I'd very much like to know if that somewhere was in Eastern climes at any period. Curious gentleman, altogether, your Uncle Joseph, and I wonder if we shall get any news of him in Old Gravel Lane?"

"Is that where we're going?" I asked.

"Precisely, Ben—where else?" he answered. "To begin with, at any rate. We're going to visit the establishment of Crippe, marine stores dealer. Who Crippe may be we don't know. Perhaps he's Krevin—your Uncle Joseph. If he is, Ben, I don't think we shall find him. If he isn't, and there's a Crippe who really is Crippe, then we want to know why Krevin carried Crippe's cards in his pocket. Perhaps Crippe will tell us; perhaps he wont. This business, Ben, consists largely of the question-and-answer system. Plenty of questions—but getting satisfactory answers is the difficulty, and sometimes the very devil!"

WE went off across London Bridge after a while, and turning left at the Monument, walked by Eastcheap and the Tower into the region of the docks. I had never been in that part of London before, my two previous excursions to the center of things having been in the West End, in Keziah's company, and among fashionable surroundings and fine shops, and I thought everything in this hitherto unexplored neighborhood very squalid and grimy. But Old Gravel Lane was worse than any of its approaches—a narrow, gloomy street leading down to the river between black-walled buildings. It was a paradise now, said Cherry, to what it had been, but I failed to see anything paradisiacal about it, and I felt considerable misgiving when at last, on a board obscured by dirt and age we saw the name *"Crippe."*

"Here we are!" said Cherry. "And the gentleman does business on Saturday afternoons, and there, no doubt, he is!"

He pushed aside a half-open door, and there, standing in the middle of a place that was half shed and half shop, badly lighted, and evil-smelling, we saw a man who wore all the airs of proprietorship. He was a little sturdy man, with a round paunch and a big head—his paunch was gay with a fancy waistcoat, and his head half-buried in a big, brand-new Panama hat; a just-lighted cigar, half a foot long, stuck out of one corner of his clean-shaven lips. As for the rest or him, he had a goatee beard, very stiff and fiery red in hue, and he had shed his coat, and in his shirt-sleeves—and with at least two aggressively bright diamond rings glittering on his dirty fingers—was industriously sorting and counting a pile of coarse canvas bags that lay on the floor at his feet. All round him were the things that you find in a marine stores dealer's place of business; in the background, in a sort of tank faced with glass, a young, thin-faced man sat writing at a desk.

CHERRY advanced to the shirt-sleeved gentleman with interested politeness.

"Mr. Crippe?" he inquired.

The man finished counting his sacks—those he had in hand, at any rate—before he replied. And his reply was thrown over his shoulder:

"And two's nine, and two's eleven, and two's thirteen," he said. "Eight dozen, Jenkinson—thirteen as t w e l v e. . . . . That's me! Who are you?"

Cherry took out one of his professional cards, and Mr. Crippe's hands being free by that time, he deigned to accept it, and having first balanced a gold-mounted pince-nez on his snub nose, to read it, he turned a sharp eye on both of us, passed me over with a mere glance, and settled on my companion.

"Well, wha' d'yer want?" he demanded. "Sharp, now!"

Cherry produced one of Mr. Crippe's own cards.

"To ask a question about this," he

answered. "Two of your cards were left at a house on the South Coast by a man named Joseph Krevin. Do you know Krevin?"

"Yes! Know Joe Krevin well enough! What about him?"

"Is he in your employ?"

"No—not in what you'd call a regular way, anyhow. He does a bit on commission—no salary. Job now and then. Carries my business cards, to be sure, and drops one where he sees a chance of doing a bit."

"Have you seen him lately, Mr. Crippe?"

"Not for a fortnight or three weeks—no!"

"Can you give me his private address?"

"Can't! Don't know it. Don't know anything about Joe Krevin's private affairs. And what do you want him for?"

"He's missing," replied Cherry diplomatically. "This young man is his nephew. His family want to trace him. And as we found your card in a house where he'd been—"

"Aye, well, I can't help you!" interrupted Mr. Crippe, waving the bediamonded fingers. "No notion whatever where he hangs out. Only comes in here, casual-like, now and again."

Cherry glanced at the glass-fronted tank; he like myself, had noticed that the clerk was listening for all he was worth.

"Perhaps your assistant—" he began.

"They might know at Zetterquist's," said the clerk. "That was his house of call round here—in St. George Street. Try the saloon parlor."

WE bade Mr. Crippe a good afternoon; Mr. Crippe bade us nothing, and turned again to his canvas bags. We went out into the dismal street.

"Well, you see, Ben, we got some information after all!" remarked Cherry, cheerfully. "We know more about Uncle Joseph now than we did five minutes ago. Uncle Joseph occasionally does a bit of business with and for Mr. Crippe. And if Mr. Crippe doesn't know where Uncle Joseph pitches his little tent, perhaps Zetterquists do. Quite satisfactory, so far. And now for Zetterquist's."

He led me up Old Gravel Lane and round a corner into another more pretentious but still gloomy and squalid street. We had to look about a bit there, but eventually we found what we wanted. Zetterquist & Vanderpant turned out to be an old-fashioned wine and spirits vault; there was a part where they seemed to do wholesale business, another where there were public bars, and yet a third evidently reserved for superior customers.

Into this we turned, and found our way to a quaint old parlor, the walls of which were chiefly decorated with pictures and engravings of sailing ships, models of the same, and odds and ends that, judging from their character and appearance, had doubtless been brought there from far-off places. There were a few customers in the dark corners of this room, and as most of them wore blue serge suits, had deeply tanned complexions, and obviously preferred rum to any other liquor, I set them down as seafaring parties from the neighboring docks. Also there was in that room, which had a highly seasoned atmosphere of spirits, lemons and strong tobacco, a little bar in one corner, and behind it an elderly, highly respectable person in an alpaca coat, who was industriously polishing glasses and seemed uncommonly surprised to see us. But he listened politely to Cherry's prefatory remarks, and was evidently quite interested in the professional card which he presented. He was interested, too, in me, when he heard that I was Mr. Joseph Krevin's nephew.

"Yes, we know Mr. Krevin here," he said. "The fact is, he's a sort of traveler for our firm—on commission, you understand. Picks up an order here and there, and sends it on—I fancy he does that sort of thing for various other firms—not in our line, you know—other lines. General commission agent—that's his line of business. But he's not been in here, and we haven't heard anything of him, lately. Two or three weeks, I should say."

"What I particularly want is his private address," observed Cherry. "Can you give it?"

"I can!" replied the man behind the bar. "I shouldn't give it, you know, to anybody, but as you're what you are, and as he's missing, I will. It's 241 Calthorpe Street—that's off Gray's Inn Road."

CHERRY remarked that he knew Calthorpe Street well enough, and after thanking our informant, we left Zetterquist's and the company of sea-captains, and went away—to find an omnibus going toward Bloomsbury.

"Easy enough to strike Calthorpe Street,

Ben," remarked Cherry. "A well-known lodging-house street, that! But I doubt if we shall strike Uncle Joseph. However, we now know an extra bit more about him. Sort of odd-job man, he is. And odd-job men meet queer company, and get mixed up in queer doings."

He was right in prophesying that we shouldn't strike Uncle Joseph. Number 241 Calthorpe Street, proved to be a dismal, shabby sort of house, and the landlady who opened the door to us was equally shabby and even more dismal. No, Mr. Krevin wasn't at home, and what's more, hadn't been at home since last Monday morning, and she didn't know when he would be at home, for he was given to being away many days at a time, sometimes. No, he hadn't lived there very long—some few months only; and she believed he'd just come from foreign parts when he came there. Yes, we could look at his room if we liked; it didn't matter—nothing seemed to matter, to her.

We went up to Uncle Joseph's room—a bed-sitting-room, more comfortable than the exterior of the house would have led one to suppose. And in the moment of our entrance, Cherry's keen eyes struck on something. There was an addressed envelope that had come through the post lying on the table, and he picked it up with a sharp exclamation.

"Look at this, Ben!" he said. "See? The postmark! *Middlebourne!*"

CHAPTER X

Tom Scripture

BEFORE I had time to voice my surprise at seeing the familiar postmark, Cherry had turned back the torn flap of the envelope, and we both saw that it was empty. He thrust it into my hand with an exclamation of disappointment.

"Blank!" he muttered. "Nothing there! But still—the postmark! That's Middlebourne, right enough. And the handwriting—do you recognize it, Ben?"

"No!" I answered promptly. "I don't know it. But Nellie Apps and her mother, who keep the post office, might—though there are two or three hundred people in Middlebourne, you know!"

"Aye! And this mayn't have been written by any one of 'em, but by a stranger, there for the time being," he said. "All the same here's the cover of a letter posted from Middlebourne to Mr. Joseph Krevin on a precise date—and that date, Ben, as you'll observe, was three days before Joseph Krevin turned up at your house! Very good—we must find out who sent that letter. It's not a commonplace style of writing, either."

HE put the envelope in his pocket, and began to look round. But there was little to see—so I thought. Uncle Joseph appeared to have few belongings. There was a goodly stock of clothes, linen, and the like in the drawers, which Cherry opened and glanced into; there were a few books on a shelf, some old pipes and a cigar-box or two on the mantelpiece, and a pile of papers and magazines on a side-table. But no private papers or letters lay about, and though there was a rickety writing-desk in one corner of the room, there was nothing in or on it that gave us any indication of Uncle Joseph's doings or pursuits, other than a few more business cards of Mr. Crippe, and a price-list bearing the name of Zetterquist & Vanderpant. On a shelf above it, however, stood some carved figures and ornaments, and Cherry pointed to them with a significant glance.

"I don't think there's much doubt that your mysterious relative has been in the East during those years in which his family never heard of him, Ben," he remarked. "Look at those things—mementoes of his travels, I imagine! Indian ware, I believe—oh, yes, I think Uncle Joseph has smelled the East—and no doubt picked up some Eastern notions as to how things should be done!"

The pile of papers and magazines lay just by his hand, and he began to turn it over, apparently without aim. But suddenly he pulled out an illustrated journal with a colored cover and held it toward me with a laugh.

"This is like the children's game where you get hot or get cold in searching for something, Ben!" he said. "We're getting hot! See this—the *Lady's Circle!* And the very same issue as that in which the interview with Miss Ellingham appears! And—ho-ho! Look here, my boy! What do you think of that?"

He spread the paper out before me, pointing triumphantly, and I saw at once what he meant. *The page on which the photograph of Miss Ellingham's drawing-room and of the Kang-he vase appeared had been torn out!*

We looked at each other. And Cherry began to fold up the mutilated journal, preparatory to putting it in his pocket.

"Yes, that's it, Ben, my boy!" he said, as if assenting to some proposition which I had just put into words, though as a matter of fact, I hadn't spoken. "You're right! Your Uncle Joseph has had some share in the theft of that Kang-he vase! We're on the track, Ben! And we've done a very good afternoon's work, and now we'll knock off and go to my little flat, which isn't very far away, and when we've had a wash and a tidy-up, we'll get a bit of dinner and go to a theater or a music-hall—whichever and wherever you like! Oh, yes, I think I'm beginning to see through the brick wall, Ben!"

I fancied that I was beginning to see through it myself, but I said nothing; if there was any thought in my head at all, it was of Keziah, and of what she, with all her notions about family honor and the like, would say if it were proved that Uncle Joseph Krevin was a thief. We went downstairs again; Cherry had a word or two with the dismal landlady; then he took me off to his flat, which, as he had said, was not far away, being, as a matter of fact, on the other side of Gray's Inn Road, in Doughty Street, and in a house close by one in which, he assured me with great pride, Charles Dickens used to live.

IT was a very nice little bachelor flat, cozy and comfortable, and quite big enough, he said with a laugh, for a single man who could get his own breakfast ready and had all his other meals out. It was well fitted up, too, and there was a telephone there, and while we were washing and tidying ourselves preparatory to going out pleasuring, the telephone-bell rang sharply. Cherry was at it some little time; when he returned to me in the bathroom, he nodded at me as if to signify that he had some news.

"We're getting on fine, Ben!" he said cheerfully. "That was a ring-up from one of the men we met at London Bridge this morning. Didn't I tell you that the work of the press was a very valuable adjunct to the work of the police? Just so! And the result of the announcement in this morning's papers about Miss Ellingham's loss has had a result already. A Mr. Spelwyn, of Bedford Square,—no great distance away,—has been telephoning our headquarters this afternoon about it. He's evidently an authority, an expert, and a collector, in the matter of that Chinese stuff, so of course he'd be attracted by the news. And he's informed our department that if whoever has the affair in hand will call on him tomorrow morning, he'll give the caller some information. I've got the affair in hand! So tomorrow morning, my boy, 321 Bedford Square, at eleven o'clock sharp! And I wonder what Mr. Spelwyn's got to tell!"

HOWEVER, I think neither of us speculated much on that during the rest of that Saturday evening. Cherry took me to dinner at a Soho restaurant where there were all sorts of strange people to be seen, and then to a theater—a rare treat for me, who had never seen anything but a pantomime or two at Kingshaven; and the novelty and excitement of these things drove the Middlebourne mysteries, Cousins, Uncle Joseph, the Kang-he vase, and all the rest of it, clean out of my mind.

But they revived next morning when Cherry and I, presenting ourselves at Bedford Square, were shown by a stolid-faced manservant into a library or study, wherein, ranged on shelves, or exhibited in cases, were quantities of pots and plates, as Keziah would have called them, which were doubtless as rare and valuable as they seemed to me odd and ugly.

Mr. Spelwyn, who joined us presently, was a little middle-aged, pleasant-mannered gentleman, with a twinkling eye. He seemed much interested in Cherry, whom he evidently considered very young for his job, and before he told us anything himself, he examined us very thoroughly as to Miss Ellingham, her vase, its history, its location in her drawing-room, and so on. He had not heard of the illustrated article in the *Lady's Circle;* and he sniffed, almost contemptuously, when Cherry, who carried Miss Ellingham's copy in his pocket, showed it to him.

"The woman was asking to be robbed!" he exclaimed. "There are a dozen men in London who would go for that vase after seeing these photographs and learning how insecurely it was kept, and how easily it could be got at! I wonder at Miss Ellingham, with her experience of the East. To keep a treasure like that in an open cupboard in a drawing-room which the veriest tyro in housebreaking could so easily enter —preposterous!"

"Do you know any of the dozen men in London you refer to, sir?" inquired Cherry.

MR. SPELWYN affected not to hear this direct question; anyway, he didn't answer it. Instead he pointed to the interview with Miss Ellingham.

"The name of this ware is wrongly spelled there," he said. "It should be *K'ang-hsi*—instead of what it is."

"I'm afraid I'm not much concerned with the spelling, sir," remarked Cherry, laughing. "Chinese orthography—"

"Just so, just so!" said Mr. Spelwyn. "Well, I'd better tell you what I promised your people I would tell—I think, more than probably, it has something to do with this affair at Middlebourne Grange. You know, of course, that I am a collector of this sort of thing, and an expert in Chinese porcelain. Well, about, I think, three weeks ago, I was waited on by a man who came to inquire if I cared to buy a genuine K'ang-hsi vase, and if I did, what I would give for it? I asked him at once what he would ask for such a vase, and I knew by his answer that he knew what he was talking about—he wanted seven thousand pounds. So I made short work of him; I told him that if he had such a vase to offer, I should be glad to see it, and we could discuss the price and everything else when he placed it before me. He went off—and I never heard more of him."

"Will you describe that man, sir?" suggested Cherry.

"To be sure! I took particular stock of him," replied Mr. Spelwyn. "A big, round-faced, clean-shaven man, very smooth-tongued, plausible, and polite in an old-fashioned way—well-dressed and prosperous-looking. I formed the opinion that he had at some time of his life seen something of the East. As I say, he never returned; and I have thought since that he may have called on me, knowing me to be an expert, just to hear what I had to say when he named seven thousand pounds as the price of the vase he spoke of."

"And you said nothing?" remarked Cherry.

"Nothing beyond what I have told you," replied Mr. Spelwyn.

We went away soon after that; and outside the house, Cherry turned to me with a shake of his head.

"Ben, my friend!" he said, "that big round-faced, clean-shaven man with the smooth tongue and polite manners, is your Uncle Joseph! Seems so to me, anyhow, from your description of him. I wonder if he got hold of Miss Ellingham's vase that night he was away from your house—and if that man Cousins had anything to do with the actual theft? But—who strangled Cousins and tied him up to that old gibbet-post? Nice tangle! Well, let's get some lunch, and then we'll take the afternoon train to Middlebourne and go on with our work there."

"The envelope?" I suggested.

"Exactly, Ben!" he assented. "We've got to find out whose handwriting it is that figures on that envelope. Uncle Joseph had some correspondent at Middlebourne—who was, or is, he? That's my next job, and the sooner I get to it the better."

BUT when we reached Middlebourne, toward the end of that Sunday afternoon, we found a new development awaiting us. Veller saw us walking down the street and called us into his cottage. With his usual slowness of speech, he did no more than invite us to be seated when we entered, and himself sat down too, spreading his big hands over his waistcoat, twiddling his thumbs and grinning at us; his wife, in her Sunday best, was just making ready to go to her chapel down the street, and until she had departed and closed the door behind her, Veller continued to twiddle and to grin. But there was that in his grin which suggested things.

"Well? You've got something to tell, Veller!" remarked Cherry. "The Missus is off now—out with it!"

Veller grinned more widely than ever, glanced at the door, glanced at me, leaned forward, and sank his voice to a tone which indicated his sense of mystery.

"That there Tom Scripture," he whispered, " 'tis along of him!"

He nodded, once, twice, thrice after delivering himself of this; and Cherry stared from him to me, and back again.

"Who's Tom Scripture?" he asked. "And what's along of him?"

"He means Tom Scripture, the fisherman," said I. "He lives down our lane. What about Tom, Veller?"

Veller summoned his wits.

"Tom Scripture," he answered, "he come along home from the fishing-banks yesterday—been out there, in the Channel, a matter of nights and days. And he was in the Spotted Cow last night and heard the news o' this affair at Gallowstree Point. And when he'd had a pint or two, or maybe three, said—so I'm informed—that he could say something about that there, and would

when the right time and the right man came along! And no more—not then, anyhow."

"Well—haven't you been at him?" asked Cherry.

"Went round this morning," replied Veller. "I see him after his breakfast. He allowed he'd said what he was reported to have said. And would stand to it, too! But wouldn't say nothing to me. 'London police is my mark!' he said. 'I aint going to tell nothing to nobody but London police! Bring me a London police,' he says, 'and I'll give him vallyble information. But no less!' So I left him—till you came back. Him having heard there was a Scotland Yard man, though a young 'un, on the job, though away for the time being, so to speak! And what it is that Tom Scripture can tell, I don't know. But judging from his manner, I should say —something."

Cherry jumped out of his chair and said: "Come on! Where's this chap live?"

WE found Tom Scripture leaning over the fence of his garden, in his Sunday garments, smoking his pipe. He was a tough-faced seafaring person, more given to silence than to speech, and he looked Cherry well over from top to toe before he condescended to say anything—indeed, I think he was only moved to open his lips by the production of Cherry's official card, which, being presented to him, he turned over and over in his great fingers as if it were a charm or a talisman. But he spoke, looking from one to the other of us, his three visitors.

"This here it is, young man," he said, waving his short pipe as if about to beat time with it. "You being a Scotland Yarder, though uncommon juvenile, but still one, and armed, as they say, with what they call creedentials, and me not going to tell nothing to nobody but what is such, and no other, London police being, as you might say, more fitted to deal with these matters o' life and death than country bobbies—and no disrespeck to you, Veller, what's a friendly neighbor. But last Wednesday morning, before sunrise, I was a-going out with my boat, to the banks, for two or three days' fishing, when, as I sails down the creek there toward the bar, I sees something what was unusual—uncommon so! The which was a man, a-standing as still as a graven image on them rocks at Fliman's End!"

"How far were you away from him?" asked Cherry.

"A mile and a bit, maybe," replied Scripture. "But I carries a good glass—a ship's glass what I bought, a bargain, years ago, on the Hard, at Kingshaven. And I claps it to my eye and takes an observation. And I sees him plain—a big, fine-built man, in dark-colored shore-clothes. He stands on them rocks, as if looking round; then he comes down and walks about a bit. And then I see something else; there was a boat drawed up on the beach, maybe fifty yards away, in front o' the rocks. Now, I never heard of no stranger and no boat being there, at Fliman's End, at that time of a morning: Take my solemn 'davy that there feller weren't up to no good—and was summun as hasn't nothing to do with these parts, neither."

"You didn't do anything—hail him, or anything of that sort?" suggested Cherry.

"Nothin', master! Me and my son, young Tom, we see him and the boat, and takes a good look at 'em, and wonders, and goes about our own business," answered Scripture. "But—that there man weren't up to no good, I repeats! What call had he there, I asks you?"

Cherry said gravely that he'd think that very important question well over, and presently he and I went away to our house, so that he might redeem his promise to Keziah and deliver me up to her safe and sound. He appeared to be much more impressed by Scripture's story than I was.

"Ben," he said suddenly as we neared our garden gate, "that sounds like your precious Uncle Joseph! A big, fine-built man in dark-colored shore-clothes, eh? And this was not long after Uncle Joseph had quietly slipped out of your house. But Ben—there's a devil of a mystery in something that Scripture told us. Ben, *what about the boat?*"

CHAPTER XI

The Fish-bag

FOR all my recent experiences, I was not yet up to the subtle workings of the detective mind, and when Cherry said this, I turned and stared at him in blank wonder.

"The boat?" I exclaimed. "Why, what of it? And which boat, Mr. Cherry?"

"There's only one boat in question, my

lad!" he answered. "The boat that Tom Scripture says he saw drawn up on the beach at Fliman's End. He saw a boat there, and he saw a man! Now, we suppose—I suppose, anyhow!—the man to have been your strangely behaving uncle, Mr. Joseph Krevin. I think Mr. Krevin went to Fliman's End, for purposes of his own, when he left your house during Tuesday night—that is, early on Wednesday morning. He left his Zetterquist & Vanderpant brandy bottle—empty, Ben!—there, anyway, in the cave. Yes, I feel sure Uncle Joseph was the big man in dark-colored clothes whom Tom Scripture saw through his very good glass, bought, a bargain, on the Hard at Kingshaven. But if he was—how did Uncle Joseph get the boat there?"

"Can't follow you!" I said. "I don't see what you mean!"

"You don't see why he shouldn't have a boat there?" he remarked, laughing. "But now let your mind go back to what we saw when we went there with Veller, and the boy and girl. We saw one set of footprints in the sand, Ben, the smooth, untouched sand, above high-water mark, and those prints led *from* the cave to the edge of the beach at that mark—to where the sands are no longer dry, but wet from regular washing of the tides. From the cave, mind you! But nothing *to* the cave! Now, supposing Uncle Joseph, when he left your house in the early morning, had appropriated somebody's boat here in the creek—there are plenty of small boats about, as we can see at this moment; there they are!—and had pulled himself round to Fliman's End, beaching his boat while he went up to the cave, there'd have been a track across those sands *to* the cave! But there wasn't! And that leads me to think—what I've thought all along," he concluded with sudden abruptness. "Just that!"

"And that is—what?" I asked.

"That when Krevin left your house he went to Fliman's End to keep a previously made appointment!" he answered sharply. "Cut-and-dried affair, my lad! Somebody came to meet him there—with a boat. Why?"

"Tom Scripture said nothing about seeing any man in the boat, or about it," said I. "If there'd been a man in charge of it—"

"Scripture mayn't have seen him—evidently didn't see him," he interrupted. "The man may have been sitting in the boat, waiting until Krevin went down to him; he even may have been lying down in the boat, asleep. But that's how I figure it, Ben—somebody took a boat to Fliman's End that morning to meet Uncle Joseph, and took Uncle Joseph away from Fliman's End in that boat, and that somebody must have been a somebody belonging to these parts! That's flat! And again I say—who?"

"Supposing the boat had come off from a ship—outside the bar?" I suggested.

"I think not, Ben," he answered. "Tom Scripture sailed his craft outside the bar, and if he'd seen any vessel hanging about there, he'd have told us. No, it's pretty much what I've been thinking all through: if Krevin and the dead man, Cousins, were fellow-conspirators in the Kang-he vase affair, as I'm sure they were, I think they'd a third accomplice. And who the devil he may be licks me altogether, so far—though he's probably the man whose handwriting is on the envelope I've got! However, here we are at your place—and there's your good sister, looking out for us."

KEZIAH was at the door of our house, gazing along the lane, her hand shading the sun from her eyes. At sight of us she retreated indoors, and when we presently walked in, she was doing just what I knew she would be doing—making the tea. She gave us an admonitory look.

"You're late!" she said. "You should have been here half an hour ago. I knew what time that London train came in, and how long it would take you to walk down from the station, and I had tea ready to the minute—all but making the tea. And I want mine—it's already long past my regular hour!"

"It's very kind of you to have tea ready at all, ma'am," said Cherry. "We'd have hurried if we'd known, but we found some highly important business awaiting us, and had to attend to it. Well, here's Ben, home again, safe and sound, and in the best of health and spirits, ma'am—and I hope we find you so?"

Keziah muttered something about having a deal to try her spirits, and bade us seat ourselves. She was very silent while we ate and drank, and she asked no questions about our trip to London, and as she was naturally inquisitive and liked to turn everybody's mind inside out about such things, I felt sure that something had hap-

pened during my absence. But I knew her better than to ask questions; Keziah had taught me from childhood that it is a foolish thing to hurry other folks' cattle, and I waited, sure that whatever was on her mind would come out. And out it came, when Cherry had protested that he couldn't eat another mouthful nor drink another drop—and it came, too, in a flood.

"Then if you've both done, I'll tell you something that's been on my soul ever since within an hour of Ben's going out of that door yesterday morning!" she exclaimed. "And a nice thing, too, for any respectable Christian woman as has always been proud of her family to have to keep to herself for a day and a night and a day beyond that! Such wickedness and goings-on! I marvel that some sinners has the impudence to show their brazen faces at honest peoples' doors, let alone ask to sleep in their beds!"

"What's the matter, ma'am?" inquired Cherry, quietly kicking me under the table. "You've evidently made some discovery?"

"And I should think I have made a discovery!" retorted Keziah, with one of her characteristic snorts. "And it's not so much what it is in itself, as the discoveries that'll spring out of it! And in my best bedroom, too, of all places—the very chamber in which my father and mother looked their last on this wicked world and went to a better—couldn't be worse, anyway!—and their father and mother, on the father's side, at least, before them, for that matter! Scandalous, I call it!"

"And the precise nature, ma'am?" asked Cherry, solicitously and at the same time giving me another sly kick. "Something that upset you, I'm afraid?"

"And who wouldn't have been upset?" demanded Keziah, almost fiercely. "Everybody in this neighborhood knows that we Heckitts—and we've been in this house two hundred years, and in this parish for twice as long, as you may see from the gravestones in the churchyard—have always been of the highest respectability; there's naught common about us! And when I find things in my own best bedroom that suggests untold wickedness—but of course you don't understand what I'm talking about," she broke off impatiently. "You see, after Ben, there, had gone away yesterday morning, I decided I'd clear out that best bedroom; it hadn't been cleared out since *he*,"—she spoke the personal pronoun with intense scorn and bitterness, and we both knew that she referred to Uncle Joseph Krevin,—"since *he* slept in it! So when I'd done my various jobs down here, I went up and set to work. But I never did any work, for I hadn't been five minutes in that room before I discovered what I'm now going to show you—and you can draw your own conclusions from it!"

WE followed Keziah upstairs to the best bedroom. I saw at once what preparations she had made for beginning a grand clean-up. The window curtains were looped; the valances were turned up round the bed; newspapers and dust-cloths were laid over the furniture; a sweeping-brush leaned against a wall, and a dustpan lay at the end of the shaft, unused. But there everything had come to a sudden stop; whatever it was that Keziah had discovered, the discovery had taken all the heart out of her. And as she had a veritable passion for cleaning and dusting, being what they call house-proud, I knew that Keziah must have received a pretty smart shock.

The dressing-table in that room was draped with figured muslin, spread over a glazed linen cover—I remember how it used to crackle if you kicked against it. It crackled now as Keziah went straight to and tipped it, revealing, underneath, as commonplace an article as you could think of—a bass-matting fish-basket! It was the sort of thing that you can see by the dozen, hanging in any fishmonger's shop, or thrown away, a cheap thing, soon done with, on refuse-heaps. I saw, too, as it lay there, a derelict object, where it had come from—there were black letters on its side: *"Shardham, Fish, Game, & Poultry Dealer, Kingshaven."* And it was obviously empty.

"You look at that now! Take it in your hand!" exclaimed Keziah indignantly. "The very idea of that being left in my best sleeping-chamber! Shameful!"

I think Cherry, who by that time was looking more puzzled than I had ever seen him during the course of these bewilderments, began to have some notion that there was either an infernal machine in the fish-bag, or that it contained some ancient crab or possibly defunct lobster whose presence would naturally be objectionable to any self-respecting housewife. Anyway, he approached the exhibit with diffidence, and took hold of its looped handle gingerly, looking doubtfully at Keziah as he did so.

But nothing exploded, and there was certainly no obnoxious odor—and his wonder grew greater.

"Yes ma'am?" he said innocently. "I see this bag—a fish-bag, evidently. It—it appears to be empty, ma'am!"

"Empty!" snorted Keziah. "Aye, I dare say—but not so empty as you'd think, young man! Now, come! Didn't you show me the other night some bits of shavings—packing stuff—that you'd picked up on the carpet in Miss Ellingham's drawing-room? Of course you did! I remember 'em. Now you look into that fish-bag!"

WITH a sudden gleam of intelligence Cherry drew the mouth of the bag open, and he and I looked inside. There, sticking to the rough sides of the matting, were, without doubt, bits, odds and ends of shavings, the thin, wiry stuff that pots and glasses are packed in. He uttered an exclamation as he drew some loose ends out and laid them carefully on the smooth pediment of the mahogany-mounted mirror. But before he could do more, Keziah had her hand on his arm, twisting him round toward the old-fashioned four-poster bed.

"And look here!" she said, pointing to the floor near the bedside. "There's more of that stuff—shreds of it, dropped on my carpet! And though I'm not a detective, I can put two and two together as well and as quickly as any man Jack of you! Those shavings are identical with those that you brought away in your pocketbook from that drawing-room at the Grange! And when Joseph Krevin came in here that night on which he disappeared, he had that vase with the foreigneering name with him, in that fish-bag, packed in those shavings; and as sure as my name's Keziah Heckitt, he transferred it to his own bag in this room, and threw the fish-bag under my dressing-table—the dishonest ne'er-do-good that he is! And if I'm not right, then three and four don't make seven—so there!"

Cherry had taken out his pocketbook. Silently he produced from it an envelope in which he had carefully stored the bits of stuff he had picked up on Miss Ellingham's drawing-room carpet, and compared its contents with the shavings gathered from our own, and from the fish-bag.

"Of course!" sniffed Keziah. "Anybody with half an eye could see they're identical. Joseph Krevin's had to do with the theft of that Chinese pot! And I'll warrant that that's the first time that this house was ever disgraced by having stolen property brought into it—shameful!"

Cherry remarked soothingly that no stigma would rest upon the house because of Uncle Joseph Krevin's evil doings, but Keziah refused to be comforted, and she stalked downstairs to wash up the tea-things.

LEFT alone in the best bedroom, Cherry and I looked at each other.

"I think she put two and two together quite successfully, Ben!" he said. "There's not much doubt that Krevin brought the vase here when he came in that night. But that other man—Cousins! What part did he play? What was he doing at Gallowstree Point? Who murdered him? Was it one man—or two?"

"Could one man, with nobody to help him, have tied another up to a post, as he was tied?" I answered, conscious of a gruesome recollection of what Keziah and I had witnessed. "If you'd only seen it—"

"I know—I know!" he said. "Veller gave me one full description—Captain Marigold treated me to another. Yes, I suppose one man could—if he first got a rope round his victim's neck. But why? What was the motive? And I'm wondering, Ben, if that precious uncle of yours knew anything about that murder before you and your sister came back to tell him?"

He went over to the window, and drawing the curtain aside, looked out on the creek and on Gallowstree Point. The creek was glowing in the last light of the weakening sun; it looked very peaceful and beautiful in the evening calm. But the rocky promontory at the Point was dark and forbidding as ever, and the old gallows-post, with its fingerlike arm and the iron cage-lantern swinging from it, stood up against the white surf-line at the bar, a black and sinister patch on the quiet scene.

"I don't know whether he did or not," I said. "All I know is that it gave him what Keziah calls a turn when we did tell him. He crumpled up—and I had to get his brandy-bottle out of his bag."

"You opened the bag—yourself?" he asked quickly. "What was in it, Ben—not the Kang-he vase, of course—then."

"I saw all that was in it," I answered. "There was precious little. Some socks, handkerchiefs, a collar or two, and the brandy-bottle. He was wearing his pajamas, and his brush and comb were on the dressing-table."

"Would there have been room in that bag, when he'd put those things in, for the vase as well—packed in shavings?" he inquired.

"Plenty!" said I. "It was a roomy bag —an old, well-worn one."

CHERRY was collecting the shavings as he talked; and presently, having put the fish-bag in a drawer, we went downstairs, and after a word or two with Keziah, who was still in a state of high indignation at Uncle Joseph's temerity in using her best bedroom as a receptacle for stolen goods, we went out and up to the village, Cherry being intent on finding out if they knew anything at the post office of the handwriting on the envelope which we had found in the lodgings at Calthorpe Street. I posted him up, on the way, about the keeping of the post office. Mrs. Apps and her daughter Nellie kept it; they received and dispatched all the telegrams, too; in fact, they did everything, and there was no one in the neighborhood more likely to identify the handwriting of any inhabitant of Middlebourne. But neither Mrs. Apps nor Nellie, whom we found about to sit down to that very important meal, Sunday supper, recognized the writing which Cherry laid before them as that of any person known to them. It was not a common style of writing, however, but rather of a peculiar nature, and both mother and daughter considered it for some time as if it awoke some recollection in them.

"If I've ever seen that writing before, Mister," said Mrs. Apps at length, "it's been on a telegram. Somehow, I've a notion that I have seen it, but when I couldn't say. And if I have, that's where it's been."

"You don't send many telegrams from here, do you?" asked Cherry.

"A good many more than anybody would think," replied Mrs. Apps. "You see, this telegraph office serves three villages. And nowadays you'd be surprised how those motorists call in and send telegrams—you see, we're on the roadside, and it's handy for them; we've a lot of telegraphic business that way."

"Well, you keep your telegrams, don't you?" suggested Cherry. "Just so. Can't you kindly look them over, and see if you haven't got any in a handwriting resembling that?"

Mrs. Apps promised that she would do this, and we left the envelope with her and went away. Outside the Apps cottage we parted—Cherry to go to his lodgings at the village inn, and I to repair homeward, where Keziah was no doubt waiting to catechize me about London.

However, I was not to come under her catechetical powers just then; as I walked down our lane, I saw Miss Ellingham's butler, Carsie, coming along on the other side, as if returning from a Sunday evening stroll. He was very prim and proper in his attire, and he wore a silk hat and primrose-colored kid gloves. And at sight of me he hesitated for a moment, and then came across the roadway, plainly desirous of speech.

CHAPTER XII

The Pink and Mauve Pajamas

I SHOULD have been hard put to it to explain the exact why-and-wherefore, but I was conscious of a feeling as regards Carsie that I didn't like him. It was little I had ever seen of him, to be sure—twice or thrice at the Grange, in his mistress' presence, and now and then in the village street; but there was something in his soft gait and his subdued manner of talking that made me think of things, animals, that slink. However, there was nothing slinking in his present approach; he came up confidently enough, and his first words were almost affectionate in their tone.

"Good evening, Mr. Ben!" he said. "A nice evening, sir! Glad to see you out and about again; this summer air will do you good after your long spell indoors."

I thanked him for his politeness, and stood looking at him, a bit awkwardly, and secretly wishing that he would go on his way. But he seemed inclined to linger, and more than that, to talk.

"Any more news about these extraordinary mysteries, Mr. Ben?" he asked, with a glance which was plainly intended to suggest that whatever conversation might ensue was to be regarded as strictly confidential. "We hear next to nothing across there at the Grange; you're more in the thick of things down here by the village."

"I know of nothing very definite," I answered.

He nodded, and began making holes in the turf at our feet with the ferrule of his neatly rolled umbrella.

"Well, it's as queer a business as ever I heard of in my life, Mr. Ben!" he re-

marked. "And I've seen a bit of the world—and some out-of-the-way bits, too! Of course, what most interests me is the burglary—that, I suppose, is what the police would call it—at our place. To be sure,—between you and me, you know,—I think my mistress laid herself open to that! If that Chinese vase is worth all that she now says it is—why, it was practically inviting burglars to come and take it when she let its picture and its situation in our drawing-room be advertised in a paper! There'll be swell mobsmen in London, no doubt, that specialize in that sort of thing. Of course, I never had the least idea that the vase was in any way valuable—no more than any other old ornament of its sort! Seems remarkable, Mr. Ben, that a bit of a thing like that should be worth—thousands of pounds, I understand?"

"It's because of its rarity," I answered. "I don't suppose there are many like it, in England, anyhow."

"Just so—I suppose that's it," he assented. "I've no knowledge of that sort of thing myself. But those two little images, now, that went at the same time, Mr. Ben? Do you think,—you'll have had opportunities of hearing things that I haven't,—do you think, now, that they'd be worth anything? Anything handsome, I mean, of course."

"Can't say, Mr. Carsie," I replied. "I've no means of knowing."

He nodded again, as if fully accepting my statement, and went on punching holes in the turf.

"Just so—just so!" he said. "Well, it's an odd thing, Mr. Ben, and perhaps what should be called a coincidence, that those little images—ugly things they are, too!—had only been there in that cabinet cupboard a day or two when they were stolen! I saw the mistress put them there myself. She was dusting out that cabinet one day when I was in the drawing-room, and she says, all of a sudden: 'That shelf would do with something more on it, I think, Carsie,' she says. 'And I believe I've got the very things locked up somewhere.' And she went out of the room and presently came back with those two images, and put them in the cabinet, one on each side that Chinese vase. 'That looks better,' she said, as if she admired the effect. Couldn't see it myself, you know, Mr. Ben—foul and loathsome objects, I call those figures, one of 'em particularly."

"I never saw them," said I, seeing him pause for my opinion.

"Well, they're not in accordance with what you may style English taste," he continued. "One of 'em—why, it had ever so many heads and arms—a monstrosity, I call it! And t'other had some animal's head instead of a human being's! But there's no accounting for taste, and of course the mistress has lived in India, and she's used to seeing such objects, no doubt. However, there was a queer thing happened that day she put these images in the open cabinet, Mr. Ben. I chanced to go into the drawing-room that afternoon while the mistress was playing lawn-tennis with young Mr. Bryce in the garden, and lo and behold, there was that Indian fellow, Mandhu Khan, a-worshiping of those images! Fact, Mr. Ben! Anyway, he was bending down in front of 'em, making queer motions with his hands and arms; it gave me quite a turn! Made me think of a line of Mr. Kipling's poetry, which I'm partial to:

The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood an' stone—

"It fairly did, Mr. Ben! And in an English drawing-room too—things with as many heads as one of these three-headed calves you read about in the papers!"

HE shook his own head and its smart silk hat, sorrowfully, as if Miss Ellingham's taste in heathen images was not in keeping with the best traditions, and then suddenly tapped my arm with an extended forefinger.

"But I'll tell you what I think, Mr. Ben!" he exclaimed. "I think the whole thing has been the work of a smart London gang, and that that man who was found scragged at the gallowstree there was one of 'em! I think they quarreled over their loot, as they call it, and two of 'em did for the third. And what may the police be thinking about it, Mr. Ben—you'll have heard things, no doubt?"

Fortunately for me, Keziah came to our garden gate just then, and loudly demanded my presence at the supper-table, and with a hasty remark to the butler that I didn't know what the official police mind was on the subject, I made my excuses and left him. And after supper I went early to bed, being tired with my adventures, and if I dreamed that night, it was rather of the wonders of London than of Chinese vases and Indian images. But these came

back to me next morning, and I was puzzling my head about them as I lounged the time away—I was still regarded as a convalescent—on the beach in front of our house when Pepita Marigold came along.

Pepita, who spent most of her time running wild out of doors, was as unconcerned and gay of heart as ever. But I wasn't—I had a crow to pull with her. And I tried to look at her as a severe judge might look at a criminal arraigned before him in the dock. Unfortunately, Pepita was one of those people at whom you can't look in that way—for very long, at any rate. She came up to where I sat on the edge of a turned-up boat, and dropped down beside me as if it were the most natural thing in the world that we should sit side by side.

"Hello, Ben!" she exclaimed. "I wondered if I'd find you about. You've been to London, haven't you, Ben—come along, tell about it!"

But I made an effort to preserve my severity of countenance.

"Pepita," I said, "I've got something to say to you! Didn't you promise me you'd be my girl, Pepita? You know you did!"

She gave me a half-demure, half-roguish glance out of her eye-corners, from under her thick eyelashes, and whether of set purpose or not, moved her slim figure appreciably nearer on the edge of the boat.

"Well, I haven't said I'm not, Ben, have I?" she answered in a wheedling voice. "Don't be horrid—tell about London!"

"No!" I said firmly. "You've been going about with Bryce Ellingham, Pepita! And I'm not going to have my girl going about with anybody! If you knew anything about the law, Pepita, you'd know that a verbal contract—"

She slipped her hand inside my arm and gave it a squeeze.

"Oh, Ben!" she murmured. "I don't know anything at all about verbal contracts, and I don't care two pins about Bryce Ellingham—he's a mere kid! And I do want to know about London and what you did there. Don't be a beast, Ben, and I'll be your girl more than ever! Let's go for a nice walk somewhere—be good, now!"

THERE was no resisting Pepita, when her eyes got to work and her voice became cooing, and I fell an immediate victim and let her lead me off. We went across the fields toward Wreddlesham, a place half-town, half-village, that lay on the coast to the east of Middlebourne, some two miles from Middlebourne Grange. It got its name from a little river, the Wreddle, that came down from the hills some distance inland, and after many windings, ran into the sea between two clifflike promontories, beneath the eastern one of which Wreddlesham itself lay, a queer, ramshackle collection of old houses and cottages grouped about an ancient church and a ruinous tide-mill. Once upon a time Wreddlesham had been of some importance, but it had gradually fallen into decay, and now looked as hopeless and forlorn as any scarecrow of the fields: its trade had gone; half its houses were empty; and it was a rare thing to see a vessel tied up to either of its slowly rotting wharves.

Our walk through the meadows, which proved entirely satisfactory, and reëstablished a proper understanding between us on the subject of my strict proprietorship of her charms, brought Pepita and myself out on the western of the two cliffs between which the Wreddle ran into the sea. There were two or three cottages on that cliff, fishermen's cottages, and we sat down on the turf near one, in the full blaze of the sun and sweep of the wind. And we had not been sitting there five minutes before I saw something that made me jump to my feet with a suddenness that startled Pepita into following my example.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

I laid a hand on her shoulder and turned her toward one of the cottages—an isolated building near the edge of the cliff. On a wide expanse of headland at its side a quantity of washing was hung out on lines to dry; the various articles flapped loudly in the breeze.

"Pepita!" said I in my most solemn tones. "Do you see that?"

"See what?" she asked. "Washing? Of course I do! What about it?"

"Pepita," I continued still more gravely, "if I show you something, you'll just keep the knowledge of it to yourself till I give you leave to speak! Washing—yes! But what sort of washing? Now, Pepita, look there—follow my finger! Do you see a suit of pajamas in pink and mauve stripes—a very grand suit? You do? Very well, Pepita, as sure as I'm a living man, that's Uncle Joseph Krevin's!"

PEPITA let out a gasp of astonishment. She knew pretty nearly everything about Uncle Joseph and his doings at Middlebourne, and I had told her during

our walk as much as I thought it good for her to know about our discoveries concerning him in London.

"Are—are you sure, Ben?" she asked in almost awe-stricken tones. "His?"

"Dead certain!" I declared. "His! Those are the very things he was wearing when Keziah and I went up to his room to tell him about the murder. Pink and mauve stripes! I know 'em!"

"But I dare say there are a lot of pink-and-mauve pajamas about," she remarked. "You see them in the shops at Kingshaven."

"Yes, and you see blue and white, and red and yellow, and green and scarlet, and all sorts of colors!" said I. "But those are Uncle Joseph Krevin's, as sure as I'm a living man! And I'm going a bit nearer to have a look at them—they might have his name, or at any rate his initials, on them. Come along!"

We stole nearer the lines on which the washing was hung out; eventually we got close to the garments in which I took such interest. And I let out an exclamation which was meant to indicate a sense of triumph.

"There, what did I tell you!" I said, pointing to a label inside the waistband. "Look at that!"

Pepita looked, and shook her head.

"I don't see that that proves anything, she remarked. "It says '*Remnant, Outfitter, Southampton Row, London.*' Well—what's that?"

"You don't draw conclusions as I do, Pepita," said I. "Of course, you can't be expected to—you haven't had the experience. And you don't know London. Now, if you did, you'd know that Calthorpe Street, where Uncle Joseph lodges, is within a few minutes' walk of Southampton Row. See? Oh, it's as plain as that flagstaff! But where is Uncle Joseph, that his pajamas should be flopping about here?"

A WOMAN came out of the cottage close by. She carried a big wicker basket, and was evidently going to collect the things already dried. She came along the line, gathering them in, until she was close to us—we had by that time perched ourselves on a convenient mass of rock that cropped out from the turf. She was a good-natured looking woman, a fisherman's wife, I thought, and I bade her good-day in order to get into conversation with her.

"A grand morning for drying clothes!" I remarked as she busied herself. "Just the right sort of wind."

"Oh, they're dry in no time, a morning like this," she answered. "What with the wind and the sun, they're no trouble at all."

I pointed my stick at the pajamas, which she was just then taking down and laying away in her basket.

"Bit of finery, there!" I said jokingly. "You could see them a mile off!"

"Aye, they're pretty gay!" she assented laughingly. "They belong to a London gentleman, those, that's stopping at the Shooting Star—I do a bit o' washing for folks that they have there now and then. Of course, some gentlemen like these new-fangled things, and some likes the old-fashioned nightgown—it's all a question of taste."

I agreed with her; and presently, her basket filled, she went back to her cottage. I turned on Pepita.

"Did you hear that?" I exclaimed. "They belong to a London gentleman, stopping at the Shooting Star! Pepita, that London gentleman is my undesirable relative Uncle Joseph Krevin! Sure and certain!"

Pepita looked at me with admiring eyes.

"Ben," she said, "why don't you go in for being a detective? I think you'd be an awful good hand! And it's a lot more exciting than sitting in a law-office."

"No!" I answered sternly. "Don't you tempt me, Pepita! I dare say I'd do awfully well as a detective; I'm beginning to learn a lot about it, and how it's done. But I've been destined for the law ever since I was twelve years old, and I'm going to have a career in it, Pepita—never you fear! Still, there's no harm in doing a bit of detective work now and then, and I'm going to do a bit now. Come on, to the edge of the cliff."

PEPITA followed me to where the promontory sank sheer down to the ravine through which the little river ran to the sea. Below us, on the other bank, lay Wreddlesham, dead-alive as a decaying place can be. But I looked little at its red roofs and gray walls; all my attention was given to the Shooting Star, a big, rambling old inn that stood between the eastern wharf and the village. It had once been a house of some importance, but it was quiet enough now, and from where we stood, looking down on

it, there was not a sign of life to be seen about it, save for a dog that lay basking in the sunlight before its front door.

"Pepita," I said, suddenly, "I'm going into the Shooting Star, to see if I can see or hear of Uncle Joseph! Come on! You can look round the wharf while I go in. I'll get a glass of ale and keep my eyes open while I'm drinking it."

"You don't think there's any danger, Ben?" she asked as we began to descend the cliff. "You're all alone, you know."

"You have to run risks at this business," I replied loftily. "I'm not afraid of running one now. And I'm pretty cute, you know, Pepita."

We crossed the Wreddle by an old wooden bridge at the top of the little harbor, and strolled down to the wharf in front of the inn as if we were loafers, idling about. And after a while, leaving Pepita seated on a pile of old planks near an ancient bulk left high and dry on the beach, I went off to the Shooting Star. There was a door just within its big, empty hall labeled *"Bar Parlor;"* I pushed it open and stuck my inquisitive head into the opening.

CHAPTER XIII

The Result of Vainglory

THE room was empty—empty of human presence, anyway. I saw at the first glance that it was a shabby, faded place, in keeping with all that one could see of the house itself, from the outside. The matting on the floor was worn and in holes; the furniture was qualified for a second-hand shop; here and there the wall-paper hung in ribbons. There was a bar on one side, and some shelves behind it, but neither showed much evidence of trade; the stock of bottles on the shelves was negligible. Nevertheless there was an aroma of stale beer and inferior spirits, mingled with the smell of rank tobacco, and a couple of recently used glasses on the counter showed that somebody had been in the room not long before.

I went in and looked around more narrowly, intent on discovering any possible sign of Uncle Joseph Krevin's temporary residence in this derelict hostelry. And before I had been across the threshold a moment, I found one—an unmistakable one, too. There was a shabby writing-table in one of the windows, and on its ledge I saw a tobacco pipe which I knew to be Uncle Joseph's property—I had seen him smoking it at our house. It was a pipe of peculiar shape, with a square instead of a rounded bowl, and it had a perforated-silver top to it. I picked it up—the bowl was faintly warm. I judged from that—putting two and two together in the approved detective fashion—that my precious kinsman was somewhere about. But as I laid the pipe back in its place, I made a second discovery, and I saw at once that it was equally important with the first—Cherry, perhaps, might have considered it more important. There was a cheap, uncorked bottle of ink on the dusty writing-table, and a much-corroded steel pen near it, and on a loose sheet of ancient blotting-paper, an envelope, addressed to some wine-and-spirits firm. It needed but a glance at it to assure me that the handwriting was identical with that which I had seen on the envelope found in Uncle Joseph's lodgings in Calthorpe Street. There was no doubt about that—I was as certain of it as if I had had the two envelopes before me, side by side.

I think it was at that particular point that I said farewell to common sense and calm judgment. What I ought to have done was to go quietly away and tell Cherry of my discoveries. But I was young and impulsive and anxious to distinguish myself—perhaps I wanted to show Pepita how very clever I was. I think I had a notion of bringing the whole thing to a dramatic climax there and then, by my own unaided efforts. And instead of following Keziah's oft-repeated advice to count twenty before deciding on any important step, I rushed on my fate, beginning the rush by going out again to the front of the inn and beckoning Pepita to come to me at the door. Pepita came, diffident, wide-eyed, wondering.

"What is it, Ben?" she demanded. "You look as if you'd found something!"

"I have!" said I in a whisper intended to convey a world of meaning. "Something that'll surprise you—and everybody! Look here—just do as I tell you. There's nobody about—come inside with me, and keep your ears and eyes open, and you'll see what happens. Come on!"

She looked at the unpromising frontage of the place with evident disfavor.

"Doesn't look very nice, Ben," she objected. "If the people are as dirty as the house—"

"Never mind!" said I. "You'll be all

right; I'll see to that! And it'll be better than a play! Follow me, now."

I led her to the room which I had just left, and pointing her to the cleanest of the old chairs, knocked loudly on the counter of the bar. I knocked, still louder, three or four times, and got no answer. Then, just as I was thinking of exploring more of the house, a door at the back of the bar opened, and a man stood before us.

I took this man for the landlord, whose name, Charles Getch, I had already noticed on the signboard outside. He was not a nice-looking man. To begin with, there was something sinister about his face; to end with, he had a curious cast in his left eye. He was a big man, as big as Uncle Joseph, but more muscular—a man, I thought, of great strength. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, high above his elbow, and I noticed what powerful arms he possessed; it flashed across my mind that he had been, perhaps, a pugilist in his day. And there was nothing polite or welcoming about his manner; instead, he gave me a cold look and as coldly demanded what he could do for me.

"You can give me a bottle of Bass and another of lemonade, if you please," I said. "I've knocked about a dozen times!"

"More or less—less, I think," he answered coolly. "I heard you, my lad—but I was otherwise occupied, just then."

I saw that I should get no advantage in any exchange of words with this man, and it nettled me. And as soon as I had got my beer and I had given Pepita the lemonade, I let off my heavy artillery in what I hoped would be a crushing broadside.

"Mr. Krevin in?" I demanded, laying down half a crown. "Mr. Joseph Krevin?"

He gave me a quick, inquiring glance as he picked up the coin, and his reply came sharp as my question.

"Nobody of that name here, young fellow!" he answered. "Don't know the name!"

He threw down my change, as if in defiance, and turning away from me, searched for a clean glass and got himself a drink from a bottle which, I noticed, he kept apart from the other small stock. That done, he thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and leaning against the door from which he had recently emerged, stared at me.

"I think Mr. Krevin is here," said I. "In fact, I know he is! That's his pipe lying on the ledge, and I've just seen his pajamas, sent from here to be washed at the cottage on the cliff. And if you want to know more, I'm his nephew, and I want to see him—particularly!"

THE man's face was changing, swiftly, all the time I was speaking. When I mentioned and pointed to the pipe, he frowned; when I spoke of the pajamas, his eyes grew dark, as with sudden anger and vexation. But as soon as I mentioned my relationship, his face cleared in a queer, quick, mysterious fashion, and his manner became almost bland and his tongue silky-soft.

"Oh—you mean the gentleman from London that's doing a bit of fishing hereabouts," he said. "Well, now, you might think it strange, but I'd never got his name—right, at any rate. Oh—and you're his nephew, eh? And what might your name be, now?"

"If he's about, tell him that Mr. Heckitt would like to see him," I replied loftily. "He'll understand."

He muttered something about believing the gentleman might be in the garden, or fishing on the river-bank at the back, and opening the door behind him, went off. I turned to Pepita.

"There, you see!" said I. "Nothing like insistence—and directness! And I shall adopt the same tone with Uncle Joseph, and ask him, straight out, what he's doing here."

But Pepita shook her head. Somehow she seemed much less confident about things than I was.

"Ben!" she whispered, after a glance at the door through which the landlord had vanished. "Ben don't you think it's a very queer thing that your uncle should be here at all?"

I didn't grasp her meaning, and looked a query.

"Within a couple of miles of Middlebourne, where the police have been inquiring about his doings for some days?" she went on. "And you and Mr. Cherry looking for him, too! And this is a public-house, isn't it? Men must go in and out of here, every day—and how is it nobody's seen him?"

"Seems odd, certainly," I agreed. "But then, Middlebourne people don't come this way; there's nothing to cross the river for. And you heard the landlord say that he

didn't know his name—properly, at any rate. And again—he may be hiding here."

"If he is," said Pepita, "then that man who's just gone out knows about it, and is in some secret with him. Be careful, Ben—why not go outside?"

"Outside?" I asked. "Why outside?"

"So that we can run away if—well, if there's any sign of bother, or anything of that sort," she replied. "Supposing—supposing your uncle doesn't want you to know he's here, and is angry because you've come—eh?"

"I'm not afraid of his anger," I declared. "I've got the law behind me, Pepita! You don't know how powerful the law is! When a man's bucked by the law—"

BUT before I could enlarge on this topic, the landlord reappeared. This time he came in by the door which led to the hall. He smiled at us—and I'm not sure that his smile was not worse than his scowl.

"Come this way," he said invitingly. "He'll be with you in a minute—quite a surprise, he says, to have a call. If you and the young lady'll follow me—"

We followed him, innocently enough. I remember glancing through the open front door as we passed it, and seeing the bright sunlight lying broad-spread on the wharf outside, and shining on the dancing river and the sea beyond; it would have been well for us if we had damned Uncle Joseph heartily and left him and his host to their devices and turned and fled while we had the chance! I think Pepita had this in mind, but she owned a certain quality, wholly feminine, of passive acquiescence in male projects, and she followed obediently—as I did, too. And Getch went ahead—down a long, vaultlike passage.

It was, as I think I have said, a big house—a real old-fashioned place that once upon a time, in the days when Wreddlesham was a port of importance, had doubtless done a great trade. We turned and twisted a good deal in following our guide, and if I had preserved a hap'orth of common sense, I should have gathered an idea of danger from more than one thing. We passed many rooms, the doors of which were open. But we did not see a single soul about the place, nor did we hear the sound of a human voice; the big house was strangely silent and solitary. Once I had a notion of going no farther, but the idea of confronting Uncle Joseph in dramatic fashion drove it away. And suddenly, at the end of a little passage which broke off from a bigger one, our guide threw open the door of a room and stood aside with a wave of his hand.

"Join you in a minute," he said, fixing his queer eye on us. "Make yourselves at home!"

We walked into the room; he closed the door on us. I fancied—it may have been only fancy—that I heard him laugh as he did so. But there was no fancy about the next sound. It was that of a key turning in the lock—and it was followed the next instant by another—a boit driven home into its staple.

And the next thing was a cry from Pepita—Pepita, trembling, and with one of her little brown hands clutching my arm.

"Ben! Oh, Ben! They've trapped us!"

THAT sobered me—as if a bucketful of ice-cold water had been thrown in my face. My grand notions of a dramatic climax went as a fluff of thistledown goes in the wind, and I suddenly saw what an arrant fool I was. Yet I put out a hand, mechanically, and tried the door—fast enough, that door was, solid as granite. I heard my heart beating as I turned to Pepita.

"Don't be frightened!" I said, feeling myself more afraid than I had ever felt in my life. "It—it can't last! He—they—perhaps they've locked us in while Uncle Joseph gets away; and in any case—"

"What, Ben?" she asked nervously as I paused in sheer perplexity. "What?"

"They can't lock us up here forever!" I asserted. "We shall be missed—"

"But nobody saw us come here!" she interrupted. "There wasn't a soul about when we came on the wharf outside—don't you remember?"

I remembered only too well. That outer bit of Wreddlesham was deserted enough, and I couldn't call to mind that we had seen a living soul since leaving the washing woman on the cliff. And she had retreated into her cottage before we turned away, and probably had no idea as to the direction we had afterwards taken. But I wasn't going to remind Pepita of that.

"It's impossible!" said I, endeavoring to answer what I took to be her meaning. "People can't be got rid of this way in these days. We shall soon be missed and looked for. Your father—and Keziah—and Cherry—and everybody—"

"It might take them days and days to find us," she said. "Oh, Ben, is there no way of getting out?"

I had been looking round as we talked. The room into which Getch had ushered us was a fair-sized one, fitted up as a bed-sitting-room—that is, it contained a suite of old-fashioned furniture and had in one corner a queer old four-poster bed. But it had only one door and one window; the door I knew to be fast. And the window was fast, too—screwed down, I found on examining it, and fitted on its outside with thin but sufficiently strong bars of iron. The panes of glass in the casements were small; if I smashed one to fragments, the aperture was not big enough to creep through. And there was no way of attracting the attention of folk without, for immediately in front of the window, at about a yard and a half's distance, rose a high blank wall of gray stone, evidently the back of some barn, or stable, or warehouse.

"There's nothing for it but to wait," I said. "And—it's all my fault! I never dreamed of this, Pepita!"

"Oh, never mind, Ben!" she answered quickly. "It's perhaps as you say—they've locked us up while they get away, and they'll send somebody to let us out. But—how long will that be?"

I KNEW no more than she did on that point. But my brain had been at work while I examined our surroundings, and I now knew a few things which I certainly hadn't known when we came, light-hearted and unsuspecting, across the river to fall into this booby-trap. One was that Uncle Joseph Krevin was in hiding here, and had probably been here ever since the night he left our house. Another was that Getch, the landlord (concerning whom I had been cudgeling my brains, with the result that I remembered having heard of him as a newcomer in our parts, who had only recently taken over the license of this house), was an associate of Uncle Joseph's and possibly a sharer in his misdeeds. And a third, which came to me in a sudden flash of illumination, was that the Shooting Star was the mysterious S. S. of the penciled card which Uncle Joseph had left with the landlady of the Crab and Lobster at Fishampton to be handed to Sol Cousins. Joseph Krevin, Sol Cousins, Charles Getch—that, no doubt, was the triumvirate. And we were safe in the clutches of two of them. For I had no doubt whatever that Uncle Joseph was under the roof of this half-deserted inn.

The time dragged by slowly. Because of the high wall in front of the window, the light was bad in that room. Neither Pepita nor I had a watch, and we did not know how the day was going. But judging by the time whereat we had entered the place, it must have been well past noon when we heard the bolt outside withdrawn, the key turned. The door was opened, just enough to admit a hard-faced, dour-looking woman who carried a tray; she had set it down on the table and was out of the room again before I could do anything; the door was relocked and bolted.

"Anyway, we're not to starve!" I said, trying to cheer up Pepita with a laugh. "Here's enough to eat and drink, at all events!"

The tray was well laden with food, plain but good. And being young and hungry, we ate and drank and tried to fancy it was a picnic. But then came the afternoon, and more weary waiting. We talked and talked—until we could talk no longer. And it must have been very near the first approach of evening when the door opened again and the sinister-looking landlord came in, followed immediately by the big bulk and smug countenance of Uncle Joseph Krevin.

CHAPTER XIV

Under Examination

MY first instinct, immediately followed out, was to spring to my feet in an attitude of readiness—my second, acted on in the same movement, to plant myself in front of Pepita. And at that, Uncle Joseph Krevin, for reasons best known to himself, held up a fat, disapproving hand.

"I'm surprised at you, Nephew Benjamin, acting as if there was any likelihood of harm coming to a young lady while I'm present!" he said in his most sanctimonious manner. "And sorry I am that the pretty miss should be put to any inconvenience, such as this here unfortunate state o' things! But all that comes through you, Benjamin, a-poking of your nose into matters as doesn't concern you!"

I was boiling with rage, all the fiercer because I had a shrewd idea that it was utterly ineffectual, and I maintained my ground, keeping Pepita in her chair behind

me. And I dared to be as impudent as I could.

"That's all rot!" I retorted. "And you look here—both of you! If you don't let us walk out of this house, and at once, you'll both find yourself in a hole! You're liable to prosecution now, and—"

But Uncle Joseph once more held up the fat hand.

"I wouldn't excite myself, if I were you, Benjamin," he interrupted. "Excitement's bad for anybody, and I can't allow it to myself, consequent upon my weak heart. And there's no occasion for it, neither. All that me and Mr. Getch wants is a little private conversation, and it rests with you, Benjamin, to make it of a friendly nature. Me and Mr. Getch don't want to have no words with you, I'm sure—we're kindly-natured men, I think, and disposed to treat them fair as treats us fair. And I should suggest, Benjamin, that you resume your seat, and prove yourself amenable to what we'll call the present circumstances."

"The present circumstances are that you've locked up Miss Marigold and myself against our wills and are liable to severe punishment for it!" said I. "And you'll get it! Do you think we've no friends, and that they wont track us? We shall have been looked for ever since noon, and—"

Again the wave of the fat hand and the unctuous voice—Uncle Joseph was evidently cocksure about the safety of his own situation.

"I wouldn't worrit myself about them things if I was you, Benjamin," he said. "You're as safe here—and the young lady—as we are from interruption. It'll be a long time before any notion gets abroad that you're where you are or anybody comes seeking you at the Shooting Star—and if they did, they'd go away no wiser than when they came! You wasn't seen to come here by anybody, Nephew Benjamin, and 'cepting me and Mr. Getch and the lady what brought you your dinner, there's nobody knows you are here. And I should advise you to make the best of the sitty-wation and be friendly. Friendly—that's all we want."

"Are you going to let us out?" I demanded.

UNCLE JOSEPH made no very immediate reply. Instead, he took a chair,—the best and biggest chair in the room,—and plumping himself into it, settled his big figure comfortably, and placing his hands on his pudgy knees, looked at us in turn. As for the landlord, he leaned against the door, his hands in his pockets, watching. It seemed a long time before Uncle Joseph spoke.

"That's one o' them questions as is difficult to answer, Benjamin," he said at last, after chewing the proposition well over. "You'd ought to know, as one intended for the law, that there is questions to which it's uncommon difficult to give a plain affirmytive or an ekally plain neggytive to. I can conceive the difficulty myself, for if I happened to be put in a witness-box—"

"You'll find yourself in something else than a witness-box, if you go on!" I broke in rudely, and of set purpose. "There's another spot—the dock! That's more likely to be your destination—on the way to something still more impossible to escape from!"

I FELT a tug at my coat, and Pepita spoke gently:

"Don't, Ben!" she murmured. "There's no need—"

"Thank you, Missie!" said Uncle Joseph. "There is no need, as you kindly say, and glad I am to find that Benjamin has somebody at his elbow to admonish him. It doesn't become young men to show violence to their elders, especially when those elders is rellytives—brothers o' their own mothers, too!"

"Who's showing violence!" I exclaimed. "If anybody's had any violence shown to them, it's us! You—"

"Oh, no, Nephew Benjamin, I think not!" remonstrated Uncle Joseph. "No, Benjamin, I really couldn't allow that suggestion in Mr. Getch's presence. Mr. Getch, I'm sure, wouldn't hurt a canary bird, let alone a young lady and gentleman—"

"Never laid a finger on 'em!" muttered Getch. "Not me!"

"And sent you in a handsome dinner, I'm told," continued Uncle Joseph reproachfully. "Same as him and me had ourselves! No, Benjamin, considering as how you come here like a enemy, a-poking your nose into matters which don't concern you, I think you've been treated uncommon well—I do indeed, and I'm sure Missie there'll agree with me."

"You leave Miss Marigold alone!" said I. "What do you want?"

Uncle Joseph nodded and rubbed his hands. "That's the first sensible remark

we've heard you make, Benjamin!" he said. "That's more like it! And as I said before, and now repeats, all we want is friendliness. Friendly answers, Benjamin, to friendly questions!"

"Such as—what?" I demanded.

"Well, such as—what did you come here for?" he asked. "Come, now!"

"To see you—as I told him," I answered, pointing at Getch.

BUT Uncle Joseph's head wagged.

"You aint so fond of me as all that, Nephew Benjamin," he said, sorrowfully. "You and Keziah, you wasn't pleased to see your blood-relation, I'm afraid. No, Benjamin, I think you didn't come here for *that!*"

"Leastways, not altogether!" remarked Getch with a sardonic laugh. "Oh, no!"

"Not altogether, as Mr. Getch kindly remarks," added Uncle Joseph. "I think you came to see if I was here, Benjamin, along of having recognized garments of mine a-hanging on the cliff."

"What if I did?" said I.

"Then I'm afraid, Benjamin, that, having ascertained I was here, you'd have straightway gone back to Middlebourne and told it that I was," he retorted. "And that wouldn't have suited my plans."

"I dare say!" I exclaimed scornfully. "I can quite believe that! Well, perhaps I should. You know as well as I do that you're under suspicion."

"I could say a good deal about that, Benjamin; I could say much about that!" he remarked solemnly. "Every man knows his own business best, and them that's most suspected is ofttimes most innocent. Now, of what am I suspected, Nephew Benjamin? I ask you—friendly!"

I hesitated awhile, watching him, and wondering. I felt sure by that time that no personal violence was likely to be offered to Pepita or myself, and that these two were probably detaining us in order to get information, or until such time as they could get safely away. And hastily summing up the situation, I decided on a policy of frankness—it seemed to me that it would pay, that if I put my cards on the table I should stand a good chance of seeing Uncle Joseph's hand. And thereafter it would be a case of whose wits were sharpest.

"You're suspected of knowing something about the murder of that man Cousins, and of the theft of Miss Ellingham's Chinese vase!" I said suddenly. "That's what!"

He drew his hands back from his knee-caps, and began slowly rubbing them to and fro on his big legs.

"Dear, dear!" he said. "And supposing I did know what we'll call something about them matters, Benjamin?" He paused a second or two at that, regarding me with a sidelong glance. "Something, I say, not partiklarizing how much—what right does that give the police to look for me?"

"They want to know what you know," I answered.

"Uncommon kind of 'em, I'm sure!" he said with a flash of humor. "Like them, too—always a-wanting somebody else to do their work for 'em. They've no imagination, them police fellers, Benjamin—as you'll find out, long before you're lord chancellor. Now, you know, Benjamin, for all that you, or Veller, or that young Scotland Yard chap knows, I might be—eh?"

"What?" I asked, as he paused on a shy glance. "What?"

"I might be on the very same game that they're on!" he said. "Come, now!"

I started, staring at him.

"You aren't a detective!" I exclaimed.

HE gave me an almost contemptuous look which developed into a certain hardening about eyes and lips.

"You don't know what I am, my lad!" he retorted in a different tone. "You know nothing! But now then,"—and here he began to speak as if he were a bullying cross-examiner, and I a witness at his mercy,—"you tell me! What's that young Cherry found out about me? And let me tell you, my lad,—for we are blood-relations, when all's said and done!—you be candid with me, and I'll be candid with you, and don't you forget that at a word from me, Getch, here, can keep you and the young lady locked up, and at a word he can let you go—eh?"

Here indeed was a sudden and surprising change! But I resolved to stick to my plan—I would let him see what a hole he was in.

"Cherry knows a lot!" I answered. "He knows, to begin with, that you and Cousins met at the Crab and Lobster, at Fishampton."

"Oh!" he said. "It's a lot to know, that! And—what else?"

"And that you left cards in our best bedroom with the name of Crippe, marine

stores dealer of Old Gravel Lane, London, on them," I continued. "He's seen Crippe."

"Wouldn't get much out of Crippe, neither!" he muttered.

"But you left your brandy-bottle in the cave at Fliman's End," I went on. "And there was a name on the label—Zetterquist & Vanderpant, St. George Street. Cherry saw them—and he got something there!"

"What?" he demanded.

"The address of your lodgings in Calthorpe Street," I replied, watching him narrowly.

"Aye?" he said almost unconcernedly. "And—went there?"

"He went there—and he'd good luck there too!" said I, scarcely able to keep a note of triumph out of my voice.

"Good luck, eh, Benjamin?" he said. "And—what might it be, now?"

"He'd two finds," I replied. "He found a copy of the *Lady's Circle* amongst your papers, from which you'd torn out the page on which there's a picture of Miss Ellingham's Chinese vase. He also found an envelope lying on your table, the postmark of which was Middlebourne."

I was looking for him to exchange glances with Getch, at that. But they didn't exchange as much as the flutter of an eyelash: they seemed quite unconcerned. And Uncle Joseph's voice became cooing again.

"Aye, Benjamin, aye—and what more did this clever young man find out?" he asked.

"Nothing more then," I answered.

"No?" he said. "Ah! Anything anywhere else—in this damning chain of evidence?"

I was puzzled by Uncle Joseph's manner, by then. There was something behind all this at which I couldn't guess. But I thought to floor him with my reserve blow.

"I dare say you've heard the name of Mr. Spelwyn—the famous collector?" I said, keeping an eye on him. "Spelwyn—expert in this China rare stuff."

"It's not unfamiliar, Benjamin," he answered. "I've heard of a good many things and people—in London and elsewhere."

"Spelwyn says you called on him and offered him a Kang-he vase," I said slowly, watching the effect. "He told Cherry so! You!"

I saw a curious smile break out about the corners of his lips. But it didn't spread. He composed his features immediately, and his manner changed once again—to a combination of unctuousness and facetiousness.

"Well, now, that *is* news!" he said slowly. "Deary-me-to-day! I thought we should get at something in time. So I called on Mr. Spelwyn and offered to sell him a—what might it be termed?—a Kang-he vase, did I? Oh—ah! Well, Benjamin, one lives, and one learns! Just so!"

"Didn't you?" I asked.

He made no answer. Instead he rose from his chair and looked at Getch.

"I think, Mr. Getch, it's time these young people had a dish of tea sent in to them," he said, "—and a trifle of that nice cake of your housekeeper's. And meanwhile you and me can do a bit of reflecting on what we've heard. So—"

He made for the door, and Getch's hand went to it. I spoke, sharply.

"What about me?" I demanded. "You promised! And this girl—"

"There's no harm'll come to the girl, Benjamin, and none to you," said Uncle Joseph over his shoulder. "You shall have your tea—while me and Mr. Getch has ours and does a spell of meditating. Afterward—"

THEY were out of the door, and it was locked and bolted again within a minute, and there was nothing to do but wait upon their pleasure. And oddly enough, just then I remembered that once, when I was a little chap, Keziah had taken me to the zoölogical gardens, where I had been much impressed by the captive wild beasts, walking, walking, walking round the iron-barred cages out of which, poor devils, they couldn't get. I felt as I think they must have felt, at that moment. And I think I swore—softly, but definitely.

"Yes," remarked Pepita, "exactly. But I say, Ben, it's no use slanging that fat old scamp, you know! That's not the way to get round him. Why don't you have a go at him with his own weapons, Ben?"

"Because I'm not skilled in the use of 'em!" I retorted sulkily. "I'm not up to slyness, and subterfuge, and lying, and all the rest of it! What I say is—damn him, and Getch too!"

"I thought you were going to be a lawyer, Ben," she said. "You needn't lie, and you needn't be sly, but you can be—what do they call it—diplomatic?"

"How are you to be diplomatic with that old devil?" I demanded. "He's as full of cunning as the sea's full of water!"

"All the same," she went on, "if he comes again, I should try to get round him. For oh, Ben, suppose—suppose, they kept us here all night, and all tomorrow—"

"They—or he—promised that no harm should come to you, Pepita," I said. "And I can't believe they'll keep us here much longer. I think they'll let us go when it gets dark."

"It's getting dark now," she remarked, glancing round the gloomy room. "Whatever shall we do if they leave us without light, Ben? I'd be so frightened—"

But just then the hard-faced woman was admitted quickly, and as quickly let out again. She brought us tea—plenty of good things, too—and she left a lamp on the tray. We ate and drank, and Pepita, remarking that Uncle Joseph had some creditable points in him and would evidently not allow us to starve, ended up by expressing a pious hope that his and Getch's meditations would prove favorable to us, and result in our speedy release.

"As I said—perhaps when it's dark," I remarked. "Under the darkness—"

I glanced toward the window as I spoke, and my tongue was suddenly checked. There, peering in from outside through the glass of a lower pane, his face seen clearly in the light of the lamp, his eyes staring straight at me, was Miss Ellingham's Hindu servant, Mandhu Khan!

CHAPTER XV

Melsie Island

I ALMOST upset the tea-things and the table in the dart that I made for that window. The suddenness of my rush there checked the scream on Pepita's lips; she twisted sharply round in her chair, and I know that she was just in time to see too. But quick as I was, the face had gone by the time I reached the casement; in what I could see of the narrow space between me and the blank wall opposite, there was nothing. I slewed round again to Pepita, who had half-risen from the table staring.

"You saw?" I exclaimed. "Didn't you?"

"I saw!" she answered. "That brown-faced man at the Grange—looking in! Oh, Ben—what was he wanting?"

"To see what he could!" said I. "Spying round! Pepita, you can bet your life that chap's on the hunt for Uncle Joseph! That's it—sure as Fate!"

"Shall you tell them?" she asked.

But I had already thought of that. I began to see chances, excellent chances, arising out of this episode.

"Not one word!" said I. "We'll keep that to ourselves. "I'm not afraid of Mandhu Khan—Miss Ellingham says he's a very faithful and dependable servant. Do you know what I think? I think that Mandhu Khan is on the track of Uncle Joseph. They're awfully clever, those chaps, I'm told—see things that we don't, and are skilled in tracing people, and I should say Mandhu Khan has taken up the search for his mistress' stolen property, and he's got an idea that Uncle Joseph Krevin has got it, and is lying doggo here at the Shooting Star. So—he comes and peeps in at the window! See?"

"Do you think he'll tell—tell people at Middlebourne, I mean—that he's seen us, Ben?" she asked.

"Sure and certain, Pepita!" I declared. "Lucky thing for us that he came peeping round! Of course he'll tell! But look here—if these chaps come back, as they're sure to when they've meditated, as Uncle Joseph styled it, not a word about that face at the window! We'll keep that to ourselves. And for anything we know, there may be others round about—Cherry, for instance."

MY assurances seemed to revive Pepita's spirits— though, to do her full justice, she had never shown anything but steady resolve to go through with things; and we sat down again and finished our tea, each of us keeping an eye on the window. However, we saw no more of Mandhu Khan's brown face and big eyes. Nothing happened; the evening wore on; nobody came; it looked as if we were condemned to imprisonment for the night. And at last, after many nods and yawns, Pepita began to show signs of weariness.

"Ben," she said suddenly, "I'm sleepy—it's long past my bedtime. I can't keep awake—can't! What shall we do, Ben?"

"You must lie down and go to sleep," I declared firmly. "Nothing else for it! And you can be sure of this—I sha'n't sleep! I'll keep watch. Come on, now—you're quite safe, and you'll be asleep in two minutes."

She hesitated awhile; then, with a smile of utter sleepiness, she went over to the bed in the corner and lay down. As for me, I dragged a big chair right in front of the door and took my place in it.

"Good-night, now, Pepita!" I said in very grandfatherly fashion. "Don't worry—and go to sleep! I shouldn't wonder if we find the door open in the morning—it's my opinion these chaps will make themselves scarce in the night."

She made no answer for a time: then she spoke, in a whisper.

"Wont you kiss me good-night, Ben?" she said. "I'd feel safer, I think, if you did—somehow!"

I went over and kissed her, and she lifted her arms and put them round my neck.

"I'm your girl now, aren't I, Ben?" she whispered. "Oh, Ben—if they come back, don't go running any risks! I know you're as brave as a lion, but—"

At that very minute we heard the bolt withdrawn outside, and I started away from her, and she jumped hastily from the bed, with a startled exclamation.

"They're here now!" she said. "Ben—be careful!"

THE key turned; the door opened; and there stood Getch. He was in seagoing clothes and sea-boots and had an oil-skin hat pulled close over his face.

"Now, my lad," he said in a domineering tone that roused my temper, "come on—and the girl too! Follow me—or walk in front. Lively, now!"

"No!" I said, motioning Pepita to keep behind me. "Not till I know where we're going."

He came a step or two into the room.

"Look here, young fellow-my-lad!" he said in a lower voice and more insolent tone. "You just listen to me! You aint dealing with Joe Krevin at this minute, though you'll see plenty of him presently—you're dealing with me! You and the girl come on at once, and do as you're told, or I'll put you through it in a fashion you wont like, and carry the girl off whether she likes it or not! D'ye hear that—and d'ye see this?" he went on, raising his right arm and hand. "If I give you one real good 'un with that, my lad, you'll drop off to a sort of sleep that'll keep you quiet enough for a good while—and you'll wonder if an earthquake hit you when you wake! Now, come on!"

I felt Pepita's hand on my arm, and knew what its pressure meant.

"Where?" I asked. "Is it safe—for her?"

"Don't you ask questions, my young cockerel!" he sneered. "You heard what your uncle said before he left you. No harm to either as long as you do what you're told. And damned soft stuff to give you, in my opinion! If I'd had my way, I'd ha' wrung your young neck and chucked you in the tideway hours ago. March, now!"

He stood aside in the doorway, and motioned us into the passage. We went—silently. It was dark there, but Getch picked up a lantern which had been standing on the floor, with its face turned to the wall, and presently guided us forward, through what seemed to be a labyrinth of cellars and windings until at last I saw a gray aperture in front and felt a breath of sea air blowing toward us. And suddenly he turned out his light, and passing through an open doorway, we found ourselves on a narrow quay at the side of the river and saw dimly perceptible things in the faint gleam of a waning moon.

And the first thing was a boat, at our feet, and in it a cloaked and much obscured figure, big and bulky, sitting in the stern, surrounded by what seemed to be a number of bundles, boxes, or packages. Uncle Joseph, no doubt! But the next instant we heard his voice, in a faint whisper.

"Give the young lady this here coat," he said. "It'll protect her! And as for you, Benjamin, you must make shift with one o' these rugs—the night's not so cold as all that, and we aren't facing a long voyage. Help her in, Benjamin!"

But with the coat in my hands which he flung to me, I made a last appeal.

"Look here!" I said. "I don't mind what happens to me, but you surely aren't going to carry off a young girl, at night, in this way? Just think—"

"We've been doing a deal o' thinking, Benjamin," he interrupted, in a whisper. "Me and Mr. Getch has thought and thought, and we're a-doing what we consider best and kindest for all parties. There's no harm'll come to the young lady, Benjamin, while she's in my charge, nor to you, neither, if you behave yourself. At worst, it's only a bit of temp'ry inconvenience. So be a good lad, and behave friendly!"

"But—" I began.

GETCH cut short what I was going to say by unceremoniously thrusting me headlong into the boat, whither Pepita hastened to follow me, before he could lay hands on her. He jumped in himself then

and seized the oars; a few strokes from his powerful arms, and we were out in the river and heading for the bar at its mouth and the open sea beyond. And I judged then that it was now very late at night, for as the little town became dimly visible, there was not a light to be seen in any of its windows. As for the house we had just left, it stood black and forbidding against the chalk cliffs beyond.

Nobody said anything for a while. Uncle Joseph remained at the tiller, humped up like a bale of goods; Pepita and I, side by side, and holding each other's hands, cowered near him, amidst the packages; Getch was busy with his oars. He was a powerful hand at that job; within a few minutes he had us over the bar and out into the sea; he made still better progress there, for the dark waters were calm as a millpond. And once outside the bar and well off the land, I looked about me, especially in front, in the endeavor to fix our destination. My idea, at first, was that they were going off to some ship, but I gave that up at once, for the visibility was good, and as far as I could see, there was no ship anywhere in sight—certainly not one with her necessary lights burning. For a time I was doubtful, but when Uncle Joseph continued to steer us straight ahead of the river mouth, I knew at last where we were going. And that was Melsie Island.

I began to get a clearer notion of the situation when I had decided on that. Melsie was a small island which, as near as I could reckon, lay right opposite the rocks and caves of Fliman's End, at a distance of from two and a half to three miles. It was about three-quarters of a mile in length, and half a mile wide—a wild, rocky, barren place, over the outer edges of which one could see the waves dashing in bad weather, and on which nobody lived. And it was seldom that anybody ever went to it from the mainland; there was nothing to go for. I had been on it once, when I was out with Tom Scripture in his boat; he had put into one of its coves for some reason or other, and I and his son had raced over the grim rocks and deserted stretches of sand while he remained on the beach.

But once upon a time folks had lived on the island—monks, in the old, far-off days. There had been a famous religious house there—Melsie Abbey; you could see the ruins of it from our creek; and I, of course, had explored them when I was roaming about with Tom Scripture's boy. They were considerable, but they consisted chiefly of roofless walls and fallen masses of masonry; still, there was one part which, I had noticed on my inspection, was still in very fair preservation and could easily have been made habitable, and that was the main tower, which the last Abbot of Melsie had only just finished building when he and his brethren were turned adrift on the world.

AFTER Getch had pulled a mile from the mouth of the river, he stepped a mast and set a small sail, and there being a nice breeze blowing from land, we bowled merrily away in the direction of the island, and before long saw its dark bulk showing ahead. All this time our two captors preserved a strict and gloomy silence; indeed, they neither exchanged a word between themselves, nor spoke to us until we were close on our destination. Then Getch made some remark to Uncle Joseph about trying the old landing-place, and after commanding me to give a hand with the sail, he took the tiller himself and steered the boat into a sort of passage between high black rocks, finally bringing us alongside a quay which I have no doubt had been artificially fashioned in the monastic days for the convenience of the inhabitants.

It was quiet enough on that island; there was indeed, a sense of deathlike quietness on it, and I think that both Pepita and myself stepped ashore feeling as if we were about to be immured in a tomb. But Getch gave us no time for these or any other thoughts; now that we were landed, he seemed to assert himself as chief authority and began to order us all about, Uncle Joseph included. We had to help in unloading the boat, and then in carrying the various packages, and just as I had expected, Getch directed us to take them up to the tower in the ruins; we made two or three journeys before we had cleared everything. They were not heavy packages—I guessed, and rightly, that they contained food and drink. But there were also plenty of rugs, cushions, old coats and the like; Uncle Joseph carried most of these, and when we had got up the last of the parcels, he flung an armful toward me.

"You must just do what you can to make the young lady a bit of a nest, Benjamin," he said in his suavest tones. "It's not what you might call a boo-dwaw, this, but we must make the best of circum-

stances, and fortunately the night's warm and this here chamber is dry. And in the morning we'll see what we can do to make ourselves a bit more comfortable."

We were in a lower room of the tower, and Getch had lighted a lantern, by the light of which, small as its gleam was in that cavernous space, we could see to do things. I made a couch for Pepita in the cleanest corner I could find, and persuaded her to lie down. And I'll say this for Uncle Joseph—he was kindly and considerate enough to her, suggesting that she might like something to eat, and ordering me to see what I could find for her. But Pepita wanted nothing—except that I should stay near her. And stay near her I did, making shift as well as I could with a couple of horse-rugs, and I was thankful that within a few minutes she was fast asleep.

I myself would gladly have slept, for very weariness, but I was too uneasy. Getch and Uncle Joseph had opened a bottle of spirits and a cask of water; I watched them drinking and smoking for some time. They were very quiet and quite orderly; from their attitude and behavior they might have been discussing some peaceful domestic question. And suddenly, without knowing that I was on the verge of it, I dropped headlong into the abyss of sleep.

WHEN I woke again, just as suddenly, there was no sign of Getch. The morning sun was shining through the leadless window-places high up in the eastern wall, and I heard the crying of sea-birds and chatter of choughs, hovering around the parapet of the tower. Pepita was still fast asleep in her corner; her face, rosy-pink, half-buried in the crook of her arm, her breath coming softly and regularly. And over in his corner, half-buried in rugs and wrappings, his big bulk propped up against the angle of the wall, Uncle Joseph was asleep too—asleep and snoring gently.

I got quietly to my feet, stiff and aching from the hardness of my couch, and looked about me. In the gloom of the night, I had not been able to get any very accurate idea of the exact nature of the things we had brought up from the boat. But I now saw that, whatever the reason of this flight to the island might be, Uncle Joseph was well provisioned. There was a great deal of canned stuff, meats, fruits; there was bread sufficient to last for several days; there were two cases of bottled beer and half a dozen bottles of spirits; it occasioned me a good deal of disquietude to see all this, for it seemed to argue that we might be kept in captivity for some time. Nor was I much comforted when I also saw tea, coffee and sugar and found a couple of square tins filled with cakes—these doubtless would be welcome to Pepita, but they too foreshadowed a longer residence on the island than I desired.

But it was something to be free of Getch. Relieved of his presence, I might possibly circumvent Uncle Joseph and contrive to signal some passing vessel. Unfortunately, as I knew from lifelong experience of that coast, vessels scarcely ever come near Melsie Island—still, there might be a chance. I went out to have a look round. And anxious to be absolutely certain about Getch, I first directed my steps to the landing-place among the rocks to see if his boat was still there. It wasn't—and I knew then that he had gone in the night, and that we three had the island to ourselves.

CHAPTER XVI

The Brown Hand

THAT was a summer morning of great beauty, by land and sea, and under any other circumstances I should have rejoiced in my surroundings. I could see all the places along the coast, and pick out the bolder features of the island hills; as I stood there, gazing shoreward, I could have named a dozen such features, from the gray tower of our own parish church at Middlebourne to the great grove of beech on Belconbury Beacon, fifteen miles away to the eastward, and to the high buildings and tall ships' masts in the docks at Kingshaven, half that distance to the west.

But close as all these things looked in that pellucid morning air, I felt that for all practical purposes Pepita and I—for the time being, at any rate—were as far off them as if we had been in some island of the Pacific. There were reasons for that feeling, and good ones, due to the peculiar nature of the coast in our neighborhood. For some distance from the shore-line the sea thereabouts was very shallow; the shallow waters extended for many miles into the Channel. And Kingshaven itself could only be entered by a passage running far away from Melsie Island, while our own

light craft at Middlebourne and Wreddlesham, coming out from thence to the fishing-grounds, could only get in or out by another equally remote on the other side. Melsie Island, in short, was out of the way of craft of any sort. And so I knew that there was small chance of anybody coming to rescue Pepita and myself from this strangely brought about imprisonment.

As far as I knew, nobody knew that Getch had brought us here, though it might be that our departure from the Shooting Star, in company with Uncle Joseph, had been witnessed by Mandhu Khan. But on that we could not count—and there was always the possibility that the Hindu manservant was in league with Uncle Joseph and Getch, and had come spying at our prison-window on their behalf, just to see what we were doing. We could count on nothing. No doubt Captain Marigold was actively on the search for his daughter, and I was sure that Keziah would not let her tongue rest in demanding me—I felt, too, that Cherry would bestir himself in seeking for both. But who would dream of our having been carried off to this place? There we were—straight in front of their noses!—and as I have said, we might as well have been in Samoa.

BUT why had we been brought there, at all? That was the question which had been forcing itself upon me from the moment in which Getch unceremoniously bundled me into his boat. On the mere surface of things, it did not seem very difficult to get an answer to this question. Whether he had actually stolen it or not, there was no doubt whatever—in my mind, anyway—that my precious kinsman, Uncle Joseph Krevin, was in possession of the Kang-he vase, nor that the rascally landlord of the Shooting Star was his accomplice. It seemed to me, putting together the various things of which I was aware, that the whole business worked itself out something like this: Uncle Joseph, the murdered man Cousins and Getch were accomplices in the plot to rob Miss Ellingham of her exceedingly valuable piece of Chinese vase, for their own profit. Probably Cousins effected the actual theft, and handed over the vase to Uncle Joseph in the fish-bag found by Keziah under our best bedroom dressing-table; Uncle Joseph, in the privacy of that sacred chamber, transferred the loot to his own venerable brown bag. Meanwhile, down there at Gallowstree Point, Cousins was murdered—why and by whom Heaven only knew! But Keziah and I told Uncle Joseph that Cousins was murdered—and Uncle Joseph cleared out, bag and all.

I thought—piecing the bits together in my mental review—that he went away to Fliman's End, and was there, in the gray morning, taken off in a boat by Getch, and carried across the creek, past the scene of the murder and Middlebourne Grange, to the Shooting Star at Wreddlesham. No doubt he thought he could get away from Wreddlesham during that day, or on the succeeding night—no doubt, too, he and his host found that he couldn't, every neighboring railway station and bus-route being watched. So at the Shooting Star he remained, snug and safe—until Pepita and I walked in. He was safe no longer, then—and so Getch had conveyed him here, to Melsie Island, and us with him. But—how did he expect to escape from the island, and—when?

I WAS not reassured about our prospects of escape when, presently, I went back to the tower. Pepita, who seemed to have a genius for sound slumber under any conditions, was still fast asleep in her corner. But Uncle Joseph was wide awake, and when I entered, was looking about him, regarding the various packages with a speculative eye. He nodded at me in quite friendly fashion.

"I hope you've passed a comfortable night, Benjamin?" he remarked. "The young lady, I see, is still in the land of Nod, as they call it. As for me, I've slept in a many better places, and in a many worse. I think, if I were you, Benjamin, my lad, I should see about getting ready a bit o' something to eat."

He nodded at the boxes and cases we had carried ashore, and it was when I began to investigate their contents that I felt doubts about the term, long or short, of our detention on the island. We were certainly provisioned for some time; there was not only the stuff to eat, but the materials wherewith to cook it—spirit-stoves, kettles, frying-pans and the like; Uncle Joseph seemed to take a deep interest in all of them.

"I think I should advise one o' them cold tongues this morning, Benjamin," he said thoughtfully. "They're toothsome and tender, ready for table, and easy opened: we can try something more ambitious another time, as we get accustomed to

fending for ourselves. You're no doubt of a domesticated turn, Benjamin?"

I gave that question the go-by, though I proceeded, being hungry, to get breakfast ready.

"How long do you suppose, or am I to understand, that we're going to have to fend for ourselves?" I asked. "I should like to know."

"I couldn't say, Benjamin," he answered meekly. "I've no idea! It depends on circumstances, you see, and you're no doubt well aware, youthful though you are, that circumstances is queer things—we can't always control 'em."

"I certainly can't control mine," I retorted as I lighted the spirit-stove, and filled the kettle from a keg of water which had come with the other goods, "or I shouldn't have been here!"

"Well, well, and I shouldn't either, if I could control mine, Benjamin!" he said. "Leastways, my present unfortunate ones! But a deal of experience of life, Benjamin, has taught me what similar experience'll doubtless teach you—that circumstances was made to make the best of. I'll sniff the morning air outside a bit, while you make the repast ready."

HE got up from his improvised but quite comfortable couch, and moved off to the open doorway. And I saw then that he had made a pillow of his old brown bag —the bag which had been deposited on our porch at midnight, at the very beginning of all these happenings. He had slept on it—no doubt, to keep it close to him, and he kept it close to him now, for he carried it under his left arm. Through the open doorway I saw him standing with it, there closely held, as he stood on the platform of rocky land outside the tower, looking from one point of the compass to another; he continued to hold it there all the time he stood or strolled about there, and he had it still folded in his arm when he came back. And I said to myself on seeing this that I was quite willing to lay any odds, however extravagant in figure, that packed within that beastly old bag was the Kanghe vase!

I got breakfast ready, taking care that it was a good one, and awoke Pepita. Once fairly awake and realizing the situation, she seemed disposed to take the whole thing as not a bad joke, and the breakfast as a picnic, and her light-heartedness was uncommonly welcome. She began to help me in laying things out—but presently she seemed to remember something, and looked round with another expression in her face.

"Ben," she whispered, "I see your fat old uncle out there—but where's the man from the inn, the bad man?"

"He's hopped it, Pepita!" said I. "Gone in the night, I think; anyway, he'd gone when I woke. We're alone with my respected uncle."

"I don't mind him, Ben," she remarked. "I don't think he's such a bad sort. But that other man frightened me. Have you found out what they brought us here for, Ben?"

"No!" said I. "But I know what I think, and I'll tell you after. Look here, you take a tip from me, Pepita. Just behave as if you were taking all this as a sort of picnic, and don't show any fear of the old chap outside there—I sha'n't! We've got to stick it out in his company, and we may as well fall in with his idea that we should be friendly. After all, we're not going to starve, and Uncle Joseph wont cut our throats—at least, I think not; and we're bound to be rescued, so we may as well make the best of it."

"Oh, I'm all right, Ben!" she agreed, cheerfully. "And I'm not afraid of Uncle Joseph—not I! I could get round him, Ben, if I wanted!"

THERE was no need for her to play any tricks of that sort. Uncle Joseph, presently returning, lured, no doubt, by the pleasant aroma of the hot coffee, was as bland and polite to her as if she had been a princess and he a courtier. He gave her the best slices of the tongue and the cream off the milk, and commanded me to open a jar of raspberry jam—young ladies, he observed, were partial to sweet things, and as we had one in our company we must treat her according. Jailer or no jailer, Uncle Joseph was exceedingly complaisant, and reminded me of nothing so much as a Sunday-school superintendent, presiding over a treat to the best boys and girls. And if he had any anxiety about his situation, it certainly had no effect on his appetite, for he ate and drank with gusto.

This strange meal came to an end, and while Uncle Joseph—who said grace devoutly, as if quite accustomed to such ritual, as I have no doubt he was—filled and lighted his pipe, Pepita and I, in our rôle of faithful attendants, began to clear up the things. But there arose a difficulty.

"Where are we going to find water to wash up with?" said I. "We can't go on using what's in that keg; it'll be done in no time. And for that matter, where are we going to get drinking water, when this is finished?"

I looked at Uncle Joseph, as if he were an authority, and he nodded in response.

"Just so, Benjamin," he replied. "Water is what we cannot do without. But I made inquiry on that there point—of Mr. Getch, of course. Mr. Getch is a clever man, Benjamin—a man of ideas! Mr. Getch pointed out that once upon a time this here island was tenanted by monks. This very tower, as we're a-sitting in, is the tower of their church. Monks, Benjamin, is men. Where men lives, there must be water—that's how Mr. Getch argued it, and I take it to ha' been very clever of him. There'll be water somewheres on this island, Benjamin—must be, 'cause o' the monks!"

"It's three hundred and fifty years, at least, since there were any monks here!" I exclaimed, furbishing up my recollections of history. "Nearer four hundred if anything, and I don't think anybody's ever lived here since. If they had a well, or a spring, how do you suppose we can find it?"

"I don't think that'll be a very difficult job, Benjamin," he answered calmly. "Them monks would have their dwelling-places close to the church—I suppose they're represented in the ruins that lies about all round this here tower. And the water'll not be far off. It might be a little fresh-water stream, a-tinkling down to the sea. Now, I should suggest that you and Missie, there, should go and look for it—it'll be a nice occypation for you this fine morning, and if you linger on the way to do a bit o' love-making, well, there's no hurry that I know of. The washing-up can wait."

WE were not slow to take his hint, and armed with a can and a kettle, we set off on our quest. But before we had reached the door of the tower, he called us back, hailing me by name, in a somewhat different tone—a note of admonition had come into his voice.

"Of course, Benjamin," he said when we turned to him where he sat, solemnly smoking, the old bag at his side, "of course you'll understand that you aren't to do nothing to attract attention to this here island? No waving of pocket-handkerchiefs, nor lighting of fires, nor nothing of that sort, Benjamin—such can't be permitted, and I take your word of honor in advance that it wont be done. You must bide easy, you and Missie there, till the hour of our release comes—we might ha' been in far worse predicaments than this, Benjamin, I assure you! For we have food and drink, and you'll no doubt find water for domestic purposes, and what more can anybody desire? I've been worse lodged than this, in my time, Benjamin, more than once—oh, yes, I have indeed!"

He waved us away, as if there was no more to be said about it, and we went—reduced, for the time being, to silence by his humbugging unctuousness. We stopped out some time, too, and made a thorough examination of our more immediate surroundings, and found that in one matter Uncle Joseph had been a good prophet—there was a clear stream of good water at the back of the ruins, running from high ground to the sea, through a fern-clad ravine. Eventually we filled our vessels from it and went back to the tower—and the first thing I noticed was that Uncle Joseph was moving about, putting our goods ship-shape, and that the old brown bag had completely disappeared. I knew then that he had sent us out on purpose. He wanted to hide the brown bag. He had doubtless buried it somewhere in the undergrowth outside the ruins, or among the masses of fallen masonry which lay around the tower. Anyway we saw it no more—and for the rest of the time he went about freely, sometimes climbing the still usable stair to the head of the tower, sometimes strolling in and out of the ruins. The day wore on; we ate and drank, and did everything and nothing. Night came again; at Uncle Joseph's request I helped him to rig up a sort of door out of planks and logs that lay about. At last we all retired, as on the previous night—to our corners. I was last to sleep, and first to wake, and when I woke it was with a sudden consciousness that something was wrong. The gray light was just beginning to steal into the tower, and by it I saw a brown hand and long, sinewy brown arm thrust through a hole in our rude door, feeling, groping—

The concluding third of this captivating novel is even more delightful. Watch for it in the next, the July, issue.

The Closet of Wo Fang

Mr. De Bra learned his Chinatown during several years of intensive Government service there. For this reason the exciting story which we print herewith, is, like its predecessors, entirely authentic.

By L. DE BRA

IT is strange, indeed, what human drama is frequently set afoot through the operation of some fact so trifling and obvious that no one ever gives it a second thought. Take, for instance, the strange case of Harvey Cantrill, of the San Francisco Narcotic Squad. Although there were other contributing causes,—the wanton attack on old Wo Louie was one,—still, everything that happened to Cantrill that day in Chinatown, right up to the moment when he vanished forever from human ken, was brought about by the prosaic fact that when it is nine o'clock, A. M., in Washington, D. C., it is only six o'clock that same morning in San Francisco.

The telegram that started everything was prepared in Washington on the afternoon of March 5, 1923. Because it was a long and carefully worded message, it was made a night letter. In the usual course of business it would be on the desk of Agent Henderson, chief of the San Francisco division, when he reached his office at nine o'clock the following morning.

But that morning, by means that need not be detailed here, the import of this message was transmitted to a certain San Francisco politician who happened to be in Washington at that time. Few people ever heard of this man, but he was particularly and perniciously active along a certain line. He scowled over the note for a moment, then looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock in Washington—only six o'clock, he knew, in San Francisco. He immediately dispatched a rush telegram.

This telegram was delivered to the Barton Hotel, San Francisco, long before the hour that Harvey Cantrill was in the habit of arising. The clerk waited until eight o'clock, then sent the message up to Cantrill's room. Cantrill, a dingy robe flung carelessly about his shoulders, a sleepy scowl on his unshaven face, grunted a surly, "Thanks," as he took the message and closed the door. Tearing off the envelope, which he wadded and flung on the floor, he unfolded the telegram, sat down on the edge of the bed and read:

> Henderson has night letter ordering your immediate suspension pending investigation serious charges preferred against you.

Cantrill stared at that, blinked his little eyes, and read again. He knew well what

that investigation would disclose; and his thief's brain instantly counseled flight. He had seen enough of Federal officers and Federal courtrooms to make him quail even at the thought of a Federal prison. Yes, that was the best—a quick get-away. Too bad there was no time for the big clean-up he had planned; but—

He looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. Henderson did not usually arrive at his office before nine. Owing to the difference in time between Washington and San Francisco, Cantrill had an hour to think things over. He began dressing.

Suspended during investigation! The fools! If they knew anything they would order his immediate arrest. But they wouldn't. Cantrill knew their slow, painstaking methods; but he knew also that when they did act, they would be fully prepared. Once caught in the slow but horribly efficient Government machinery, nothing could save him—no, not even influence. A quick clean-up, a quick get-away; that was the only course left.

DURING the short time Cantrill had been in the service he had taken pains to establish certain connections, all with the idea of using them when the time came. He hadn't the slightest doubt that he could put over a big deal, especially in Chinatown, save for one thing. He lacked money. What he had made, he had spent, either in furthering his political interests, or in speculation. But here again his thief's mind quickly suggested a way to solve the difficulty; and the idea had no sooner presented itself than Cantrill began preparations for a bold stroke.

A half-hour later he had packed his things and was standing before his mirror knotting his tie with his usual careless haste. In that mirror was the reflection of a man in his late thirties. There was a suggestion of savage strength in the low forehead, the heavy jowls, and the barrel-like trunk; but this was offset by the peculiar shoulders—narrow and sloping, amounting almost to a deformity. Cantrill, however, never had an eye for his appearance. He ran the brush over his bristly black hair and heavy brows, took a black felt hat from the chair where he had flung it, and hurried out to breakfast.

At twenty minutes to nine Cantrill walked into the office of the Federal Narcotic Agent. As he had expected, there was no one in the office except Miss James, the mail clerk. This young lady had various duties, the most important of which was taking care of the vault. Since there never was anything on hand except old records, seized drugs and other evidence, her main interest was to see that no one except narcotic officers entered the vault.

"Miss James," said Cantrill briskly, "I wish you'd open the safe. I gotta mark up some seizures before we go to court."

Miss James looked up with evident dislike flashing in her blue eyes, but she took a key from her desk, arose and went to the vault. For a moment she bent over the combination, then drew the bolts. She stepped back while Cantrill swung the heavy door open, then with the key, opened the inside door. Cantrill thanked her, and stepped in.

It was gloomy in the vault. Miss James, standing by the door, could not see well what Cantrill was doing. In fact, she gave no particular attention; Cantrill had a right in the vault. Thus she did not see his long thief's hand dart into a certain box and then into the two inside pockets of his coat. She saw only that he turned around with several dram bottles of cocaine in his hand, wrote something on them with his fountain pen, then put the bottles back on the shelf.

Cantrill had stepped out of the vault, and Miss James was locking the inside door, when a stenographer emerged from the inner office, saw Cantrill, and informed him that Mr. Henderson wanted to see him at once.

This in itself was nothing unusual; but Cantrill's jaws hardened and his little eyes grew narrow as he turned and strode toward the chief's door. He found Agent Henderson at his desk, and alone. Henderson, a younger man than Cantrill, and trying his best to make good in spite of his lack of political backing, did not appear to relish this morning's task, but he went at it with all the spirit of the true fighter.

CANTRILL wisely said nothing until the chief had finished reading the suspension order and had added that there was nothing for him to do but to carry out the instructions of the Department.

"Chief," said Cantrill, rising, "I don't blame you, of course; but this is a hell of a way for the Gov'ment to treat a man. I know what's behind this. I've been too active. I've been cuttin' in on the dopering, and they've framed me. I aint wor-

ryin'. It'll all come out, and I'll be asked to go back on the job. And when I am," he finished with significant emphasis, "I'll know who my friends are. That's all!"

Henderson watched the big man as he strode out of the office. He was convinced of Cantrill's guilt; but he knew enough of the ways of politics even in a civil service job to realize that his own convictions did not count. He would have to prove his case to men who would try to block him at every move—not that they cared for Harvey Cantrill, but because they feared the influence that had secured the man his position.

Knowing that Cantrill had this backing, it never occurred to Henderson that the man would contemplate flight; and it was only natural that the agent became so absorbed in interviewing witnesses, taking testimony, and attending to the other details of the case against Cantrill that Cantrill, the man, was forgotten.

It was nearing three o'clock when Watkins, the head field inspector, walked into the chief's office accompanied by Miss James. Watkins closed the door, and locked it. The chief thought nothing of this. Watkins was his confidential man.

"Mr. Henderson, it's not my fault!" began Miss James spiritedly. "No one has been in that vault today except myself, Mr. Watkins and Mr. Cantrill. I let Mr. Cantrill in early this morning. Why shouldn't I? I didn't know he had been fired. But all he did in there was to mark several bottles of cocaine."

"He didn't mark them," said Watkins dryly. "He merely scribbled on them. It was just a ruse. He—"

"Wait a minute!" cut in Henderson. "What's this all about? Is something missing?"

"Nothing but!" exclaimed Watkins. "You remember about a week ago we seized a trunk containing thirty ounces of heroin and a lot of counterfeit money? Well, I offered to turn the money over to the Secret Service where it belongs, but they're all upset on account of the killing of Operative Logue, so the U. S. Attorney told me just to keep the 'queer' with the heroin until our case is closed. That money was in the vault last night when we locked up for I saw it myself; now it's gone. I'm convinced that Cantrill took it. He was on that case and knew all about the money. It's exceptionally good stuff, and he wont have much trouble passing it."

Henderson looked at Watkins for a moment, then reached for his desk phone. "All in large bills, wasn't it?"

Watkins nodded. "That's the only thing that'll bother Cantrill, but I think he'll work 'em off in some big deal and—"

Henderson interrupted with an impatient gesture. He took the receiver off the hook. Within a remarkably short time every available officer was scurrying uptown to look for Cantrill.

But Harvey Cantrill, with five thousand dollars in counterfeit money in his pockets, and a big idea in his crook's mind, had spent a busy day.

ON one of the quieter back streets of Chinatown is a three-story building that looks as though it might have been built by Americans for American occupancy and later given over, for some reason, to the Chinese. The ground floor is now entirely occupied by a maker of bean-cakes. The top floor is a Chinese rooming-house. On the second floor, running from street back to alley, are the office, the storerooms and the living-rooms of Loi Gee.

Loi Gee's business defies classification. He might be termed a merchandise broker, but he is more than that. Although he does not advertise in the Chinese papers, everyone in the Oriental quarter knows him; and most of the merchants, especially those eager for quick profits with no questions asked, have at one time or another availed themselves of his services.

Cantrill knew him; and it was to Loi Gee's place that he turned his steps within an hour after leaving Henderson's office. With his usual caution he went down the alley, climbed the stairs and entered Loi Gee's place from the rear.

Just inside this rear door, on the left, were three small rooms occupied by Loi Gee and his family. On the right, running half the length of the building, was a large room in which, among a litter of many other things, were Oriental rugs and old teak furniture. Some of these were priceless; others were worthless imitations. Old Loi Gee, with his queer sense of business honesty, always told his customers the truth about them. His motto was to sell anything that anybody wished to buy, sell it honestly for what it was, but bargain for the last copper *cash.*

There was only one thing in this crazy-patch storeroom that caught Cantrill's eye.

Lined along the wall, standing upright, were a dozen or more coffins. They were heavy, solidly constructed affairs destined ultimately to carry some body back to China for burial. Cantrill, with no patience for old Chinese customs, made a wry face and hastened up forward to Loi Gee's office.

This office, for various reasons, was on the left just beyond the living-rooms. A little farther on, shut off by a partition pierced by a single door, were the stairs that lead down to the street, and up to the rooming-house on the top floor. The remainder of Loi Gee's floor was cut up into small rooms that he kept locked.

CANTRILL rapped imperatively on the door of Loi Gee's office; then, without waiting for an answer, he opened the door and strode in. He frowned as he saw that another sat at Loi Gee's desk, a young Chinese with a stolid face and heavy-lidded eyes. He was clad in a Chinese blouse of black satin, the usual tight-fitting American trousers, and Chinese padded slippers. The American custom he had affected of combing his coarse black hair pompadour fashion gave him a peculiarly barbarous appearance. Cantrill knew him as Loi Gee's confidential assistant in all of his enterprises.

"Hullo, Wo Fang!" Cantrill sang out, when he had carefully closed the door behind him. "Where's Loi Gee?"

Wo Fang looked up, unsmiling.

"He's out just this moment," he replied in almost perfect English. "What can I do for you?"

"Find him and get him here damn' quick! That's what you can do! Savvy?"

Again Wo Fang looked at the American, his yellow face impassive, his slant eyes cold and unblinking. "I will try to do that," he said, reaching for the desk phone. "Is there any trouble?"

"Mebbe there is, and mebbe there aint. I'll tell that to Loi Gee."

"Very well." Wo Fang took the receiver off the hook, waited a moment, then spoke quietly in Cantonese. Cantrill did not suspect that he was talking with Loi Gee, who was having a late morning rice in his rooms. "The white official with whom you deal occasionally is here," said Fang. "He wishes to see you at once. He refuses to tell me the matter."

There was a moment of silence; then Cantrill heard a jumble of harsh gutturals come over the wire. "Send Ah Kim to see if other officials are waiting outside," instructed Loi Gee. "Tell him when he has done that, to go through the kitchen and report to me. I will call you then."

Again Wo Fang used the phone; then he hung up and turned to the white man. "I think Loi Gee is on his way to the bank," he lied easily. "He will be asked to call me when he arrives. Wont you sit down?"

Cantrill grunted surlily and took a teak stool back of the door by the wall. He got out a cigar, and while he smoked impatiently, his gaze wandered nervously around the cubby office with its shelves of dusty bundles, queer-looking jars, and stacks of old Customhouse bills. Wo Fang, he noticed, was bent over his desk, his eyes on columns of Chinese characters, his long-nailed fingers moving swiftly over his counting-board.

A MOMENT later the telephone rang; and five minutes after that, Loi Gee, having gone out through his kitchen, came in through the hall door. Loi Gee was a man of perhaps fifty, neatly dressed in Chinese clothes of funereal black. A sparse beard, silvery white against the dark skin, and an erect, military bearing, gave him a touch of dignity that was not in keeping with the bright black eyes. Those eyes suggested, but they never betrayed, the keen bargaining mind that lay behind them. Loi Gee greeted Cantrill cordially.

"Lock the door, Loi Gee," said Cantrill, rising. "I wanta talk business. See?"

This request apparently did not appear strange to Loi Gee. He locked the door, then went to his desk and sat down on the stool just vacated by Wo Fang. He moved out another stool. "Hab seat, Mista Cant'll," he said. Then, to Wong Fang: *"Ts'ing tso!"*

Obediently, Wo Fang moved out another stool and sat down.

Cantrill scowled. "I want to see you alone, Loi Gee."

Loi Gee waved a wrinkled hand and smiled with his thin, bearded lips. "I un'stan' English ve' poo'ly," he said. "Wo Fang my pa'dna long time. He—"

"Oh, very well!" Cantrill cut in. "I know you're 'fraid of a frame-up; so let it go. I'm not scairt. See? Now listen, both of you: I got a chance to make a big deal, but I got to turn it today. That's why I came right to you. I want a lot

of white goods and dark goods. All you can get."

"He wants to buy morphine and opium," Wo Fang said in quiet Cantonese.

"No hab got." Loi Gee turned his bright black eyes to Cantrill, and again smiled with his lips.

"The hell you aint! If you aint, you know where to get it. Don't waste time trying to bargain with me, Loi Gee. I mean business. I got a friend that's startin' in uptown. A bunch was grabbed there last week, and the hops are crazy for stuff. I want all you can scrape up today. Say, thirty cans o' mud and—"

"Op'um ve' ha'd catch 'em," spoke up Loi Gee. "Sebenty dolla' one can."

"It was sixty yesterday, you old thief!" grinned Cantrill. "We'll split the difference. Anyway, it aint my money. See? I get my rake-off. Now get me thirty cans o' mud, 'bout thirty ounces o' M. and—"

"Mo'phine seventy dolla' too," said Loi Gee, shaking his head.

"Bosh!" snapped Cantrill, his little eyes flashing angrily. "Say, who do you think you're talkin' to? Cut out the chin-music and get down to business. I want thirty cans o' mud, thirty ounces o' M. and twenty or twenty-five ounces o' C. I want it as soon as possible. Not later than three o'clock this afternoon. Get it, and I'll hand over five thousand dollars—cash money!"

FIVE thousand dollars! Loi Gee's glowing eyes closed slowly; and when they opened, he was looking at Wo Fang. "Wo Fang," he said, pulling at his silvery beard, "what think you of this?"

Wo Fang turned to Cantrill. "Loi Gee wishes me to ask you a few questions," he said. "Are you still in the service?"

"Sure! Don't you worry 'bout that! I'll protect you."

"How many people will know of your purchase from Loi Gee?"

"Not a soul! I'm playin' a lone hand. See?"

"The payment will be in cash?"

"That's what I said."

Wo Fang turned to his employer and spoke in Cantonese. "You heard what he said. It sounds all right; but I wish you would have nothing to do with it."

"Why?" asked Loi Gee. "There is a chance for a good profit."

"True; but it is against the law to sell opium, and—"

"As you have told me many times before. But if the white foreign devils are so foolish as to pass laws that interfere with me making an honest dollar, why should I obey the law? Do they obey their own laws?"

"I understand," sighed Wo Fang. "However, it is bad business. You are doing well enough as it is. This week already we have sold two hundred mats of rice, a four-hundred-dollar rug, a lot of imitation blue-and-white, a hundred cases of lizard wine, four coffins, eight dozen rat-traps—"

"That has nothing to do with the question," cut in Loi Gee. "There are only two things to consider: first, is there profit in it? We know there is. Second, is it safe?"

"It is no more risky than many of the similar deals you undertook against my advice."

"Then," concluded Loi Gee, nodding his head, "we shall go through with it. Fortunately, I heard only last evening of a big shipment that got by the eyes of the Customhouse officials." He leaned back and for a moment pulled thoughtfully at his white beard. "Telephone to Ah Kim to follow this white man and report in an hour where he goes and with whom he talks. Then tell this official to be here at three o'clock."

Wo Fang obeyed. When he hung up the receiver and turned to Cantrill, he found the white man eying him suspiciously. "Loi Gee thinks he can arrange the matter," he said. "The time is short, but he will do his best. He asks that you be here at three o'clock. You will have the money by that time?"

Cantrill stood up, passed his hands over the front of his coat and felt the bulge of the two packets of counterfeits. To cover the move, he drew out a cigar.

"The money is in the bank," he grinned. "I'll be here. Don't fail me."

"Mista Cant'll," said Loi Gee, rising, "I'm bi'ness man. When I gib my wo'd, I kip it."

"I know it," said Cantrill, and grinned again. "So long." He turned toward the door, forgetting, apparently, that Loi Gee had locked it.

There came a sharp rap on the door. Cantrill halted.

"Who is there?" Loi Gee called out in Cantonese.

"Wo Louie," came the muffled answer.

Loi Gee turned to Cantrill. "Tha's all

light. Jus' ol' man." He unlocked the door and opened it.

AN old man shuffled in. His face was gaunt and pallid; his clothes hung loosely on his emaciated body. He looked at Wo Fang, opened his mouth to speak, then caught sight of Cantrill. Slowly, the old man's eyes widened, a throaty cry of mortal terror came from his lips. He sprang back and flung up his bony hands as though to shield his head.

"*Aih-y-a-h!* No sabby key! No sabby key! No sabby key—"

Cantrill stared, then turned to Wo Fang. "Nutty, eh? Who is he?"

Wo Fang looked at Cantrill; then, slowly, his hooded eyes closed to mere threads of wet ebony.

"I don't know," he replied slowly.

Cantrill again turned toward the door. He may have seen the questioning look that Loi Gee gave Wo Fang. " 'By!" he flung over his shoulder, and left.

Loi Gee waited until he no longer heard the white man's heavy tread. Then he turned to Wo Fang.

"So—that is the man?"

Wo Fang nodded. "I have always suspected it; now we know it beyond a doubt." He turned and spoke gently in Cantonese to the man crouching against the wall.

But this man did not hear him. His bony hands outspread before his face, he was moaning over and over: "No sabby key! No sabby key! No sabby key—"

AFTER Cantrill left Loi Gee's he attended to a number of matters, all of which Agent Henderson dug up afterward, but none of which enter into this chronicle. At noon Cantrill ate a leisurely lunch, then went to his room and over his cigar reviewed all his plans. He knew that even the cleverest crooks usually overlook some trifling thing that traps them and he resolved there would be no flaw in his scheme.

His meditations were interrupted by a rap on the door. It proved to be a messenger with a note from Wo Fang. Surprised, Cantrill opened the message and read:

> It is very important that I see you at once. Phone me at China 166 but do not mention this note. Say merely where I may see you.

Cantrill scowled over this for several minutes then went to the phone.

Ten minutes later Wo Fang rapped at the door. Cantrill admitted him, then carefully locked the door and closed the transom.

"Well," he said, motioning to a chair, and seating himself on the edge of the bed, "what's on your mind?"

Wo Fang sat down. He took a thin silver case from his blouse. "It is very difficult for me to tell you this," he said quietly, "but even though it may be disloyal to Loi Gee, I have decided it is my duty to warn you."

"To warn me!" Cantrill's little eyes narrowed.

Wo Fang nodded slowly. He opened the cigarette case.

"Say!" Cantrill's jaws hardened as he glared at the Oriental with sudden suspicion. "What's up, anyway? Speak out! I'm your friend, aint I? I've been a damn' good friend o' yours. Don't forget that!"

"Among the Chinese," said Wo Fang in his low even tone, as he took a cigarette from the case, "it is an inviolable code never to forget a friend."

"All right!" breathed Cantrill, and leaned forward. "Now—"

"Also," went on Wo Fang, and he shut the case with a snap, "*we never forgive an enemy.*"

Cantrill drew back as though he had been struck in the face. He passed an unsteady hand over his jaw. Fang appeared not to notice the white man's agitation. He pulled a match and calmly lighted his cigarette.

"But I'm your friend, aint I?" demanded Cantrill.

Over the flame Wo Fang's hooded eyes gave Cantrill a look of surprise and mild reproach. He tossed the match away and took the cigarette from his lips.

"I have your own word for it," he said, and bowed slightly.

"Certainly! So now talk right out. Is old Loi Gee planning to bunk me?"

"I am very sorry to say that he is."

"The devil! He knows all the tricks of the dope-game forward and backward, of course; but I thought he was an honest Chink. I suppose the deal was too big for him to resist the chance to make a few more dollars, eh? But he can't bunk me. I'm goin' to test all the stuff before I hand over the money."

"Yes, he expects that," said Wo Fang, nodding his head. "That's why he will give you only pure goods. But after you leave—

well, of course, you will leave by the rear door. As you go down the rear stairs, where you cannot be seen from the alley, you will be attacked by four men. You will not be harmed; but a cloth will be thrown over your head, and if you don't drop the suitcase, it will be jerked from your hand. Instantly, then, one of the Chinese will say in English: 'He's the wrong man! Let him go!' They will vanish. You will pick up the suitcase and go on your way, thinking you have been attacked by mistake. When you open the suitcase, you will see everything in order; but afterward, if you examine the contents of the bottles and cans, you will discover that while your head was covered, the suitcases were switched, and that instead of having five thousand dollars' worth of opium, morphine and cocaine, you will have perhaps ten dollars' worth of molasses, quinine and alum."

"Oh-ho!" grunted Cantrill. "So that's the game, eh? Loi Gee is planning to get five thousand dollars in real money—for a lot of phony dope. Say, how come you know so much about this?"

"I am in his confidence in everything," Wo Fang replied.

CANTRILL got out a cigar, bit off the end with a savage clip of his jaws, and struck a match. He puffed thoughtfully for a moment.

"I s'pose old Loi Gee doesn't think I have sense enough to figure out that he's behind the whole thing when I find the suitcases have been switched, eh? Or maybe he thinks the stakes are big enough that he doesn't care what I suspect so long as I can't prove anything? Well, any suggestions?"

Wo Fang shook his head. "I considered it my duty to warn you. You will know better than I how to meet the situation."

Cantrill nodded.

"Well, let's see! I could drop the whole thing, but I don't want to do that." He brushed his hands over the front of his coat, felt the bulge of the counterfeits, and continued: "Now that I know Loi Gee is planning to swindle me I'm more than ever determined to put it through *just as I had it planned.*"

Wo Fang was silent.

"Now I could go out the front way, I suppose; but that's too risky, even if I could get out without Loi Gee's men following me. And I don't want to mix with them four Chinks. A scrap in broad daylight is bound to lead to trouble."

He paused. Wo Fang drew slowly on his cigarette.

"But I got to go some place. How about going upstairs to that lodging-house? I could wait there until Loi Gee's men think they've missed me, then go out the back way. Eh?"

"Very good," agreed Wo Fang, nodding. "However, since I room up there I happen to know that there are quite a few Chinese passing back and forth in the hall. A white man loitering in the hall would arouse comment. Loi Gee and his men would be informed."

Cantrill jerked the cigar from his mouth. "You say you room up there? Well, why can't I go right to your room and stay there until it's safe to beat it? For that matter, as a friend o' mine, why couldn't you let me know when Loi Gee's men have given me up?"

Wo Fang's heavy-lidded eyes closed slowly, like shades drawn over windows.

"I shall be very glad to accommodate you," he said.

"Do it!" concluded Cantrill. "I'll slip you—say—three hundred dollars for the favor."

Wo Fang's face did not betray any surprise at this unusual liberality. He looked at the white man a moment, then shook his head.

"It is not enough, Mr. Cantrill."

"The devil it aint! It's too much; but you wouldn't be a Chink if you didn't bargain. Well, I'm not going to squabble with an old friend. From the money I have ready for Loi Gee," he went on, checking a grin, "I'll keep out five hundred for you. How's that? And remember the debt of friendship you owe me."

Wo Fang's lips tightened on his cigarette as he inhaled slowly and deeply.

"Mr. Cantrill," he said, the smoke writhing from his lips and nostrils, "I don't want your money. I merely wished to know how much you value this favor. Come to my room with the drugs just as soon as you leave Loi Gee's. Whatever I do in this matter, I shall do," he finished slowly, "because of the debt I owe you."

AT three o'clock—the precise moment when Agent Henderson sent his men scurrying uptown to hunt for Cantrill—Cantrill turned into Shanghai Alley and

mounted the stairs to the rear entrance of Loi Gee's. He smiled as he noticed several Chinese loitering on the stairs—sullen-eyed, flat-faced chaps of the highbinder type. "Yellow devils!" muttered Cantrill to himself. "It takes a white man to put it over them. Still, I'd been up against it, mebbe, if Wo Fang hadn't given me that tip."

He found Loi Gee at his desk puffing contentedly on his long-stemmed pipe.

"Well," said Cantrill, "I'm here—and ready."

"Good!" smiled Loi Gee. "And I—"

The telephone rang. Loi Gee put the receiver to his ear. "He came alone from his hotel," Ah Kim reported in rapid Cantonese. "He spoke to no one on the way. I see no other white foreign devils around."

Loi Gee spoke a few words in reply then hung up and turned to Cantrill. "Eba'-t'ing all leddy. You catch 'em money?"

"Certainly."

Loi Gee arose and locked the hall door. Then he opened the door that led into the living-room, stepped in and closed it after him. He returned directly carrying two suitcases. He locked this door, then put the suitcases on the desk. From beneath his blouse he took two small keys, unlocked the suitcases, and threw back the lids.

Cantrill's little eyes gleamed as he tore aside the newspapers that lay on top and disclosed a large number of cans and glass jars, all neatly packed. The cans were about twice the size of a deck of cards and bore red labels printed in Chinese characters conveying, among other things, the information that the contents were pure smoking opium from Macao. Thirty of the glass jars bore red labels also, but these were in Japanese characters save for two words: *"Morphine—Japan."* The other jars were marked *"Cocaine"* and bore the label of a Philadelphia manufacturer.

"You test 'em?" queried Loi Gee.

"You damn' whistlin' I'm goin' to test 'em!" snapped Cantrill. He lifted out one of the opium cans, pried off the lid and smelled carefully of the black, gummy substance. Then he took a bamboo penholder off the desk and shoved it clear to the bottom of the can. Cantrill knew the trick of putting a little good opium over a lot of worthless axle-grease. What adhered to the end of the penholder he touched with the flame of a match. For an instant his nostrils lingered over the wisp of white smoke; then he dropped the opium back in the case and selected one of the morphine jars. With his knife he cut the seal, removed the cork, and dug into the white, flaky drug, took out a little, and dropped it on a piece of paper. From his vest pocket he took a small vial of colorless fluid, uncorked it carefully, and let a drop of the nitric acid fall on the white drug. Instantly it turned a beautiful orange-violet.

"You find eba't'ing all light," Loi Gee said. "I'm bi'ness man. I deal honest."

"Sure," agreed Cantrill. He was willing to let it go at that. Wo Fang, he recalled, had said the opium and morphine would be the pure goods. Loi Gee's trickery was to take place on the back stairs.

CANTRILL shut the suitcases, locked them and put the keys in his own pocket. He drew out two bundles of greenbacks and flung them down on the desk before Loi Gee. "Count 'em!" he said gruffly. "Five thousand dollars!"

Loi Gee picked up the two bundles of currency, broke the binders, and scattered the bills over the top of the desk. Then, picking up one at a time, he counted them rapidly. Finding the sum correct, he again went through the stack of greenbacks and examined them carefully. A few he held up to the light. "Mebbe Gov'mint men put ma'k on 'em," he said, his bright eyes on the white man's face.

"Don't you worry!" Cantrill denied. "I'm not playin' anybody else's game!"

"Money all new," went on the Oriental. "Mebbe all—what you call 'em—bad, eh?"

"Mebbe it is," grinned Cantrill, picking up the suitcases. "You take it down to the Bank of Italy in the morning and find out. That's where I got it—about fifteen minutes ago. Stopped there on my way here."

Loi Gee drew out his gold watch. He looked at it a moment, his dark face thoughtful, his long-nailed thumb rubbing back and forth across the crystal. In that instant of silence, Cantrill caught the stealthy *slf-slf* of padded slippers going down the hall past Loi Gee's door.

"Well," he said sharply, "if you're satisfied, I'll get out of here."

He strode across the floor, set down one of the suitcases, and turned the key in the lock. "Good-by," he said, as he opened the door—"and good luck!" he flung over his shoulder as he closed the door behind him.

Loi Gee made no response. He stared at the door for a moment, his long-nailed thumb moving back and forth, back and forth across the watch crystal. Then he caught up the telephone.

"Ah Kim, did the white man stop at the Bank of Italy on his way here?"

"No, venerable sir. He did not stop any place."

"Then send Gar Sam to follow the white man wherever he goes. When you have done that, go yourself quickly to the home of Bock Lim and tell him I need him at once."

Ten minutes later, Bock Lim, who had worked for twenty years in the San Francisco branch of the Bank of Canton, and who knew all about bad American money, calmly informed Loi Gee that the five thousand dollars the white man had paid him for his "farm" was all counterfeit.

OUTSIDE Loi Gee's door, Cantrill glanced toward the rear exit. He saw no one. Of course, he reflected, any one waiting to waylay him would be on the stairs outside. With a shrug of his shoulders, Cantrill turned to the left, opened a small door, and passed down a narrow hall that opened on the stairways.

There, for a moment, Cantrill hesitated; then he turned to the flight that led up.

Halfway up, on the landing where the stairs turned, Cantrill almost ran into a man coming down. With a sharp cry, this man sprang back against the wall. "No sabby key!" he shouted wildly. "No sabby key! No sabby key!"

"Shut up!" Cantrill ordered, adding a curse. He hurried on up the stairs and turned down the hall to room number five. He kicked on the door. It flew open. Cantrill stepped in and quickly shut the door behind him.

It was gloomy in this room, only a faint light coming through the one window; but Cantrill's little eyes picked out a bed, a table, two or three teak stools, and something that appeared to be a corner closet. From between the curtains that hung over this closet, stepped Wo Fang.

"Well, I'm here," said Cantrill in a low voice.

"Did any one see you come to my room?" asked Wo Fang, unsmiling as usual. "I think I had better lock the door for the present."

"Lock it!" snapped Cantrill. "However, no one saw me except that crazy old nut with the 'no sabby key' business. What's the matter with him, anyway? He gets on my nerves."

CANTRILL set the two suitcases on the floor against the wall. Over his shoulder he saw Wo Fang was locking the door. Swiftly, silently, Cantrill stepped to the closet and snatched the curtains aside. Back of them, in the very corner, he saw what he probably took to be a narrow wardrobe. The door was standing open. Satisfied now that Wo Fang was alone, Cantrill turned away from the closet just as Wo Fang turned away from the door. Cantrill may have noticed that Wo Fang put the key in his pocket.

"Be seated, Mr. Cantrill," said the Oriental, moving out two stools.

Cantrill sat down with his back to the wall. The suitcases were behind him. He faced Wo Fang and the door.

"How long will I have to wait here?"

"Not long. I have a boy posted downstairs who will let me know when Loi Gee's men have given you up." Wo Fang sat down. He drew out his cigarette case and, after offering it to Cantrill, who declined gruffly, lighted one for himself. "You were asking about that old man, by the way. A sad case! Perhaps you know something about it?"

"How could I know anything about it?" demanded Cantrill surlily. "I never saw the old fool before."

"No? Perhaps I can refresh your memory. You recall the raid on the Canton Café about a year ago?"

"A year ago," echoed Cantrill slowly. "I wasn't in the Government service then."

"Quite true. You were a city detective assigned to Chinatown. The raid I refer to happened shortly before you—ah—resigned."

Something—it may have been what Wo Fang said, or merely the deadly incisive tone he used—made Cantrill draw back. His little eyes shifted to the door, and back to the dark, sullen face and hooded eyes of Wo Fang.

"This old man was the night cashier at the café," went on Wo Fang quietly. "He knew nothing of what went on upstairs except that it was frequented by opium-smokers who occasionally sent down for tea. The night the upstairs was raided, the officers found a number of the doors locked. Since they had the place surrounded, they did not want to break down

the doors; so they went downstairs, rushed on this old man, and demanded the keys. The old man, frightened out of his wits, told them 'no sabby key.' Then—"

"Then he reached under the counter for a gun!" cut in Cantrill. "I heard all about that case."

"Then he reached under the counter," continued Wo Fang calmly, "and one of the officers, a big, powerful man, struck him over the head with a revolver. He fell to the floor unconscious. Under the counter the officers found only a small bunch of keys belonging to the café."

Cantrill opened his lips to speak but something in Wo Fang's hooded eyes struck him silent. Wo Fang went on:

"Since he was only a Chink, nothing was done about it; but shortly after that, one of the men in the raiding-party was permitted to resign. Later, through influence, he obtained another position. As for the old man, he has never recovered, never will. His mind and speech are permanently affected. Although he frequently sees white men, he doesn't seem to fear them. It is very queer, then, don't you think, that he should act so strangely on seeing you?"

CANTRILL leaned forward, his big hands working nervously. He opened his mouth, but again fell silent as Wo Fang reached up swiftly and turned on the light. Since he turned it off again almost at once, the move undoubtedly had some significance. Cantrill was probably too agitated to notice.

"That man belongs to the old generation of Chinese," continued Wo Fang. "His son, although, for business reasons, he has an American education, also clings to the old ways. Therefore, the son considers it his filial duty to avenge the wanton attack on his father. The Chinese, you know, never forget a friend—nor forgive an enemy."

There was a moment of silence. Outside, padded slippers came *slf-slf* down the hall. Cantrill got to his feet. "So you—" he began, but stopped abruptly as some one rapped on the door, a peculiar tattoo with the ends of long nails.

"Wo Fang! Wo Fang!"

Wo Fang sprang close to the door. "Yes! What is it?"

"Suey quan hou! Gov'ment men catch Loi Gee. White men with guns on both stairs. I hear Henderson say he come here to talk you—"

"Henderson!" Cantrill's hoarse whisper rang in the still room. He snatched out a revolver and covered Wo Fang. "If this is a trap—"

Wo Fang ignored the gun. He pointed to the two suitcases. "That stuff is in *my* room, isn't it? You could tell Henderson that you caught me with it. A Chink's word against yours would be worthless. Does it look, then, like I set this trap? Listen! Henderson is coming down the hall. He probably wants nothing of me except to interpret for him. He wont search my room. Put that stuff behind the curtains!"

Cantrill hesitated. He looked at Wo Fang's saffron face and hooded eyes and read—nothing. Outside, in the hall, he could hear steps. Gun in hand, he grabbed up the two suitcases and set them behind the curtains.

"Better step into the wardrobe," whispered Wo Fang.

Cantrill crowded in. Since there was barely room here for a man's body, he turned to face Wo Fang; and as he turned—

The heavy lid of the Chinese coffin—slammed shut.

Wo Fang calmly adjusted the curtains, crossed to the hall door and unlocked it. A pockmarked youth in Chinese garb stood by the door. Wo Fang stepped out.

"You did very well, Quong," he said, as he locked the door again. "Even the fact that you addressed me in English seemed not to arouse his suspicions. Now I have one more duty for you. This evening, after the halls are quiet, I shall give you two suitcases. You must hide them in some room that is vacant. Tomorrow morning you must telephone to the Government officers secretly and tell them where the suitcases of opium and morphine are hidden. Thus we shall rid ourselves of the cursed stuff."

"I will do as you say," promised Quong; "but, sir, why not sell the opium and—"

"Haie!" broke in Wo Fang angrily. "I could not do such a dishonorable thing!"

"Very well, sir. And the coffin you had me put in your room—"

Wo Fang's hands were steady as he put a match to his cigarette. "Well," he said indifferently, as he flipped the burnt match away, "in a day or so—there is no hurry—you may prepare it in the usual manner for shipment to our ancestral burial grounds—in China."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"A Night on a Breton Road" reveals Mr. New at his best—authoritative as to his foreign background and the facts of international relations; vitally interesting as to his characters and the dramatic situations in which they are placed.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THE car was a seven-passenger, twelve-cylinder landaulet of stream-line pattern which could and frequently did maintain an average of eighty English miles an hour, but could also crawl along at a fifth of that speed with the innocent appearance of looking much faster than it really was. Its color was a peculiar shade of olive-drab which was practically invisible at a thousand feet.

The chauffeur was slightly above medium height, of muscular build and dark complexion. He had been taken, at times, for a French colonial, an Italian, a Spaniard or a South American. With the beard habitually worn by his race, he would have been recognized as Afghan or Hindu—which was why it had proved advisable to shave his face while driving the Trevor cars, for recognition would often have been dangerous for him.

Inside the car, what seemed to be a handsome young fellow in his thirties was stretched out in a comfortable position for a long ride, with a fur robe tucked about for padding as well as warmth, though the car was heated to some extent from its own exhaust. The figure had on the putties, breeches and leather jacket of an aviator's suit—but no padded outer coat, and with a felt hat replacing the flying helmet. Closer examination would have proved the person to be a woman whose almost slim appearance masked one of the most perfectly coördinated human bodies ever produced by a life of constant activity. She was actually close to her fortieth birthday, but in physical strength, endurance and skill, she was more than a match for most men.

She had left her Paris mansion on the Avenue de Neuilly at seven in the evening, after dark—had passed through Versailles, Chartres, Alençon, Mayenne, Vitré and Rennes at what appeared to be a steady twenty-mile speed, en route for Brest, where a famous deep-sea yacht lay anchored out in the Rade, opposite the town, waiting for her. But along stretches of the National Road between the above cities, the chauffeur had shoved his speed up to

between sixty and eighty miles as often as it seemed prudent to risk it, so that they had rolled out of Rennes about midnight—having covered the two hundred and thirty odd miles from Paris in just over five hours.

From Rennes, westward, the Government road climbs from nearly sea-level up over a shoulder of the Breton hills at elevations of five hundred to one thousand feet, and the little villages are considerably more scattered—leaving stretches of the road deserted, without sign of human habitation for six or eight kilometers.

ABOUT four kilometers beyond Saint Méen, at one o'clock in the morning, the woman in the car started up broad-awake from her doze at the abrupt slowing-down caused by the chauffeur's jamming on his brakes instead of stepping on the gas as he was about to do—both of them knowing every mile of the road in the dark, from having been over it many times. Glancing ahead, she saw the indistinct mass of a car at the side of the road—either in trouble, or stopping for some other reason. As one seldom does that sort of thing on long deserted stretches of the French highways, the chauffeur instinctively stopped his car just behind the other one and got out to investigate—both he and the lady producing automatics in case there was more in the matter than they could make out in the faintly luminous darkness of a starlit night.

As he had swept the ground with his lights in a wide arc before stopping, he was fairly sure that nobody outside of the stationary car was near enough for a sudden attack, or seemed to be making off after robbing whoever might be inside. By the glare of his own lights, he made out a solitary figure swaddled in traveling-rugs—for the air registered twenty degrees of cold, centigrade, or "twelve above" on a Fahrenheit thermometer. The figure was neither dead nor asleep. Occasionally an arm in a fur sleeve came slowly up with a cigarette between the fingers, there was a methodical puff or two, and then the arm slowly dropped to the mummy's lap again. There was no sign of a chauffeur or any other person in the vicinity—just the swaddled figure sitting there in a motionless car on a deserted road over the hills of Bretagne, methodically smoking, presumably thinking his own thoughts. There was something dignified, almost majestic about him. The chauffeur hesitated to disturb him until the lady impatiently got out and joined him.

"What is it, Achmet? Anybody hurt?"

"Nay, O *Chota Ranee!* It be one who hath gone into the silences, look thou—communing with matters upon a higher astral plane, one thinks, by that which appeareth on this one's face."

"At this time of night? In a place like this! Nons'nse!"

Then, swinging open the door, to the figure inside: "I say, old chap! Are you in trouble? Where's your chauffeur? Can we be of assistance?"

The Buddha calmly took another puff, then slowly turned its head to look at the handsome features outlined in the glare from her lamps.

"Eh? Oh no! But accept if you please a thousand thanks! No! I have merely ordered my chauffeur to leave me here and walk to Trémorel, which is a tiny village down there, about two kilometers. After sunrise, he will return with hot coffee and rolls, which I trust I may enjoy. Meanwhile—one absorbs himself in his thoughts. Behold! Er—the face of the young m'sieur—it is, I think, familiar? Yes?"

ACHMET straightened up with a military snap and quietly put in what he considered the necessary word—it being understood that there was no particular reason for withholding it on this trip, so far, at least:

"M'sieur addresses Madame la Comtesse de Dyvnaint!"

"Ah—to be sure! I knew it could not be mere accidental resemblance! Madame la Comtesse—I salute you! Perhaps if one leans forward a little into your lights, one's face may be also familiar. Eh?"

"M'sieur Georges du Rambouvé—Deputy for one of the Departments in this neighborhood, I believe. Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and one or two others—yes? But m'sieur—is it safe, or wise—this choice of a place to do one's thinking? Anything might occur!"

"But yes, madame—and such risk as there may be is a small matter when the affairs of France are in the balance. Look you! We bear a heavy weight of responsibility—we of the Chamber! It is crushing! It is one misfortune upon another—one ill-considered decision pointing the way to what might have been a better one. Poincaré was right even when the trying-out of his policies proved them impractical—he was never more right than today, when he reverses them and tries for

another way out! In Paris, one cannot think—the incessant deluge of matters for consideration is too great. Yesterday I was in despair! I considered very seriously the bullet in the head—when something should snap in my brain under the strain. I said to myself: 'I must leave the city at once—go where it is possible to think!' *Et voilà! Oui?* It is possible to do so in this place—under these conditions. Yes!"

"And your conclusions, M'sieur Georges? Have you reached any?"

"It is, look you, like seeing figures through a fog. If we but knew what the Germans really mean to do? That is—if we but knew the one or two men who can lead the Reichstag to following out any definite plan—provided such men exist, and I'm confident they do! We thought when Berlin practically approved the scheme of the good Americain, le Général Dawes, that the way was becoming more clear. Then—crash! The Reichstag is dissolved, either to prevent the scheme being adopted or to prevent final and effective opposition to it—the reason might be either! The Socialist members prolonged the sitting another day in order to arrange hiding-places for themselves—there being reason for the belief that they will be shot wherever found. If that happens, there may be enough Socialist strength in Germany for civil war—though I consider that very doubtful. Socialism is losing ground there. Stinnes is out of the country on a vacation. Presumably, the real German policy may show itself in the next month—though it's quite on the cards that it wont. But underneath all this ferment, I am confident there is definite plan. The depreciation of their finances was not accident. The Germans pay a per-capita tax amounting to nineteen American dollars. The French are paying twenty-five—the Americans thirty, the British thirty-eight—according to news statistics which I believe about right in this instance. So, in a country which was not ravaged by war, its natural resources and economic wealth untouched, it would seem that the Germans are paying a lower tax than any of the other belligerent nations. A good part of the reparations can be paid if we find the practical means of collecting."

Countess Nan would have been very glad to prolong the discussion—the Deputy having started more than one train of thought in her mind which seemed worth considering; but she was in a hurry, and the night-air was biting cold; so, on his assurance that he was quite all right and that it was of little consequence if anything did happen, they left him there—a swaddled mummy in his motionless car, smoking and thinking, through the rest of the night. She was bound to admit that for the purpose of absolute concentration, his idea as to surroundings had merit—even if his appearance did send her into spasms of silent laughter as her car raced on westward.

Beyond Merdrignac the road passes through forested hills—sometimes along the course of small streams, then across over rising ground more or less wooded on both sides, with more twists and turns than in the open country. And it was here, at six kilometers west of Merdrignac, that the lights of a car bound in the other direction suddenly flashed around a turn in the road. In perhaps two seconds another pair of lights appeared behind the first car—and it became evident that it was racing to overhaul the one ahead. When the two seemed to be abreast, there was a noticeable slowing-down until they stopped. Then came tiny flashes—four of them, evidently pistol-shots. It looked like highway robbery by motor-bandits. Without glancing around for instructions, Achmet gave his car gas enough to make it leap forward like a projectile, and he was ready to commence shooting the moment he came within range.

The bandits, however, had noticed his approaching lights when he was still a mile and a half away. Before he came up, they had started again and were approaching him at a speed which would have meant suicide for all concerned had he attempted to stop them with his car as they passed. But he got in four shots aimed at the chauffeur's seat—and though he didn't know it for some time, the car eventually came into Rennes with one dead man, another who died before sunrise—and two survivors who told the police a lurid story of their being set upon by highwaymen and only by a miracle escaping. Unfortunately they were allowed to proceed before later news came dribbling in from Loudeac with a different story.

WHEN Achmet stopped, across the road from the other car—with his lights turned upon it, the chauffeur sat in a huddled mass, hanging over his wheel. He had been shot through the head—probably killed before he realized what was happen-

ing. In the car a handsome woman lay back in one corner—fully conscious but apparently dying. While Achmet was examining the body of the chauffeur, Countess Nan had wrenched open the door and sprung inside—proceeding, without waste of breath in questions, to unfasten the woman's wraps and waist in order to see just where she had been hit, how serious her condition really was. With a faint smile, the victim whispered:

"You can do nothing, m'sieur le médecin—ah, pardon! I did not see that you are a woman! One bullet went through the lung—*voilà!* I cough a little of the blood every moment or two. There is a sense of paralysis in the intestines—another shot must have penetrated them—"

"But—I can take you into Loudeac, where there are doctors who will get the bullets out—give you some chance for your life!"

"*Non, madame!* It is eighteen or twenty kilometers—I shall be dead in an hour or two! The motion would hasten it!"

"Did you see who shot you? Was it simply a case of robbery—or had you reason to suspect attack?"

"It would have been robbery if your car had not been approaching so fast. They meant to get certain papers which I have—would have taken other valuables, undoubtedly, to give the affair an appearance of mere banditry. Madame is French—yes?"

"No. English."

"Ah! Then I will tell you what I would not tell a Frenchwoman. I think I could have managed to burn my papers before I die. I am a political agent for Von Hauptmann, in Berlin. Of all the different factions in Germany, those which he controls hold the balance of power—for three years, he and certain men in Charlottenburg have really shaped our political affairs more than any other men or influences. Von Hauptmann himself is the strongest and most influential of the lot. He sent me on a tour through the United States, to confer with and advise his executives who live there—men who know practically all of the German secret agents and Soviet emissaries from Russia, but who are generally unknown to them. These executives have used the others for their own purposes up to a certain point—but consider their aims and objects childish.

"I am bringing back data covering the exact conditions in every State of the union—data which I was to place in Von Hauptmann's own hands—he trusts nobody very far! Came through Brest, and was proceeding across France by motor in order to prevent other secret agents from following or robbing me of the papers. I have never feared Von Hauptmann or permitted him to bully me—for I was a Gräfin of the old Empire. He values my services—pays me well—but knows my sympathies are imperialist. He may use his influence in that direction—or oppose anything of the sort—depending upon the way the political situation develops.

"THE man who shot me," pursued the dying woman, "was Major Pfaff, one of his subordinates. Looks as though Von Hauptmann had listened to slanders against me—believed I was treacherous, sent Pfaff to kill me and get the results of all my work in the States. Just to punish him for condemning me with no chance for defense, I'll do what I can to block him as far as possible with my last breath! The data of my trip, with my passports and several identifying photographs, are under the cushions of this seat. Take them now, with my money and jewels—before anyone else comes along the road and makes it impossible! You may publish the information in the London *Times* if you like! I don't care. . . . . Wait! Turn your face toward the light from your car-lamps again, madame! My God! Unless my mind is already clouding, beginning to wander—you are almost my double! Take the hand-mirror from that pocket in the cushions! Look carefully at my face—then look in the mirror! In that suit, you might be taken for my twin brother! We are about the same weight and development."

"H-m-m—the resemblance is certainly a strong one, madame! A strange coincidence—in the circumstances!"

"Coincidence—yes! If madame were of the type which craves adventure, regardless of risk? But such a thing is—preposterous! No person with any common sense would consider it for a moment!"

"H-m-m—suppose I were the type you have in mind? What would you suggest?"

"Oh—can't you see! I want to block Von Hauptmann—in every possible way! If you were to impersonate me—it would give him—jolt of his life! For his murderous treatment of a—woman who—kept faith with him! If you convinced him—he would—order Pfaff shot—for slander—for

bungling in eliminating me! Of course—you would be in great danger—constantly—be a fool—even think of it! But—you'd learn things—England—France—American State Department—give much—to know! If you—dared risk it, madame—I'd die with a laugh—on my lips!"

"If it proves that nothing can save you—well—I may try it! To punish the cowards who have killed you! The brutes! While you have strength enough to do it, better give me all the details you can! Describe Von Hauptmann's appearance—where I would naturally have interviews with him—his associates and servants whom I am supposed to know—names of the men in Charlottenburg—description of the house—personal habits of Von Hauptmann and half a dozen others! Here—take a few swallows of brandy from my flask! I see you have a steamer-trunk by your poor chauffeur! I'll take clothes from that to insure their being familiar to them."

FOR another hour the Gräfin von Muhlberg gasped out bits of vital information which Countess Nan rapidly jotted down in her notebook—studying the dying woman's face, hands, unconscious gestures, voice-inflections and general coloring, as she did so. With such wounds through the right breast and the abdomen, which she had carefully examined, she knew that the woman couldn't possibly live for more than an hour or so—she was bleeding internally. And as the sky was becoming gray in the east, the Gräfin stopped talking—gasped, once or twice—and then was still.

With Achmet, Countess Nan searched the car thoroughly, removing everything that had belonged to the dead woman and concealing the articles in secret receptacles which had been designed for emergencies in the Trevor car. The steamer-trunk they placed by the side of the road and forced open—removing the essential garments, personal knick-knacks which might be needed in impersonating the woman, then scattering the remaining objects on the ground as if road-bandits had pawed over the trunk and thrown out everything they didn't want. It would have been simpler, of course, to carry the trunk with them—but it would have had to be explained to the police and it would have been then impossible for Countess Nan to obtain any of the things she needed.

As the Government regulations were strict, they left the car and the bodies just where they had been attacked—racing into Loudeac to report the affair. As soon as the Countess' identity was established by her passport, she was treated with every courtesy by the town authorities, who waived their right to detain her and Achmet as witnesses. But she insisted upon running two of the sergeants de ville and a surgeon back to the scene of the murders, while the police-car followed—and let them take down her deposition as to just what she and her chauffeur had actually seen—their examination of the dying woman, her refusal to be taken into the town for surgical aid.

Madame la Comtesse de Dyvnaint was altogether too famous a character, had rendered too great services to France, for anyone to question her statements, and two of the gendarme officers knew her quite well by sight, as she had passed through the town many times. So they didn't delay her more than three hours. In Brest a couple of spare suitcases were purchased, and while they ran out of town a few miles upon some presumable errand, the Gräfin's belongings were stowed in them, with other articles of Countess Nan's, so that in case there had been any customs or police inspection of her luggage as she was going off to the yacht, there would have been nothing to arouse suspicion. But none of the Brest authorities dreamed of interfering with her. She had the freedom of the city—her famous deep-sea yacht *Ranee Sylvia* was a frequent visitor in the Rade.

AS she came up the accommodation-ladder, her sailing master and part of the crew "manned the side" as was customary when she or Earl Trevor came aboard. Every man of them would have shaken hands with her if sea-etiquette had permitted—and their smiling faces gave the sort of welcome she liked best to get.

"A little late, Tommy—but we had a lot of adventures coming down from Paris last night. Are you waiting for anyone else? Whom have you on board?"

"Earl Lammerford, my Lady—and the Honorable Mr. Carter. I fancy they'll be in the after-saloon, playing chess—it's a bit sharp an' nipping, up here on deck. They came aboard in Salcombe Harbor just before we left. To the best of my knowledge, there was no word of anyone but yourself expected at Brest—though I fancy we're stoppin' at Naples for the Marchese di Soltaverno, if there's time. His

Lordship of St. Ives had a radio sayin' the Marchese would like to join us if we were coming that way."

"It means a detour of not more than eight or ten hours, with the *Ranee's* speed, and we'll save more than that by going through the Corinth Canal—I'll be delighted to have him aboard! Scarpia may last for several years—but he's past eighty-six, now. Very good, Tommy! Get the anchor up and run out through Le Goulet at once—then crowd her all the weather permits, across the Bay. You can't pass Finisterre any too soon to please me! Fancy I'll stay below for a while—got nearly frozen last night!"

WITH Lammerford and Raymond Carter at the dinner-table, it was a family party of old friends who meant more to each other, because of adventures and perils shared for years, than most relatives ever do. After the dishes had been cleared away, Nan spread the dead woman's papers on the table for their examination while she gave them a detailed account of the previous night—omitting, only, her marvelous resemblance to the Gräfin and the tacit understanding between them before she died. When Lammerford studied her passport and the half-dozen photographs among the papers, however, he saw the resemblance at once and commented upon it. But the record of the woman's trip through the United States interested him so much that he soon forgot it. Each page of the memoranda he read—and reread—before passing it to Carter, who had been for several years Chargé d'Affaires at the American Embassy in Paris. And the more he went into them, the more a thoughtful expression deepened in his expressive face. Presently he remarked, reflectively:

"I wonder! How authentic do you suppose this mass of stuff really is, Nan? Let's check it off a bit—see how it proves up! In the first place, this Gräfin von Muhlberg could have had no possible knowledge that you were approaching her on the road last night—that she was about to be shot within a few minutes and had but two or three hours to live. No time to prepare these papers since she landed at Brest. There would seem to be no possible hypothesis which would account for her preparing such papers as a hoax upon anybody; there is too much detail concerning her exact movements from day to day. If she had not been sent out by somebody in Berlin, to whom all these different people in the States were known, there would seem to have been no object in anyone's trying to assassinate her. The weak point in her story is the presumable evidence that she was shot by the orders of the very man who sent her out. Eh?"

"That's not so weak as it seems, Lammy! Suppose somebody in Berlin who had cause to fear her kept insinuating to Von Hauptmann that she would collect the information exactly as he ordered, return as far as France with it—then find some means of turning it over to the French Government, or to some other faction in Germany inimical to his? Knowing her as well as he undoubtedly did, it would take a lot of suggestion and even some apparent proof to make him believe this. But if he did—eh? If he finally decided the evidence was against her—would anything be more likely to enter his mind than the necessity for eliminating such an unscrupulous tool within a few hours after she landed at Brest, and securing everything she had?

"It was pure accident, you know—our happening along in a car on that lonesome road in time to prevent their getting those papers! They could not have foreseen this—and you may be sure they'll find out, before they get through, whether the French police found any papers in her possession, and what was done with them—or, if they didn't find any, what chance there may be that they are still concealed in that car of hers. For the moment, of course, they are escaping murderers—intent only upon getting out of France without being implicated; but other members of their organization will be sent to look into the affair within a few days at the most. They'll get my name as the person who came up in that other car and found the woman dying, but I doubt very much if they even dream that she would have given me the papers. They'll assume either that she destroyed them before I came up—or concealed them somewhere, if she had the strength to do it. Being a German of the old nobility, they'll be certain that she took no chance of letting them get into French hands—no matter what they told Von Hauptmann."

"Well—let us assume, then, that we have no reason to doubt the woman's story or the authenticity of these papers. That leaves us with the discovery of an apparent policy of certain German factions, at all events, which would appear to be opposed

in some ways to most of the inferences we have discovered as to their secret diplomacy in other countries since the war. And yet, if one looks far enough ahead, the objective is really about the same—dominating the entire world with German ideas and products. We suppose, from evidence we have picked up, that certain factions in Germany which we have reason to think influential, have been working along the same lines as emissaries from the Moscow Soviet —in fact, have been more or less affiliated with them in the spread of communist and bolshevist propaganda calculated to undermine the foundations of every other country in the world. Yet in this mass of data there is no suggestion whatever of anything like that! It appears to be a most persistent, intensive, campaign to sell German goods everywhere to the exclusion of all other goods."

"WELL," responded Nan, "that's about the way these memoranda struck me. It seemed impossible that the same Junta in Germany could be working along the lines we know about—more or less affiliated with the Russian propagandists—and be working with this seemingly different objective at the same time. Which would appear to favor one of two suppositions: Such a Junta might have considered that the bolshevist efforts paved the way for intensive propaganda of this other sort by weakening the loyalty of various countries toward their own governments, the belief that their own goods and customs were better than others—and tooled along with the Russians until the time came for concentrating upon their real objective. Or—we are getting evidence of two different influences in Germany, each made up of several factions which have more or less power. This last supposition is entirely possible—but somehow I don't believe it! The whole thing looks to me like a Machiavellian game of using other destructive influences as long as it was of advantage to them—while in the background there is the one and one only object of making Germany and everything covered by that name paramount—eventually. In which case, it is still but the one Junta—acting one way through this faction, a totally different way through another one, and in apparent opposition to both through a third. The names she gave me of the men in Charlottenburg are partly those we've known for several years—and Von Hauptmann acts with them when he isn't quite strong enough to dictate."

"H-m-m—if one were only in Von Hauptmann's confidence sufficiently for a frank discussion of the things he has in mind—eh?"

"I've been thinking along that line—quite a lot. See here, Lammy, let's figure out how we're fixed for time, just on the chance that one or two of us happen to be fools enough to meddle in something where the risk is almost prohibitive. I had a radio from George—sent in code through the International News Syndicate—that they were leaving Moscow with fairly good chance of getting out of the country by way of Roumania inside of a week. If he and Abdool aren't detained anywhere,—don't run into complications at the last moment,—they should reach Bucharest within two or three days after we pass the Dardanelles, at the outside. With luck, they might do it sooner—but I'm figuring that it may not be safe for them to attempt coming right through on one of the Rapides. We'd best figure on thirty hours from the Dardanelles up to Varna—including possible detention at Stamboul. We'll have the yacht reported in Bucharest by a radio to Charley Jones of the Resboiul —and they'll communicate with him as soon as they arrive, then come down by rail to Giurgevo on the Danube, across by ferry to Rustchuk, and then down to Varna by rail. Barring unforeseen complications or misfortunes, they'll join us inside of two weeks—after which, they can rest up on the yacht and leave one or two of us free to have a go at this German proposition if we feel like it."

"You'd hardly risk impersonating that woman, Nan? You've not enough knowledge of her personality and acquaintances to go upon. The chances would be against you from the start. And if any of that crowd discovered you as an impostor, they'd be merciless—no question as to that! I'm beginning to place this Von Hauptmann, I think. There was such a man interested in the combined-service management of the Woermann and Deutsch-Ost-Afrika steamship lines before the war. He also owned blocks of shares in the Hamburg-Amerika, Norddeutscher-Lloyd and Kosmos lines. A friend of Ballin's—much the same type—using his steamship properties for incessant German propaganda in South America and Africa while Ballin was doing the same thing in

the United States. Behind all that,—to get another slant on the man,—he was a cousin of the Prince Hohenfelder who was killed near Verdun. It's not at all impossible that he may have automatically succeeded to the title by this time—but at all events, he's a Junker and a typical representative of the modern big-business type which is pushing German trade and ideas in every direction. As a Junker he has the authoritative position which commands respect and obedience from social inferiors as much today as it ever did. As a captain of industry he must be an extra-efficient organizer and something of a financier as well. From what the Gräfin told you and what her papers show, he appears to be a shade higher up in authority than even the Charlottenburg Junta concerning which we've picked up so many stray threads of evidence and information. This may be of recent occurrence, as he gradually forced himself to the front—or he may have been always one of those whom we never could locate in the background, behind the Junta. I'm assuming, of course, that he's the same person I have in mind—a tall, spare man, but muscular and in perfect condition—perhaps fifty-five or sixty by now, possibly a few years under that. I first heard of him in the steamship business around nineteen ten, I fancy; and he would have been working up in it for some time before that. As a cousin of the Prince, he was received among the nobility on an equal footing everywhere—which gave him an advantage over some of the other business leaders. I presume he must have had a military command during the war, but don't recall hearing of him anywhere in that connection. It is even likely that he may have been in the Wilhelmstrasse service abroad—presumably in the States, acting with Boy-Ed and the rest of that crowd."

"You're giving pretty good reasons why we ought to get inside his head and inventory some of his thoughts if we can, Lammy! I'd been supposing him just about the sort of man you describe, and I've no doubt he's the same one. As a matter of fact, I do know a little more about the Gräfin von Muhlberg than I've told you. Just as a test of whether that knowledge is really good for anything, I'm going to study her handwriting in these memoranda—there's certainly enough of it—and see how closely I can imitate it. If I make a copy that will pass your and Raymond's inspection, I'll write a letter purporting to be from the Gräfin to Von Hauptmann and see how much trouble I can stir up for Major Pfaff. Then, if two of us go up to Berlin—say, as German-Americans—we can find out whether anything happens to Pfaff or not. If he were mysteriously killed, I fancy it would be perfectly safe for me to impersonate the Gräfin and have an interview with Von Hauptmann."

"Even though he knows she was killed by Pfaff?"

"I propose to show in my letter that she wasn't killed entirely dead! Fancy I've sufficient ingenuity and imagination to work out a fairly plausible story—and just casually state that he took all my papers, with money and other valuables."

"Oh, the devil! Then, if Pfaff made no return of them to Von Hauptmann, swore he hadn't time to get them—eh? Oh, I say! That's a stroke of genius, Nan! Pfaff would swear, of course, that some impostor wrote the letter, that he can produce proof of your death an' burial! Against that, would be the Gräfin's own handwriting—which must be pretty familiar to Von Hauptmann. And then, if you turned up in some of her clothes which he remembered, answered every question without a slip—eh? Well—he might find it dev'lish hard to prove you were not the Gräfin! An' I doubt if he'd even think of it after the first glance at you—the resemblance is certainly a bit startling! Of course you'd do a bit of study to make it perfect—and commit this entire mass of memoranda to memory? What?"

NOW, forgery, as a pastime, is by no means difficult. If it were, we would not have so many individuals of low intelligence getting away with it—temporarily. Nan Trevor was nothing if not thorough and systematic; the languages she spoke with such remarkable purity as to accent and idiom had none of them been mastered in a week—or a month. Her command of them represented indefatigable perseverance in getting pronunciation just right, in learning to differentiate colloquialisms in various parts of a country. So when she got down to work upon reproducing the Gräfin's handwriting, the first task she set herself was to copy the entire thirty sheets of memoranda—imitating the writing as she went along, to the best of her ability. At the end of the third or fourth page, she could depend upon facsimiles of cer-

tain words and reproduce them without hesitation. By the time she had finished the memoranda, she could have made a copy of those particular pages which probably would have gotten by—but was still in doubt as to the formation of many words she might have to use which she could not remember in the text.

In a second going through the data she picked out all of the capitals, small letters and numerals—setting them in alphabetic columns as fast as they occurred—then studying them to see what unconscious variations of form the Gräfin had given them under the spur of different thoughts. From this alphabetic key she might have constructed any letter she chose to write, but she needed the word-outlines so clearly in her mind that she could write them off-hand, without any sample copy—wherever there might be a necessity of offering such convincing proof. Before reaching Naples she had made twenty complete copies of those thirty pages, the last five from memory alone—and had written the following letter upon French stationery which she had procured in Brest and which bore the well-known water-mark of a paper-mill in that vicinity.

It was the more convincing in that it bore no salutation, no signature other than a code-word which the Gräfin used in her correspondence with Von Hauptmann—also from the fact that names and statistics were written in a code arranged between them. A stranger picking it up on the street would have made very little out of it beyond the bare facts of a night-attack upon some woman which nearly resulted in her death:

"I AM writing in bed—in an attic room of a house belonging to the young surgeon who brought me back to life. He thinks he is in love with me—has certainly given proofs of it by doing things beyond the law to help me. It was clear to him that if I reappeared in this locality or anywhere else in my own personality, I would be in constant danger of another and probably fatal attack. Now let me describe the events of that night in detail—consecutively, while my mind and memory are perfectly clear. I came ashore at Brest by private launch and found the car waiting for me as per schedule. The chauffeur, Karl Weissmann, said he had had no trouble of any sort. My passport was regular—no detention from the authorities. After getting Karl to make one or two small purchases while I sat in the car, we left the city by the Chemin National almost immediately.

"At eighteen kilometers beyond Loudeac, another car overtook us from behind. Karl was ordered to stop. He had scarcely done so when he was shot through the head by Pfaff, who was on the front seat of the other car. Two faces in the tonneau were less clear, but I am confident they were Immelmann and Paul Schwartz of old Wilhelmstrasse.

"Pfaff jumped down, wrenched open my door—shot me twice through the body. I sank back into the corner—he must have supposed I'd been killed instantly. He practically stripped me in searching my body—then the inside of the car, ripping some of the cushions loose. He then took my steamer-trunk from alongside the dead Karl in front, threw it out on the bank, forced it open, pawed everything out into the ditch—he and Immelmann. They took a number of things—all my papers and memoranda, of course—money—jewels—and even some of my clothes—to rip the linings out, I suppose.

"When he had practically finished, the lights of another car appeared—at possibly three kilometers. Jumping into their own car, they opened up the petrol and flashed by the approaching machine at probably a hundred kilos the hour. Stopping them would have been suicide to anyone attempting it.

"In the other car were a woman of the nobility and her chauffeur—making a night run to Brest. She found me conscious, able to speak—but I supposed I was dying, and she also. I refused to permit her to carry me into Loudeac—thought I would be dead before she reached it. Her car was a powerful one; she raced ahead into the town, returning with the police and a young surgeon who gave me hypodermics—after which they took me into the city. In the hospital, the police said I was dead, and the surgeon nodded—but he didn't think so. Clearing the operating-room of everyone but himself and an elderly nurse whom he could trust, he extracted the bullets—found to his amazement that one had but grazed the lung and the other had passed through the left side of the abdomen between hip and ribs without severing any of the intestines. One case in a million—a miracle.

"I told him I would never be safe again

in my own personality—he agreed. In the next ward an unknown woman had just died. He had two coffins put in the morgue of the hospital—laid me out there with the corpse. Put it in one of the coffins—put weights in the other—screwed them up. At one in the morning he and the nurse carried me out to his own house, through back-alleys on a stretcher, with a blanket over me, as a corpse. Grippe is epidemic. Two gendarmes who saw us supposed I was a victim being taken home for burial. In the morning the two coffins were buried—mine under a fictitious name which the doctor gave the authorities as my real one—the other woman as an "unknown"—presumably I. Karl was buried elsewhere—will ascertain the place if possible, before I leave, in order that his family may be notified—though the authorities here are very strict in preventing any disturbance of graves, if they should wish to remove the body. Application should be made through the Government, I presume. In another week or so I shall be able to go out—the surgeon is influential—will procure me a passport as a Frenchwoman from some place to be decided upon later—some locality with which I am familiar.

"I am sending this by a friend of the surgeon's who is en route to Naples and will post it as soon as he is beyond the French barrier. By the time it reaches you, I hope to be safely out of France—my position here is too risky and menaces the good surgeon.

"Of course Pfaff has told you nothing of all this—it is inconceivable that he could have been acting under your orders. Watch him closely—ascertain whom he has seen or visited since he shot me. Particularly, note whether he seems to have more money than usual. My return to Berlin is somewhat uncertain. I must first regain my health completely—and then take some precautions against recognition. March 28th. TOPAZ."

AS Lammerford was on deck when she finished, the Countess handed the letter, with the sheets of the Gräfin's original memoranda, to Raymond Carter, who proceeded to make an exhaustive comparison and study of them—finally laying down the sheets with a low whistle.

"Nan—that's a lalapaloosa! A work of art and inspiration! It's as short as you could get it and yet give all the details. It's simple, direct, absolutely convincing! I can't see a single word or letter which isn't convincingly in the Gräfin's handwriting. This letter will jolt the man a whole lot; he'll find it very difficult to doubt the evidence of his senses. But—there's one thing certain; if he has agents anywhere around Bretagne, he'll wire them at once for details of the woman's burial! Unquestionably that will be his first reaction."

"I forestalled anything like that when I left Loudeac. Gave the surgeon ten thousand francs of the Gräfin's money—which will go a long way in the Breton country, even at twenty-four to the dollar—to be divided with the police, for running down her murderers—with the gravediggers—and with the surgeon, for his services. Then I told him that the affair looked to me like a political feud, that it was more than likely some of the gang would come back unexpectedly, dig up the woman in order to photograph her face just to make sure they'd killed the right person. He smiled—told me to leave that to him. He would arrange matters so that it would be practically impossible for such ghouls to find her grave or recognize the corpse if they did. Of course a man like that wouldn't commit any outrage upon a corpse—but there are scientific means of altering the appearance of one so that recognition would be difficult if not impossible."

"Phew! You're some organizer, Nan! You never seem to overlook a bet! Well—I think your only risk in showing yourself in Berlin will be from that Pfaff scoundrel or some of his hirelings. Von Hauptmann should be absolutely convinced not only of your fidelity to his interests, but of there being others working against him in his own camp."

LET us now go up to Berlin and glance into a secluded study in a pretentious house on Tiergartenstrasse. The room was somber in its general tone, with dark-colored walls, hangings and bookcases; but a wide bay-window at one end, overlooking a garden, admitted a patch of sunlight which softened the effect. Sitting with his back to the window, a broad, flat-topped desk before him with telephones and various baskets of papers, was a tall man with graying blond moustache and close-cropped hair. He seemed to be in prime physical condition, able to handle large affairs as easily and expeditiously as small ones. His secretary sat before a typewriter on a small table at his left; ap-

parently she'd been sorting over his morning mail, opening letters which she knew to be concerning routine affairs, passing over to him others quite evidently confidential. Presently she came to one which brought a puzzled expression into her face. It bore a Naples postmark, but in the lower left corner had been written a single word: *"Edelweiss."* This she recognized as code, indicating a communication from one of her employer's many secret agents, and so she tossed it over upon his blotter, from where he picked it up in a moment.

As his eye caught the code-word, he had the sensation of being stunned for an instant—and glanced at the Naples date of two days before. There seemed to be something unreal in the atmosphere of the room as he picked up the shears and clipped off one end of the envelope—he had a detached feeling as if he were sitting up in the air, somewhere, and looking down at himself. As his eyes glanced over the handwriting on the pages, his teeth cut through the cigar in his mouth, completely severing the end of it. The secretary had noticed nothing unusual in his manner and was busy at the machine with her back to him. Slowly, deliberately, he swung his chair around, crossed one knee over the other and proceeded to read the letter in detail—missing no word of it. Mechanically he reached for a match to light a fresh cigar, and reread the letter from beginning to end. Then he said in a drawling, reflective way:

"Miss Brunn—get me Paris on the long distance—Léon Thibaut—Rue Vanneau. . . . . Or—no! Wait a bit! The telephone people wont put us through for six or eight hours at the shortest. Call up the radio station at Nauen! Give them this message to Thibaut—tell them who's sending—say it must be rushed, at once!

"'Give me particulars in detail of Gräfin's death—burial—the surgeon in charge—how long she lived. Answer at once! Most important. Relatives inquiring.

"'K. L. V. H.'"

Had anyone been in the Nauen station when the operator received this message over the phone, it would have been apparent that Von Hauptmann was a person of unquestioned authority, among those affiliated with his organization at least. It just happened that the Eiffel Tower station was not busy at the moment, and the operator took down the message within ten minutes after Von Hauptmann's secretary dispatched it. As the mysterious Léon Thibaut had a registered telegraph-address, including his telephone-number, he had the message five minutes later. It took him another ten minutes to get certain memoranda from his files and write out an answer—then twelve minutes before it reached Tiergartenstrasse.

Kavohan—Berlin:
Gräfin barely conscious when woman in other car reached her—died in about ten minutes. Body taken private ward Loudeac Hospital. Removed hospital morgue with another dead woman shortly after midnight. Both put in coffins early morning. Buried at noon. Nobody admitted burial-ground at the time—exact location of grave uncertain. Relatives must obtain Government permission for disinterment and prove claim to body.

LETIB.

If anything had been needed to clinch a conviction of the letter's authenticity in Von Hauptmann's mind, this radiogram would have done it. While apparently contradictory, it proved that there had been ample opportunity for the procedure described in the supposed Gräfin's letter. An ominous frown deepened on the politician's forehead.

"Miss Brunn! Have you any idea where to locate Major Pfaff just now?"

"He was to have been in one of the Wilhelmstrasse departments until noon, Exzellenz."

"Get him on the phone! Say I want to see him as soon as possible. Within the half-hour will do if he can't make it sooner—but that's the limit!"

THE girl felt a creepy sensation down her back as she reached for the telephone—having been with the man long enough to become familiar with that tone in his voice and know that it meant trouble for somebody. "Er—when the Major comes, you will remain here at your typewriter, busy with your work, but I depend upon you to catch every word that is said—know everything which goes on in the room! That's all!"

For some reason which Pfaff couldn't explain to himself, he was conscious of a vague apprehension when he received Von Hauptmann's message. He had received many others of a similar nature in the past—Von Hauptmann demanded action when he was in a hurry or when any matter seemed unusually important, but Pfaff rarely truckled to him as he would have been compelled to do with a military su-

perior. Everybody was equal under the Republic—the spirit was coöperation rather than military discipline, though upon some occasions he had been cowed into obeying orders without question. He could think of nothing which the man might be holding against him, yet in spite of that he was uneasy. Had he been a better judge of character, he wouldn't have been deceived by Von Hauptmann's careless, almost cordial manner, when he finally came in.

"Draw up a chair for yourself, Pfaff. H-m-m—rather interesting post I've had this morning—variety, and some things quite unexpected. This letter, for example, has just reached me from Topaz—"

The Major's mouth dropped open in an expression of utter amazement—then he grinned:

"Oh—I see! Written before she—er—dropped out. Delayed in transit. 'Pon my word, you had me going for a moment!"

"Wait! Look at the postmark on the envelope! Look at the date at the end of this letter—March 28th. Eh?"

For a moment, Pfaff's face turned a sickly color, like putty—then became purple with passion as he said:

"Forgery! Without the slightest question! Oh, I'll admit it's a damned good one, from what I can see of the writing! But in a case like this, the solution lies in getting back to known facts and seeing how they match up. The woman is dead and buried more than three weeks ago! I'll stake my shirt or my soul upon that! Dead women don't write letters! Hence—forgery!"

"Hmph! You'd find yourself on the street without a shirt and without a soul, I think! You say she's dead. She says she isn't—and seems to know."

"But man—I tell you that it's simply impossible she's alive! The Paris agents went down there after we got away from St. Malo to Southampton—assured themselves of the death and burial!"

"Read this message from Thibaut—I sent him a radio this morning."

Pfaff read it three times, in the attempt to find some catch in it.

"Well? Proves what I say—doesn't it?"

"On the contrary—it proves that what she claims might easily have happened. Really corroborates her letter in every particular."

"Oh, look here, Von Hauptmann—I know that woman couldn't have lived after being shot the way she was! I tell you this letter is a forgery! And if you don't get down to cold logical reasoning, you'll be giving your confidence to some impostor with an object to gain—presumably a spy from one of the outside governments!"

"Wait! Consider the length of this letter! A thousand words at least! Do you think there's any person living who can forge to any such extent as that, and have it a hundred per cent perfect?"

"Yes! I'll bring you a man tomorrow who can do it!"

"An expert in chirography—eh? But the person who wrote this was nothing of the sort. Just some one like you or me who had never had time to go into anything of that sort—some one who knew you—gives the names of everyone in your car that night! Who else in all the world would know things like that? The French police? The surgeon who attended her? Nonsense! You say it is possible to forge a letter like this well enough to get by? I say it isn't! —Miss Brunn, get half a dozen of the Topaz letters from the file! —I'm going to give you all the samples you can possibly need to copy from, Pfaff—and three days to see how well you can imitate them. If you go to an expert, I'll know it, and the test is off! If you work out a passable forgery, yourself, I'll believe this woman is dead—if you don't, I'll go into the matter farther and try to locate her!"

MEANWHILE, Countess Nan and Lammerford had come to Berlin as German-Americans on a visit to the city. With their extensive acquaintance in the States, it was not very difficult to find mutual friends of the people they had known there for years, in one way or another—introducing themselves as "friends of so-and-so" in Chicago, Milwaukee or some other city—the Countess, of course, having changed her appearance sufficiently to prevent recognition. As both were charming people, socially, it took but a day or two for their establishment in Berlin society upon a quite popular basis; nor was it in the least difficult to meet Von Hauptmann and several other men whose names the Gräfin had given her. Upon one occasion, the Junta chief made inquiries as to whether they had met the Gräfin von Muhlberg in the States—and the Countess was able not only to describe two such meetings, but to give a pretty strong inference that the Gräfin had been doing most excellent work for Germany over there. In

a few days more, she decided to risk an interview with him.

Going to the offices of the *Abend-Weissblatt,* a newspaper belonging to the great press-syndicate which the Trevors controlled, she obtained an interview with the editor in chief. Twenty years before, Jimmy Tredegar had been one of the most popular attachés of the British Embassy in Berlin, with a positive gift for languages. Trevor had met him there and suggested a line of underground work, at four times his diplomatic salary, which had too strong an appeal to be resisted. Jimmy was "recalled"—presumably to be transferred elsewhere. Instead, he grew a heavy German beard, put on thick-lensed spectacles, cut his hair *en brosse,* ate things to put on weight—and returned to Berlin as the Herr Doktor Paulus Ahlers, in charge of the largest syndicate sheet in that city. He remained throughout the war without being once suspected—getting valuable information into the Allies' hands occasionally. And his offices were arranged with a private rear entrance through an alley to another street. So the Countess, when she made herself known to him, was able to make up perfectly as the Gräfin in his private dressing-room—leaving by the rear entrance.

WHEN she was admitted to Von Hauptmann's study, her face partly hidden behind a gray silk veil, the man seemed to have a premonition that something was about to happen, for he was sitting back in his chair with every muscle tense. When she removed her veil, he came slowly to his feet and leaned across his desk to look at her.

"*Mein Gott!* Pfaff was so positive you were dead that I almost believed him! Sit down, Gräfin—and let us talk of this affair! First—your papers, you say, were stolen by Pfaff—so that of course you cannot give me a complete report of your trip. But you may recall parts of it."

"I can give you every detail, Herr Prinz. You see one hears the news, under the rose. One does not work as intensively as I did without having it impressed upon the memory."

She described for him the whole trip in detail, giving the names of executives the Gräfin had met, and what they had told her. Speaking of one man in New York, she said:

"Schnellbacher read me an article from one of the evening papers which said that Germany had now on deposit in the United States alone, one billion, three hundred million dollars, in gold. It was outrageous nonsense, he said—the paper should be sued for libel—it gave an erroneous impression of our finances. I told him that while I had no statistics at hand, I thought the newspaper might not be so far out."

"Hmph! Some of our bankers and industrial leaders would consider that a very conservative estimate—and begin figuring up the gold on deposit in Amsterdam, Rio, Buenos Aires, Rome and Madrid!"

CASUALLY, innocently, quoting bits of conversation with those she was supposed to have met in America, the supposed Gräfin got Von Hauptmann completely off his guard. Remorse for his share in what so nearly had been the death of a faithful executive rendered him anxious to make amends by trusting her more than any other subordinate—until he frankly gave her information as to German policies which she had no idea it would be possible to get. Finally she got up to go, saying she didn't know when they would meet again, as she feared Pfaff and his hirelings—meant to keep out of sight as far as possible. Von Hauptmann laughed—shortly, with an ugly edge to his voice.

"Pfaff! I don't think you need feel any further apprehension concerning that scoundrel, Gräfin! I killed him last night—here, in this room, when he had drawn a pistol and was trying to shoot *me!* I'd just been saying he'd better hand over your papers—or confess who had them. Miss Brunn sat there at her typewriter and saw the whole affair—keeping her head, fortunately. The police didn't even put me under bond. As for his associates or tools, not one of them would attempt another murder without orders from somebody higher up."

"I'll admit that what you tell me removes a load from my mind—but I'm going south again until I've completely recovered. I'm by no means well, even now. Afterward—perhaps we may work together again. Perhaps I'll go back and marry the surgeon—he rather appealed to me. I—don't know."

He never saw her again—nor suspected that she was other than what she seemed.

Another adventure of the Free Lances in Diplomacy will be described in the next, the July, issue.

One Good Turn

The competent writing man who gave you "The Doll," "The Lobster List," "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin" and other memorable stories is at his best in this interesting new story of Young America in the melting pot.

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

TONY MARAVIGLIA was troubled. His health was good, his school record passable, his home life pleasant; but he was acutely distressed, for all that. For the first time in his thirteen years, he was finding himself unpopular, and he couldn't understand why.

It would have puzzled an older and wiser person who did not have the key. Tony was as likable a kid as one could ask to meet—of fair size for his age, sturdy in build, with regular features, big brown eyes, and dark hair; his looks were no small asset. He was civil and mannerly, too, as became his Italian blood, though he had a full share of that restless vitality without which one may be a young male of the human species, but never a real boy. But with all these advantages, and many others, he was an unwanted playmate, sometimes treated with cool indifference, sometimes snubbed; and it bewildered him almost as much as it hurt him.

He knew that the trouble depended on the neighborhood into which they had moved just before school opened; but that was no explanation. Growing prosperous and being mindful of his family, Maraviglia, Senior, first moved from three rooms over a store in "Little Italy" to a comfortable flat in a block tenanted mainly by skilled workmen. Prosperity continuing, he bought a good house in a rather exclusive residence suburb, which was altogether too smugly satisfied with itself, and resented the intrusion of one of a different race. The father did not notice this much, being downtown most of the day; and Mrs. Maraviglia and the daughters had their own groups of friends and could wait. But Tony, youngest of the family, needed companions close at hand; and besides, he came in contact with the most intolerant part of the population. There are three groups of male conservatives in any community: soldiers, clergymen and boys under fourteen; and the last are the tightest Bourbons of the lot.

"Mr. Green," said Tony to the scoutmaster, after an evening of civil rebuffs

that had ragged the boy's nerves till he hardly knew whether to fight or to cry, "why don't the fellows here like me?"

"They don't dislike you, Tony," said the man, who had noticed the attitude of the youngsters, and tried—so far with small success—to change it. Tony sensed the evasion.

"They don't like me," he repeated. "I—I never did anything to them." Tears were pretty close, but the scoutmaster dropped an arm across his shoulder.

"Buck up, kid," he said. "It's nothing to worry about. They all knew each other pretty well before you came, and that makes 'em clannish. It takes time to get acquainted, especially since you're not in school together." For while Tony went to the public school a half-mile away, most of the other youngsters of the neighborhood attended a private school as exclusive as the aspirations of their parents.

"Couldn't I get transferred to another troop?" asked Tony.

"Don't," counseled the scoutmaster. "Don't run away from trouble. Stick it out. I'll do all I can, but it mostly rests with you."

Tony grunted doubtfully, and went on home.

THAT was a Friday evening. The next day Tony went three-quarters of a mile to visit a lad in his class at school. It was a pleasant visit, but not satisfying. Mark noticed his guest's fits of glumness, and some questions gave him the facts, as far as Tony knew them.

"You want to bean one of 'em," said Mark. "I would, if 'twas me."

"I can't," said Tony. "They don't give me any reason."

"Don't need much of a reason," returned Mark sagely. "You watch, an' the minute you get an excuse, soak somebody!"

No one in the troop gave excuse. Snobbish as those lads were,—being reflections of their parents,—scouting had given them a code which kept them from too gross offense. But Ed Myers, son of a prominent lawyer in the next block, was under no such handicap. He met the Italian lad a few days later.

"Hello," said Tony, cordially.

"Unrh," said Ed.

"Going anywhere Thanksgiving?" asked Tony, who could think of no other subject that seemed safe.

"Unrh?" said Ed again, this time with a questioning accent; and he added, after a moment's pause:

"What do you know about Thanksgiving, you wop!"

"I aint a wop!" exclaimed Tony, hurt and abashed.

"Y'are, too!"

As the bully spoke, Mark's counsel came to Tony's mind, and he struck.

It was a lively fight while it lasted. Ed was somewhat the larger, and better skilled in the use of his fists, but Tony had the advantage of the first blow, and was several times the angrier. In half a minute they were rolling on the sidewalk, teeth clenched, noses bleeding, uttering Neanderthal cries as they pummeled each other's features. Tony had a shade the better of it until, in the rolling, Ed managed to come on top. Before he could use his position, the Italian boy doubled like a jackknife, got both feet in the enemy's stomach, and thrust out with all his strength. Ed went flying; both boys scrambled to their feet, breathless; and Dr. Andrews, who had watched the strife and feared a continuance might be disastrous to Tony, stepped between.

"Here, here, boys!" he said. "That's enough! If you must fight, join the army. Ed, you started something you couldn't finish. Put some iodine on that lip. Tony, you'd better slip up the back way and get your face washed before your mother sees you. Go on, now, both of you."

TONY took the doctor's advice and thereby dodged a maternal lecture, but he felt baffled and wretched. What on earth had he done that everyone in the neighborhood was against him? Folks liked him at school, liked him where he had lived before—what was the matter here?

None the less he gorged himself on turkey the next day in good American fashion. There was no school Friday, and he got permission to visit some cousins. As he climbed the "L" steps, he saw two adult neighbors just ahead. One was Doctor Andrews, the only person in the block who always had a smile and a pleasant word for the boy; the other was a man named Simons, who had grown rich on patent medicines before buying into respectability and a wholesale drug company, and whose pretentious establishment covered a quarter of a block near by. An-

drews was tall and thin; Simons was tall and fat, and by right of bulk was directing the conversation:

"How you like your wop neighbors, Doctor?"

"Very well, indeed," said the Doctor shortly, though he did not know that one of those neighbors was a few feet behind him.

"Well," returned the other, "I aint fond of Black Hand outfits myself."

"These people are no more Black Handers than you're an auto bandit," answered the Doctor. "They're very nice folks, and their daughters are the two prettiest girls in four blocks. The boy's a good kid, too" (Tony's heart warmed at the words), "a lot more polite than my cubs were at his age."

"Yeah, they're polite enough," said Simons, shifting his ground with the ease of a man who would as soon justify a prejudice by one unsound argument as by another. "Soft soap don't cost nothin'. But what do they amount to? That's what I'd like to know."

"They're well to do, I believe," said the Doctor, who knew the standard by which Simons judged most things.

"Maybe. Graft's been good lately." (Privately, the Doctor thought Simons ought to be an authority on that subject.) "But wait till they get in a pinch, an' see 'em go under. They'll do it. They haven't got the guts. None of these wop breeds have," continued the cultured gentleman, who had been reading the latest book of lunacy on the subject of race-difference, and making his stenographer at the office look up and explain the strange words. "It takes the Nordics for that. These Latin guys can't stick when the going gets rough."

"Oh, I don't know," said the Doctor, laughing. "The Romans were the original human postage stamps, it seems to me. Here's the train."

The Doctor entered the forward car, trying—unsuccessfully—to find a seat where Simons couldn't sit near him. Tony hurried to the rear car, got back into the farthest corner, and brooded.

SO, that was it, was it? Folks thought he and his people were cowards. At least, Simons thought so, the Doctor didn't; but the boys seemed to agree with the fat man. They must be—what was it? Nordics. Tony didn't know a Nordic from a neoplasm, but he could see that it was intended to mean a superior bunch. His scout companions, even, believed themselves better than he, because they thought he didn't have the guts to stick when the going got rough. They never told him and gave him a chance to show them. They just looked down on him.

He made a resolve to hunt up Simon's boy, a spoiled cub about his own age, and beat him till he bawled for help, or die trying. But even as he thought this, Tony realized that it would not help him. Simons hadn't talked about fighting. It was something else, it was the trick of sticking when things were going badly. That was what the fellows thought he couldn't do, and what he must show them he could. But how?

HE rode past his station while puzzling, and got off near the neighborhood where he was born, where he had many acquaintances, and where his father still owned some property. The population had changed some; it was no longer eighty per cent Italian, as in the days of his babyhood; but Tony felt that none of these folks would question his sticking powers. Still, probably they weren't—what was that funny word? —Nordics. He would remember it by Norwegian. Tony wondered whether one joined the Nordics as he joined the scouts, or had to be born that way.

He stood on the corner, scarcely seeing the stream of traffic that flowed past in four directions, when his quick ear caught a puffing sound. Behind him was a woman, about fifty years old, less than five feet high and not much less than four feet wide, lugging a bundle nearly as big as herself. By the way she leaned over, it was heavy. Tony bethought him that he had not done a good turn to anyone that day. He stepped nearer and raised his cap.

"Can I help you, madam?" There was Italian politeness as well as scout courtesy in the query, but the woman stared, uncomprehending. Courtesy was a new thing in her life, and new things were dangerous. "Hah?" she said in a nasal tone.

"Can I help you, madam?" repeated Tony.

"Hah? Vot you want?"

Some passing girls giggled, and Tony flushed a dull red. "Can I help you over the street with your bundle?" he asked.

"It's heavy for you." He pointed to the luggage as he spoke.

"Nah! Nah!" The woman seemed to exhale all her remarks through her nose, which indeed was well able to accommodate them. "You get out! Young slickers! Swipe mein pundle, hey? You git!"

The girls squealed with laughter as the old woman waddled on. Tony turned away, furious and humiliated; but stopped before he had gone ten yards. Here he was, quitting when the going got rough, just as that brute of a Simons had said. Not much! He had started to do a good turn to someone on that corner, and he would stick till he did it, if it took till night!

HE settled himself to wait, but for some time, no candidates for a good turn offered. Two persons asked him directions, one of which he was able to answer, while he got the other from a street stand man a few feet away, and translated it. But trifling courtesies of that sort did not satisfy his newly inflamed passion for service. He hung around a half hour before he saw an old man approaching from the west. His hair and his patriarchal beard were white, he limped along with a cane, looking neither right nor left, stepped off the curb, and started to walk straight into the path of an automobile.

Tony reached him with a quick jump and jerked him back. The auto grated to a stop six feet beyond where it would have struck the old man had he not been pulled away; but the ancient's wrath at being handled was keener than his gratitude at being saved. He struck out with his stick, and Tony, too surprised to dodge, caught the blow on the shoulder.

"Hey, grandpa, cut that out!" called a voice of authority, and a policeman shouldered through the little crowd. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. The kid keeps you from gettin' hurt, an' you take a swipe at him! On your way, now!" He started the old crank forward with a gentle push, and piloted him across the street.

Tony stood, wondering whether he had performed the required good turn that would permit him to leave. The cop evidently thought so, but the old man didn't; and Tony decided to wait till he could do someone a favor that none could question.

He had scarcely come to this conclusion when he saw another old man, though not so ancient as the cross-patch who gave thanks with a cane. This person was about sixty, Tony judged; his hair and mustache were gray, his chin needed a shave, he clutched in one hand a flat package half hidden by an overcoat six sizes too big for him, and plainly, he was not sure of his whereabouts. Tony waited till their eyes met. Both smiled, and the lad stepped closer and raised his cap.

"Is there anything I can do, sir?" he said. "I'm a Boy Scout."

"That's nice," said the old man, vaguely. "I—no—yes—where is Halsted Street?"

"This is it, sir," said Tony, pointing to the busier of the intersecting thoroughfares.

"Oh, yes, of course. Thank you. I—I didn't know." The old chap seemed embarrassed.

"What number did you want on Halsted, sir?" asked Tony.

The old man stared at him with mild blue eyes. "You're a nice boy," he said, at length. "Oh, yes, number. I—don't want a number. I just—"

He stopped, Tony waited half a minute, and spoke again:

"I'm acquainted around here, sir," he said. "If there's any place you want to go, I'll be glad to show you."

"You're a mighty nice boy," returned the old man. "I—let's walk this way."

THE last words came abruptly as the old man started west. Glancing back, Tony saw a bluecoat crossing the street. Could it be that this old man was afraid of the police? Tony looked him over, and decided that the notion was absurd. The lad had known plenty of folks who walked the other way when a cop came by, but they bore no resemblance to this timid, refined looking, puzzled old gentleman. The policeman passed on out of sight, and the old man stopped, wiping his forehead.

"Where did you want to go?" asked Tony, again.

"Go? No place. That is—you see—I do want to go somewhere till I can—get into communication with my influential associates." He orated the last words.

"Yes, sir?" said Tony, respectfully.

"You're a nice boy," repeated the old man. "I—I want to avoid publicity. A quiet place, just a bed and chair, but safe. Be it ever so humble—" he rolled out the quotation roundly, then dropped back to his timid manner again. "You don't know such a place, do you?"

"Why, I think so, sir," answered Tony.

His uncle by marriage, Alessandro Bonti, had rooms over his store. Tony described the place, and the old man nodded.

"Lead on," he commanded. "That is—if you think it's safe."

Marvelling much, Tony guided his companion to the store and acted as interpreter. The old man refused to take the room at first for more than one night. Bonti did not care to rent rooms in that fashion, but Tony's pleas turned the day, and his uncle piloted them upstairs to a tiny room with a chair, a gas plate, some hooks and a cot.

"Yes, yes," said the old man. "I—I may conclude to remain, if conditions prove satisfactory." Bonti pocketed the small sum he had charged, and departed. Tony started to follow, but the old man clutched his arm.

"You're a nice boy," he said for the sixth time. "What's your name?" Tony told him, and he nodded. "You may call me Professor Denison," he said. "I prefer to remain incognito for the present. There are too many thieves trying to steal my invention."

"Yes, sir?" said Tony.

"I have foiled them," went on the old man, his voice ringing out a little. "I have it all here. An invention that will change the world and revolutionize industry! All here—and here!" He tapped first the flat package and then his forehead. "I foiled their plots. You wont tell anybody, will you?" he added in a totally different tone.

"No, sir, of course not," said Tony.

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

THEY shook hands, and Tony left, the man urging him to come again. Tony reached the sidewalk in a glow of conscious virtue. It paid to stick. This was a good turn worth while.

He had no especial reason for secrecy, but he did not mention his adventure at home. Grown-ups had a way of asking queer questions. Next morning—Saturday—Tony was to meet some schoolmates at the museum. He dropped off at Halsted on his way downtown to look in on Professor Denison, but the old man was not in his room. Time was lacking for investigation, but that afternoon, coming home, he tried again. The room was still empty. He went to the store to inquire, his uncle was out, and his cousin, with a derisive grin, told him that the old man had skipped. Much disappointed, Tony went out, looked round aimlessly for a few minutes without seeing his protégé; then fairly bumped into him at the corner by the elevated station.

"Oh, it's Tony," said the old man, who had jumped like a rabbit at the encounter. He was even more nervous than the day before, but he still clung to the package, half hidden under his too big overcoat. "I'm glad you've come," he added.

"I've been to your room twice to see you," said Tony.

"I can't stay there," said the professor, quickly. "They—they know. They found out where I was staying, and I had to move."

"Who found out?" asked Tony.

"No names," said the old man, finger on lip. "The men who want this," touching the package. "Of course, they would try to hunt me down, you know. It means everything to them. This invention of mine will free the world from their clutches. Power from the air, unlimited power, just by touching a button!" His voice rose as he spoke, but he stopped abruptly, peered round, and started west, motioning Tony to come with him.

"And they—those fellows—want to steal this?" asked Tony.

"To destroy it!" exclaimed the professor. "It would free the world, and they want to keep the world enslaved. I could feel them working on me in the night."

The last sentence was puzzling, but the others seemed plausible enough. The night before, Tony heard on his radio a concert played a thousand miles away, and with that fresh in mind, picking power out of the air did not sound at all unlikely. At the back of his mind, to be sure, Tony had an uneasy feeling which he could not define, but he deemed it nothing to fuss about.

"Where will you go next?" he asked.

"The—the country. Yes, I think it would be well for us to go out to the fields and groves. They will not look for me there. I got some provisions," he touched a bulging overcoat pocket. "They were—very expensive. When my invention is at work, there will scarcely be need of money," he continued.

THEY were walking westward as they talked, in the street next to the elevated structure, and had almost reached the next station when a man came up behind them.

Tony had noticed him across the street a moment before, a short, rather stout man, wearing good clothes, yet palpably a "rough neck." He clapped a fat white hand on the professor's shoulder.

"Hey, old nuts, I want you!" he said; and then, turning to a companion who was waiting thirty feet away: "Go get the taxi; I'll hold him."

FOR a moment, Tony was stunned. The professor had given a squeak at the rough touch, and now stood cowering. His misery roused the lad's wrath. This harmless old man was his inventor, his by right of discovery and a good turn; and to have him grabbed in this way—

"What do you want of him?" he demanded. The rough fellow looked down at him, rolled a cud of tobacco in his jaws, spat copiously, and answered:

"Mind your own business! Beat it, or I'll run you in, too!"

Tony recoiled a step at the truculent tone, then stopped, with a flush of angry shame flooding his face. Quit because the going was rough? Not this time.

"Yes, you will—not!" he blustered back. "You aint a policeman!"

"I am, too!" returned the man. "Beat it, I tell you!" But Tony saw that the challenge had told, and his own courage rose.

"Yes, you are—I don't think!" he taunted. "Where's your star?"

"Damn you!" said the man, stepping forward. Tony skipped out of reach, and Professor Denison, who had begun to pluck up nerve at being championed, jerked away and ran. The short man started after. Tony dropped on all fours squarely in the path, and the pursuer hit the pavement all at once, with a slap and a "woof" that could have been heard a block. Tony sprang up.

"Don't tell!" he shouted in Italian, for he knew some of the boys gathered round. Without waiting an answer, he raced after the professor, who squeaked again as Tony caught his arm.

"It's me!" said the boy. "Here, this way!" They were right at the back entrance to an "L" station. Tony led the way inside, shoved the price of two fares through the window, and led his prize up the stairs.

"You're all right," he said. Professor Denison drew a long breath, felt of the package which he had held all through the ruction, and looked at his rescuer gratefully.

"You're an awful nice boy," he said. "Let's take a train."

They took the first one which came, which was not Tony's. The boy asked some questions in the car, but the answers were not enlightening. Professor Denison was clear on just one thing; he meant to get out into the country. "They" would not find him there.

Tony and his protégé rode to the end of the elevated; took a surface line in the same direction and rode to the end of that; then walked on. Out of earshot of the car crew, Tony inquired:

"Where now?"

"Keep going," said the old man, taking his arm. "They'll find me if we stay here. We'll seek rough glades and forest free—" there was a swing to the words which sounded like poetry, and reminded the lad of the "stage at eve."

A FEW rods took them into the forest preserve, a place in summer beset with chattering, paper strewing picknickers, but now quiet and deserted. Tony looked round in awe. It was the first time he had been in the woods when the trees were bare, and he marvelled at the beauty of the skeleton branches against the red sky, for the sun was setting. Underneath were the leaves, brown and dead, and rustling at the touch of alien feet as if trying to whisper the secrets of the forest. Tony felt as if he were walking in the presence of ghosts. Denison raised his hands, intoned something about the Druid wood, and led the way; the boy after him, silent and wondering. They must have walked more than a mile when the old man stopped, sat down on a little bank, and said, querulously:

"I'm tired."

"It's been a long walk," agreed Tony. "And now, we've got to go back."

"Go back?" the old man's lip was quivering as if he were ready to cry.

"Yes. It'll be dark in a little while. We can't stay out here all night."

"Why not?" demanded Denison. "If we go back, they'll steal my invention. It isn't cold. I can stand it, why can't you? You've got to stick to things—" Tony gave an unconscious start at the words—"if you mean to win. 'The cards that win the stakes of wealth or glory are genius, patience, perseverance, pluck.' I have them all. I stay."

There it was again, thought Tony, that challenge to his sticking capacity which seemed to thrust itself at him from every side. Professor Denison must be a—a—Nor—Nordic—but by the ghost of Garabaldi, he wasn't the only one! Would Tony Maraviglia stick? One guess!

"Where shall we camp?" he asked indifferently, hoping his mother would think he had stopped with a cousin, as he sometimes did.

"Where? Anywhere. 'Our fortress is the good, green wood, our tent the cypress tree.' We must save my invention. When I get that on the market, men will become as gods. They shall pass through air and earth at will, be masters of earth, air, water, fire—what more can mortal man desire?"

Tony remembered that last line, but his mind was of the practical Latin variety, and Kipling did not seem much help just then. He looked around. A few yards away was a bank much higher than the one on which they sat. It faced the south—the sunset clouds still told which way was west—and at its foot, protected from the wind, was a level space of sandy soil, in places drifted a foot deep with leaves.

HE was a street boy, who never had been in the country a dozen hours in his life; he was new in scouting and knew its lore only by hearsay; but even hearsay is worth something. He moved over to the sheltered place, kicked aside the leaves till he had bared a stretch of sand big enough for a fire, and began collecting wood. He did everything in the most awkward possible manner, but wood was so plentiful that he soon had quite a pile, and was bringing out a match to light it when Professor Denison came over.

"No, no!" exclaimed the old man, so suddenly that Tony dropped the match. "My goodness, you don't want all that wood going at once! It would set the forest on fire. Pshaw! The pile wouldn't burn the way you've got it fixed! Look here!"

He threw off his huge overcoat, dropped on his knees, and with deft fingers put together a "pigpen" of small sticks. A handful of dry leaves was put at the bottom of this, and lighted with Tony's match.

"There," said the old man. "A little fire. You can feed it, but slowly. Always build a little fire. You can get close to that and control it. When my invention is on the market, we won't need fire," he went on in his orator's voice. "We shall warm our houses and cook our food with the boundless energy of the circumambient ether—"

"I wish we had some food to cook," interrupted Tony.

"Why, we have," said the professor, going to his overcoat. "I foresaw trouble. I knew. We are provisioned for a campaign. Look!"

He dug from the pockets a package containing half a dozen "wienies," and a paper sack with two battered cream puffs. Further excavation brought out a can of beans, a lemon, a head of lettuce, and a ten cent trial package of tea. The professor displayed his treasures proudly till he caught Tony's bewildered stare.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"N—nothing," said Tony. "Only—"

"It's the best I could do." The great inventor was almost whimpering. "They were after me. You saw them after me—why, you got me away from them. You—you wont go away and leave me, will you?"

"No," said Tony. "I—I'll stick—till we both go back."

"You're a good boy," said the professor, cheerful once more. "Let's eat."

They toasted and ate the sausages, the old man supplying technical information while Tony brought fuel, watched to see that the fire did not get in the leaves, and gathered big leaves which still clung to a white oak shrub to serve for plates and napkins. The professor told him the name of the tree, and followed this information with a discourse on atomic energy, which plants had captured, but which men knew nothing about till it was chained by his invention.

THE meal made them thirsty. Tony remembered passing a pump some quarter of a mile back; but the glow in the west had faded, and though the woods were lighted by a full moon, he did not want to leave the fire. The old man agreed that they could wait till morning for a drink, but within two minutes, was asking for one again. After this had happened three or four times, Tony took his courage in both hands, and, getting his bearings as best he could, started off to find the water supply, leaving the old man by the fire. The city boy stumbled nervously through the ghostly woods, making noise enough to warn any wild thing within a

mile. He found a path, remembered that they had come down it, and followed it back till he came to the pump. Luckily, it was working, which is not always the case with the forest preserve water supply, and several bottles which had carried liquid refreshment were lying near. He took the cleanest looking of these, rinsed it out as well as he could, filled it and hurried back. In his haste, he passed the point where he should have turned off to the fire, but suspecting his mistake, gave a call, which the professor answered. Guided by this, he reached the camp to find the fire nearly out, and the old man badly frightened. He perked up at Tony's return, and suggested that they turn in for the night.

BY this time, Tony knew that his companion was insane. How or when he reached that conclusion, the lad could not have told; but he knew. Denison had escaped from an asylum; "they" were the asylum authorities; and he, Tony, had kept them from capturing their patient.

That did not worry the boy's conscience in the least, the fellow he had tripped was a rough neck who needed a lesson in manners, anyway. But just because Tony had done Denison more than one good turn, he felt bound to do more, and the fact that he had thrown the authorities off the track added to his sense of obligation. He must take care of the old man till he could get help—and how was he to get it? He had promised to stay by his protégé, and even without that promise, would not have dared to leave him. When someone was by to ask questions or pick up loose ends, Denison seemed intelligent enough, and had a world of unassorted information in his white head. But left to himself—Tony thought of the neglected fire, and felt sure the poor old chap would die before he could be found again, if lost now.

"It's going to snow," said the professor, suddenly.

Tony looked up. The clouds which had given such a gorgeous sunset had spread till they covered the sky and hid the moon, and there was a changed feeling in the air. He wanted to urge going back to the city, but checked the words on his lips; they were useless. He gathered fuel, built up the fire, raked the leaves together for a mattress; and then, with many misgivings on Tony's part, and many an awed glance through the dim woods, the two laid down to sleep. They snuggled closely, back to back, for warmth, and Tony had remembered enough of his hearsay camp lore to turn their feet to the blaze.

HE awoke because his back was cold. Sleepily, he reached down to pull up the covers—but there were no covers. Still only half conscious, he sat up, groping; something soft and cold fell on his hand; and he came to his feet, broad awake. The fire was out, the professor was gone, and it was beginning to snow!

He called loudly, but only the echoing woods gave answer. He shouted again and again, with no reply; and all the ancestral terrors of loneliness and darkness and hostile forests woke from the gray cells where they had been sleeping through generations of city life, and clamored for flight. Whimpering like a frightened puppy, the boy started wildly through the night; then as suddenly stopped, ashamed. This was no way for a big boy—and a scout—to act, especially one who had set out to prove that he could stick when the going got rough. This was no way to become a—a Nordic; and think of that poor old man, lost somewhere in this whitening wilderness. He had started to see this thing through, and to do it, he must keep his head.

With a greater effort of will than some folks ever make in their lives, he returned to the bank and forced himself to think. In a moment, he began feeling among the ashes of the fire, and cried out with joy when he burned himself on a live coal. He gathered some dry leaves from the bed, put them against the coal, and after several trials, blew them to a flame. He added twigs, larger sticks, a fair sized chunk of half rotten wood. The fire blazed up cheerfully, and he looked around with steadier eyes.

Toward the northeast, small trees—though Tony did not think them small, grew thickly. In every other direction, the woods were rather thin, and toward the south for some distance was nothing but scattering brush with here and there a sapling and here and there a big tree. Probably the professor had gone in that direction. Tony decided to search as far as he could go and still see the fire; and then stop and figure his next move.

In spite of the storm, a good deal of light from the moon filtered through the clouds, and this was diffused and radiated

by the snow. One could see to travel, all right, but not very much more. Picking up the stoutest stick he could handle, Tony started southward in what he fondly believed to be a straight line, turning now and again to look at the fire, which someway never was exactly behind him. He stumbled and lurched over the obstructions and hollows as any pavement dweller would. From time to time he stopped and shouted, but got no reply. He bethought himself of something the scoutmaster had told them about finding a lost trail, and quartered back and forth. The snow by this time was deep enough to leave tacks, but it is doubtful if his untrained eyes could have seen them. He had come quite a distance, the woods were growing thicker, and fifty feet ahead of him, as he turned back from a guiding glance at the campfire, something moved.

THE bottom seemed to fall out of Tony's stomach, and he got behind the biggest tree at hand with one sidelong bound. Waiting till his heart steadied a trifle, he peered out, but could see nothing save the dim trees and the falling snow. He stared till his eyes ached, telling himself that there were no wild animals so near the city, that he had imagined the movement, and many other comforting things which he did not believe for a moment. He whipped up his courage, and sidled forward and to the left; then stopped and stared again, this time at a curious lump in the snow. In a moment, a suspicion crossed his mind, and he hurried forward and picked the thing up. It was the professor's hat. The old man had come this way, and probably was hiding in the thicker woods in front. Acting on a sudden inspiration, Tony circled to the left till he believed himself abreast of the place where he saw the movement, then called softly, as one calls in the room of a sleeping child:

"O Professor!"

"Yes?" The subdued answer came instantly, and the old man stepped, bareheaded, from a thicket in which he had hidden. "Did you get away from them?" he asked in a half whisper, brushing the snow from his hair.

"Yes," said Tony. "They're gone, now, and it's all right. Put on your hat. Now let's go back to the fire!"

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the old man. "They'll come again, they'll be watching for me there. I could feel them coming in the night, so I got up, very softly, and came away. I knew they wouldn't hurt you, but I didn't think you could get away from them. You're a smart boy."

Tony didn't believe it, but he was too worried to argue about small matters. "We can't stand here all night," he said impatiently.

"I can't go back there," said the old man in that whimpering tone which the lad had come to know so well. "They're after me, and I must save my invention." For the first time, Tony noticed that the old fellow still clutched that precious parcel, partly sheltered by his huge overcoat. "I tell you," the professor went on, briskly. "Let's just walk till we come to a good stopping place. That's it. We'll fool 'em."

TONY assented—there was nothing else to do, and they drifted down wind like sheep in a blizzard. They reached a path going in their general direction, and took that, Tony ahead, turning often to see that the old man followed. The snow came fast and faster, and the walking grew heavy. After an hour that seemed a week, they came to the edge of the woods; and across a field, the boy could see the loom of buildings.

"I'm cold," said the professor, fretfully.

"So am I," said Tony. "Come on."

He took the old man's arm and helped him along. They were within fifty feet of the barn before the professor saw it, and stopped.

"There's a farm," he whispered.

"I know it," said Tony. "We'll get them to take us in for the night."

"No, no!" exclaimed the old man. "They'd set the dog on us."

Tony had not thought of that, but he judged it probable, and suggested a compromise. "Let's sleep in the barn, then," he said.

"Fine!" exclaimed the old man. "Let me show you— I know barns.

Tony willingly dropped back to second place. The old man skirted the barn till he came to a fence, climbed over that into the cow yard, and there, in the lee of the building, found a door unlocked. He opened it, and they stepped into a darkness heavy with a warm animal smell. Tony closed the door behind them, and stood motionless. He could not see his hand before him; but he could hear a chewing sound close by, and in a distant part of

the barn, some heavy animal moved and stamped impatiently. The professor moved, feeling along the wall, and in a few moments came nearer again, and whispered:

"I've found a lantern! Give me a match!"

"Haven't got one," returned Tony, in the same voice, remembering his agonized search for a coal. The professor exclaimed impatiently, and began to explore his own clothes. In a second or two, he found what he sought, lighted the lantern, and Tony looked round in the yellow radiance.

THEY were standing on a walk that ran behind a row of cows, fastened to stanchions. There were seventeen of the animals, all black and white and comfortable looking. Most of them were lying down, and nearly all were working their jaws as if chewing gum. Tony stared at them, he never had been so close to cows before, and wondered what would happen if they got loose.

"We can't sleep here," he whispered.

"The haymow," returned the old man in the same voice, and led the way. They found a passage that led between the cows to another part of the barn, an open space, with a ladder rising on either side. Choosing the right hand one at a venture, they climbed, and Tony got his first close acquaintance with hay. The upper part of the barn seemed full of it. Holding the lantern cautiously, they made their way to the highest and farthest part of the hay mountain, and there put out the light, and again snuggled down to rest. This time, Tony managed to lie on the skirt of the old man's overcoat. He didn't mean to have any more runaways.

He was asleep in five minutes, and it seemed not more than another five when he was roused. The old man was shaking his shoulder and whispering frantically in his ear:

"Tony! Tony! They've come, and we're trapped. What shall I do?"

"Hush!" whispered the boy. He could hear voices and footsteps, and a clink of hollow metal. He crawled cautiously toward the front of the loft, and below, in the region of the cows, was a moving light. A disgusted voice floated up to him:

"What in tarnation did Jim do with that lantern?"

"Left it in the tool house most like. We don't need it. Hist!" The last word was spoken in a tone of command, and in a half minute followed a curious ringing sound in a swift, steady rhythm. Tony was wondering what it could be when the professor touched his leg.

"Farmers come to milk," he said. "Doesn't that milk sound good on the bottom of the pail? Wish we could get some."

"What does 'hist' mean?" whispered Tony.

"Oh. Just a corruption of 'hoist,' to make the cow set back her foot. Poor drudges!" It was uncertain whether he referred to the farmers or the cows. "They'll be glad when my invention comes to end their toil."

"Hush!" said Tony, for as always, the professor's voice rose when he got on that subject. The old man subsided and crawled back in the hay. The boy lay still, listening.

"Heard about the chap that got away from that private asylum?" asked one of the voices below. The other grunted an assent, and the first went on:

"Seems like they used the old boy a little rough, an' his beatin' it has brought things out. His folks say they're goin' to put him in a fine sanitarium, now, when they find him, but they wont have much chance if he killed that kid."

THERE was more of the remark, and an answer, but Tony heard neither. Killed a kid? That mild, gentle, timid old man a murderer? Impossible—and yet—what did he know about insane folks? Nothing, except that they were likely to do the most unexpected things. His scalp tingled as he thought how he had slept at the mercy of a madman and he half rose in the hay, only to settle back again. He didn't, wouldn't believe it; and anyway, though the going was the roughest he ever had heard of, he hadn't come this far to quit now. He would stick to the finish.

A door opened below, and a third man came into the barn. Listening closely, Tony made out that the newcomer was "Jim," that he had been in town late the evening before, that he had brought the latest paper—there it was—but that there was nothing new in it. Much to the listener's relief, nothing was said about the lantern. Jim joined the milkers, and conversation lagged. A smell of warm milk came up into the loft, and made the boy's mouth water. At last, just as daylight began to show, the job was finished. One of the men left to take the milk to a depot,

the others continued the chores. They threw down hay from the loft across the open space from where Tony lay, fed the cows and the horses which occupied another part of the barn, performed some other tasks, and finally went to the house, saying that breakfast would be ready.

The moment the barn door had closed behind them, Tony was climbing down the ladder in search of that paper. He found it, carried it to a window, and even in the dim light, the staring headline leaped out at him:

ESCAPED LUNATIC MURDERS MISSING BOY!

He gasped at the ghastly "streamer" that ran clear across the front page, and then, in slightly smaller type at the head of the actual story, he saw his own name:

TONY MARAVIGLIA KIDNAPPED BY MAD INVENTOR: MAY BE MURDERED!

So he was the "kid" who had been slaughtered! He thrilled a bit at the thought, and read further. The guard on the elevated train remembered an old man and a boy who answered to the description of the missing parties, but there all trace of them was lost. One of the attendants at the asylum from which the old man had escaped had made a public statement accusing the management of gross negligence and brutality, and an investigation was promised. The relatives of the missing man had not suspected anything wrong, but would prosecute if cause were shown, and in any case, would care for the old gentleman in a well-known sanitarium when found.

TONY climbed back into the mow and roused the professor, who was asleep again.

"Have they come?" he asked, in a frightened whisper.

"No," said Tony. "They can't come. The government's got after 'em, going to put 'em in jail. We're safe, now. Come on to the house and get breakfast."

"No, no!" exclaimed the old man. "I'm afraid. They'll get me anyway, and steal my invention."

"They can't," said Tony, and then a new thought struck him. "Do you know what those fellows are saying about you?" he asked. "They say you've murdered me!"

"It's a lie!" exclaimed the old man indignantly. "Why, you aint dead!"

"I've got to show 'em I aint, though," said Tony, craftily. "And you'll have to come along and back me up. It's safe, they can't touch you. Come!"

Protesting much, but yielding to the new note of dominance in the boy's voice, the professor came.

DR. ANDREWS was wakened by the clang of the telephone by his bed, and sleepily put the receiver to his ear. The first words ended his drowsiness, and the listeners in the modern farmhouse heard one side of an important conversation:

"This is Tony!" His boyish voice squeaked a little. "Say, Doctor Andrews, I'm all right. . . . . Wont you tell mother, please. . . . . I was afraid to call her for fear she'd faint. I aint dead, honest. Say, Doctor, the professor's with me, that got out of that place, you know. . . . . What? Sure I mean it. . . . . No, I kidnaped him. We've been together right along. He got lost, once, but I found him—in the woods. . . . . Oh, 'bout midnight, I guess, an' then we found the barn here. . . . . Course I did. . . . . Say, Doctor, I heard Mr. Simons tell you the other day that no Latin guys couldn't stick when the going got rough. . . . . Sure I heard it; I was right behind you. Say, if you see him, tell him I say he's a liar!"

He relinquished the phone to the farmer, who confirmed the news that the refugees were safe, and gave directions for reaching them. Tony went into the living-room, where the professor lay asleep on a couch, with the flat package on the floor beside him, open at last. Tony picked it up, and looked at the jealously guarded drawings.

It was a book of bungalow plans.

Harold MacGrath's splendid serial, "The Green Stone," will lead our next issue. And with "The Bent Man," a fine novelette by Clemont Wood, and a dozen attractive contributions by J. S. Fletcher, H. Bedford-Jones, Clarence Herbert New, Agatha Christie, Culpeper Zandtt and others, you will have a magazine well worth reading.

The Outsider

An appealing and unusual story of the swamp country by the author of "The Lagoon Rat," "Old Ironsides" and many other realistic stories.

By EARL K. COLLINS

DAWN was breaking through the pines and slowly lighting up the backwoods road as Greb Plunkett's oxen, swaying under their hickory yokes, jostled and bumped the cartload of cordwood over the roots in the wheel-ruts. The gaunt, slouch-hatted swamper trekking alongside the load, with a blacksnake whip coiled in one hand, was hoping, now, to swap the wood somewhere in town for plug tobacco and a few groceries. But at any time from ten to forty years ago, when he was wandering aimlessly about the State, he wouldn't have cared whether he ate or starved. In those days he might have been encountered down in the Everglade country, among the shiftless Seminoles, or hanging around some turpentine camp, or maybe farther north with a logging crew—though wherever it might have been, it would have been with that past of his following him around like a hounding shadow. Now and again it seemed to him that he had shaken off this dogging Nemesis, but always it was to find it, later, waiting for him in some new place—as it had waited for him here. The eight years he had lived in the county had convinced him that folks, somehow, just didn't care to bother with him.

But now, as he trudged along with his oxen, he wished, for the sake of his girl, that things had been a little different. He hated to think of her cooped up in that two-room shanty back on the bayou—shunned because he was shunned. Yet she was his; and being his, the world had decreed that she be banished with him.

As he neared the creek, he looked up suddenly at the sound of voices ahead of him and saw Sheriff Lowery and the military figure of old Judge Sutton approaching in a topless buggy. He pulled up at one side of the road and waited as they splashed through the stream. They spoke, nodding, as they drove by.

"Howdy, Plunkett."

"Mornin', Plunkett."

"Howdo, suhs, howdo!" Turning, he followed the buggy with his eyes until the woods enveloped it in the distance.

He liked those men, especially the warm-faced old Judge, because they, unlike the rest, had never passed him by without a "Howdy" or a nod of the head. He felt better as he turned back to his team, and drove on.

WHEN he reached the courthouse square, he found it crowded with the usual Saturday-morning traffic from the back-country. Picking his way slowly through the jam of vehicles, he stopped at a store in the middle of the block—only to learn that no wood was wanted. Four doors farther down, the result was the same, though here the proprietor was blunt in declaring that he had too many cash customers to wait on to bother with swapping. Greb moped out to his team and stood wondering whether to canvass the residential section or try to strike a bargain over in the post office store. Finally he guessed he'd try over there.

He drove around to the other side of the square and made his humble proposal to the spectacled old miser behind the counter. The old fellow, peering over the top of his spec's at Greb, talked as though he were interested; yet he doubted whether he'd swap—unless Greb could manage to come down a pound or two in the grits.

"Wood aint a-sellin' much hyeh lately," he said, "an' grits is up to a nickel."

"Well, suh, how'll three pound be, 'stead o' five? Hit's a genuwine bargain."

That would be all right, he reckoned. "Best tote it in the front way—stack it up yonder in the back room."

A half-hour later Greb stacked the last of the load against the wall, and going into the front again, found the groceries waiting for him in a soap-box on the counter. He hoisted the box to his shoulder, thanked the old man, and was stalking out when the keeper's old-maid daughter called to him from behind the mail-wicket at the rear. Catching his glance, she shoved a letter under the grating and then turned indifferently back to sorting the rest of the morning mail. For him? A letter for him —for Greb Plunkett? He picked up the official-looking thing, racking his brain for a possible sender; but finding none, he wondered if the letter was for him, after all.

"This hyeh's f'r me, miss?"

She answered coldly, not bothering to look around: "If it wasn't, I wouldn't give it to you, would I?"

His face flushed, and his eyes, soft and mild, focused a hurt look on the back of her neck. They seemed to say: "Thar haint no use a-sayin' hit thetaway, miss." But the thought never was spoken, for he was out in the street, with his oxen watering at the trough, almost before he knew it; and in his hand was the crisp sheet of paper the envelope had held.

He studied it intently. Yet the riddle of those run-together typewritten letters remained unsolved as he stood there and imagined all sorts of things. He wished, when he was putting the letter away in his hat, that he knew what those lines said to him. But he'd find out in time. He'd get them read somewhere—probably by his girl; he guessed he'd better be getting home now—home to Martha.

He uncoiled the blacksnake and popped it at the drinking oxen. As they swung away from the trough, he fell in alongside the cart and plodded on with them. At the corner he cracked the whip again, and with a drawling "Gee-haw-w-w," swung the team into an avenue of age-old trees.

THE blue-bonneted girl was romping with her dog in front of the weather-beaten shack, twenty yards back from the bayou, when at noon Greb came up the road that ran along the bayou's edge. His eyes lighted as he watched her. For all her seventeen years, she was just a baby, he told himself, and growing to be a bigger one every day. When she saw him, she held up a welcoming hand, shoved the dog away from her, and ran down the road to meet him. But instead of rushing into his outstretched arms, she dodged, as he made to catch her, and climbed onto the cart, where she hunted through the box for something that she knew would be hidden somewhere among the groceries.

Finally her hand came out, and a piece of pink "tub candy" went into her mouth, and another, and another, until there was no more. Then she jumped down, laughing over the victory of her hunt, and raced on ahead to take supper out of the oven. In the doorway she paused to wave back; and Greb, smiling, drove on toward the fenced-in grove of oaks.

By the time he had unyoked the oxen and fed his lean-ribbed horse, Martha was waiting at the table for him. Putting the box of groceries aside, and hanging his hat on the back of the chair, he sat down.

"Got this hyeh in town this mornin',

honey," he said, handing the letter across to her. " 'Lowed as how you could make hit out. See air you able."

Of course she was! Hadn't she once gone to school for a year? Hadn't she often led him around the newspapered walls of the shack and spelled words out of different columns to prove to him that she could read?

BUT now as the silence grew, and her face became more and more puzzled, he felt that she was going to disappoint him; and his mind slipped back into his first wondering of what those lines could say to him. Maybe an unknown relative had died and left him a fortune? Maybe some commission house up in Jacksonville was making an offer for that coming strawberry crop of his? Why didn't Martha speak? The pitiful look of helplessness on her face was reflected in his own.

Suddenly that look broke the strain for them both, and she burst into tears, the letter fluttering to the floor. Greb understood then. And his understanding overrode all the disappointment he had felt at first. Going around the table, he folded her in his arms.

"Thar, thar, hesh your cryin' up," he soothed. "Wont be long 'fore you kin larn to read an' do figgers right well. Wont be long, ma'am, wont be long."

When she had quieted down a little, he led her to the back doorway, and there, as he held her close, he raised his long arm to a level with his shoulder, pointing. Out there in a treeless square lay those six acres he'd planted in strawberries.

"Them'll fetch us in heaps o' money, Marthy, when pickin' time's a-comin'," he said. "Heaps! Then you kin git up to Jacksonville, whar folks haint a-knowin' me, an' be a reg'lar little lady a-gittin' book-l'arnin'. Yes ma'am, a reg'lar little lady. Haint thet nice?"

She lifted her face at this, and smiled, but faintly. She didn't want him to feel that she had cried for book-learning alone; and she told him so, saying that she had cried—oh, she'd just cried about things in general, she guessed.

"The older I get," she drawled, "the more it's hurtin' me to see people treatin' you like some outsider."

"Nev' mind, honey, nev' mind," he said, leading her back to the table. "Nev' mind a-tall. Hit don't matter—much." And with that they sat down again.

WHEN the meal was over, he got up, slowly, thoughtfully, and pulled his hat down on his head. He wondered whether Judge Sutton or the Sheriff would mind reading that letter for him; they'd be driving back by his place pretty soon, and it ought not to take more than a minute or two of their time.

"Marthy," he said, looking across at her, "if Jedge Sutton an' the Sheriff go by hyeh, run out an' ask 'em if hit'll be too much trebble f'r 'em to drap in a minute; they air the ones thet drive thet white-faced sorrel—you know 'em. Best tell 'em hit's 'bout thet letter, I reckon. An' meantime, I'll be a-hoein'."

"Uh-huh," she replied, and followed him to the door.

The dishes were still in the pan when she glanced through the window and saw two men, in a topless buggy, just up the bayou road. Wiping her hands on her apron, she rushed out to the roadside and hailed them. Timidly she told them about the letter, and asked them if they'd mind coming in.

The old Judge looked down at her, as though studying her face, and smiled slowly.

"So you're Plunkett's girl," he remarked, "—the little miss thet waves out at everybody."

"Y-yes sir," she stammered. "I'm her."

"Well, well. . . . . Now, I don't guess we're men thet'd disappoint a lady, air we, Sheriff?"

The younger man usually agreed with his political sponsor. "Don't believe we are," he replied.

They parked the buggy under an oak tree, and followed the girl into the shack. There, while they sat waiting at the table, and Martha from the doorway searched the field for Greb, they silently surveyed the interior. They hadn't expected to find clean rag rugs, nor such careful arrangement of the few sticks of crude furniture, nor fresh newspapers, with scalloped edges, on the shelves, nor a picture calendar. Yet here were all these, along with a cupful of wild violets on the window-sill, to prove that this man and this girl had gone into exile, each in turn, with their pride still unbroken.

Sheriff Lowery lifted a pair of what-do-you-know-about-this eyebrows; but the old jurist lifted no brow, made no grimace. He ignored the Sheriff entirely as he fastened his eyes on the girl in the doorway.

Standing on tiptoe, craning her neck one way and then another, Martha swept her eyes across the field until, down at the far end, in a meager patch of knee-high corn, she caught sight of Greb—weeding.

Cupping her hands to her mouth, she called: "Da-de-e-e! Oh, Da-de-e-e!"

Looking up, he saw her framed in the doorway, motioning for him to come in. He dropped the hoe, and came on between the rows.

In the doorway, as he took that troublesome letter from his hat, he saw Lowery and Sutton at the table munching biscuits, sandwiched with jam. Martha, over in the stove-corner, was finishing the work—switching about as though serving guests were an everyday act of hers. Greb smiled at this.

"Howdo, suhs," he greeted, coming forward. "Hope I haint a-trebblin' you-all much?"

"Afternoon, Plunkett—afternoon, suh. Don't know as we're mindin' it any." The Judge swallowed the last bite of biscuit. "So it's a letter you want read?" he said.

"This'n right hyeh," Greb replied, handing it over as he sat down. "Got the blamed thing in town this mornin'. Well, Sheriff, suh, how you gittin' 'long now'-days?" he added, turning to Lowery. "Seen you pass by a right lot lately."

"Yes, about three times a week. I'm keeping a watchout—"

Judge Sutton, glancing at the signature, "*James J. Bagley,*" hastened to take advantage of this conversation. He read silently as the talk went on between Greb and the Sheriff; and while he read, he kept telling himself that he'd probably lie out of reading the letter to Greb if it proved to be what that signature had hinted.

He was convinced now that it couldn't possibly prove otherwise. The end was in sight; the inevitable was coming. When he saw it, he felt cautiously around for one of Lowery's feet, and pressed hard.

"Plunkett," he said, "I'm mighty sorry, but I cain't seem to read this thing 'thout my glasses." He paused. "Don't know about the Sheriff, though. Maybe his eyes've got over thet highwayman's pepper by now." He pressed the foot again, adding: "Better look this over, Sheriff."

He tossed the letter across the table; and the Sheriff, feigning bad sight, held the crisp sheet close, then far, as he squinted. To his mind there was nothing in any of those typewritten lines that shouldn't be told to Greb; yet it wasn't for him to question Sutton's choice. He passed the letter back to the swamper.

"Sorry," was all he said.

Greb was plainly disappointed. Were these men trying, as others had tried, to cure him of bothering them again? He hadn't much faith left in human beings, and the hurt tone of his voice showed it.

"Hit's all right, suhs," he said slowly, "hit's all right. I thank you-all jest the same."

Judge Sutton flushed. He hated himself for having accepted the hospitality of this man, and then lying to him with the taste of his food still in his mouth. He rose, towering above them.

"Excuse me," he said, and strode alone out the back way.

DOWN by the grove of oaks he lighted an old Virginia cheroot, then climbed to one end of the rail fence, where for a time he sat, his jowls in the palms of his hands—thinking. He wanted his eyes to see what that mind of his was thinking about—Greb's six acres of hard-earned soil; but his mind betrayed those eyes even while they stared at the soil itself.

The cleared ground vanished as if by magic, and numberless trees sprang up, clotting the land; underbrush bushed up from the earth; dead leaves and storm-torn limbs lay over it like a blanket; and the place was again the worthless woods of eight years before. It was then that Greb, with this girl of his, had driven his dusty team of oxen out to the bayou and squatted on the tract. He had come up from De Soto County, the Sheriff had said, over the old Spanish Trail; and from the way his ax rang through the woods, he had come to stay. He was always chopping. Tearing limbs, and the heavy thuds of falling trees, became familiar sounds to passers-by along the bayou road. They never missed them a day unless Greb was staving off hunger by working spare time at the mill, where he managed as well to accumulate a few dollars for farm implements and fertilizer. And now—Greb Plunkett, shunned of men, was headed straight for a chasm of disappointment.

The old Judge, stirring uneasily on the fence, realized this as the purport of that letter came back to him. He'd done a despicable thing in lying to Greb, he decided; and he wondered, as he puffed idly on the cheroot, if he didn't owe Greb the

truth about those lines. Somehow, he felt that he did. He slid down from the fence, and throwing away the butt of the cheroot, he poked back toward the shanty.

As he neared the open door he heard Martha telling the Sheriff about the *terrible* time she'd had with her last canning. When she saw Sutton coming in so thoughtfully, she broke off abruptly, and both she and Greb rose to offer him a seat. But he waved them down, saying:

"No, thank you, reckon I'm not wantin' any chair." Then, stopping at the near end of the table, he looked straight at Greb. "Reckon I just want to say, Plunkett, thet I lied to you 'bout thet letter. 'Lowed a while ago I could best keep out of this hyeh mess—'lowin' 'nother way now, suh." He paused. He could see the veins in Greb's neck throbbing. "Thet letter," he went on, "is a thutty-day notice from Jim Bagley. Don't say much else than you're clearin' clean out, leavin' crop an' all, or gittin' kicked out. Says he's not wantin' any squatter on any o' his land."

GREB sprang to his feet. "His'n!" he exclaimed. "His'n! Why, suh, I—I—" His voice trailed off into nothing, and he sank, as if crushed, back into the chair again, burying his face in his hands.

Martha, kneeling, hugged him to her breast, soothing him; and his ear, against that breast, vibrated with the beating of her heart. He mustn't give in like this, though. He felt that he must hold up to the very end for her sake, no matter the cost to himself. And feeling this, he straightened up, smiling wanly.

"Thankee, suh, f'r tellin' me," he said to Judge Sutton. "Reckon hit's the big-might'est thing a man like me kin say. Thankee!"

And still smiling, he followed the Sheriff and the Judge out to the oak, where the latter spoke a parting word to him and climbed into the buggy with his companion.

Greb, somber-faced and silent, watched them drive down the road, small then smaller in the distance, until, at the far bend, they swung from view. He hung his head; the mask was gone. He walked in and out among the trees for a while, until he could pull himself together to face Martha. Finally he went in and told her that he too, after supper, would go down that road—to Bagley's house—in town.

GREB was on his way by sundown; but as the horse plodded up that sleepy avenue of age-old trees, nine hammerlike strokes boomed out from the courthouse tower. Roused from his thoughts, he saw Bagley's imposing house at the corner just ahead. He'd like to know how many squatters' crops it had taken to pay for that place. If only Bagley would let him stay until after the July and December pickings! Those two yields would mean more money in a lump sum than he'd earned all told in his life.

He swung from the saddle, leaving the horse untied, and shambled up the long walk that led to the crescent-shaped tier of stone steps. From the third of these steps he glanced through an open front window and saw Bagley bending over a roll-top desk in a back corner of the "parlor," which was, as well, the office of his private bank.

At the door he sounded the knocker twice. Uncle Jake, an aged negro, came with a query on his lips.

"I'm a-wantin' to see Mr. Bagley," Greb told him. "My name's Plunkett."

The old man disappeared with the message, leaving Greb to wait on the gallery. Presently he came back with word that his massa wasn't at home. What kind of tomfoolery was this, anyhow? Greb, with an unwonted spurt of speed, brushed past the startled Jake and strode straight down the hall to the open parlor door. Hearing the footsteps, Bagley swung round in his swivel chair, frowned darkly, then rose and came forward with the air of a surly dog.

"Thought I sent out word that I wasn't at home? Now you get out of here, sir, mighty quick—and stay out!"

"I haint a-wantin' but jest a minute, Mr. Bagley," pleaded Plunkett.

"Get out!" commanded Bagley.

"Cain't I ask you, suh, 'bout stayin' on the place a little longer, f'r my gal's sake? Hit don't look—" his visitor began.

"No! No!" Bagley shouted. "Dam' your girl! Get—"

"Whut's thet? Whut's thet, suh?" Greb, clinching his brows in a fighting scowl, moved down on Bagley, and the latter backed away, guardedly. "Whut's thet? Dam' *my* Marthy? Hell's fire, *dam' you!*" And seizing him, Plunkett flung him back into the swivel chair with no apparent effort. *"You!"* he repeated, glowering at the slumping, wide-eyed figure. "Not *my* Marthy, suh!"

Bagley recalled stories he had heard of this man—known from Key West to Fernandina as a killer. Why hadn't he asked the Sheriff for a deputy guard? He might have known that this savage'd come down on him, raving mad.

"You air the cheatin'est whelp I ever run up ag'in' in my sixty-odd years," Plunkett was going on. "I'm a-gittin' kicked off'm thet place 'cause you know I haint got money nuff to hire no legal lawyerman. Haint got nary soul to go into court an' stick up for my squatters' rights. You know hit! Whyn't you put me off 'fore I cl'ared thet tract up? Whyn't you do hit? I kin tell you—*quick!* You wanted to wait tell I made them wuthless woods int' hundred-dollar-acre land; thet's why, suh, thet's why! But hit haint jest them six skinny acres 'lone you air a-hankerin' after; you got more'n five hundred left. Haint jest them, suh! Haint jest them a-tall! Hit's them berries you air a-wantin' to steal to boot. Haint thet so? Haint hit? Talk! Talk! Haint thet so?"

BAGLEY sprang to his feet, and at the same instant, jerked out a side drawer of the desk. What a fool he'd been! What an utter fool to sit there, cowering in the chair, with this illiterate swamper's tirade turning him blue in the face—and his revolver in the drawer all the time. He'd forgotten about the weapon entirely until now. But now that he *had* remembered. . . . . By God, he'd show this backwoods dog just how much a gentleman *would* stand for!

He jerked out that drawer like a madman. Greb straightened in surprise as he stepped back; but he wasn't surprised so much that he didn't have enough presence of mind to whip out his own revolver as he took that backward step. The swift movement of his hand to his hip, then up to his side, and the leveling of the weapon, was like one soft note melting into another; and with those movements rhymed the shot. For just as Bagley wheeled, with his revolver clutched in one hand, Greb fired!

Bagley's knees caved in. He lifted his arms, then dropped his weapon, and sank to the floor with a groan. Greb stood motionless as a statue—smoke coiling upward from the muzzle of his lowered gun.

For a moment he stared, bewildered, at the thing on the floor, then down at his own pistol, dangling at the end of that limp-hanging arm of his. He saw the wisp of bluish-white smoke curling up from its mouth. He had done it again!

Thrusting the weapon back into his pocket, he glanced furtively around; nobody, that he could see, was near. He slipped quietly through the open window, and tiptoeing across the gallery, shuffled down to the curb with assumed unconcern. But when he had swung stiffly to the saddle, and was riding away at a walk, a feeling came over him that this sleepy street he was on was coming to life. True, he had seen nobody, had heard no sound of alarm; not even Uncle Jake had come ghost-crying out on Bagley's gallery. Still, the feeling persisted that in house after house eyes were peering at him from front windows—him, the despised swamper who'd just shot Jim Bagley!

His nerves went on edge. One of his eyelids began twitching; now there was a jerky quiver in his leg. He wished he could quit that—twitching, twitching, twitching. First thing he'd know, he'd be drawing attention to himself; and the next thing, a howling mob'd be on his neck. That was it—neck. His fault or Bagley's, his infernal neck'd suffer; he wasn't a man of affairs. And since he'd probably be lynched, he must get out of here as quietly as possible—out to where that long series of swamps lay, behind the deep forest of pines.

He passed an incoming man or two on the way, but never drew his eyes from the straight line ahead, where the woods rose. He rode on quietly, his hands folded carelessly over the saddle-horn, until the forest pressed up against his face and he had ridden over the first few shadows that fell like ghostly bars across the moonlit road. Then he jerked up the reins.

The horse lunged forward, settling down presently to a hard, steady gallop that carried its rider through varying currents of air—now warm, now cool, now damp. Then the dampness rode with them, right along. The more the dim-lighted road wound and swerved, the more enveloping became that moist air. It had drenched Greb, and his sticky clothes clung to his skin, by the time he reached the shallow stream that gurgled along the far side of the six-mile forest.

He galloped straight across the connecting bridge, disappearing in the jumbled wood ahead, and raced on until the road

curved sharply past the edge of the swamp. Here he swung down, while the horse was still in motion, and watched the riderless beast gallop on into the dry woods beyond. Following an instant of pause, he turned abruptly, and as if to add force to the effort, flung himself headlong into the swamp.

IT was as if he were some kind of animal bred in these swamps. He was, at any rate, at home in them. For he'd spent most of his life, as a lone-handed battler, to wrest from their likes the bread of a miserable existence. He had forsaken them, in a fickle moment, for a few short years; but now in his hour of trouble he was coming back to them. They'd befriended him before in their own way. They were doing it now—shutting out the moonlight and walling him up in solid night.

At last he stopped, exhausted. He slumped against a tall sycamore, hugging it for support, as he gasped for breath. Presently the pumping of his heart subsided to an even beat. The pounding of his ears ceased; strength came back to his legs. He leaned away from the tree and looked about in the barely perceptible light. He guessed he'd better be getting on again. As he lifted a foot, a sound caused him to pause with bended knee. He tilted his head with a jerk, listening. In the distance, from somewhere back toward town, he heard the yelping of dogs. They were coming! The mob!

SPLASHING back a few yards, he came into shoulder-high water, and with arms stretched out like wings, began wading from one tree to another, rapping each with his knuckles—rapping, and passing on, rapping, and passing on, until finally a dead cypress of enormous girth sounded hollow under his blows. He waded around the trunk, kicking it, and on the other side found a waist-high hole rotted in the once proud giant of the swamps. Filling his lungs, he shut his eyes, and ducked down, then crept through the jagged opening and pushed up until his head was above the water within the tree.

The blackness enveloping him was so deep that it seemed green, and the silence so intense that it seemed almost to pierce his ears. The swollen state of the swamps from recent rains, and the hundreds of hollow stumps and trees strung throughout them, made the cypress a sort of receiving station for sounds. He could have heard a cough a mile away as clearly as over a phone.

He picked up the yelps of the bloodhounds again, and in time, the hoof-beats of the horses—drawing closer and closer. At the bridge the yelping of the dogs was drowned out completely by the pounding of hoofs. He heard the loose boards rumble and knew the bridge was shaking on its creosoted pilings. To him, within the tree, the very woods seemed to tremble as Sheriff Lowery and his horde of torch-bearing horsemen thundered across the planking at a gallop. The sounds became fainter—ceased. Then the yelps of the dogs told Greb, listening with every nerve alert, that his horse had been found.

When next he heard the dogs, he knew that they had tracked him to the swamp. He knew, too, that no dog could follow a scent beyond that rim of slush and water. Distance was therefore no longer a part of the battle; wits alone would count henceforth.

Suddenly a pea-sized spot of light jumped through a woodpecker's hole in the tree, danced on his face, and snapped out again. He pressed an eye to the hole. The swamps down around that line of men and horses seemed to be on fire! The trees, the sky, and all the sparse patches of earth down that way were red from the glow of the torches. He surmised, from what he could see of the line's length, that the right and left wings were overlapping the edges of the swamps; and at a distance of a few hundred yards, possibly another man or two was bringing up the rear of those ends. He was pretty sure that they were marching like that—guarding against his slipping out in the face of their advance and then crawling back in after they had passed.

PRESENTLY a few of them approached his tree close enough for him to read the grim determination on their drawn faces. Once, when a horse reared up, then spun around and plumped down, he thought he saw the Sheriff, though he wasn't sure. He brushed the sticky film of sweat from his eyes and set them on that line again, now only a hundred feet away. Under the flare of the torches the fan-shaped screens of water, rising from the lifting knees of the horses, broke like raindrops against his tree. And the water, from the riotous plunging outside, rose in the tree

and lapped his chin. . . . . Fifty, twenty-five, ten, five feet—and they had gone on, missing him. He relaxed, sick—sick all over. He wanted to sink down, just sink down—and rest.

After they had gone on, he came out for a breath of fresh air, and was still enjoying it when he heard them, now at the other end of the swamps, swing their horses around and come sweeping back toward him. He became all nerves again. He scudded back into the cypress—waited, listened, and presently heard them plunging past once more. The entire night they combed those swamps and scoured the surrounding woods for him. But in the silence that came with dawn, he knew that he had made good his escape, that the mob had gone back to town—a worn-out, defeated pack of hunters.

As he crept out into the open, the gray morning blinded him. He clasped his hands over his eyes and crouched by the tree until he had accustomed them even to the scant light. Then he began picking his way out of the swamp. When he had reached the edge he skirted it for a mile or more and then turned into the woods.

Before long he found that for which he sought—a cabin in the center of a small clearing, with smoke curling from its chimney; and over the hog-pen fence a gray-haired negro was leaning. He'd seen this darky before, he thought, passing his place. Yet not until long after Uncle Ben had disappeared within the cabin, did he go forward and knock softly on the door.

"Howdo, uncle!" he said, while the door was still opening.

"Mawnin', suh, mawnin'."

"Air you a-knowin' me?"

"Yessuh. You's de gen'leman lives back yondah on de bayou, Ah b'lieves."

"Hit's me—an' I'm hongry, uncle, mighty tired an' hongry. Haint a-mindin' sparin' me a swig o' coffee an' a mite o' grub, air you?"

"Mindin'? Me mindin'? Naw suh, naw suh," he lied. "Come right on in an' set yohse'f at de table." He'd give this fugitive anything at all to eat—if Greb would only choke it down and get out of there.

He threw another fat knot on the dying breakfast fire and went about getting the meal with such a plain show of nervousness that Greb had to smile. He knew that the mob had dropped by here and scared this stooped old darky.

"Whut's the matter, uncle?" he asked. "War them men by hyeh a-askin' f'r me? Air you a-feared they'll come back now an' find me eatin' your victuals?"

"Ah—Ah ain' zackly scaihed, naw suh; but it doan' give me no res'."

"I'm a-guessin' not," Greb agreed, smiling wearily. "Maybe them folks would skin you, at thet. Supposin' you hike off somewhar an' lit *me* git up the grub?"

Here was an avenue of escape for Uncle Ben. " 'At's bes', 'at shuah is bes'," he said, hurrying bareheaded toward the door.

"But wait thar jest a minute, uncle; don't run. I'm a-wantin' to ask you somethin'. Like to ask if you know Jedge Sutton?"

"Him? Me? Long time; ev'ybody do."

"Well suh, supposin' you drive in to town an' tell 'im I'm out hyeh?"

The old man frowned and came back to the table. "You means 'at?" he asked. "Yaw'll wants 'im to *ketch* you?"

"Yes, him—jest him, uncle; best not tell nobody else—ceptin' my gal, maybe—Marthy. Like to have you drap by an' tell her not to worry none."

"Yessuh, Ah tells her, yessuh. Ah tells de Jedge, too—*quick*," he added, and hobbled out to hitch up his mule.

As he stood at the tiny window and watched him drive away, Greb told himself that it would be well into the night before he'd get back with *that* stone image of a mule. A long day of waiting lay before him. He turned from the window at last, and dragged his leaden feet to where the coffee-pot and the skillet sat on the hearth.

DUSK was settling when Martha stopped the team of oxen at the edge of the clearing. She went up to the cabin, with a basket on an arm, and pressed an ear to the door. And she heard, faintly, the labored breathing of the restless sleeper within. She pushed open the door gently; and through the semidarkness she saw Greb—hunched over on the table with his face buried in the crook of an arm. Now she tiptoed into the cabin and bent over the fatigued swamper, calling softly:

"Daddy, daddy." Then: "Wake up. It's me, Daddy—wake up."

He straightened up sleepily, looked at her with his weary old eyes, then rose and took her to his heart, whispering:

"Baby—my baby. I warn't a-wantin' you to do this, honey—come all the way out hyeh."

"Maybe you wasn't," she said. "Maybe it aint fittin'-like for a lady, but my *inside* made me come, Daddy."

He found a match on the rough mantelshelf, after much fumbling, and lighted the squatty little wall-lamp.

"See!" she chirped, as he turned around. There were pickles, biscuits, wild-grape jelly, and a whole fried chicken. Just what he'd expect her to bring—these things. He said something about "a-wishin' f'r 'em all day," then sat down at the table. And while he ate, she sat across from him, chatting lightly, with her back to the door. But only once did she mention Bagley—and that was when she informed Greb that Bagley was merely wounded, that the latter had issued a statement in which he accused Greb of "attempted robbery at the point of a gun." Except for this, she chose more pleasant subjects.

Suddenly, jumping up, she wheeled round and snapped her eyes on the opening door. Behind her, Greb was rising too. . . . . Judge Sutton and Sheriff Lowery walked calmly in.

Throwing her head high, Martha cried: "You aint takin' him! You aint! You aint!"

THE old Judge was aware that all little girls become "sassy" at times. He just said, melting her with his soft tone: " 'Bout half right, Miss Marthy. Sheriff hyeh'll let a man finish eatin', leastways."

"Guess I haint hongry no more, suhs," Greb mumbled, hanging his head.

" 'Low, then, as how we might talk facts fust off," the Judge added. "But remember, Plunkett, we're wantin' truth. Wantin' just what happened from start to last—what was said and done, suh."

Greb stood there, unruffled at all times, his voice very low, and gave his version of the shooting. When he had finished, the two men questioned him severely; finally, Judge Sutton asked:

"Reckon you're not twisted, Plunkett? Reckon you couldn't have flung Bagley down just 'fore he reached for thet gun?"

"Jest like I said, suh—flunged 'im when I fust went in thar."

The Judge glanced at the Sheriff, then shifted his eyes back to the swamper. "What Uncle Jake was tellin' us," he said, "after twelve hours. Lyin' old cuss rigged up a fib an', yes suh, he clung to it thet long after I drug him out of thet clothes-closet—said fust he was in the hall an' saw you shoot Bagley 'thout cause. 'Bout Bagley, though, he's sayin' you were after robbin' him."

Greb smiled a disgusted sort of smile. "So Marthy was a-tellin' me when I was eatin'," he said. "But I'm 'lowin' you suhs haint a-wantin' me to 'spute a thing like thet." He wondered if he should continue, guessed he might as well. "Robbin'd be doin' wrong by 'im," he went on, "an' I haint doin' wrong by no man yit. Go cl'ar back to when I was a young'n down in Lee County, an' you haint a-meetin' up with a man I done dirt to. Had trebble, yes suhs—bushels—trebbles I warn't a-helpin', nohow. Take my lockin' horns with thet feller Jim Simpson down thar, my fust scrape—tuk me when I war a young'n an' jest worked me f'r my keep.

"Good family war a-wantin' to 'dopt me when I got ten, but Simpson was up an' a-promisin' me some land an' a coupla head o' stock if I stayed thar with him tell I come of age. Come twenty-one, though, an' he backed out cold. He was a-beatin' me off'm thet place o' his'n with a steck o' stovewood when I killed 'im dead. Haint a-believin' hit, suhs, 'less you air a-mindin' to. But hit's God A'mighty's truth—same as what happened after the jury war a-freein' me for killin' Simpson. I crossed over into Manatte County an' went a-workin' at a sawmill. Believe me or no, warn't no time a-passin' hardly 'fore a crowd was a-stoppin' me at the gate, one knockin'-off time, an' a-tellin' me they warn't a-wantin' Jim Simpson's killer round thar. Recollect right, I said I figgered this hyeh world was my home same as t'other man's. More trebble then; when they was a-pouncin' on me, I begin shootin'. Hit's been thetaway all the time—one wad o' trebble jest leadin' up to 'nuther. Haint nev' shot a man in my life, suhs, 'less 'twas self-defense."

HE paused again. Would these men listen to one more thing, he wondered.

"Wantin' to say somethin' else, suhs, if you haint a-mindin'," he began. "Wont take more'n a minute."

"Reckon we're listenin'," the Judge replied. "Have your say."

"Hit's 'bout what come after a little trebble I had up in Suwanee County some 'leven-odd years ago," Greb told them. "Had to cl'ar out sudden-like. Jest tuk my hoss an' went a-hikin' down country." His voice was now only a whisper. "Was

ridin' round down thar, a-lookin' f'r work, when I happened on a little run-down place a young widder woman was a-rentin'—didn't have no hired man no more. He pecked up an' left her the fust time she warn't a-havin' no pay f'r 'im. Well, I 'lowed, somehow, I could best be helpin' her out f'r a spell. Took hold o' the place an' jest 'bout keeped us from starvin'—all anybody could be a-doin' with thet land, anyhow. I stayed thar two-three years, though—gittin' no pay nor wantin' none. Guess the doctor war a-gittin' all the coppers the pore woman could scrape up—seck all the time, puny-like an' yeller. Then come a night, after I been a-settin' up four nights straight with her, thet she got wuss'n ever. Knowed at a peek she was nigh seck to death. Knowed right, too. Jest 'fore she's a-takin' off, she squzz my hand, an' says t' me: 'Greb, I'm hearin' you air a killer, but I trest you; take Marthy—she's yourn f'r keeps.'"

He ceased speaking. . . . . Only the silence answered him.

"'Take her; she's yourn,' she says. 'She's yourn, Greb; take her.' Thet's what I done, too. An'—well, suhs, hyeh I am." He spread out his hands in a helpless sort of way. "Hyeh I am, suhs, hyeh I am," he murmured again, sinking into a chair.

YES, Judge Sutton agreed silently, here Greb was—the most battered and world-lashed mortal he'd ever seen brought to judgment. Still, he realized that this crushed-looking swamper was just another product of a time-worn story—orphaned in babyhood, bled for his hire when a child, and sent along into manhood with a broken spirit. And yet Plunkett had, despite this handicap, mended that spirit—welded it together, no doubt, with good resolutions.

Sutton decided, since Greb had shot Bagley in self-defense, that he wouldn't stand by idly and see this struggler go down without a chance; and that decision included a good many things. The Sheriff, for one thing, would give Greb's place, back on the bayou, sufficient protection. Bagley's course, though, regarding the shooting, was uncertain. He might be vindictive and foolish enough to resort to perjury in an effort to "railroad" Greb to prison—his sworn intention; and again, after the Judge had given him a "man-sized talking-to," he might discard all plans for revenge. But that was business for the morrow; now another matter was at hand.

"Lowery!" the Judge called, jerking his head toward the door. "Wantin' a little talk with you, suh."

They crossed the clearing and stopped on the fringe of the woods; and the Judge, propping his foot on a stump, began talking. The two remained there, in discussion, for twenty-five or thirty minutes. Then the Sheriff, obeying Sutton, mounted his horse and rode away.

The Judge reëntered the cabin at once and scrawled a note on the back of a pocket-worn envelope. With this note he stepped over to Greb.

"'Lowin', Plunkett," he began, "as how thar might be times when gifts are not fittin'—whether of the pocketbook or of the heart; but no time on earth, suh, is the sperrit of good will ever barred. You gave it to this young girl when you took her; and now, suh, on her behalf, I pass it back to you." He handed the note to Greb. "Put it whar you're not losin' it," he cautioned, then went on: "You an' Miss Marthy go straight back of this hyeh place till you're comin' to the Culver forks; then take the left-hand road—the old mill road. 'Long 'bout daylight you'll be reachin' a little red cotton-gin on one side of the road an' a big white house on the other. Go up to that house an' give that note to my son, Frank Sutton; the note'll introduce you. 'Bout the rest, Lowery's on his way thar now to explain it to Frank. An' don't be worryin', Plunkett; I'll be bringin' you back when it's time." He wondered if he had forgotten anything. "Guess that's 'bout all, suh. Best be gittin' 'long now," he advised, offering his hand to Greb.

The swamper looked at him in incredulous dismay, then down at his hand, then at his face again.

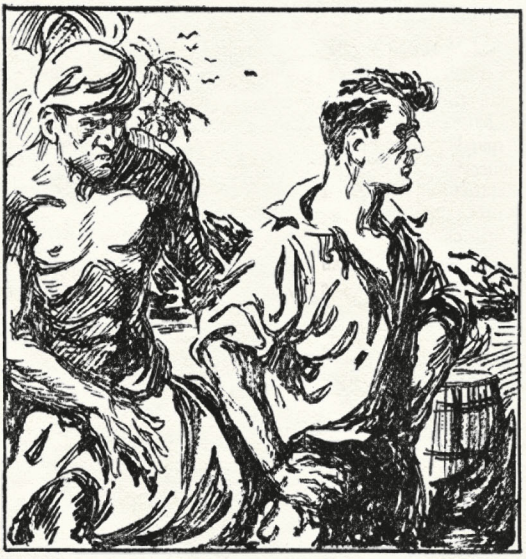
"My hand, suh," the Judge reminded. "You're not wantin' it?"

Greb seized it, gave it a grip of iron.

"Want hit! Want hit!" he exclaimed. "Why, suh, I been a-waitin' nigh sixty years f'r this—a man's hand in *mine*."

Later on, the lumbering cart again jostled over the roots in the wheel-ruts, with Martha and Greb sitting on it side by side. The moon filtered through the boughs overhead and cast on the road a checkered tracery of dancing foliage. And Spanish moss, drooping from outreaching limbs, brushed Greb's cheek in a caressing sort of way. . . . . Peace descended on the swamp, such a peace as had come into the hearts of the man and the girl.

That daring adventurer Trenchard whose exciting fortunes you followed in last month's success "Madagascar Gold" is also the central figure in this new story of sudden hazard and swift action in far ports and seas. And you'll find this sequel even more interesting than its predecessor.



The BARREN

A complete novelette by

CHAPTER I

GRENILLE leaned forward across the café table, watching a party coming to the table that stood at Trenchard's back. Then he looked at Trenchard, suddenly tense and alert.

"You said," he breathed, "that only one man in Madagascar knew you by sight—the same who furnished your description to the authorities."

Trenchard, who was lighting his pipe, nodded carelessly.

"Yes—Lieutenant Brouillan, port officer at Nosi Bé. No danger from him here in the capital."

"Then don't turn around, or you're a dead man. He's just sitting down at the table behind you."

Trenchard calmly finished lighting his pipe. He sat motionless, watching his companion; Grenille, in turn, watched the two men who had just come in and were seating themselves just behind Trenchard at the adjoining table.

One was a colonel of infantry, a tall and dignified officer. The other man was slender, lithe, uniformed as a naval lieutenant, sitting with his shoulders not two feet from those of Trenchard.

"This is a lucky meeting, my nephew," said the colonel, relaxing in his seat after giving his order. "What the devil brings you to the capital? I thought you a fixture in Nosi Bé, in that charming place of yours in Hellville."

"Ten thousand francs, a month's leave, and a detached command," said a penetrating voice, that of Lieutenant Brouillan. "In other words, I am about to become moderately wealthy, get my captaincy, and achieve fame."

"Good! Give me your magic formula, by all means! How shall you do all this, pray?"

"By hanging the pirate Trenchard."

At this, Trenchard's brows went up. Grenille, now over his first alarm, pawed his black beard and began to grin.

"Ah, yes!" said the colonel, laughing. "I remember, you have seen and know him. Well, he is said to be a brave man. I warn you, he has sharp teeth!"

"But I have brains," said Brouillan complacently.

Trenchard chuckled at that.

"The Brazen Peacock," "Cactus and Rattlers," "The Second Life of M. the Devil" and many other fine stories have well demonstrated Mr. Bedford-Jones' extraordinary gift for fast-moving fiction. But never have his talents showed to more enjoyable advantage than in this absorbing novelette.

ISLANDS

H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE night was clear, warm but fresh, and this capital of Madagascar, whose unwieldy name had been shortened to Tananarive, lay bathed in the glorious splendor of a tropic moon. From the café terrace, by day, one had a marvelous view of the city on its two steep hill-slopes, and of the surrounding hills and rice-plains for full fifty miles; but now, by night, all was changed. Up above, the church spires and glass palace roof glimmered in the moonlight, and below lay a city of fairy-land, its up-and-down streets jeweled and radiant with electric clusters, tinkling with rickshaw bells, while now and again the strident siren of a motor pierced harshly across the night.

"Very pleasant weather we are having, my dear M. Argenteuil," observed Grenille smoothly.

"Very," repeated Trenchard, who bore perfectly good papers and identity-card under that French name. None would have suspected him of being the famous pirate and smuggler, worth ten thousand francs dead or alive, whom few knew by sight but all by repute. The infamous pirate would never come inland to Tananarive, in the very center of Madagascar; and then this M. Argenteuil was a slim, quiet, small man, his level gray eyes inoffensive, always calmly poised, his features bronzed, but neat and attractive in cut. Anything but a pirate, certainly!

"He will not be easy prey, this Trenchard," observed the dignified colonel thoughtfully. "When you trap him, your troubles only begin. And remember, he is not a pirate as we know the word—that is, in the sight of international law. You have a plan?"

"I have made all arrangements," returned Brouillan in an assured voice. Trenchard shot a smoke-ring at Grenille, who chuckled in response; but to their disappointment no details were forthcoming. "Not a pirate, you say? Nonsense! He is a smuggler, an enemy to society, a man who disregards all law; and he has a weak point—his devotion to that sailing schooner of his! He respects nothing, does not hesitate to sink a ship or fire on our soldiers, yet sticks to his old-fashioned schooner. That will ruin him."

"Well, well,"—and the colonel sighed,—"here is the *apéritif*, and we shall drink to

your success and wealth. You are to command a ship?"

"But yes—the *Tonkin*. I am to correct the charts of the Barren Islands, on the west coast. Also, my pursuit lies in that direction. Trenchard's ship is at Zanzibar now, somewhat damaged from his last month's escapade on the northeast coast."

Trenchard's lips curved in their faint, inscrutable smile. His schooner at Zanzibar, indeed! He had carefully planted that report. True, he was not in conflict with British interests, and Zanzibar was a refuge for him, since he was no pirate according to international law; at the same time, Brouillan would have whistled had he known just where the schooner lay at the present moment.

"If I were you," said Trenchard, leaning over the table, "I'd get out of here. You have to see your man and arrange about that cargo. I don't dare leave yet—besides, that rubber-broker of yours will be along any time now. Do you suppose he's connected with this petty schemer?"

Grenille shook his head a trifle anxiously. He was a fiery little Frenchman, usually a reckless and carefree man, though walking in dangerous paths.

"It is impossible to say," he responded. "I am sorry now that I introduced him to you. And I do not like leaving you here."

HE fingered his black beard, for he was true to his friends, and one word might ruin Trenchard, who was persona non grata to the French authorities. Trenchard, that inscrutable and quiet man, had queer notions about laws, and would sooner help some poor downtrodden devil than kowtow to port authorities. Not so long since he had been nearly trapped; bullets had flown, and Trenchard had caught one of them. So, with his usual audacity, he came to the capital to recuperate.

"Don't worry," said Trenchard. "Besides, you must book our seats in the Government mail-auto. If we don't get out tomorrow morning, we're stuck for another three days, and now it's time we got out. I'll meet you later at the hotel."

With a resigned shrug, Grenille obediently rose. He had influential relatives in Paris and did not fear for himself so much as for Trenchard. Since there was need of action, he drew his hat over his eyes and sauntered away.

Trenchard mouthed his pipe, wondering what sort of scheme this Lieutenant Brouillan had cooked up for his undoing, but failed to catch any further words on the subject from the table adjoining. The waiter came bustling around. Trenchard beckoned and handed him a purple five-franc note, then waved him off with a gesture, sure of keeping his table.

Ten minutes afterward a portly man approached and greeted Trenchard with a bow. This was a rubber-broker to whom Grenille had introduced him, and who had business to discuss. The broker sat down, glanced around, and then spoke.

"Well, M. Argenteuil! We may talk here?"

"As well as anywhere."

"I understand, then, that you are acting as agent for a certain gentleman whose name we may not mention."

Trenchard nodded, and jerked his thumb toward the table behind. The rubber-broker made a gesture of comprehension, and kept his voice down.

"And if any bargain is made with you, this other gentleman will perform his part?"

Another nod from Trenchard, who was relieved to find that the broker did not suspect his actual identity with the gentleman who could not be named. The broker ordered a drink, and then lighted a cigarette and thrust himself over the table.

"Here is the case, monsieur. I am acquainted with two men who are willing to pay large sums to get out of Madagascar and reach the mainland—either Mozambique or Zanzibar or Mombasa. For reasons which we need not discuss, they are unable to leave by the usual channels; every port is being watched for them."

Again Trenchard nodded. "Who are they?" he demanded curtly.

"One is an American named Berry, the other a Frenchman, Emile Forillon."

Trenchard compressed his lips. He had heard of Berry—a rubber-plantation manager in the south, guilty of a particularly atrocious murder.

"We need not discuss Berry," he said. "My principal does not care for his class of criminals—"

"But monsieur! Your principal is also an American. This man will pay heavily—"

"Appeal denied," was the curt response. "Let the scoundrel hang. Who's the other man?"

"Forillon? Ah, that is a sad case! The

man had a post in the Administration Bureau. His wife ran away with a superior. Forillon threatened revenge, and was arrested on a trumped-up charge of smuggling, and sentenced to a penal colony. He broke out of jail, and is in hiding on the west coast. Some friends have supplied him with money, so that he can pay—"

Trenchard made a gesture. "Can he be at the Arab village of Soalala, in Boyanna Bay, within five days?"

"Yes."

"Let him be there next Tuesday and he will be taken care of. No money necessary; my principal does not accept money for helping unfortunate men."

TRENCHARD cocked his head slightly, listening. The two officers at the adjoining table were ordering a regular meal. He frowned, then spoke.

"Monsieur, you can do me a service. I am about to leave. Kindly follow me very closely, as far as the door; I do not wish to be seen by a certain person."

The broker assented. Trenchard laid out coins to pay for the drinks, then rose. A moment later he was past the adjoining table and heading for the entrance, the broker close behind and shielding him with portly figure from any chance recognition by Brouillan. At the entrance Trenchard exchanged farewells with the broker, went out, and beckoned a rickshaw.

In fifteen minutes he was at the quiet little hotel, down past the center of the lower city and almost in the shadow of the magnificent railway terminus, with its gardens and avenues of Australian pines. Once in their room, where he found Grenille smoking alone and anxiously, Trenchard sat down and recounted his talk with the broker.

"I'll lend this chap Forillon a hand gladly," he said, "for he's a victim of this cursed bureaucrat government. But it occurred to me that the chap might be a plant. You'd know if there has been any such case, of course."

Grenille assented at once. "Yes; the exact circumstances are vague, but it's been in the journals to some extent. Forillon was put under arrest for smuggling, broke jail, and seems to have evaded capture."

"Then that's all right," said Trenchard, and relaxed. "Seats booked?"

"Yes. The auto leaves early, too."

"The sooner the better," grunted Trenchard. "Wont you change your mind and come along to sea?"

Grenille shook his head. "I'm going to have another try at that gold prospect in the north. I'll see you as far as Maevatanana and make sure you get off all right. The cargo is all arranged; a *dhow* will bring up the stuff from the south and will meet you at the Barren Islands—at the anchorage a mile north of Lava Island. It's the only possible place."

"What date?" demanded Trenchard, frowning slightly.

"A week from Friday."

"Can do. I'm to pick up this beggar Forillon on Tuesday, at Boyanna Bay—I can get down the coast all right by Friday, this monsoon. Everything's clear. Now, then, do you imagine that your cargo proposition could be tangled up in our friend Brouillan's little plot? He mentioned that he'd be doing some charting along the Barren Islands, you know. It looks a bit thick."

Grenille frowned. "My friend, this is a cursed coincidence—but no more. First, the *dhow* and cargo belong to old Ali el Khadar, who hates the government as the devil hates holy water; I answer for his integrity absolutely, and for that of his son whom I met tonight. He is the biggest Arab trader in the south. The son is getting a wireless off to Ali in the morning, and so, without mentioning your presence here I told him that I had overheard Brouillan, and he promised to inform the old chap. Ali will send you any information by the *dhow* that he can pick up. Also, the son said that he'd get off a wireless to his agent in Majunga, who in turn will inform Ali in the south if he learns anything. Thus, if these Arabs pick up some news, you'll get it. Now, if you're afraid to go near the Barrens, I'd better see the son again tonight and call off the deal—"

"No," said Trenchard. "If you answer for Ali el Khadar, that's enough. Let's turn in and get a good night's rest, eh? Right."

CHAPTER II

BARRING three English missionaries, a number of west-coast chiefs returning from the capital, and two officers from a visiting cruiser also returning, Grenille and Trenchard had the big charabanc to themselves the following day. It was a mad

trip—a perfect macadamized road, stretching down-grade for two hundred and fifty miles, the throttle wide open and the huge car thundering along regardless of all traffic. Was not the Government mail-stage more than any private citizen? Also, the driver wanted to compress the journey into one day, having a lady to meet at the end of the run. So what would take two full days up-grade, took one day down-grade; and only the missionaries, who felt certain the driver was drunk, failed to enjoy themselves. Every time the car roared through one of the deep cuts or plunged headlong down a bit of steep road, they waxed indignant. When the party finally staggered into the hotel at Maevatanana, it was only an hour after sunset.

Next morning Trenchard stepped aboard the flat-bottomed, puffy little river steamer and said good-by to Grenille. In the past month he had depended much upon the Frenchman, and a firm friendship had grown up between them. As they stood together by the gangplank, Grenille turned with a low word.

"My friend, if I have luck this trip, I am through with Madagascar—and I shall have some gold to sneak away with. Where can we meet?"

"How long will you be up in the hills?"

"Possibly a month at the outside."

"Then say a month from today, at Port Choiseul on the east coast. In the afternoon."

"Done," said Grenille. "You're off—good luck!"

"Same to you."

So they parted, each knowing that the other man, if alive, would keep the rendezvous. The chances were against either; for Grenille, while not a hunted man, was playing a risky game in going after native gold. Trenchard looked back once as the steamer puffed out into the stream and waved his hand; then he faced the northwest and the future, alone. Two days down the Betsiboka would land him at Majunga, the most important harbor of the island, and the odds were even that he would step ashore to face arrest and a firing-squad.

WITHIN five minutes Trenchard, while making his way aft, came face to face with a Hindu merchant from Majunga, who knew him well. The Hindu gave him a blank stare and passed by; Trenchard went on his way, a glow in his heart, and secured a deck-chair beneath the stern awning. This little incident lifted his spirits amazingly and served as an antidote to the parting with Grenille. For a moment he had felt lonely, and smiled a little at the realization. After all, there were men who trusted him, who held his regard as worth more than ten thousand francs in blood-money—natives, Arabs, Hindus, Chinese, merchants up and down the French and mainland coasts. He thought of Lieutenant Brouillan, who talked of his little plots and schemes, and almost laughed.

The trip was uneventful. Trenchard, after his month of rest and recuperation, fully recovered from the bullet which had smashed his ribs, felt a growing impatience to be standing out to sea with the schooner leaning to the freshening salt wind. That bullet had paid him well, but he did not reckon payment in dollars. He was in the game for love of the game itself. At the present moment he did not even know—nor did Grenille—just what game he was playing with Ali el Khadar. The old Arab undoubtedly had something to smuggle out of French hands, but Trenchard had asked no questions. He seldom did ask questions, for that matter.

NOW, as he smoked his pipe and watched the hilly country around, watched the boatman shoving the little steamer off eternal sandbanks, watched the stretches of grassy plain when the river meandered in wide curves, he was glad to feel that in a few more hours he would be in the game once more. Of Brouillan or the latter's schemes he hardly thought—time enough for that when the time came. He was carefully figuring out each move to be made in taking off the man Forillon. Boyanna Bay, where he was to pick up the fugitive, was only a few miles along the coast southwest of Majunga; it was a large and shallow bay containing only Malagasy or Arab villages. To slip in there and out again would be a simple matter, and then on down to the Barren Islands.

"Altogether too simple," thought Trenchard, watching the two naval officers get out rifles and go to work potting crocodiles. "There's evidently a cruiser at Majunga, while Brouillan's tinpot chartership *Tonkin* may be there as well—no telling. I don't think I'll take chances with the schooner. I'll go get Forillon myself."

That was typical of Trenchard.

HE said few words to anyone aboard, playing his rôle of a phlegmatic Norman to perfection, and did not even see the Hindu trader from Majunga until, on the second day, the mangrove swamps of the river delta came into sight. Then he deliberately went in search of the Hindu, and found the latter among other brown men on the foredeck. Trenchard made a gesture, and the Hindu joined him at the rail of the starboard passage.

"Tonight," said Trenchard without preamble, "I shall be at the Hotel Paris. Tomorrow I go to Soalala, where I know no one. I want to get in touch with some one there who can be trusted and who knows everyone."

"Good, sahib," said the Hindu quietly. "The son of my father's brother is in business in Soalala, and knows all those infidel Arabs. He is Ram Das Bhantjee. Say that I sent you to him in the name of Vishnu the blessed."

"Thank you," said Trenchard, and went aft again.

An hour before sunset the little steamer was puffing across Bembatoke Bay toward the wharves inside the long white Pointe de Sable. For a mile or so Majunga ran along the shore, beautiful with its mosques and Hindu houses, a deep green park behind these where gigantic baobabs and mangoes flourished, and cresting the hill above, the large white *colombier* or military pigeonry, with its conspicuous bell-tower. It was not at these things that Trenchard gazed, however. He had already noted the Messageries liner and the big cruiser at anchor in the outer road; now he inspected the long wharves ahead, between the iron pier and the jetty, where Arab *dhows,* bullockers and coasting steamers were loading or unloading. Here hinged his fate, and as the river steamer whistled shrilly at the lighters, his gray eyes searched out that upon which hung life or death.

Presently he found her, tied up alongside the wharf. For an instant his heart stood still; the schooner lying there appeared deserted. Had she been recognized and seized, then? Impossible! Even to his eye, she looked unnaturally in her disguise. Then he perceived that she was not deserted after all—water-casks were going aboard. He drew a deep breath of relief.

A man more impatient, less master of himself, might yet have ruined everything; but not John Trenchard. He turned away, watched the town ahead, listened to the bells clanging below, waited by the open gangway as the little boat banged in at the wharf and lines were flung. Then he was out and ashore with his bag, and beckoning a rickshaw.

"Hotel Paris."

He rode on through the town—a Hindu and Arab town with its arched windows and doors, its lintels and door-posts elaborately carved in Bombay and brought here for installation, its throngs of stately Arabs and bustling Hindus. Now from a mosque minaret was droning forth the call to afternoon prayer, and as Trenchard turned into the little Greek hotel, he heard behind him the rising buzz of voices clamoring out that first sura of the Koran.

IN five minutes he had secured his room for the night. Then, lighting his pipe, he left the hotel and walked toward the wharves again. He sauntered along in leisurely fashion. Now and again he saw men who knew him—one or two Arab traders, a Hindu, two brown Sakalava fishermen who had once guided his schooner through the intricate Anakao shoals away from an irate customs launch. None of them spoke to him or seemed to see him. Trenchard loafed along, pipe in mouth, and presently approached his schooner.

Despite his self-control, he sighed a little at sight of her, for now she was a filthy native coaster, topmasts down and stowed below, her decks strewed and littered, lines hanging in sloven fashion, ropes half-coiled and disorderly, canvas tattered and patched. In her bows perched a huge Arab coral-anchor, of hollow wood filled with stones, that would have disgraced the sorriest *dhow.* Her crew of a dozen laughing Malagasy seamen were taking water-casks aboard and stowing them anywhere, a sous-officer of the port keeping tally. Loafing on the wharf beside a towering pile of fowl-crates, smoking and flinging an occasional order to the men, was the mate Yusuf, now in command.

Trenchard glanced at the bows of the schooner, saw the eyes painted there, Arab style, and paused beside Yusuf, who ignored his presence. Trenchard did not miss the men, some in uniform and some not, who were scattered all along the wharves, keeping an eye on things; they might be watching for escaped criminals such as Berry or Forillon, they might be alert to anything of a suspicious nature.

"Where are you bound for?" asked Trenchard, taking the pipe from his mouth. Yusuf turned and gave him an insolent stare. He was tall, a half-naked, pock-marked coast Arab, absolutely fearless and knowing every inch of the Madagascar coasts as few men knew them. These two men, one white, one brown, when at sea were as one man, in whose hands the schooner was invincible.

"South to Maintirano," said Yusuf, then flung a sharp order at his men, ignoring Trenchard.

"Tuesday night," said the latter in rapid Swahili, "off Boyanna Bay. Inside the Vigilant Bank, twenty-two hours. I'll show a light. Dangerous."

"Ma'ashallah!" Yusuf whirled on him with strident scorn. "God forbid that I should gossip with infidels when I have work to do!"

TRENCHARD shrugged and turned away. These two men understood each other perfectly, so that, between them, words were often needless. Yusuf knew that Trenchard would be waiting, at ten o'clock Tuesday night, inside the long Vigilant coral reef which ran out from Boyanna Bay. Trenchard knew that the schooner would be there to pick him up if Yusuf were alive. As this was Monday evening, both men had no time to lose.

In the red sunset, Trenchard cut across town, entered the park, and amid a towering aisle of mango trees climbed up the hill to the Malagasy town at the crest. There he paused, looking out to where the tall chimneys of the slaughterhouse and refrigerating plant belched smoke into the sky; then he went on past the *colombier* and entered the native town. In ten minutes he came to the shop of a Sakalava whom he knew, and paused before the open front. This man had made a fortune in cattle during the war, yet still kept up his business of selling silk-and-rafia goods. He looked up at Trenchard and nodded slightly.

"Here!" Trenchard passed him a note. "I want to cross the bay tomorrow morning at sunrise. A two-man rickshaw must be waiting to get me to Soalala early in the afternoon."

The Sakalava nodded assent and clawed at the bank-note. Trenchard turned and departed, passed down the hill again, and went to his dinner in the little hotel. So far, all was well.

MORNING saw M. Argenteuil breakfasting at dawn, satisfying a curious constabulary officer at the boat-landing, and on his way across the five-mile bay in a long fisherman's canoe whose outrigger flashed gold and silver in the sunrise. No wireless messages had arrived; therefore Ali el Khadra and his agents had learned nothing of Brouillan's schemes. Trenchard was inclined to make light of the latter. In the fresh salt air of morning his spirits were high; this was his last day under the assumed name; by next dawn he would be treading his own deck again, and once among the poorly charted coast reefs he could laugh at any pursuing gunboat. True, a calm would have him at a disadvantage, but even the tricky Mozambique Channel had a regular routine of weather in June; and the coast to the south, probably the least known portion of the entire world as regarded its dangers of reef and weather, was as the palms of their hands to Trenchard and his mate Yusuf. From early morning to ten o'clock, a land breeze, and from three to six in the afternoon a sea breeze, and at other times probable calms; but out in the channel proper calms would be almost unknown while the monsoon blew.

The brown Sakalava paddlers chanted a lively tune, drove their paddles hard, brought the big canoe up to the muddy landing inside Maroloha Point. Trenchard and his bag were set ashore, and found one of the new type of hill-road rickshaws waiting. This *tokandia,* so named after the mythical one-legged animal of the island, had one wheel, with a comfortable seat over it on heavy springs, and a man took the poles at either end, balancing and propelling it. Trenchard got settled, and was off.

West went the long, splendid road, always westward, past the glittering Makambi Inlet and on into the reddish hills, past Malagasy villages, past uplands studded with grazing humped island cattle, past rivers and coastal inlets where men and vehicles were ferried across. It was a glorious morning's ride, and Trenchard, knowing himself absolutely safe for once, relaxed and enjoyed every minute of it.

A laugh of happiness came into his throat at thought of the precision and fidelity with which he was served by these brown conquered men of Madagascar. A word from any of them would have been worth ten thousand francs; yet here he came and

went his devious errands among the men who hunted him, and was unseen. There was something mystic and wonderful about it all; it put a glow into him. If treachery came to undo him, it would not come from these stalwart brown men.

So at last, after stopping at a village for a noonday meal of partridge and roast pumpkin, they came across the tree-scattered uplands at Boyanna Bay, and swept down the curving shore, past villages and high red cliffs, to the little town of Soalala at the head of the bay. Here a few coral-stone houses testified to the omnipresent Hindu merchants; *godowns* and cattle sheds crowded the waterfront; *dhows* were being laden with bullocks and meat; but Trenchard looked up the bay to where, two miles away, a long shape lay rolling and spouting forth a tiny stream of smoke. A gunboat, lying at the six-fathom anchorage—but why? Gunboats seldom came here. Had Forillon been captured—had the fugitive "squealed?" No, for none of the old tinpot's boats lay off the village.

TRENCHARD climbed out of the rickshaw in front of the bazar of Ram Das Bhantjee, a very decent little shop where European goods were sold. Having previously instructed his two men about having a boat ready for him that night, he paid them and turned into the shop, without regard to the curious crowd gathering to see the white man. A sedate, white-turbaned Hindu came forward and greeted him, proving to be Ram Das in person.

"I am sent to you by your cousin in Majunga," said Trenchard.

"With what message, sahib?"

"In the name of Vishnu the blessed."

The Hindu salaamed, then led Trenchard through to a back room very comfortably fitted. The message was obviously a password, for when the door was closed, Ram Das smiled and spoke.

"Sahib, you are in safety here. Your desires?"

Trenchard took possession of a comfortable divan and lighted his pipe.

"First, about that gunboat out in the bay. What's she here for?"

"She came yesterday, sahib, and sent ashore inspectors to look at the cattle going to the Comoro Islands in those *dhows*. They finished their work this morning and went aboard her. She is leaving today or tomorrow."

Trenchard frowned, hesitated. Sight of that gunboat had unsteadied him. This Hindu did not know his name, there was no reason to suspect anything amiss, and yet he had instinctive certainty that somehow he had put his foot into a trap—not here under this roof, but in Soalala.

"Tonight," he said slowly, "I am going away in a boat; it is arranged for, when darkness falls. There is a white man here whom I am to take away with me. His name is Forillon, and he is in hiding. Have you any news of him?"

Ram Das dissented. "None, sahib. If it is your pleasure, I will inquire. You wish to see him?"

"Yes. If possible, have him brought here just at dark; but," added Trenchard cautiously, "do not let him know before then that I am here."

Ram Das, perfectly comprehending this strategy, flashed a smile, and disappeared. Half an hour later he returned with word that Forillon was sheltered in the house of a half-caste cattle-merchant, and that he would attend to bringing the man at dark. Satisfied that all was right after all, Trenchard removed his boots and stretched out for a siesta.

It was late when he wakened. Soon after, Ram Das appeared with food and excellent coffee, and Trenchard dined well. The gunboat, he learned, still lay at her anchor and would not leave until next morning; she had sent no more boats ashore. Trenchard, forcing himself to stifle his objectionable instinct, decided that her presence here was only a bit of bad luck, which need have no effect on his own plans—unless something went wrong. Ram Das proved to have a chart of the bay, produced it, and Trenchard pored over the sheet.

The bay opened due north, was about ten miles long, and four wide. Only a narrow track in the center was suitable for the gunboat, however; most of the bay consisted of coral reefs, mud-banks or shoals. The east head was composed of high red and white cliffs which ran back into mangrove swamp, but it was with the western side that Trenchard was concerned. This was all high forested hills, coming down in abrupt cliffs to the water, and these cliffs ran out to the square end of Bararata Point. For three miles to the east of this point, curving in across the harbor mouth, ran the Vigilant Bank—a wide coral shoal of erratic and varying depth.

Off this point there was nearly always a breeze, even during the period of usual coastal calms. Therefore Trenchard had no great fear of the schooner running into trouble. He could not rid himself of the thought that the gunboat might be here awaiting her; yet, since the fugitive Forillon was at liberty, this hypothesis could not be entertained.

"I must be getting nerves," he thought disgustedly. "Too much land-breeze, not enough salt air! The only danger might come from the gunboat leaving harbor tonight, but she'll not do that. Six fathom is the least she can dare tackle about here, and she wont take chances on running the channel at night—these French chaps don't do such things. Yusuf is certain to circle out to sea and then come straight in to pick me up, too, so she wont be sighted by the gunboat. All's safe."

The sun was gone behind the wooded hills across the bay, and Ram Das came in for a moment, to say that he had summoned Forillon. Trenchard nodded. If the Hindu suspected the identity of his visitor, as perhaps he did—since Trenchard was famous up and down the coasts for smuggling goods and men out of French hands—he made no comment.

Twenty minutes later, Forillon entered the room.

CHAPTER III

TRENCHARD had had more or less experience with native leaders or white men escaping from Latin authority along the east coast of Africa. He did not, by a good deal, set himself up to be any philanthropic assistant to fugitives; yet he had been more or less thrust into that very position, owing to his peculiar notions of justice as opposed to law, and to his readiness to lend the under dog a helping hand. This somewhat accounted for the wild hostility with which French and Portuguese regarded both him and his nameless, elusive schooner.

"Your name?" he asked quietly.

"Emile Forillon, monsieur," answered the man.

"I suppose you realize," said Trenchard, holding a match to his pipe, but regarding Forillon from beneath his lowered lids, "I suppose you realize that the prosperity and freedom, if not the actual lives, of the men who are helping you and me—men such as Ram Das Bhantjee—are dependent on your future silence. In other words, that they trust your fidelity."

"Yes," said the other, his eyes widening slightly at this speech.

"My name's Trenchard."

Forillon made no response.

He was a thick-set but extremely wiry man, not over thirty, and he certainly looked his part, having a stubble of reddish beard, ragged garments and much dirt. His features expressed a certain stubborn tenacity, the undershot jaw looking as though it were double-bitted; the full and deep voice indicated a high-roofed singer's mouth, and each word was shot out with an intensity which showed that the man had deep strength of character. His sun-reddened face was that of an indoor man. His eyes were intelligent, striking, of a deep and vivid blue. The hands which gripped his wide straw hat were large and powerful; the square shoulders and posture of his body indicated military service. So Trenchard summed him up, and knew that he had to deal with a man of uncommon character and intelligence.

"If I were a *chef de bureau,*" said Trenchard, "I should not pick such a man as you to ensnare in false accusations."

Forillon shrugged and smiled, showing white and even teeth, well cared for.

"What is done, is done, monsieur," he said. "I must express my most grateful homage for what assistance you are giving me; and since I have money in plenty—"

"Keep it," said Trenchard. "You'll need it more than I do, and there are some things for which I don't take pay. Sit down and be comfortable. Smoke."

Forillon looked astonished at the refusal of his money. He sat down, produced a pink packet of Oran cigarettes, and lighted one. Trenchard glanced through the high window, saw that darkness was rapidly falling, and tamped at his pipe as he spoke.

"You realize," he said, "that accidents may happen."

"But yes." Forillon shrugged. "The presence of that gunboat in the bay makes one nervous, Captain Trenchard."

"What boat is she?"

"The *Sagittaire.*"

"Obsolete," murmured Trenchard. "One six-inch gun, four four-inch, a battery of three-pounders. Four fathom draft, which means that she wont venture in less than

six. Collard, her commander, is a cautious old woman. She can do only six knots, and that with effort."

Forillon's eyes opened. "My faith! You have information."

"That is my business. I believe in living." Trenchard's inscrutable smile touched his lips. "You have no effects, no luggage?"

"None. I suppose we cannot leave until the gunboat departs, eh?" Forillon spoke carelessly, but his fingers were gripping the cigarette very hard. "How and when do we reach your schooner?"

"Here and now," said Trenchard. "We shall leave in five minutes."

Forillon jerked his head slightly. His deep blue eyes fastened upon Trenchard, who read a flicker of alarm, of dismayed consternation, in their depths.

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible?" asked Trenchard, suddenly alert. The other hesitated, licked his lips, lifted his cigarette and puffed at it.

"I have—I must see the man who sheltered me. I must pay him."

"I shall have it attended to. Give me the money."

Forillon darted a glance around, then put a hand into his pocket and drew out a sheaf of notes. He counted out three hundred francs and gave them to Trenchard, who struck a gong on the table. The door opened, and Ram Das entered. Trenchard extended the money.

"Have this given to the man who has sheltered M. Forillon. How much do I owe you?"

Ram Das salaamed. "Sahib, he who sent you here would not be pleased if I accepted money from his guest."

Trenchard rose. "Very well. For the hospitality, I thank you. Come along, Forillon."

They passed out. Ram Das let them into the street, and Trenchard started for the shore. The stars were glimmering; darkness was stealing over the land, although the bay was still faintly luminous. Trenchard put his hand under his shirt, where an automatic was slung. He looked down the bay to where the lights of the gunboat glittered, then glanced at the sky. There would be no moon for an hour at least. Everything looked like plain sailing.

Uneasiness was upon him, none the less. The very peace and calm of the night seemed to hold a nameless and indefinable menace for which he could not account. Beneath his outwardly calm demeanor, Trenchard was a nervous organism, and more than once had been saved by yielding to the vague warning of a telepathic or sixth sense. Now it came to him insistently that there was danger to him from this man who trod at his side, whose very walk expressed a strong and stubborn character.

THIS thought Trenchard put resolutely aside, having already weighed the possibility. Forillon, who faced a penal colony if caught, could not gain freedom by betraying Trenchard; from the very nature of the case this was impossible, even though the manner of the man had been a trifle queer. Still, men were apt to be queer when so circumstanced. It was not at all impossible, on the other hand, that the rubber-broker had given away the whole game to the authorities. In such an event the gunboat might be letting Forillon alone as a bait to catch Trenchard, might be waiting and watching for the schooner to show up, might be lying with steam up in order to act at a moment's notice. Such a possibility did not worry Trenchard in the least.

The two men were treading the sand to the left of the village, where the channel of a small creek broke through the circling sand-banks and afforded passage for fishing boats. On the beach these lay drawn up—boats from twenty to fifty feet in length, with curved ends. The eight-inch planks were tied together with twisted cords of anivona fiber, the seams being calked with strips of bamboo, and the thwarts protruded through the sides, Delagoa Bay fashion, to stiffen the construction. As the two white men approached, four natives rose and greeted them. Trenchard gave them quiet instructions.

"You have the lantern? Good. Strike across the bay, and when you get in under the cliffs go straight out to Bararata Point. Keep as far away from the gunboat as you can. No noise."

The stalwart Sakalava fishermen grinned in perfect comprehension, and ran out a small twenty-footer. Trenchard and Forillon were placed amidships, a small lantern with hooded sides and a sliding sector being given Trenchard. The boat was shoved off, the paddles dipped, and next minute the craft was heading for the dim lights of Bali, on the opposite shore.

After a mile of paddling, the boat turned,

scraped across a sandy bar, and drove north into the long reach of the bay. Save for the stern paddle, the others were now abandoned, and a sail was run up on the low mast to catch the fitful breeze. The boat was sent slipping through the water at a good rate, and once past the Bali cliffs, the breeze strengthened. They passed the gunboat, whose lights showed stationary, at a mile. All this while Forillon had not spoken, but now he leaned forward.

"Safe to smoke?" he inquired.

"Aye, if you keep down under the gunnel," said Trenchard.

Forillon squatted down in the bottom of the craft. He passed his cigarettes to Trenchard, who refused them, then took one and got out his box of matches. He scraped one; it fizzled and died, as Forillon held his coat about it to conceal the light. He scraped a second. The match broke in his fingers, and the flaming end whirled up into the air above his head, falling hissing into the water.

AN exclamation burst from the fishermen. Forillon cursed and flung the whole box of matches overboard, the cigarette after them. Trenchard said nothing, but eyed the gunboat and to himself damned his carelessness in giving the man permission to smoke.

"Curse the luck! I'm sorry," said Forillon.

"You may be sorrier," said Trenchard. "Down! Out of sight! Get that sail in!"

His eye had caught a movement of lights aboard the gunboat. The Sakalavas had not waited for this, but as the little flame whirled through the air had headed the boat in for shore. The tide was down, and an exposed sandbank jutted out into the bay, behind it a long curving shoal. The four paddles flashed; the sail dropped; and in two minutes the boat was flashing in past the tip of the sandbank, which now lay between her and the gunboat.

Here she waited. Then, without warning, a finger of light reached out from the gunboat as she began to sweep the shore with her small searchlight. White and brown men kept low in the boat.

"You've done it," said Trenchard. "She saw the light. Keeping good watch, eh?"

After playing up and down, the finger of light vanished. The Sakalavas dipped their paddles, hoisted the sail, and sent the boat driving across a mile-wide shallow bight for another sandy spit. Just before they reached it, the searchlight broke out again, but failed to pick them up.

"She's moving," said Trenchard. "Still, she's two miles away—go ahead!"

They gained the shelter of the sandspit, lowered the sail, and the four men leaned on their paddles. The searchlight wavered over them, passed on, then drew back and began to search the shores behind them. Again the sail went up, this time to stay. Looking back, Trenchard saw that the gunboat was coming out. She would come slowly, however.

"Ah!" The word broke from him, as her lights vanished. Now he knew for certain that she was here to catch him, that she had been awaiting his schooner. So, then, the whole game had been betrayed! The rubber-broker had played double! Thinking that the schooner would run in to pick up Forillon, the gunboat had waited to catch her—and was now going out to get her as she came, sneaking out with all lights doused.

"Old Collard might do something, if he wasn't such an old woman," said Trenchard quietly. "But he'll have to feel his way out at half-speed."

He could hear Forillon's deep breathing, while the four paddlers grunted softly in unison to time their strokes. The canoe, under sail and paddle, flashed along at amazing speed, working along the line of straight cliffs that stretched to the north and the point beyond. After a little, Trenchard, who did not depend on the execrable French Government match, leaned over the lantern, shielded it with his wide hat, and got it alight. He drew the slide closed, and waited. A glance at the radium dial of his watch showed that it lacked ten minutes of ten. Another mile, and the boat would be off the point. The gunboat, naturally, would not be looking for any ship to come in across the dreaded Vigilant Bank—she would be watching the channel and the harbor approach to the eastward, across the bay. On the starlit water he could see nothing of her, but knew that she was feeling her way out toward the entrance.

THE black line of cliffs rose against the stars as the boat scudded along; and presently, off the port bow, appeared the open sea and the higher mass of Bararata Point. Vainly Trenchard searched the water; he could see nothing of the schooner,

but then, his horizon was very limited, and the waters were obscure. He stood up with the lantern, opened the sliding shutter so that its light glimmered to seaward, then closed and opened it again. Closing it, he sat down. Two flashes—that would mean danger. Yusuf would understand.

The native in the bow uttered a low word. Trenchard rose again and searched to seaward. Now he made out a dark blot; the wind was freshening here off the point, and he motioned to the natives.

"Down sail."

They obeyed, and the long canoe floated on the lifting waves. Again Trenchard lifted the lantern and flashed his signal toward the approaching schooner, then placed the lantern on the thwart beside him. He was not certain the light had been seen, so low in the water was the boat, and Yusuf, in the face of the two-flash warning, would not show any response.

The dark blot increased in size, and then swung up into the wind a cable-length distant with a slatting of canvas. A hail came in the voice of Yusuf.

"*Rais* Trenchard?"

"Right," called Trenchard. "Have a line ready."

The paddles dipped, and a moment later the boat was ranging under the side of the schooner. A line was flung, and another. Trenchard felt for money in his pockets, and handed some notes to the nearest fisherman. A Jacob's ladder tumbled down and was held taut.

"Up with you, Forillon," said Trenchard.

"*Diantre!* I am stiff," said the fugitive as he came to his feet.

The boat touched the schooner's side and rocked. Forillon uttered a curse, half fell across the thwart, gripped at Trenchard to keep his balance. Next instant there was a rush of flame—the lantern, overturned, smashed, fired the oil.

What came then, came swiftly. Trenchard struck out, the blow sharp and quick as a whipcrack. Forillon gasped and sank down. Seizing the man, Trenchard shoved him into the spreading pool of flame, crushing and smothering with clothes and body the flickering flare; in a moment it was accomplished, and the last oil-flame died out.

"Pass him up, quickly!" he snapped.

The fishermen obeyed, hauling at the blackened, senseless figure, shoving it up the ladder to where one of the Hova crew awaited it. Then Trenchard leaped to the rungs.

"Off with you!" he cried to the fishermen. "They'll be after us—you're safe."

The boat drew away from beneath him. He swung up and over the rail, and sprang to his own deck. Then he paused. That deck was bathed in a strange radiance; the flapping sails overhead were distinctly seen, every line and spar stood out.

"By Allah!" exclaimed Yusuf, at his side. "A searchlight, eh?"

"The gunboat," said Trenchard. "That flame gave us away. She's two miles off."

Yusuf laughed suddenly, and snapped out orders. The men sprang to obey. The schooner turned; her sails bellied out in the wind; then she leaned over to the thrust and went smashing through the waves toward the high headland.

Trenchard did not interfere, understanding the strategy instantly. Yusuf was heading west, straight across the Vigilant Bank, and in five minutes would be sheltered from any gunfire by the point itself. The gunboat, on the other hand, would have to circle around for miles before clearing the outjutting end of the reef. Thus the schooner was not only safe, but had a clear start which would carry her beyond sight of the slower gunboat within an hour.

A bursting gun-crack broke against the wind, and Trenchard laughed.

"Fire, you poor fools!" he said. "If your gunnery isn't better than your seamanship, you'll never catch John Trenchard, or sink him either! Yusuf! Where's that man who came aboard?"

"On the after hatch, *rais.*"

"Put him in irons below, forward. After breakfast, bring him on deck to me. Our course is for the Barren group, down the coast."

So the schooner slipped in past the headland, and the searchlight died. Trenchard, with a deep sigh of relief and comfort, tumbled into his own berth and was asleep in a moment.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Trenchard came on deck after breakfast, the schooner was heeling over to a spanking breeze. She was just doubling Cape St. Andrew, whose palms and sandy point lay far off to port, and was well inside the long shoals which kept steamers fifteen miles out to sea. The

ocean horizon was empty. The gunboat might be dismissed from calculations.

Trenchard went to his mate, glanced at the compass, cocked an eye at the canvas aloft, and made no comment. The schooner was not the same ship which he had seen in Majunga harbor. Now her topmasts were up, her own heavy spread of canvas had been bent, and the decks were shipshape; also, slings were out and she was getting a new coat of paint above the waterline.

"You know the anchorage a mile north of Lava Island, at the south end of the Barrens?" said Trenchard. "We're to meet a *dhow* there and take aboard cargo, but I'm a bit suspicious. In the capital, we heard that the *Tonkin* expected to catch us—that chap Brouillan from Nosi Bé is in command of her. He was at the capital when I left, but may be anywhere now. We're to meet the *dhow* Friday. She belongs to an Arab merchant, Ali el Khadar, one of those big chaps."

Yusuf nodded. "By Allah, *rais,* you need suspect nothing from that man! If there is any plot, Ali and his house are not in it. He has interests all over the south of Madagascar and does a good deal of trading with the natives. What is the cargo?"

"Not mentioned."

"Then it is gold, which he must smuggle out of the country to Zanzibar. Perhaps the plot was concerned with this man whom you brought aboard. Did he signal the gunboat?"

Trenchard shrugged. He told Yusuf who Forillon was—whereat the Arab frowned in perplexity.

"Whether or not he signaled," said Trenchard, "I can't make up my mind. At the same time, I'm going to run a blazer on him. You're in ballast, I see. Have any trouble while I was gone?"

"None, *rais.* I went to the Mauritius and brought over two cargoes to Diego Suarez."

"Good. Give Forillon his breakfast, then send him to me. Leave his wrists ironed. Any weapons on him?"

Yusuf jerked up his head in negation, and went forward. Trenchard stretched out in his long deck-chair, eyed the inland coast hills and lighted his pipe.

He could not make up his mind about Forillon. Two accidents had happened, both perfectly excusable; but Trenchard seldom excused accidents, and he had already set down Forillon as a man who rarely made mistakes, certainly as no bungler. To offset his suspicions were two very important facts in favor of the fugitive. One, Forillon had nothing to gain by betraying Trenchard; the other, Brouillan was on his way south to take charge of the *Tonkin* and had had nothing to do with events at Majunga. So Trenchard did not know what to think, though he was inclined to give Forillon the benefit of the doubt.

AS he sat in the lee of the upper rail—his chair lashed down—and looked out over the miles of seaward reefs where the rolling breakers burst and foamed heavily, the thought of what he must do brought him sadness. Trenchard liked other men, if they gave him a chance; he was no ravening wolf who hated his own kind. If he had to fight, he would fight terribly, but he would also go a long way around to avoid the encounter. He reckoned Forillon as a brave man, too, and gave him respect—traitor or not.

"Confound it, I'm fair forced into this business!" he reflected unhappily. "Ram Das and the others, and these chaps aboard here, all know that I'll protect 'em at all costs. Forillon, if by any chance he is a traitor to me, has seen too much and knows too much. I gave him fair warning—"

He stiffened suddenly. Could this be the reason why Forillon had taken such desperate chances to signal the gunboat—granted that he had tried to signal her? Could it be because of the very warning which Trenchard had given him?

Trenchard chewed hard on that cud, and did not like the taste of it. Then he saw Yusuf coming aft, Forillon marching along beside him with that stiff-kneed, stubborn walk which so expressed the man's character. Unwashed, unshaven, filthy, the fugitive none the less held his heavy chin high, and his blue eyes looked straight and square at the skipper who awaited him, so that for a little Trenchard almost dismissed his doubts. None the less, he forced himself to that game which he must now play. The two men came aft and stopped by the deck-chair, and Trenchard nodded to the mate.

"Sit down," he said in French, then let his eyes dwell frostily on Forillon's gaze. The Frenchman sat down, crossed his legs, smiled slightly, and indicated his ironed wrists.

"Is this the way I gain liberty, M. Trenchard?" he asked quietly.

Trenchard regarded him with that cool calm which men found so baffling.

"Let us have a little talk," he said. "You have breakfasted well, I trust?"

"Excellently, thanks," said Forillon composedly. "In view of the unlucky blunder which I made last night, very well indeed! Still, that was due to the unsteady boat."

Trenchard blew out a thin cloud of smoke. "You are not the man to make blunders, or to excuse them," he returned. "Perhaps, in your hours of reflection, it has occurred to you that I took excellent precautions to avoid being injured by your signals, and that I took no chances whatever on this schooner being picked up by the gunboat."

He paused reflectively. Yusuf, squatting behind Forillon, grinned suddenly, for he comprehended something of Trenchard's intent. These two men understood each other thoroughly. Forillon, however, looked a bit puzzled.

"It is perhaps natural," he said slowly, "that you should suspect me. Two accidents happened—"

"Why did I give you permission to smoke, if not to make sure of you?" said Trenchard softly, and let this sink in. Then he played his high card. "On my last evening in Tananarive, I had a very pleasant chat with Lieutenant Brouillan—who did not recognize me at all—and with his uncle the colonel. Brouillan was in high spirits, and told us all about his scheme for capturing the pirate Trenchard. I trust this will enlighten you?"

FORILLON sat motionless; under his iron control not a muscle moved; even his eyelids did not flicker. He could not control the reflex of the heart, however. Beneath his sun-red skin, beneath his stubble of beard, the color slowly ebbed from his face. He knew only too well that in this game he had staked his life. In the coldly inexorable eyes of Trenchard he read a doom which could not be avoided. The ghastly realization broke upon him that all the while this man had known the whole plot, that Brouillan had betrayed everything, that the elaborately detailed preparations had been blasted in a moment. So the blood ebbed, leaving his face a livid gray, as though the cold shadow of death had chilled his heart.

Trenchard appeared not to see. "There is only one thing that I do not understand," he went on, "though of course you can explain it. That is your present position as a fugitive. I did not care to ask Brouillan too many questions, you comprehend."

The certainty of Trenchard's attitude, the frightful shock which this exposure had brought, left Forillon with all defenses smashed.

"It—it was arranged," he muttered. "It was to open the way—I was to get aboard here, and then—the chance offered first at Boyanna—"

Trenchard nodded, and gave no sign of the miserable triumph which he felt. He could not congratulate himself on having bluffed this man.

"So, when that rubber-broker got word to you, it looked like a good chance to nab me in Boyanna Bay, eh? And you got word to the *Sagittaire* in a hurry. You should have known that Collard was an old woman and would bungle it. Hm! So you let yourself be temporarily branded in all eyes as a criminal, a fugitive; you staked not only your life, but your good record and your reputation, upon winning! And with everything set to win—Brouillan talks in a Tananarive café! Not you, but Brouillan, lost the game; only, you pay. What do you think of that, eh?"

"C'est la guerre," said Forillon, nearly himself again, unafraid, collected.

"No, it is not war," returned Trenchard in a grave tone. "It is the thoughtless sacrifice of a good and devoted man who has staked everything, by a fool of an officer who has staked nothing. That is not war; it is murder. As I warned you at Soalala, I have no choice in the matter. For myself, I respect and would not harm you; but for those who trust to me, I must see that you do not live to tell tales."

Forillon nodded composedly.

"To each of us his duty, M. Trenchard," he said in a firm voice. "That is perfectly understood."

Trenchard looked at Yusuf, who had risen. The Arab lifted his brows slightly and touched his knife. Trenchard shook his head, and spoke in Swahili.

"No. This is a brave man, Yusuf. Assign Hazo as a guard; let him be taken below, given my razors and clothes. Let him wash and have his irons removed."

He made a gesture to Forillon. "For the present, make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you," said Forillon, and rose.

THERE was no mention of parole, for Trenchard had read his man thoroughly. Forillon was one of those men who regard their duty as a stern and terrible god; his duty was to betray Trenchard, and he regarded nothing else. No parole was necessary, however, for the schooner was a prison from which Forillon could not escape, and which he would never leave alive. A giant brown man was summoned and given charge of him; all the crew were made up of Hovas, the finest race of Madagascar, stalwart and soldierly men who in their hearts hated the French. The prisoner and his guard vanished below; Yusuf departed to sleep; and Trenchard had the deck.

There was no satisfaction in this victory. It was easy now to see with what solicitous care Brouillan had prepared every step of his plot. Forillon had been a devoted sacrifice, had been "planted" as an escaped criminal, with the idea of placing him aboard the schooner as a secret agent. Had not the chance to nab Trenchard in Boyanna Bay looked too good to be passed by, the scheme must have succeeded. Forillon, at some port or other, would have sent word to Brouillan where the schooner lay. Failing that, Forillon would have learned enough of Trenchard and his methods to gather him in, and also many of his friends. Taken all in all, the scheme must have won in the end.

Trenchard watched with gloomy eyes as Forillon came from below, naked, and went into the waist of the schooner, where the Hovas doused him with buckets of water. Then he went below again, with Hazo at his shoulder.

"The most decent way out of it," thought Trenchard, "will be to give him a chance to fight me, and then down him. But why should I risk my life? I can't hang the beggar, and I can't tell Yusuf to knife him. Damn it! If I turn him over to that *dhow* we'll meet, the poor devil will be unmercifully tortured to death. Blessed if I know what to do, for a fact. I ought to justify my reputation and go in for cold-blooded murder. Only wish I could!"

Often it is easier to gain a reputation than, once gained, to live up to it.

Trenchard, with the cape behind, headed south along the coast, inside the Pracel Bank. Here, except on his private charts, the shore-line was little known, the reefs were poorly charted; he was in no danger of encountering troublesome ships. Thirty-five miles inland towered up the tremendous landmark of the volcanic Ambohitrosi Peaks—two huge cones, with a smaller peak in the center. With these to steer by, with a leadsman to keep track of the bottom, and a keen-eyed Hova aloft to mark coral patches, Trenchard held his schooner driving to the south.

TOWARD noon a new Forillon came on deck—shaven, bathed, clad in fresh whites; yet his new aspect only emphasized the impression of dogged tenacity which marked him out. He came aft, nodded to Trenchard and lighted a cigarette. His perfect coolness, his calm self-control, had quite returned, and he ignored the ever-watchful Hova who towered always at his elbow. Trenchard liked the man's deep poise, liked his quiet strength, and as they avoided more intimate matters and talked of wind and weather, he felt himself gaining respect for this enemy.

Then, just as eight bells rang out high twelve and the watches were changing, came the ironical touch of fate which placed Trenchard in torment.

The schooner was scarcely moving, for a light calm had fallen and only her topsails had a breath of air. Two of the crew were down in slings, seizing the opportunity to get the new coat of brown paint over her lee counter; Trenchard, leaning over the rail, was watching their work. Another man was going up the shrouds above him, with a bucket of tar. At this instant, the schooner came to an abrupt stop.

Some unguessed and unseen spur of coral caught and held her for an instant; with a heave, a smashing slat of canvas and rigging, a groaning wrench of spars and timbers, she lost way and then swung over and up into the wind, hanging on the pinnacle of coral. With the abrupt shock, the Hova in the shrouds lost his tar-bucket, which was unsecured by a lanyard; it fell from his hand, struck Trenchard over the skull, and carried him across the rail. It was all one of those peculiar combinations which to a landsman would seem impossible—an unsecured bucket aloft, an unseen pinnacle of coral far below, a man leaning over the rail at the precise spot and time to bring the coincidence aright.

Of all those aboard, only the helmsman and Forillon saw the bucket strike Trenchard. Then the schooner was bearing away on her course while men ran and

shouted, and Yusuf came leaping on deck with a storm of Swahili, and at the stern rail the brown giant Hazo stood shaking a useless knife at the water. For in a flash Forillon had gone over the rail and was now heading down through the clear water, his figure still dimly seen by those who watched.

By the time Yusuf brought up the ship again, got a boat over the side and understood just what had occurred, minutes had elapsed. The six oarsmen sent the whaleboat foaming across the water, to where the red hair of Forillon shone in the sunlight. He waited, holding the retrieved and senseless figure of Trenchard, until the boat was alongside; then they were both hauled aboard, the skipper with no worse hurt than a bump behind his ear, Forillon laughing.

It was a little thing, a combination of circumstances, a coincidence; at the same time, Trenchard wakened to the realization that Forillon had saved his life. What was more to the point, the action had been done instinctively, without thought of consequences, without any calculation.

Trenchard realized all this as he sat in his deck-chair that afternoon, while Forillon was sleeping below, and the realization was torment.

CHAPTER V

TRENCHARD dined below with Forillon that evening. The skipper's head was still swollen and sore, but he needed no reminder. Across the table he met the steady, deep blue eyes of his prisoner, while the lamp swung overhead and the timbers creaked, and the schooner heeled a little to the thrust of the slight breeze.

"I'm in your debt, Forillon," said Trenchard abruptly. "You saved my life today—no doubt about that. Why did you do it?"

Forillon considered this for a moment. Words did not come lightly to his lips.

"I am not an assassin, monsieur," he replied.

The meal went forward in silence. When it was over, Trenchard filled his pipe, the Frenchman lighted a cigarette, and they went on deck. The schooner was standing down the coast, the night was clear, and by moonrise the breeze promised to fail. Forillon was no longer under guard, and the two white men walked up and down the deck. Trenchard was first to speak.

"I am not a man who forgets a debt," he said, slowly bringing out the thing which lay in his mind, "any more than you are a man to neglect your duty."

"That is true," said Forillon, and looked toward the west, where the high mountains rose black against the star-strewn carpet of the sky, and the long thunderous roll of surf lifted from the reefs with monotonous insistence, falling and dying and swelling again, glimmering with phosphorescence.

"I regret," said Trenchard stiffly, "that I cannot consider myself alone; in such case, I should set you ashore at once and take my chances. As it is, this is out of my power to do. You might promise to keep silence about what you have seen, but you would not keep the promise."

Forillon sighed. "I shall not lie to you, Captain Trenchard. I could not even give such a promise."

"I understand."

Trenchard was indeed in the grip of circumstance. If Forillon left the schooner alive, the men who trusted Trenchard with an absolute confidence would feel the heavy weight of punishment; in another two days, or sooner, Forillon would know how Ali el Khadar's mercantile establishment shipped forbidden gold out of the country, and that would be another mark down on the slate of reckoning.

That Forillon would spare the organization behind Trenchard was out of the question, for the authorities were determined to stamp out all concerned—if caught. "I would not even give such a promise," Forillon had said, and the meaning was quite explicit. Forillon was no sneak, no craven. Knowing himself lost, he faced the issue squarely.

There was but one way out, as both men realized, but the realization came more bitterly to Trenchard than to the Frenchman. Now that he owed his life to Forillon, the bitterness was increased an hundredfold. Both these men were alike in that duty meant something more than any personal interest to each of them. Trenchard, leaning over the rail that night and watching the slowly heaving water around, grimaced at the ironical situation; Forillon owed a duty to constituted society; he himself owed a duty to the enemies of society—to the friends who trusted him. And his was the upper hand, the duty to be done.

With a different sort of man than Forillon, Trenchard would have cared little, but here destiny had involved him in a harsh net. If he spared Forillon, he would be pursued by the furies; the curses of those whom he abandoned to a merciless law would follow him; nor could he himself ever forgive the act. On the other hand, he must deliberately execute this man who had saved his life, and that act would damn him in his own eyes. Both ways lay damnation.

Hour after hour passed, while Trenchard walked the deck, pipe in mouth; the moon was up, striking the breaking reef-foam into snow, silvering the idle sails and deck and burnishing a long silver-gilt pathway down the sea; the breeze fell to nothing, and eight bells rang out low twelve from forward. Yusuf appeared to take the deck, eyed land and reefs and water, nodded perfect comprehension of their position; and Trenchard went below to snuggle into his blankets and dream over the problem facing him.

Morning came, with no solution. The schooner was leaving Coffin Island behind and standing out across the wide sweep of Koraraika Bay, with the land a dim blur against the eastern horizon. Barring calm, she would be at her destination before night. Satisfied of this, Trenchard went down to breakfast, and again faced Forillon across the table. Each man nodded, passed a good-morning, and went on with his meal. Forillon was acutely sensible of Trenchard's trouble, but showed no exultation over it; the two were enemies in a purely impersonal way, and had come to hold each other in deep respect.

BY the time noon rang out, Trenchard had resolutely cast the problem from him for the moment; he told himself that when the decision came, there was but one thing to be done. He must land Forillon, at low water, on some awash reef which would be covered at high tide; he must leave the Frenchman there with a pistol. He must do it; yet to do it would be a terrible thing. So he set the whole affair out of his mind for the present, though he cursed himself as a coward for temporizing. Besides, another matter came up which demanded more urgent attention.

Midway of the morning a *dhow* was sighted, bearing for Mozambique from New Maintorano and coming by the North Pass from the intricate shoals which here fringed the coast for miles. She broke out a signal from her jigger mast, and Trenchard recognized the private signal which was used for him by several Arab syndicates. Since his schooner changed her rig and appearance with the moon, the Arab skippers could never be quite sure when they were speaking him; but he made the answering signal promptly and bore down for the *dhow*. Presently the two craft were hove to side by side, with canvas flapping. The Arab *rais* came to the rail and hailed Trenchard in Swahili.

"Word for you, *Rais* Trenchard! That accursed *Tonkin* is at the Maroantali Island anchorage, taking soundings. She is also stopping and searching every *dhow* and schooner. Can I be of any service to you?"

To any coaster's ear, this information conveyed a great deal. There were only two anchorages in the Barren group which any vessel of size could approach. One was at Lava Island, for which Trenchard was bound; the other was ten miles north of it at Maroantali Island. At this latter spot was the *Tonkin*. Here posted, she had full control of the entire inner channels which all coasting vessels used; she could catch every vessel going up and down the west coast of the island. Evidently Brouillan was aboard her and was searching for Forillon; it might be that he had some information of a gold shipment, and was trying to nab it.

Trenchard turned and looked at Forillon. Here was his chance, and he was a fool not to take it. He could turn over Forillon to these Arabs, and could be absolutely certain that the spy would disappear forever. His own hands would be clear of the actual deed. Yusuf, who had appeared at Trenchard's side, gave him one eloquently savage look of expectation; and spurred by that look, Trenchard turned to give the order. His gaze fell on Forillon, who stood at the rail; perfectly comprehending Swahili, Forillon was just tossing a cigarette into the water with a gesture of finality.

Something about that gesture checked the words on Trenchard's lips. He stood half hesitant. Had Forillon given him one pleading look, the result would have been different, but the spy stood gazing at the *dhow* as though registering in his mind every man aboard her, calmly unafraid, not flinching from his fate, himself to the end. Give a man such as this, a man so

like himself in spirit, a white man, over to be murdered by Arabs! No, better to abandon cowardice and do the job himself. Trenchard swung about to the rail.

"No, nothing, *rais,*" he responded. "Allah further you!"

"And you," came the response; then the big foresail of the *dhow* swung up, she pointed up almost into the wind's eye, and tore away. Trenchard looked at Yusuf, and under the bite of those gray eyes the Arab lost his scowl suddenly.

"Due southwest," said Trenchard quietly, "past Albatross Shoal. Get outside Boursaint, then around past Lockwood Reef and strike Lava Island tonight from the south."

THE canvas fluttered up; the schooner leaned over and picked up a bone in her teeth, then, close-hauled and with every inch of sail spread, darted toward the Mozambique Channel with her lee rail almost awash. Forillon, lighting another cigarette came up to Trenchard.

"A fine ship," he said calmly. "And well handled! I can understand now why you stick to her; in this age of power and radio and long-distance guns, it is still possible for a sail-pirate to flourish."

"In Madagascar waters," amended Trenchard.

"Precisely. I presume that I may write some letters—which you may read before they are put in the post?"

"Certainly. —Hazo! Take M. Forillon to the saloon cabin aft and give him writing materials."

As he said this, Trenchard made a slight gesture, which only the giant brown man understood. The latter went below with Forillon, and presently returned again to Trenchard.

"Well, *rais?*"

"Go down in the cabin and watch that man. Pretend to sleep. When you see him about to throw a bottle from the cabin port, bring the bottle to me. Do not harm him."

Trenchard added these last words almost with a sigh. Hazo vanished below. Two of the watch were at work getting up what seemed to be a stay running from fore- to main-mast and then down to the deck; but it was no stay. When it was finally adjusted, a hole in the deck by the foot of the mainmast was unstoppered—a small hole carefully fitted and insulated. Through this the false stay was passed, then Trenchard, after inspecting the course and watching the apparently open sea ahead, sent a man aloft to keep an eye out for coral patches, and himself went below to his own cabin—into which ran the end of that false stay. He did not appear again until just before noon, when he came on deck bringing his sextant, and ran into Yusuf.

"I've got the radio working," he said. "The *Tonkin* is in communication with Majunga now—she's taking soundings along the Crescent Reef and has two launches working around Maroantali Island. She's safe to stay there for the day."

"Allah upon her!" said Yusuf, and grinned. "And now—what is this?"

Hazo appeared, grinning, and handed Trenchard a bottle. Trenchard opened it and managed to draw out a paper, which he tore into fragments and threw down the wind. Forillon came up the companionway and met Trenchard's gaze calmly.

"So you have declared war!" asserted the skipper.

"I have never declared peace," returned Forillon.

Trenchard was furious at thought of his own hesitations and delays, while this other man went about his duty, coolly taking advantage of every opportunity. Yet, when most furious, Trenchard was most in command of himself.

"You are confined to your cabin," he said. "Hazo! See that this man does not leave his cabin. Cover his port from outside. Remove from the room all matches; if he wants to smoke, give him a light and watch him while he smokes, for he is capable of setting fire to the ship. Give him some books from my cabin, nothing else. Watch him as you would watch a mad bull."

FORILLON, shrugging, turned and went below again, with Hazo after him. Trenchard glanced at his watch, inwardly conscious that he was fast coming to a crisis in the affair of his captive; then he raised his sextant, carefully adjusted the instrument, swung the arm and clamped it, screwed the vernier for more accuracy, got his observation. Eight bells clanged from the ship's bell—noon. Madagascar was rolling down under the horizon.

When he had worked out the position, Trenchard ate his noonday meal by himself, then smoked a pipe on deck; he paced up and down, hands behind his back, slen-

der figure a little bowed. Then he went below and turned in—there would be work ahead that evening. The *Tonkin* was posted here, watching the middle passage; up north was the *Sagittaire;* down south were other craft; every coaster and *dhow* was being watched and searched; every arm of the law was reaching out with flexing muscles to locate Forillon, Trenchard and smuggled gold. The metal was more precious than ever these days, for it meant the life of nations; but to the men who used it, it meant the life of individual commerce. Governments meant little to them, but gold payments in Zanzibar and Mombasa and Mozambique meant everything.

"It must be done," thought Trenchard as he stood by the helm that night and conned the schooner up past the wide coral beds of Lava Island to the anchorage a mile beyond the north tip of the little islet, whose bare half-mile of trees and sand lay black on the water. To north and east lay a horrible jungle of coral beneath the star-glinting wavelets; long banks and ridges of it for miles off the coast, here eleven miles distant; depths leaping abruptly from half a fathom to seven fathom, circles and pinnacles and wavy lengths all unseen, but showing on the chart as roughly following the outline of the wooded coast, following it out again and again far to sea.

"It must be done," came the thought again into his mind, as the big wooden coral anchor splashed, and the hawser ran out; and ten miles to the northward he caught the sweep of a distant searchlight across the sky. Brouillan was there, searching.

CHAPTER VI

MORNING came in a blaze of blue and scarlet and gold. Trenchard, coming on deck, stood struck with the glorious color all around, then spoke mechanically to Yusuf.

"I've been listening to the *Tonkin.* She's waiting for a *dhow* coming up from the south and bound in to New Maintiano today—must be our *dhow.*"

He did not hear the mate's reply; he was thrilled, transfixed by the clear beauty of the scene around, which in another hour would be all hot sea and rock under the blazing sun. Now the mainland lay in a vague purple mass to the east. Lava Island lay just to the south, a sharp triangle of bare rock studded with brush, conspicuous trees at north and west corners; all around the island broke snowy surf on the fringing reef, spray flying like molten silver under the level sun-rays. Three miles away was the desolate Simpson Reef, rising ten feet above the thundering surf; the same distance to the northwest were three little tree-girt islands, rich flecks of green. The scarlet of the sunrise sky glimmered back again from the blue water, and here and there showed patches of green where coral banks came close to the surface. Away off to the northwest rose a spire against the horizon, the tree-crowned rock of Androtra Island, reaching sheer out of the water for a hundred feet. For the rest, the horizon was blank, empty, blue sky meeting bluer sea-rim, while the schooner lifted and fell and tugged at her hawser as though straining to be away from here and plunging toward the open sea.

"All right, old girl, you'll be away soon enough!" said Trenchard. "An hour, and there will be only blazing blue sky, and green sea and brown coral banks, and a *dhow* coming north under the hot sunlight. . . . . I'd give a hundred dollars if that rascal hadn't saved my life."

He went down to breakfast, then spent half an hour listening in to Majunga and the *Tonkin.* Presently the *Sagittaire* struck in with some reference to her near catch of the schooner at Boyanna Bay; then Brouillan began filling the air with queries as to whether anyone had heard anything from Forillon. At this, Trenchard wearily broke off and began to dismantle the set, which he placed behind a false panel in his cabin wall.

"The fools!" he muttered. "It hasn't occurred to any of them that I might be listening to their talk! I'd like to have a sending set—no, that would wake 'em up. As long as they take me for a fool like themselves, I'm safe."

He went on deck, ordered the antenna dismantled, and watched the crew finish their paint job. Half an hour later the man aloft reported the sail of a *dhow* visible to the southeast, and Trenchard knew that his waiting was ended. Hazo came up to report that Forillon had breakfasted and was reading quietly.

Then the morning breeze began to die out, and the waves fell to climbing rollers that swelled and ran down the sea

and passed on. The *dhow*, a big sixty-footer with two masts, came crawling up past Lava Island before her canvas flapped; then she put out three big sweeps on either side and walked along at a fair rate toward the anchored schooner, thus covering the final half-mile, her Arab crew grunting out a wailing Swahili chant as they tugged on the oars.

There was only a ground-swell, none too heavy, at that, and she bore up alongside the schooner; a line was flung and made fast, then another, Arabs and Hovas greeting each other with laughing jests. The *dhow* was well laden, and on her stern deck were several symmetrical piles of huge green coconuts, smooth husks glinting like gold in the sunlight. Trenchard leaped to her deck and returned the greeting of the Arab *rais*—a white-bearded, dignified man.

"I am Captain Trenchard," he said.

"May Allah further you!" replied the Arab. "I was told to ask where the arrangement was made, and by whom."

"By my friend Grenille, with the son of Ali el Khadar, in Tananarive."

"That is true. My master sends words to you that a plot is afoot, but he does not know the details—"

"I do," interrupted Trenchard. "The *Tonkin* is ten miles north of here, searching all passing *dhows*."

The Arab smiled. "She may search me, and welcome, once I am rid of my trust. Give me a receipt for three-score coconuts less two, which are to be delivered to Akbar ibn Hausa in Zanzibar."

Trenchard looked at the piled nuts. He went to the nearest pile and picked one up, shaking it. There was no fluid inside. He looked more closely, and saw that one side bore a plug which stopped a round hole. Each nut, then, held a few quills of gold.

"Very well." Taking pencil and paper from his pocket, Trenchard scribbled the receipt. The nuts were carefully transferred to the schooner, and Trenchard had them sent down to his own cabin. There was no mention of precious metal, but he knew that they held a great store of gold, stolen from the mines or washed in the hills by brown Malagasy hands, bartered here and there to the agents of Ali el Khadar, gradually collected at headquarters and now shipped up to Zanzibar. There would be good pay for delivering this cargo. Perhaps some of those nuts held drugs or stones—no matter.

"By the prophet—on whom be peace! —look out for the currents today, for they are swift," said the old Arab skipper. "Peace be with you!"

"And with you," answered Trenchard.

THE lines were cast off. The *dhow* came about and pointed eastward, her six sweeps hard at work, to go crawling up the coast inside the reefs to the north.

Still the calm continued, the sun blazing down with unwonted heat. Out of pity, Trenchard ordered that Forillon be allowed on deck. The Frenchman came up, looking extremely wilted, but nodded to Trenchard with his blue eyes indomitable and steady as ever. He came to where the skipper sat by the rail, lighted a cigarette, tossed the match overboard and then stood watching it for a moment.

"Lava Island," said Trenchard, waving his pipe toward the islet. "The *Tonkin* is ten miles or so north of us. We'll be off with the breeze, and away."

"And the breeze comes?" inquired Forillon.

"This afternoon."

"I wish I knew what you meant to do with me," said Forillon, turning.

Trenchard looked up at him from the chair, met the steady eyes with a gaze which was like gray stone, and spoke calmly. The crisis had to be met.

"You are to be shot at sunset this evening. I will take charge of any personal messages you'd like to have sent."

Forillon compressed his lips, read an unswerving purpose in the face of Trenchard, and nodded slightly.

"Very well. I'd like to be alone for a little, if I may."

"You have the deck," said Trenchard.

Forillon walked forward, his step as deliberate and sure as ever. Gazing after that stubbornly determined figure, realizing anew that, while the man was no assassin, it was yet a duel to the death between them, Trenchard drew a breath almost of relief. At least he had set a time. He could visualize the rifles being broken out from under the rock ballast, the brown Hovas lined up, Forillon pitching forward as the crack of rifles blew down the wind. It would be a hard job to do—no doubt about that; but it must be done. The remembrance of those coconuts pounded that fact into Trenchard's brain with subtle insistence. This Ali el Khadar, Ali the Green, whom he had never seen nor

met, entrusted to him as a matter of course a fortune which might be sequestrated with impunity. When that scrawled receipt came into the brown hand of Ali, the latter would reckon his gold safe as though held in a bank.

"Yes, it must be done," muttered Trenchard. "And at sunset—no more vacillation or delay!"

YUSUF was below; so, too, were most of the crew, or asleep in whatever patch of shade they could find about the deck. The Malagasy cook was singing in the galley. Noon was approaching, the sun blazing down with intolerant fierceness. Trenchard felt lazy, sleepy, as he basked in the heat; but having dismissed Hazo, he felt it incumbent upon him to keep an eye on Forillon. He rather hoped, indeed, that knowing the worst, the man would somehow make a bolt for it or put up a fight—anything to serve as an excuse.

He mouthed his pipe and looked at Forillon. The latter had gone forward into the bows and was now sitting on the deck, leaning back against the capstan, smoking cigarettes. Trenchard lifted his eyes to the sea beyond. The schooner was heading to the north, the island behind her, as some current swung her stern; she dipped gently to the pull of her hawser, the long and steady ground-swell lifting her very slightly. The sea had fallen by this time, with the tide nearly at full ebb, and glimmered like molten glass under the pouring sunlight.

Time passed. Trenchard sought in vain for any breath of wind, any slightest cat's-paw ruffling the smooth and glossy surface of the water. The slow and regular dance of the spars against the sky, the occasional slap or bang of shrouds and stays, were all lulling in their influence. The *dhow* had quite vanished by this time, and there was nothing to break the infinity of the sea-horizon. Trenchard caught himself nodding, jerked awake, saw that Forillon had not moved position, and lighted his pipe to keep from another relapse. Forillon was smoking cigarette after cigarette.

"Don't know how I ever stood it ashore," thought Trenchard in easy contentment. "A month of it! Well, after this I stay where I belong. I've no business—"

The naked torso of Yusuf emerged from the companionway, and an Arabic word spat forward. One of the men sleeping there moved, leaped to his feet and struck the ship's bell. Trenchard glanced at his watch—noon to the minute. He looked up, to meet a blank stare from Yusuf, who had come to the deck.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"By the ninety-nine excellent names of Allah, *rais!*" exclaimed the mate, still sleep-drugged. "If the island is not moving upon us—"

Trenchard glanced around, then sprang to his feet. A sharp call came from forward. There Forillon had risen and was coming aft, leisurely.

THEN it all broke upon Trenchard, though the others still stared in dismayed consternation. Instead of being a mile away, the island was a scant quarter-mile astern and a little to starboard; the schooner was drifting straight upon the quarter-fathom reef off the north point, must be over it now. Trenchard recollected in a flash how Forillon had tossed his match overboard and watched its drift, how he had been sitting there by the capstan and the anchor-hawser. His hand slipped under his shirt, and he whirled, pistol in hand.

Forillon halted and regarded him steadily. Trenchard was in the act of firing when the look of those deep blue eyes drove home to him; no fear there at all, nothing but a calm acceptance of fate. "To each of us his duty," the man had said. Trenchard lowered his pistol.

At this instant the schooner staggered. Her bottom scraped; the brown men cried out, then with a crunch and a bang, the stiff three-knot current had her on the coral fair and square. She canted a little to port and hung there, motionless.

Trenchard indicated the Frenchman. "Put that man in irons. Take him down to his cabin."

The dismayed, dumfounded men leaped to obey. To the skipper's irritated disappointment, Forillon made no resistance whatever. A man came running from forward with word that the hawser had been cut, and the crew understood. Forillon was searched, and from his pocket was taken a broken hacksaw blade.

At this Trenchard was silent. He remembered how, six weeks previously, he had been working in that spare cabin over some metal fittings, and had broken a blade or two in the hacksaw. And now the schooner lay grounded on a reef a thousand miles away, because of a broken blade flung carelessly aside and overlooked.

Yusuf met his eyes, both men reflecting

on the same thing. If the iron anchor were put out, it would probably be lost on this coral ground, and whether the schooner could be pulled off was highly problematical. Even if this could be done, it would avail nothing, for there was not the shadow of a breeze to stir her. Trenchard shook his head to the unspoken question.

"No," he said, as though Yusuf had inquired. "The tide's at ebb. Take out the small kedge and keep her from driving farther on the coral; that's all. She'll be off in an hour with the lift of the water, and by then the breeze will be coming."

YUSUF snapped orders at the men, who began to get the whaleboat overside. Trenchard looked around the horizon, and his eye caught a slight speck off to the northeast. He turned to the companionway and went down to his cabin for his prismatics. In a moment or two he was back on deck.

"You'd better take command of the ship, Yusuf."

The Arab looked at him, took the prismatics, turned and swept the horizon. He picked up the distant speck, then returned the glasses. A calm fatalism settled upon him.

"Allah the dispenser ordaineth all things, *rais*, and the fate of man is written," he said.

Trenchard passed down the ladder and went to Forillon's cabin, from which Hazo and another man of the crew were just issuing. He motioned them back, and stood in the doorway looking at Forillon, who sat handcuffed on the edge of the bunk.

"Gag him," he said to Hazo. "Then tie his ankles together."

The two brown men obeyed. Dismissing the two men, Trenchard spoke to him quietly.

"You have done your duty, and I shall do mine. You've laid the schooner on the coral, and there's no breeze to stir her. The launch or cutter from the *Tonkin* is coming, and I fancy that Brouillan's in her. We're caught beyond hope of escape; at the same time, there's a bare chance that we may escape. If we do, you shall be shot at sunset. If not, you'll be rescued."

He closed the door, locked it, and passed to his own little cabin across the passage. From his port, Trenchard had a clear sight of the sea to north and east.

He studied the cutter intently. She was steaming slowly along, and for a moment he thought that she might not have seen the schooner, since she was low in the water and her horizon was foreshortened. As he watched, however, she swung around and pointed for the island. He could see two sailors in her bow, working over a gun which they uncovered; it was a machine gun, whose nickeled bullets were capable of piercing through and through the schooner. He counted fifteen men aboard her, all wearing service pistols; his own crew of a dozen were far outnumbered. Under her stern awning was an officer who now stood up and began to scrutinize the schooner with a pair of prismatics. One glance showed Trenchard that this officer was Lieutenant Brouillan, and he withdrew from the port lest he be seen.

HE went into the saloon cabin, a small room stuffed with books and charts, closed the door of the passage, and then closed the opening in the skylight above; the two ports were already open, and he left them so, for the heat here was nearly insufferable. Trenchard sat at the table, laid his pistol at his elbow, and then calmly began to smoke. Below him in the bowels of the ship he could hear a confused noise. Yusuf was breaking out the rifles hidden in the ballast.

Trenchard had nothing to do but to wait, and he puffed steadily at his pipe, master of himself now as ever. Yusuf knew exactly what to do. Every possible contingency had been gone over and rehearsed with minute care; Yusuf had a whole box filled with forged papers in French and Arabic—clearances, manifests, documents of every conceivable kind, just as Trenchard had another box of different papers for his own use. More than once the schooner had emerged from disaster because these two men made no false moves, knew exactly what should be done, and did not hesitate to do it.

"If that cutter had a wireless outfit aboard, which she hasn't, we'd be lost," reflected Trenchard. "Then Brouillan could have summoned up the *Tonkin* in a hurry. As it is, he's got us cornered and will make the capture himself. He's caught us, no doubt about that; but we have one chance. Slim and desperate as it is, it's a chance. If it fails, I'm afraid that I'll not keep that appointment with Grenille."

He smiled slightly and tamped down his pipe with steady finger.

CHAPTER VII

WHILE it was true that Lieutenant Brouillan knew Trenchard by sight, it was equally true that he did not know the schooner by sight. Few men did. None the less, as his smart little cutter steamed down at her, he thrilled to the possibility that he had caught the pirate at last.

Coming closer, he scanned her intently, studied every line of her. Brouillan was a complacent little man with a high opinion of himself and an exaggerated sense of his own ability; none the less, he was capable enough, and might be pardoned his cocksure air. It did not occur to him that this schooner might have come from the north, simply because he had been watching the inner passage. He thought that she had either come up from the south, or else had come from Delagoa Bay for Maintirano. It was evident that she was in ballast and had been freshly painted; at the same time, she was aground, her lines and spars were in slovenly shape, and her slightly canted deck was littered with everything from rock ballast to uncoiled lines.

"Only natives aboard her," he muttered, then issued curt orders. "One man remain at bow and stern to fend off; two men remain at the gun with you, bo'sun. The rest come aboard with me."

The men responded smartly. Brouillan laid aside his glasses and watched the deck of the schooner as the cutter came past her bow and bumped along to where Yusuf had swung over a ladder. He rose. Two of his men held the ladder, and he mounted to the deck above. The seamen followed one by one, ten of them. Brouillan surveyed the grinning Malagasys, then turned to Yusuf and swept him with a look.

"You speak French?" he demanded.

"Perfectly, M. le Capitain," said Yusuf, with a cordial laugh that showed his white teeth. "It is a blessing that you have come to aid us, for now we shall get off this accursed reef."

"Where is Captain Trenchard?" snapped Brouillan.

"Tren-chaird?" repeated Yusuf, with a puzzled stare. "I do not understand, monsieur. I am the *rais* here."

"Your papers?"

"I have them somewhere—Hazo! Go down to my cabin and find those papers. I think they are in the upper berth." With this careless response, Yusuf grinned again. "This is my first experience of these waters, monsieur, and I assure you I do not like it. I was engaged to bring this schooner from Mozambique to New Maintirano, you comprehend; an Arab firm there has bought her. Well—"

"What firm?" demanded Brouillan. Yusuf, with a surprised air, named one of the chief Arab traders of the port. "Continue," said the officer.

"As I was about to say," went on Yusuf, "we must have been forty miles north of here and at least twenty off Koraraika Bay, when we struck a shoal. In the open sea, I assure you, with not the slightest evidence of any danger! It must have been set there by Allah's providence to injure us. Our rudder broke. We drifted two days before getting it fixed, and did not know where we were."

"You struck the Taunton Castle shoal, evidently. Continue."

"Yesterday morning we spoke a *dhow* bound north. She guided us to an anchorage here, and we repaired the rudder. Then, this morning, our hawser parted, and before we realized it we had drifted on the shoal."

Brouillan grunted. "Fine seamen, you Arabs! All hands asleep, I suppose."

HAZO appeared, bearing a dirty envelope, which Yusuf took and extended.

"Here are the papers, monsieur."

Brouillan examined them, and found no cause for suspicion.

"Right," he said, returning the envelope. If those papers had passed his eye, they would pass anywhere. "Your cargo?"

"There is none," responded Yusuf. "We are in ballast. We were about to lighten the stern by shifting all the ballast forward —you observe, the hatches are off—when we saw your boat coming. Now, if you can take a hawser and give us a pull—"

It was cleverly said, cleverly acted, but Brouillan was not to be put off the scent by any such means.

Trenchard, sitting in the cabin below, listening intently to every word uttered by that penetrating voice, knew that the crucial moment had arrived. If Brouillan did not search the cabins, the game was won. If he insisted on making a thorough search, however, then there was nothing for it but to go down fighting, make a desperate effort, and take what was meted out. Trenchard rose from the table and went to the port, or close enough to look out. He saw the ruffles of cat's-paws reaching across the

water, making faint ripples, and knew that the breeze was coming, and coming from the right quarter. Under his feet he sensed rather than heard a faint scraping, and knew that the rising tide was lifting the schooner. With wind and tide, in another ten minutes she could be off, if she were free. But—she was caught.

He stood there, listening.

"We'll help you off, yes. First, I want to have a look around. Four of you men go forward and take a look below. Two of you drop into the hold and take a look. The other four will remain here. *Rais,* suppose you show me your after accommodations. Your cabins are empty? What is that noise?"

It was a muffled, methodical thumping, followed by a subdued thud, then came a sharper and clearer rattle of iron on wood. Forillon had worked himself from his bunk, had fallen to the floor, and was beating with his handcuffs against the door of his cabin. Trenchard, knowing that it was no time to temporize, darted to the door and down the passage, unlocked the door of Forillan's cabin, and with a thrust of his foot shoved the prostrate man aside. He leaped in, picked up Forillon, and hurled the man into his bunk with a crash. Forillon lay senseless.

THEN Trenchard was back again in his saloon cabin, stifling a curse, and went to the port. He was in time to hear Yusuf's explanation—one which showed that the game was up.

"—a poor unfortunate Frenchman, monsieur, who is out of his head. His name I do not know. He never speaks, but sits all day at the cabin table, working with pencil and paper, drawing figures. The authorities at Mozambique forced me to bring him—they wanted to get rid of him."

"Hm!" returned Brouillan. "This looks a bit queer to me. I'll take a look at your cabins and see this man. You men remain here. If I whistle, come down."

Trenchard sat again at the table, laid down his pipe, waited. The clack of heels sounded on the ladder, sounded in the passage.

"There he is, monsieur."

Trenchard met the gaze of Brouillan; the eyes of the two men gripped. Into the face of Brouillan flashed amazed recognition; for an instant he was too astounded to speak, but his hand slipped to the pistol at his side.

Then Yusuf struck the officer a terrible blow behind the ear.

Trenchard was out of his chair and leaping forward. Brouillan swayed, put out his hands for support, and his knees loosened. Trenchard caught him as he fell, drew out his automatic, and passed it to Yusuf. Then the two men leaped for the ladder.

Just in time! An angry cry rang out from somewhere forward, followed by a shot. Then came a burst of shouts, the bark of pistols, the clear crack of a rifle. Trenchard gained the deck to see Hovas and Frenchmen driving at each other, pistols at work, hidden rifles jerked out. Yusuf was up with a roar and loosing his automatic on the four seamen by the rail. Two of them dropped, the other two returned the fire, but Trenchard's pistol was speaking by this time. Those four were out of it.

Two were caught in the hold and died there. The other four, up forward, were firing with cool precision. Three of the Hovas lay about the deck, two more staggered away wounded; then the burst of rifle-fire broke on the French seamen. Three of them went down, the fourth gained the rail and leaped to the cutter below.

SHE, meantime, was not idle. Six men in her now, she began to shove off. A Hova came to the rail and heaved up a huge chunk of the rock ballast. Three bullets from below riddled him, but a scream rang out as the great ragged rock hove down and smashed into the craft. Then, abruptly, the machine gun began to spray lead through the schooner.

Unable to elevate sufficiently to reach her deck, the three gunners depended on their comrades to cover them while they poured an unremitting stream of bullets into the devoted ship at their side. Nothing could resist those nickeled agents of death, which went through and through the schooner; they were quite capable of raking out her bottom and sinking her.

Before they could do this, however, rock ballast began to come down. Trenchard, at the rail, fired coolly, while others of his men banged away with rifles and hove down jagged chunks of ballast. Had she drawn a little away, the cutter might have won that fray, but her engines had been smashed, the bottom was riven out of her. She vomited up a great cloud of steam; her men were shot down—then she vanished suddenly at the reef-edge. There was a

muffled roar; a boiling surge of steam and bloody spray shot up in the air. Trenchard, driven back by the concussion, caught in his arms the reeling figure of Yusuf, whose naked torso was spouting blood.

"Hazo!" rang out his voice. "Come here."

The brown giant came, running. Like many of his race, he was not only a good surgeon but an unrivaled physician, and kept a large store of his native herbs aboard. He knelt beside Yusuf, dashed blood from a scalp-wound out of his eyes, and peered down.

"Will he live?" demanded Trenchard.

"If cared for, yes."

"Then take care of him. Attend to nothing else."

TRENCHARD came to his feet, staring around. He caught a puff of cool breeze on his cheek, and knew that the wind was come. Sight of the deck, however, sickened him. Five of his own men were sprawled out dead; most of the others were somehow wounded, yet were wildly exultant and filled with savage fury of battle. They were dragging two wounded French seamen to the rail, and were about to hurl them over the side when Trenchard was upon them.

"Stop that! Get out the whaleboat—look sharp, now! Two of you take a drag on the capstan and bring in that hawser taut. We're off the reef and the wind is here. Out with the whaleboat! Put these two men into her. The officer is down in my cabin. Bring him up and put him in likewise."

He leaned over the wounded seamen and roughly bandaged them. The others, dead, were being put overboard. The whaleboat was put out, and four of the Hovas passed down into her with the wounded men. Brouillan, still senseless, was brought up and put aboard the boat. Trenchard gave a curt order.

"Put them ashore, and return quickly."

The brown men grunted and fell to their task. A sullen splash showed the fate of the last dead seaman. Of the vanished cutter, nothing showed but some torn and shattered fragments; the six men aboard her had gone down.

Trenchard sent his remaining two men aloft to shake out the canvas. Hazo came to him and reported that Yusuf was badly hurt, shot through the breast, but had a good chance of recovering.

"Get that foresail shaken out then," said Trenchard. "As soon as she feels the wind, cut the kedge hawser. Let's get out of this cursed place."

It was only a short trip to the north point of the island and back. The whaleboat returned and was somehow hauled aboard. On the northern horizon was lifting a smudge of black. Trenchard pointed to it.

"There you are, men! The *Tonkin*. Look alive, now! If we're out in the channel in twenty minutes, she can't catch us. If not, she'll reach us with a gun. Get to work!"

Hazo chopped the kedge hawser asunder; the other men got the canvas out. Trenchard, at the wheel, felt the breeze freshening fast, and the schooner laid over it. She drew out, wore, and then went driving off toward the open channel.

Trenchard, as the open sea spread forth ahead, gave the helm to Hazo and started below. Now was the time—no waiting for sunset. It must be done now, at once. No sentiment, real or false, could postpone the job further. He descended the ladder and walked to Forillon's door with steady tread. He threw the door open and entered.

For a long moment Trenchard stood motionless, transfixed. He was not prepared for the sight that greeted him. The blue eyes of Forillon were closed; the face was ghastly pale above its gag. Then Trenchard saw the splinters of wood, the ripped siding, the smashed port—those nickeled bullets from the cutter had riddled the ship's side through and through. A pool of scarlet confirmed the fate of Forillon.

Appalled, awed by the thing which happened here, Trenchard instinctively reached for his cap, then found himself bareheaded. After all, the decision had been taken out of his hands. Judgment had been passed; the sentence had been executed. There was nothing more to do, except to pay his debt to Forillon.

"I will pay it," muttered Trenchard. "There is a French ensign somewhere aboard—"

He lifted his eyes and looked through the wrenched and splintered opening of the port. On the far horizon he saw a trail of black smoke.

He turned and closed the door, softly, as though loath to awaken that sleeper.

Another of H. Bedford-Jones' spirited stories appears in the next, the July, issue.

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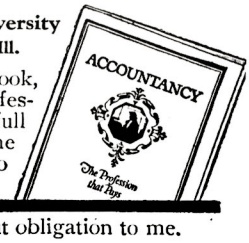

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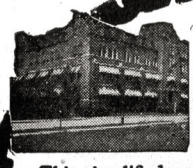

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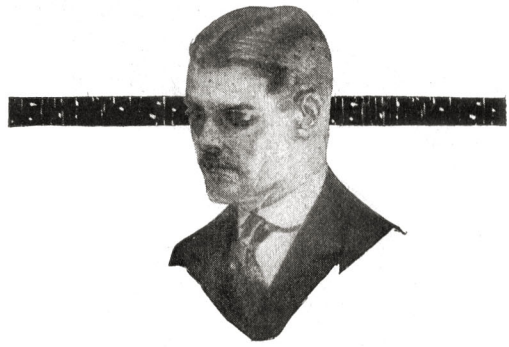

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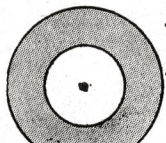

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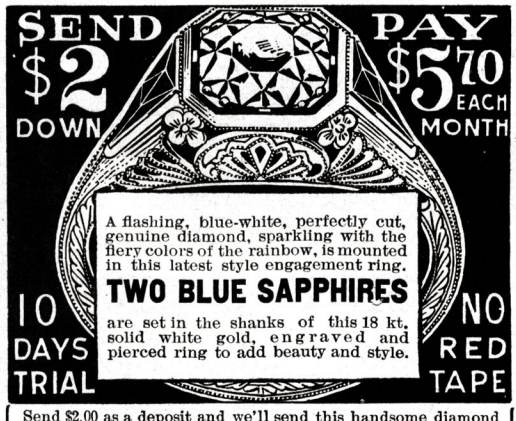

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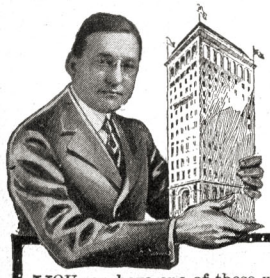

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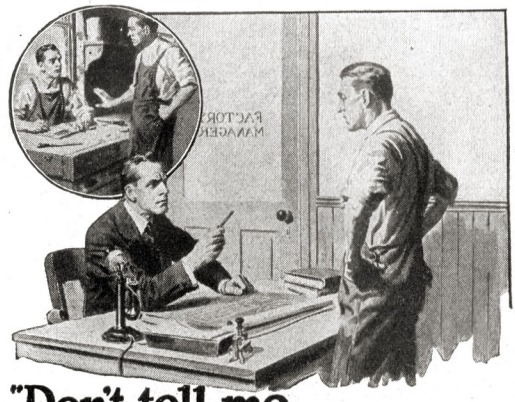

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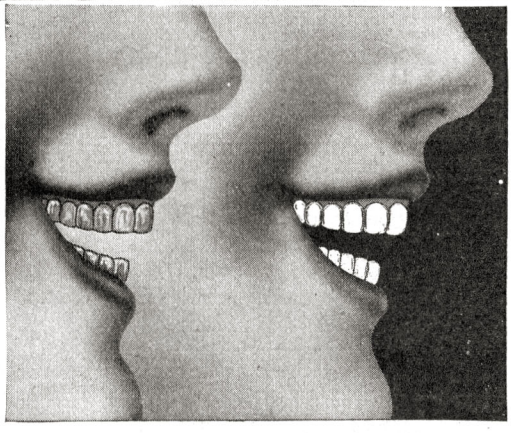

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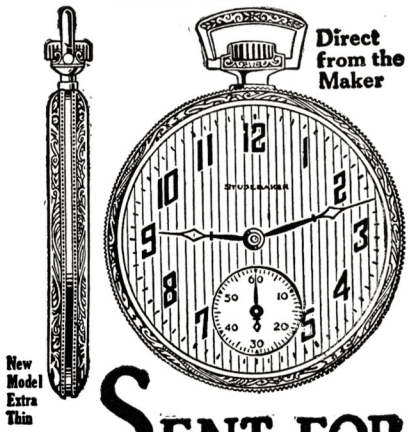

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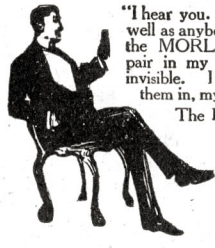

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912

OF THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for April 1, 1924.

State of Illinois, } ss.
County of Cook. }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Consolidated Magazines Corporation.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Editor, Karl Edwin Harriman.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor, None.

Business Manager, Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

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A. R. Stumer .....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Ralph K. Strassman.....33 W. 42nd St., New York City

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of the stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of March, 1924.

[Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.

(My commission expires Jan. 4, 1925.)

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Naturally Recolored by Canute Water

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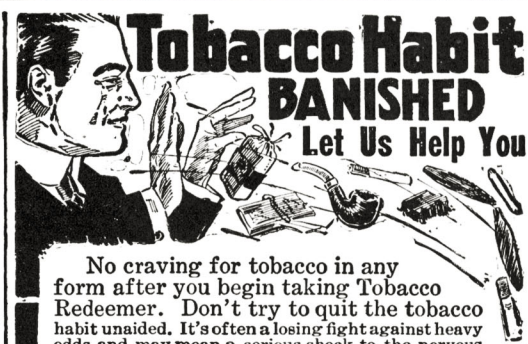

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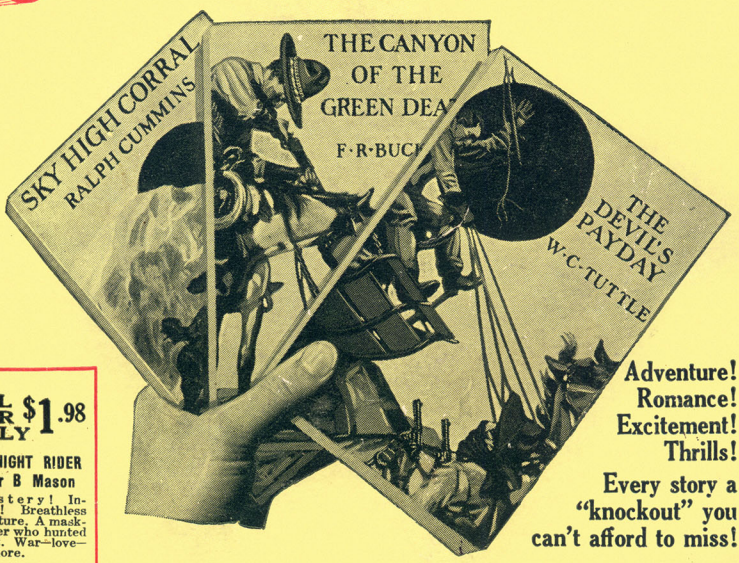

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